Chapter One

PREAMBLE: LEARNING ALONG THE WAY

The tension that we need to maintain between the rich, diffuse, complex character of everyday life and the ways our literatures organise and symbolise its buzzing confusions sustains the moral tenor of our work Grumet (1990:339)
Introducing this Project

This thesis maps a critical pathway along which I walk, weaving between the ‘dead-certainties’ of the theoretical strands that influence my life/work as a radical/experiential educator and the local-knowledge that is gathered as a teacher, student and co-learner within an institution and without it. Its aim is to articulate an ever-present tension in my work. In one position is the philosophy of consciousness, the unfolding of the ‘naked’ individual through the reflective methods favoured by fathers and mothers of liberal humanist education (see Knowles 1975; Rogers 1983; Boud 1993; Brookfield 1986 and Schön 1983). This involves practices of the self that are designed to promote ‘insight’. In another is the call of ideologies singing liberation and freedom through the conversion of ‘false’ consciousness to ‘conscientisation’ through the Marxist and Neo-Marxist radical educators (Freire 1970; Mezirow 19781, 1991; Shor 1980; Giroux 1983; McLaren 1989; Newman 1994). This involves practices of the self, designed to develop a superior consciousness as a prerequisite for collective action - another form of insight. Practices based on insight (including reflection and the growth of true consciousness) can make those on whom these practices are imposed, complicit in their own oppression. This occurs because, by focussing the attention ‘inside people’s heads’, the educated subject is constituted as an atomised individual (see Matthews 1991), one who exists prior to society and culture.

The other dimension contributing to the tension is a ‘social epistemology’ (see Luke & Freebody 1997), found in postmodern practices in education: the deconstruction of dominant knowledges/discourses (including the previous process) that constitute individual subjectivities through a micro-technology of disciplinary power (Foucault 1977), or practices that promote ‘outsight’. These involve practices of the self that
'sing-up' the ways subjectivity and identity are constituted by the power-knowledge nexus in our western society.

It is the tension between the 'truth stories' informing these different approaches to radical/experiential education that is the central motif of this thesis. This tension is, I propose, the heartland of a reconstructionist pedagogic enterprise. Modernist certainties and truths, have been dethroned by radical, critical education and experiential education, but this revolution has occurred by displacing old certainties and replacing them with new ones. Pedagogy, I suggest, should work to displace certainties, but not to replace them; it should sustain the tension rather than resolving it.

To do this requires what I am calling a narrative epistemology because a narrative epistemology upholds the tension. It does this in several ways. A narrative epistemology:

- has verisimilitude; it 'sings-up' the material basis of knowledge;
- serves to disconnect people from the dominant cultural narratives constituting their lives. It does this by 'singing-up' the performance aspects of language (see chapter 6), and the use of dramatic forms;
- interrogates cultural narratives and taken-for-granted social practices rather than people (and what is in their heads);
- unpacks the strategies that invite people or coerce them into the subjectivities and identities that are sometimes useful (and at others not), to their lives.

Through this interrogation a narrative epistemology reveals the partiality and finite nature of knowledges/narratives, paving the way for the development of alternative knowledges by:

- using discursive practices that encourage openness. It does this through externalising conversations, discourse analysis, subverting binary oppositions, and dramatic approaches to pedagogy;
changing the focus from the development of higher/deeper levels of consciousness, to the development of 'local-knowledge', 'thick-descriptions' and a spirituality of the surface.

I want to emphasise that I am not talking about facilitating people through behavioural modifications (active listening, reflective feedback, learning to communicate) or the arrangement and organisation of people (by telling stories, group processes, conflict resolution), although all these things can help. A narrative epistemology shifts the focus away from people to language and social practice; it is both the means and the end of this project. It is the way of knowing, the method, the style, the structure and the end point.

The central questions I began with were about the seemingly benign self-styling practices of radical/experiential education and their emphasis on reflection, conscientisation and self-inquiry. Are they in fact agents for the perpetration of a particular sociopolitical agenda? Are these practices another form of subjugation in which the individual is constructed as a docile body (Foucault 1977), fitting in to dominant conventions about human beings, and therefore promote questionable ethics? Or can these practices promote agency and resilience against dominating social practices? Of course, as Foucault said, 'everything is dangerous' (see 1983a). I am not aiming to emerge out of this inquiry with a clear answer.

A concern that is central to my teaching practice/inquiry is found in Foucault's exposition of ethics which he engaged in the latter parts of his life, through an exploration of what he termed, 'technologies of the self' (1988a). Ethics, he considered to be one's relationship to oneself in the light of the subjugating practices of our culture. In other words the choices that we have/can learn in the light of dominant cultural narratives. He differentiated between ethics as moral codes and regulations, and ethics as 'the real behaviour of individuals in relation to the rules and values recommended to them ... the manner in which they comply more or less fully...
with the standard of conduct, the manner in which they obey or resist an interdiction or prescription' (1985a:25). Working with individuals in their negotiation of the dominant subjugating practices of the culture - a negotiation of the tension between 'the imposition of forms upon oneself, and the activity of forming and shaping oneself as a certain kind of subject' (Falzon 1998:64) is, I propose the role of a 'reconstructionist teacher'. The philosophical stance required for this is a narrative epistemology.

I will turn to the practices of the tradition I work within, to explicate my pathway to developing an epistemology that upholds the tension identified earlier and in doing so provides the space for an ethics of the self. In other words the document will demonstrate its central thesis. And, perhaps more significantly, it demonstrates that deconstructing practices are not a 'tearing down' of beloved ideals but the unwrapping of a complex gift. As all aspects of a practice are examined, they reveal the partial and contingent nature of knowledge - that it is historical and fortuitous and therefore subject to transformation. It is this revelation that heralds the resistance\textsuperscript{13} (the blip on the screen), the possibility - however small/substantial - for human agency (see Spanos 1993:164). It is to this fragile possibility that I, as an educator, would like to turn.

Broadly, I want to propose that rather than being nihilistic, abstract and unethical, Foucault's work in poststructuralism makes explicit our embodied and concrete human relations and in this sense could be considered more ethical than many methods that claim ethics as central to their practices (such as critical pedagogies). Rather than preaching rousing rhetoric and universal prescriptions for emancipation/liberation, and even compassion, while acting in abstract, and disembodied ways, it makes visible the 'inter-action' between individuals and society/culture - or the ways that people constitute/are constituted as subjects. In this sense, ironically, poststructuralism could be considered radically human. It speaks to our embeddedness in context, our multi-storied tendencies, including the

---

H. Byrne-Armstrong PhD thesis 1999
multiple and varied ways that we dream up social forms - as well as resist them. It embodies us, places us in contexts, as well as speaking to a multiple, changing self-landscape of actions and relationships.

Furthermore, Foucault’s work affirms, through its historical analysis, how these patterns or social forms that we create are transitory, partial and contingent - they depend on our positioning and identity. Through the fissures and rents of these social forms are glimpses of our agency - the peculiar, quaint, iconoclastic, extraordinary and monstrous abilities we have as human beings to resist. It is to this notion of ‘mobile and transitory forms of resistance’ (Foucault 1981:96) that this thesis turns. Identifying as a reconstructionist teacher means to me providing space in which resistance to the established social forms shaping the context can occur, knowing that it may be the small and tawdry acts of resistance that are the glimpse of agency and self-responsibility (my purpose as an educator).

There are others who have been before me in this journey. Lather (1991), Gore (1993), Giroux (1994), and Parker (1997) have written extensively in this area. What is missing is the articulation of this dilemma through the discussion and exploration of educational practices. Ellsworth (1992), Lewis (1992), Davies (1996), Shor (1996) and Carson & Sumara (1997) have achieved some of this and I would like to add to it. This thesis articulates a journey to formulate practices that utilise the inherent tension in the local radical pedagogy and regards the utilisation of this tension as its aim. There are multiple ways of doing this and this is just one. I believe that the more these practices are ‘sung-up’ (into thick, descriptive narratives), the more possibilities there are for ‘mobile and transitory forms of resistance’ (Foucault 1981:96).

The research is informed by the postmodern; it ‘legitimises the local, plural and immanent’ (Nicholson 1990:23). The context is local; it is a story of a local practice with colleagues and students within and without the Academy but does not purport to be representative. It is plural in that it is
multi-storied and reflexive - it perceives itself from several perspectives, and imminent in that it has emerged from the lived experience of the tortuous path walked by people engaged in radical education.

Locating Myself in the Research

I position myself at an intersection of radical experiential education, cultural feminism, interpretive traditions and poststructuralism. The web of understandings that this intersection produces provides both clarity and the complexity that inevitably arises in living with the above understandings.

That the thesis is an account of my lifework illustrates the tension central to this thesis. The positioning of the author self-reflexively within the text is pivotal to the cultural feminist project of which I am a part. The notion of the death of the author, which opened the door to seeing ourselves as constituted subjects (the postmodern turn), is also central to the work. The unease that exists between feminism and postmodernism has been written about extensively (see Nicholson 1990; Brodribb 1992; Ramazangolu 1993; Porter 1991). It is embodied in the creatures that Grumet's quote at the beginning of this chapter identifies. As a feminist, I chose to locate the work in the narrative of my everyday practice as a white, middle class educator. 'Learning along the way' provides one metaphor for the narrative to allude to its material basis in the humdrum of everyday teaching practice. However, the narrative is located in everyday practice to make clear a feminist stance on the nature of knowledge and theory making (see Stanley 1990). The knower and the known are not separate. This thesis demonstrates theory-in-the-making as it traverses the contested areas of the radical/experiential learning discourse. In my poststructuralist hat I also know that whatever narrative I write, in the reading creatures will sneak in and inhabit the crevices of the text.
Unexpected forms of theory-making will emerge as the text develops a life of its own. This is also the everyday experience of a radical educator and explains my fascination with the poststructuralist turn to language/text.

Vindicated somewhat by poststructuralist and postmodern discourses, radical and experiential education is becoming increasingly accepted in the Academy. Outside the Academy it is used with the vigour of a Broadway musical and with an uncritical righteousness and sentimentality only found in the shadow of liberal humanism. My journey has been an exploration of radical/experiential learning in both of these contexts, but also in the light of contemporary discourses. Its path runs through many intersecting desires: the expectations and needs of students, the values of practitioners, and the dominant discourse of the Academy. It runs along trails of knowledges: dominant stories, subjugated stories, intuitive knowledge(s), imagination, cultural knowledge(s), women’s knowledge(s); and through the dense jungles created by the influences of liberal humanism (the tyranny of niceness - the ghost of Pollyanna, and sentimentality - the very present ghost of paternalism).

This thesis has not dramatically changed my work, but it has certainly enhanced it. I still teach in ways that are considered radical and experiential, addressing the 'how' and 'why' (the historical foundations) we come to know, as well as the 'what', in classroom interactions. But I now approach these relationships from the view of a narrative epistemology.

Through examining the ways knowledge is produced, I intend to show the import of the knowledge-power (see Foucault 1977, 1986, 1988) connection on classroom practices and the effects of making it more transparent. Power exercised in educational settings can be productive and/or oppressive. Changing my perspective from power as something possessed to power as circulating and exercised at the micropolitical levels of daily life, leaves me no choice but to attend to its operation in the local context, to 'conduct an ascending analysis of power, starting from its infinitesimal
mechanisms' (Foucault 1980:99). Pedagogy is not only the practices and
processes of teaching but also the social relations that shape the classroom
(see Kenway & Modra in Luke & Gore 1992). The 'change of heart' that I am
exploring currently with students, is to reframe the 'how an individual
learns' into a 'how and why knowledge is produced', and how such knowledges
are constitutive of subjectivity and identity. Asking these questions involves
the development of a narrative epistemology.

The pathway is 'critical' in the sense of being discriminating or
discerning15. In grappling with radical/experiential learning practices there
are many potential dangers and dilemmas, the most obvious being the danger
of reification, a paradox particularly present when writing a thesis. This is
the story of learning to traverse the complexities of the path in a
discerning way armed with only one or two maps and a bunch of fellow
travellers finding direction as we go. I have developed many tools and
stances on the journey. Walking this path requires the enterprise of a
 hustler, the focus of a scientist, the creative drive of an artist, the
impeccability and wakefulness of the hunter and a witch's cauldron (amongst
other things!).

I do not believe that I will, and am not seeking to, come up with any
universal principles - especially as this thesis is firmly embedded in a
poststructuralist discourse. Foucault spoke very definitely about this in
terms of the ethical. He proposed that an 'ethical intellectual' was one who
took a position that, in part, at least, refused to 'tell others what to do, a
refusal to lay down the law for others, or to bury resistance under the
weight of a prescriptive, prophetic discourse' (Foucault in Falzon 1998: 64).
Rather, this is a story of my learning along the way - and, as I reflect, there
may be some guiding principles which others in their own endeavours to
reflect on their practices, may find useful.
Writing the History

Having reached my adult years in the climate of the late 1960's, I have lived through the contemporary unveiling of women's rights. Absorbing Greer's (1971) *The Female Eunuch* was a disturbing communication for someone who was eight months pregnant with her first child! Just as I was relentlessly being subordinated (by the 'dead-certainty' of 'nature's gestation period!') to the private sphere of the home and child rearing, I received this call from the public sphere to arm myself, (burn my very supportive nursing bra) and go forth! This resulted in 20 years of juggling the private and the public, my family and my career, a phallocentric and biologically determined view of gender and the 'freedom' (and resulting exhaustion of being everything to everybody) of the view that gender was a socially constructed role.

My feminist frame emerged from versions of the consciousness-raising groups that were a characteristic of the 1970's. Around firesides, the children heaped over toys and games, eyeing each other as they fustled¹⁶ and padded around, we conducted intense conversations about our changing identities from young women to mothers and the duty of care and responsibility we were now inextricably bound into. This space provided the means of 'singing-up' a female reality that was separate and different, and one that subsequently subverted and transformed the social reality (see Spender 1980).

The fact that this voice began to be heard from many quarters at once produced the groundswell which became a decentred social movement (a phenomenon of this epoch), and at the time, arguably the only way to penetrate the power bases of phallocentric discourse. The cry that 'all women are ... the subject of processes of subordination by men in a patriarchal society which privileges men in the social/public and political sphere' (Gebbie 1994), is considered essentialist and outmoded
in the nineties. But it was a vital step in the 1960's, not only for women, but for bringing (other) 'minority' agendas forward. The success of connecting and uniting voices into a grounded political movement was a phenomenon that encouraged other (more) marginalised voices to be heard, and the lives and lots of people all over the world have been changed.

Excursions into the 'political feminist world' intruded on our domesticity; marching with our children hitched in different trajectories around us, strategic meetings for publicity and fund raising, and support for women's centres, were all hyphenated by calls and cries from children as they impacted into our world with their needs (see Ruddick 1989). At the end of the day we would go our separate ways to feed and bed our babies and greet and feed our partners.

Our roles were accepted with only a glance at the inherent contradictions - a result of the dissociative split between experience and what is generally taken to be the reality (see Gilligan 1993) that centuries of inscriptions from patriarchal hegemonic practices had written on our lives. Grumet described the experience aptly when she said, 'holding political theory in one hand and the humiliation of not being able to fit into last year's bathing suit in the other, feminists understand that knowing and being are not identical' (1990:338). Although women knew that the political and social struggle was vital to be a part of, we also pragmatically recognised and accepted the responsibility imposed on us, the 'duty of care' as mothers of young children, the manager of relationships in the family and of its connections with the broader system, and this counteracted '...feelings of guilt at not being a 'real feminist' (see Ruddick 1989).

Like many women, the 'duty of care' spread to the necessity of my family becoming a double income family. As a middle class 'girl', I was educated into a professional sphere which was chosen by society at the

H. Byrne-Armstrong PhD thesis 1999
time as one of the appropriate jobs for women to have as an accessory or emergency fall back position, and with the willing support of my spouse I joined the workforce. This was both a necessity for my mental health and for the family income, but like many women influenced by early feminism, I embraced it as part of the liberatory struggle. It is only having developed a (postmodern) voice (of irony) that I recognise that the action was more likely one of support of the hegemonic voice rather than resistance to it!

The schism between my experience/knowledge and 'reality' gradually became no longer tenable. Like Gilligan, 'I became aware of the strength of [the] internal voice which was interfering with [my] ability to speak (1982;iix). I returned to university to explore this 'split' - I did not know what to name it initially - then academic feminism exploded into my world. I made sense of my stories through outstanding feminist writers (Daly 1975; Diamond & Orenstein 1990; Spender 1980; Belenky et al 1986; Gilligan 1982) and began an endeavour to find an 'authentic' voice to connect me into the public and private sphere.

Although my earlier education (school and university) was in mainstream education, as a teacher I have only been involved in a form and structure of education that is considered an alternative to mainstream forms of education - experiential and radical education. Initially my involvement with experiential education had the goal of self-development. Experiential learning unleashed a passion for personal learning which mainstream education had not. I progressed from a passive, compliant and reasonably successful recipient of foundational knowledge initially, to an active and very successful proponent of experiential education.

Experiential learning was the context for a Masters by research. My particular interest was the function of reflection in learning. I followed Husserl's\textsuperscript{17} writings about separating out a realm of 'pure'
experience through 'bracketing' or suspending presuppositions about the existence of a world beyond consciousness (see Sass 1990). He contrasted a natural attitude with a phenomenological attitude, which he identified as our ability to stand back, reflect and observe structure. Central to his theory is the notion that experience, language and social practices can be separated from each other. He believed this sort of radical reflection was necessary for entering into what he termed a transcendental phenomenology - the purity and clarity of thought (see Sass 1990) needed to discover what the nature and structure of the original pre-linguistic experience was without the strictures of language. (see Polkinghorne 1988). Contemplative knowing (as he termed reflection), for Husserl, was the fundamental mode that made meaning of human existence. His underlying assumption '...was that the essence of human consciousness is primarily manifest in acts of contemplative knowing' (ibid.:238).

My doubts about this proposition came from a series of very pragmatic experiences in contemplative communities. Certainly contemplative knowing gave people meaning in their lives, but it did not seem to help their relationships or ability to cooperate as human beings. I became 'politicised'. I read and used Freire (1970) and associated writers (Mezirow 1981, 1991; Shor & Freire 1987; and McLaren 1989) in my work as well as being engaged in ten years of social action. I travelled extensively as part of a worldwide project aimed at working with social issues. In large international, cross-cultural, residential 200 people struggled together to understand violence, oppression and ways of understanding difference. These residential became theatres for airing the disabling aspects of discourses of racism, ethnicity, homophobia and sexism and our collective and often internalised, fears and hatreds. People shared their stories and experiences, struggled with conflict, difference and marginalisation. Sitting in the Fire, the title for Mindell's

H. Byrne-Armstrong PhD thesis 1999
book (see previous endnote) that described these experiences. Through them I came to know that I am constructed by a social milieu; my voice is one of a white, educated middle-class academic woman and this positioning marks me as privileged. I also live in the shadow of powerful discourses, which shape me as 'other'. But the degree of 'otherness' is not defined or static. In many contexts, I am privileged over my colleagues and friends who are differently coloured and classed or have other than mainstream sexual preferences. I have many stories from this time:

- I have been witness to stories of childhood sexual abuse and violence against women (especially women in 'third-world-countries') and worked in communities with women to change these disabling discourses;

- I have protested at stories of violence against people who choose other than mainstream sexuality, 'She was flown back to the States in a military aircraft in handcuffs and leg irons for being lesbian in the armed forces' (Armstrong workshop notes 1992). Lesbians and gays demanded that I look at the privilege of my 'invisibility' as a white middle class heterosexual woman and my internalised heterosexism. I have marched for gay and lesbian rights and given my services to the gay community to work with those identified as people with AIDS;

- I have been yelled at in anger as a representative of a colonising white race who is implicated in genocide when I said, 'I feel hopeless, I have tried everything that I know; whatever I say or do is never enough'. The reply, 'Good, you feel despair; now you begin to know what it is like to be black in this country (USA). Perhaps there is the first glimmer of empathy; now perhaps we can begin to talk' (Armstrong notes 1993);

- I have been told to go and work on my privilege, to stop feeling a 'victim' to stand strong in the world. 'What privilege to voice that you are oppressed! Most of us do not have that privilege; we have no voice

H. Byrne-Armstrong PhD thesis 1999
and no time to whine, we are so busy surviving in your white world’ (Armstrong workshop notes 1993).

For the Masters by research, I met with a learning group over six months and, using a participatory research methodology (Reason & Rowan 1981), explored the place of reflection in learning. The philosophical position that I took was a constructivist one (ibid.); that the nature of reality is transactional, co-created and subject dependent. Within this frame, any learning is viewed as social and contextual, occurring when people actively transform their experience/theories into action. This meant that reflection was never passive and simply contemplative. As a group we identified that it was our ability to metacommunicate\textsuperscript{20} that was the key to our learning. Metacommunication is an active form of reflection, which I called reflexivity. Reflexivity, I proposed, was the process of synthesising the context (knowledge ‘received’), with our ‘self’ (lifeworld) through a double loop of reflection and critical awareness (see Armstrong 1994). I proposed that a reflexive interaction with learning was essential for learning to occur; it promotes the continuous process of flowing between our thoughts as we construct them and our actions. ‘Knowledge gained in this way is embodied knowledge; the connected knowing of Belenky et al. (1986), knowledge which transforms our perceptual window...’ (Armstrong 1993).

This research and my experiences with social action have informed my practice and shaped me as an educator. I was asked to develop curricula in various learning contexts; a core learning-to-learn unit in a three-year undergraduate course, a course for trainers in organisations, and a stream of work concerning conflict and difference in the workplace. These experiences form the raw material of this dissertation.

After several years of practice, problematic themes began to surface; there was a tension between content and process, personal growth and education, learner focus and teacher focus, structure and no structure, self-determination and autonomy, self-assessment and self-monitoring. Any

\textsuperscript{20} H. Byrne-Armstrong PhD thesis 1999
practitioner in the field of radical/experiential pedagogies will be familiar
with these tensions. They lead to a sense of failure as an educator (see
Gore 1993). My response to this sense of failure was to want to research
and explore the issues more. This was an impetus for this
exploration/thesis.

**Locating the Style**

If we continue to speak this sameness,
if we speak to each other as men have spoken for centuries,
as they have taught us to speak,
we will fail each other.
Again ... words will pass through our bodies, above our heads,
disappear, make us disappear
(Irigaray 1980:69)

As a feminist researcher, it is essential that I situate myself within the
broader endeavour of my lifework, 'to concretely and analytically locate[s]
the product of the ... labour process within a concrete analysis of the
process of production itself' (Stanley 1990:12). My own voice and its
location has been growing in clarity (and loudness) through my lifework. In
writing with my own voice rather than the dominant, abstract, patriarchal
voice of the academic culture, I know I am taking a risk of being criticised
for swimming around in untheorised raw data, 'a kind of pre-theoretical
chaos' (see Stanley 1990:42) which is unscientific and devoid of theoretical
implications. This of course assumes that there is such a thing as 'raw data'.
From the theoretical positioning I am taking there is no such thing.
Experience is never raw, it is always constitutive of a 'first order' theorising
(ibid.) - an interpretation and a narrative embedded in history and culture.

I also find myself fully recognising the enormous courage, power and
strength of those mothers who held the space open for me to construct and
write a thesis which embodies my gender and socialisation. There is a
slippery boundary between what is my voice and these voices of others - the
mothers - those wise women before me whose work has contributed to my
voice in this thesis, and the fathers whose vision for a better world
contributed to their enterprise. I am informed by the writings of these
women, including their protests, - strong and angry at times - at the
absence of half the planet's population in the texts of male theorists whose
work was deemed to be 'liberating'.

As I am engaged in the patriarchal project of writing a thesis, I use
a voice that engages in the contest. But I am also struggling with an
(impossible?) task to find a voice that also disengages; a voice and language
which is not 'from the sameness' that Irigaray (see above) spoke of. In the
broader scheme of things, both/all these voices, connected through their
difference, can (and do) contribute to all lives in the shadow of the
powerful discourses that shape docile bodies in the name of capitalism,
humanism and patriarchy (see Foucault 1977). These are the creatures in
the attic. For my voice to emerge, I return to the wisdom of the mothers
and (my version of) the central tenets of feminist scholarship. Hopefully,
out of this will emerge a voice that speaks 'from herself' with the purpose
of speaking to others to make visible the web that connects, not in a
sentimental sense but in a pragmatic sense. The style of writing, therefore,
is personal, narrative and at times poetic. This is the way that I write and it
is the way that I, as a human being, connect to other human beings. It is
grounded in a narrative sense, in history, it is my story only at this point of
time. It links a series of events together and frames them with a plot. It is,
in this sense, reflexive. It is a demonstration of what it is about.

As a feminist researcher I am aware that I am not doing research only
with women. But, the research is feminist in other ways (see Horsfall 1997):
• The knower and the known are not separate, 'a feminist insistence on the
determined conjoining of the dichotomies, a refusal to accept that such
divisions exist within a world of experience (Stanley 1990:11). Knowledge is material and embodied. The process of knowledge construction that is this thesis is my lived experience. Feminists write extensively of the political processes of phallocentric discourse that separate the researcher from the researched (see Stanley 1990; Reinharz 1992; Nicholson 1990; Kreiger 1991). This thesis 'draws the process of knowledge production, in researching and theory, into its product in the shape of written accounts of it' (Stanley 1990:4, emphasis in original). It historically traces, therefore, the narratives of my lived experience as I live and shows the production of knowledge that leads me to re-author these stories:

- This is a feminist thesis in the sense of walking the path of knowledge construction while reflecting on my construction of it. Reflexivity is therefore another narrative running through this thesis - a bias I have about critically thinking through the actual process of knowledge production and the subjectivities and identities that constituted my voice through the methods and the stories I write. It has also required a certain discipline and refusal to take up the invitations of dominant academic narratives that would refute that the personal is political. The process of doing a thesis is a profound challenge to my constructions of life. I feel wrapped in the tight and often restrictive womb of my office which remains a prison until I unravel my new found knowledges and look out my window, walk with my grand-dog in the park and take action in the world.

And, as a feminist researcher in education, I am aware of the subject positions that I easily fall into:

- 'the feminist teacher is a kind of mother' (Gore 1993:69) ... in fact ..'a strange creature - neither father or mother' (Pagano in Gore ibid.). The duty of care that was regarded as central to (early) feminist ethics and moral views inform this work but the meanings of 'care' has changed.

H. Byrne-Armstrong PhD thesis 1999
Teasing out the threads, identifies a dichotomy of, on one hand the 'authority' of a more masculine perspective, (the universal ethic of justice and rights built on objectivity, detachment, abstract thinking and individual autonomy), and on the other the 'duty of care' a 'feminist' perspective based of intersubjectivity, nurturance, particularity and emotion. Some would say that the tension between the two is not new (see Browning Cole & Coultrap-McQuin 1992). In my particular location embedded in radical pedagogic practice, this tension is alive, vivid, a disturbance and at times even fun!

Walking Through the Thesis

In the thesis, following the feminist, post-structuralist stance I am taking, I am not distinguishing empirical and philosophical research. Throughout the thesis, I blend theory and practice. They are both knowledges and produce knowledge. The central philosophy of the thesis is poststructuralism, so this is appropriate. I do not advocate giving more airtime to practices to even the balance of decades of oppression. This would be to support the dichotomy. I approach theory as a narrative/knowledge and practice as a narrative/knowledge. However, I have positioned the research data in discrete narratives (chapters 5-8). This is to follow (somewhat), the conventions of a thesis as well as to walk my talk (see chapter 4).

Throughout the thesis there are recurring metaphors which are fully explained in chapter 4. These metaphors, 'singing-up', 'dead-certainties', 'local-knowledge' and 'thick-descriptions' are used purposely to denote the stance of this thesis and its likely outcomes. The latter three metaphors are used to structure the chapters of research narratives in discrete examples of knowledge production:

Chapter 1 is the introduction to the thesis;
Chapter 2 is an exploration of Foucault as he pertains to this thesis. I have not provided a full coverage of his work, neither am I a 'Foucauldian'. However, I have explored his work and his project to elucidate the position of this thesis. To do this I have explored the major themes of his work relevant to the educational discourse, and the perceived problem of his work in terms of feminism and the emancipatory education project;

Chapter 3 explores the radical/experiential education tradition that I have grown up within as a teacher. I call it the local radical pedagogy to express that it is my version of pedagogy as this will differ from my colleagues and their versions. It identifies four major movements in radical/experiential education that have influenced my work and a brief overview of the major ideas they promote. Education is the means through which I have explored an epistemology rather than an end point, so a description of each movement is less important than a critical reflection in the light of poststructuralism. So, rather than just describing each movement, I have taken a step backward to explore their lineage and to critically examine aspects of them in the light of this project;

Chapter 4 follows the pathway to the methods used in the thesis and the birth of a narrative epistemology. The chapter describes the seeds of the stance I am taking, and how the 'turn to language' and the 'death of the subject' influences my use of narrative as a form of knowing and a praxis. The methods used in this research are the methods of the narrative epistemology that I propose. These methods, interpretation (in a poststructuralist sense), and discourse analysis, is a playful approach to learning;

Chapter 5 is the first research narrative. It is the narrative of an encounter with feminism. It is a journey through feminist politics and practice tracing my path from the 'dead-certainties' of the early feminist writings (the oppression of all women by all men), to the explosion of these universal ideas and the beginnings of a 'politics of difference' (Young 1990),
and the notion of 'intersecting oppressions' (Yeatman 1995). The event that begins it was an exploration by the students and myself of gender issues and was called by the students, the 'famous fishbowl incident'. The 'dead-certainties' are the story of this event and the first interpretation (an ironic, hermeneutic interpretation) of it. This was not satisfying. The incident was a complex and challenging event and led me to do a lot of reading and reflecting and a discourse analysis on the same material. This forms the 'local-knowledge'. This 'local-knowledge' was the impetus for me to change to a more ironic view of early feminism. Encounters with oppression are immediate, momentary and context driven, not simply universal and continuous and internal. Yet it is important to view this statement with irony, knowing that in a global sense it is women who live in dire poverty and distress. Realising the necessity for an ironic tension around feminist issues leads me to a politics of difference ('thick-descriptions').

**Chapter 6** The insight-out sight encounter is the encounter with humanism and its universalising ideals and belief in the human subject as the centre of the universe\(^{23}\). The self-technology closest to this project is reflection (in a phenomenological sense) and this narrative is the exploration of reflective practices as 'dead-certainties'. My masters thesis was embedded in reflective teaching practices and they formed the basis of my pedagogy. This narrative tells the story of an exercise I have used in many contexts over the years, and the deconstruction of it using student and co-researcher reactions. The resistance to this exercise sparked my curiosity and led me to read Foucault's later work (on technologies of the self), stimulated by a comment by my supervisor\(^{24}\) at the time about my Pollyanna approach to reflective practices and I am grateful for this comment! The narrative from 'Technologies of the Self' (Foucault 1988) is the 'more dead-certainties' in this chapter. I have placed them in this category to keep reminding the reader that I do not think that this knowledge is now the truth. I want to maintain an attitude of ironic tension about all knowledge.
The 'local-knowledge' is the interpretations of my co-researcher's experience before and after this theoretical exploration. This led me to rethink my practice and to begin to articulate a different form of practice ('thick-descriptions'). The interesting thing that emerges from this narrative is about the notion of resistance. In humanist discourses resistance is seen as a problem, something to be removed. Taking the position of this thesis (poststructuralism), resistance is not something to be avoided, but rather resistance, in the sense of making a choice to comply or not with dominant discourses, is the aim of the educational process and the beginning of agency.

Chapter 7 tells the story of encounters with power, truth and desire. The 'dead-certainties' of this narrative are formulated around a conflict between staff and students over one of the greatest paradoxes in experiential and autonomous learning, which is the slowness of learners to, (if they ever do), take responsibility for their learning. The 'local-knowledge' is the 'singing-up' of the discourses of truth shaping the field of action and making it more possible to see why all attempts at encouraging self-direction tend to fail. Bringing conflict and desires into the classroom or workshop space is not everyone's cup of tea. The first 'thickening-description' of this narrative explores this and recounts events that play with the space to keep it 'open' in the face of criticism and judgment. This is important in the light of my proposition that small and tawdry acts of resistance by students are important to their sense of agency (and therefore autonomy). This does not always mean confrontation. The final thickening description is an account of the use of Augustus Boal's (1992) work to keep the space open for power to be reconfigured.

Chapter 8 picks up the theme of the material basis of knowledge more literally, by firstly describing an event in which the space was used to shape people's meanings about the group. It followed the session in which the conflict had been spoken about endlessly and little resistance had existed.
This initially silent exercise seemed to open the space for something new to occur and the issues that had been dealt with by endless chatter suddenly dissolved in the mystery/magic of this space. But it also left me uneasy. The body as a site of knowledge production has been the object of surveillance and disciplinary technologies since the birth of the human sciences. As someone who has worked with the body for twenty odd years there were important questions to be explored before I felt comfortable using the body as another text (albeit a living, breathing text) for knowledge production in classroom practices. This exploration has led me away from, and back to, using alternative forms of pedagogic practices. The 'local-knowledge' is the description of another initially non-verbal exercise aimed at making complex theory relevant and alive to students. 'More local-knowledge' is another example of embodied knowledge, a subversion of the binary oppositions that form notions of community. This is a story from the same group of students in the initial events of the other narratives in a session they did on 'Building community'. The 'thickening-descriptions' are two stories demonstrating the collapse of the mind/body split in the production of self(s) through play and writing. They demonstrate that complex theories can be embodied in simple activities and that through this engagement, resistance and agency are included as learning outcomes. It also leads into the discussion of the paradox of these activities and the necessity for someone engaging in them to be aware of their implication in the disciplinary practices of surveillance and regulation;

Chapter 9 is the conclusion, a continuing discussion of a narrative epistemology based on the journey so far. It first looks at the central motif of this thesis, the ironic tension that I am saying is necessary for knowledge production in a reconstructionist environment. It then 'sings-up' a narrative epistemology, examines the difference between a practice embedded in an individual epistemology and a practice embedded in a narrative epistemology. And the characteristics of a narrative

H. Byrne-Armstrong PhD thesis 1999
epistemology; externalising conversations, discursive openness, the
cultivation of desire, narrative as a political practice. It concludes the
thesis with a thicker description of politics of a narrative epistemology and
its significance at this historical moment as well as its problems and
difficulties.

1 Throughout this thesis I will refer to knowledge in the plural to imply that there is more than one
knowledge. This is a political action to challenge the might of the notion of a single, rational
truth/knowledge.
2 'Truth stories' is the term I use for discourses -the theories/social practices that shape our lives.
3 One interested in a fluid notion of social justice (see Gore 1993).
4 I use the term 'pedagogy' to denote teaching and learning practices.
5 See chapter 3 for full discussion.
6 Notions such as conscientisation, self-actualisation, emancipation, liberation, even reflexivity, epistemic
cognition.
7 Lifelikeness: narrative knowing is based on the connection between everyday life and knowledge
production.
8 Throughout the text I am using discourse and cultural narrative interchangeably.
9 These "metaphors" are explored more fully in later chapters.
10 This phrase was used by my Michael White (see 1997) and is later explored in his last book, *Narratives of
Therapist Lives*, Dulwich Centre Pub, Adelaide (1998) which has been published since this thesis was
written. He is referring to moving away from the hermeneutic notion of deep, true meaning to meanings
as existing in everyday life. He is advocating an exploration of the different understandings of what
we say as being the process of meaning making rather than searching for a deep truth.
11 Epistemology in this sense is also an ontology. The stance I am taking is that knowing, doing, being are
one, present in our actions (and talk is an action).
12 In this thesis I call the radical/experiential tradition of education that I work within the 'local radical
pedagogy'. It has foundations in both the liberal humanist school and in radical education. In chapter 3.
I trace the influences of these different traditions on the (my) work.
13 Resistance in the sense I am using it is not resisting someone or something (although it may) -a
problem. Resistance in the poststructuralist sense is recognising the partial and contingent nature of
dominant discourses resisting them if one should choose.
14 The subtitle of a book by Mary Catherine Bateson, called *Peripheral Visions: Learning Along the Way*.
15 Rather than implying a connection with critical theory.
16 This word is not in the Oxford Dictionary. It is my word and descriptive of the activity I am
describing.
17 Phenomenology, and particularly the notion of "bracketing", was where early humanistic psychologists/
educators went to find a philosophical base for the reflective aspects of their work (see Rowan 1983).
18 Therefore alluding to a metaphysical subject.
19 Process oriented Psychology, an organisation at the time centred in Switzerland (now USA) that was
connecting the personal to the political through cross cultural workshops/training in working with
conflict/difference held in a different country each year (Russia, Poland, India, Australia, South
Africa). It is the brain child of Arnold Mindell (author of amongst other books, Mindell, A (1992)
Leader as a Martial Artist USA Harper Collins; Mindell Arnold (1995) Sitting in The Fire Portland,
Oregon, Lao Tse Press
20 Bateson's (1973) term for our ability to comment on our own communication.
21 Central to poststructuralist and postmodern discourses is the collapse of the dialectic. A discussion of
this is in chapter 7.
22 See page 106
23 A phrase I once heard and have used ever since is "terminal uniqueness".
24 Professor Bob Hodge,
Chapter Two

THE PASSION AND THE PROBLEM OF/USING FOUCAULT

Thought is freedom in relation to what one does,
the motion by which one detaches oneself from it,
establishes it as an object and reflects on it as a problem
(Foucault in Rabinow ed. 1984:388)
Introduction
This chapter explores the theoretical narrative that has, at this point of time, increasingly informed my work and bought passion to my project, namely the ideas of Michel Foucault (see 1973, 1977, 1983a, 1983b, 1988). It is my reading of Foucault's work; it is not meant to be, or purporting to be, a comprehensive summary of his work. Like many feminist educators (Gore 1993; Orner in Popkewitz & Brennan 1998; Davies 1996; Weedon 1987), I am appropriating his ideas and using them in ways that are beyond the bounds of his work. I am not a 'Foucauldian', (whatever that is), and I am not strictly applying his genealogy or interpretive analytics (see Dreyfus & Rabinow 1983) to my work. I am taking up his invitation but more so, I want to demonstrate how these ideas have revivified my work. For me the personal has always 'felt' political, but I could find no ways to articulate this except through methods of phenomenological reduction (see Armstrong 1993). This was inadequate in explaining the power of social practices. As a teacher, I became pessimistic and then curious about the tiredness and the feeling of failure I felt at the seeming lack of response from students to invitations to pick up their passions and empower themselves. What reading in poststructuralism has done is to point a way out of this pessimism (see also Gore 1993:xv). This project can never be completed, and as it is situated in poststructuralism, this would seem fitting. But rather than finding this frustrating my ongoing engagement (and thickening descriptions - Geertz 1983) is enabling and therefore a contrast to the modernist pessimism I had previously experienced.

The Death of the Subject & the Turn to Language
In the last thirty years there has been a major shift in thinking which has been felt in all areas of society, including education. This movement can be encapsulated by the metaphor, 'the death of the subject', and heralds the

H. Byrne-Armstrong PhD thesis 1999
downfall of the bastion of humanism, the self-reflective, transcendental, rational subject and its accompanying 'philosophy of consciousness'; the premise of emancipation and progress through the actions of a liberated agent (see Popkewitz & Brennan 1998). That this influences thinking in education is obvious, as education is historically involved in producing this idealised subject (see Usher & Edwards 1994). That it is also relevant to radical, critical and experiential forms of education can be seen in their embeddedness in the Enlightenment project's goals of progress and emancipation and the development of a true consciousness/potential.

Nurtured by the explosion of the information age and the birth of globalisation, the 'death of man' [sic], or the postmodern turn is, I would contend, more of a description of life at the end of the millennium than it is an overarching philosophical theory about life. Furthermore, the 'turn to language' that it crystallises moves the focus of contemporary research away from the transcendental subject to 'the material and constitutive role of knowledge in the construction of contemporary life' (see Popkewitz & Brennan 1998:8). This is a shift from knowledge making as emergent from a 'philosophy of consciousness' (ibid.) to what these authors and others (see Luke in Musratt, Luke & Freebody 1997) call a 'social epistemology'. A social epistemology, rather than exploring the 'natural' potential of individuals through their 'distortions of perception', turns to interrogate the talk and social practices and their codes and regulations in any situation, proposing that talk and social practices are not reflective of life but constitutive of it. The narrative epistemology that I am proposing takes this a step further to allude to the multi-storied nature of this talk and social practices. Furthermore this way of knowing is a political praxis. Some stories have more air-time than others, there is a connection between the narratives and power. This is the connection with Foucault's work. He showed that it is both
the discursive and non-discursive practices (i.e. manifestations of power),
that determines what is known and who knows it.

There are widespread intellectual discussions and disputes about the
effects of this turn to language (within education this has been especially so
in radical and liberatory education - see Lather 1991; Luke & Gore 1992;
Giroux 1994; McLaren 1995). Does the 'death of the subject' herald the
death of ethics, a relativism in which anything goes? Does the loss of
foundationalist/universal ideals of emancipation, liberation, reason and
democracy mean nihilism, fragmentation and anarchy? Does the turn to
language herald ever-increasing levels of abstraction and political paralysis?

I want to demonstrate, through my work as an experiential and
radical educator, that rather than heralding nihilism and moral degradation,
the 'death of the subject' as articulated in the work of Michel Foucault
provides us with possibilities that move beyond these pessimistic
predictions. I would argue that this pessimism is rooted in modernist
dichotomous thought and, furthermore, that by questioning the very ground
on which Enlightenment projects have depended - the metaphysical subject
- Foucault opened the door to a new wave of theory and practice. His
meticulous exposition of the materiality and historicity of knowledge, and
the way that individuals are produced as subjects and objects through
everyday social practices, could be regarded as more humane and ethical
than many of the universal ideals and prescriptions for liberating individuals
found in humanism and modernism.

Foucault's Passion - giving theory feet ...

Foucault was, as he himself admits (1983a), picking up where others left off
(for example, Marx, Nietzsche, Heidegger). Through the three modes of
inquiry in his work (ibid.) - knowledge, self/subjectivity and power - Foucault
has articulated what I am calling, a 'narrative epistemology'. The first mode

H. Byrne-Armstrong PhD thesis 1999
proposed that knowledge was not simply linguistic, rational and in the realm of pure ideas, but knowledge is material and productive, the verisimilitude of a narrative epistemology. Secondly, this materiality is historically formed (the temporality of narratives) and therefore contingent, never final, always partial and fragmentary. Subjects are both subjects and objects of knowledge. Knowledge is linked with power through systematised and institutionalised packages of regulating discourses, or truth stories, which constitute our identities - but never fully because of their partiality and contingency, the political praxis in a narrative epistemology. His final project was the exploration of ‘technologies of the self’ (Foucault 1988), the relationship between the subject and the self seen through the shadow of the confessional practices of our culture.

Foucault’s project is achieved by extrapolating the micropolitical relationship or interaction between individuals and their socio-cultural contexts. In his words, ‘the different modes by which, in our culture, human beings are made subjects’ (1983a:208). By demonstrating the historical and contingent nature of knowledge production and the constitution of different forms of subject/identity in the context of games of truth and power, he shows a different pathway towards social and political change. He thought that liberatory and revolutionary struggles were limited because, in their resistance, they necessarily had to implicitly accept what they were resisting. His strategy was to sidestep this dichotomy by questioning the nature of its existence in the first place.

What Foucault does is to place the messy, complex and often contradictory interface between people and their social worlds at the centre of producing social change. He examined HOW and WHY knowledge is constituted by a careful and exacting historical examination of social practices - under what conditions they were produced, implemented and reproduced and for whose gain (see e.g. Foucault 1977). In other words, how
and why we have come to know ourselves as subjects and objects within the powerful discourses that shape our lives. This is a different goal to one that proposes a universal ideal about emancipation and recipes for how to produce a liberated subject who can execute it. Any universal ideal is abstract and removed from its social and political foundations in human history. Radical/experiential forms of education are driven by concepts such as emancipation and liberation, and have an emotional appeal but their origins are forgotten. What Foucault did was to change the question from what is liberation and the liberated subject and how we produce it, to how does liberation operate in different contexts over time? Who speaks it and for what purpose?

Mainstream forms of education remove people from their historical origins by preaching a truth and exhorting us to fit it, making the world seem deterministic, abstract, inhuman and therefore impossible to intervene in (Popkewitz & Brennan 1998). But experiential/radical education can have the same effect - through a different mechanism, the presence of the standpoint of an a-priori subject or universal ideal. Institutionalised and subjective agendas that determine these things get hidden in multiple levels of invisible and covert power (see Falzon 1998). This is illustrated in the rhetoric of the myriad of writings in critical pedagogy and in humanistic psychology/education/participatory research (see Knowles 1975; Rogers 1983; Reason & Rowan 1981). The rhetoric in these discourses ‘talks up’ the ideal subject as the starting point for emancipation, justifying this through the very theories (abstract, rational, patriarchal) that have oppressed the subject in the first place (see Young I. 1990; Gore 1993). The main issue is that accepting the potential agency of people as natural (and/or hidden behind layers of distorted thinking/blocks/restrictions) leads to a tendency to lose sight of how language and practices (including the ideal of potential agency) are historically formed (see Popkewitz & Brennan 1998:25).
Furthermore, as these systems of knowledge remain invisible and we continue to preach abstract ideals or examine our navels, the power and politics that support the systems in the first place, do not change.

I would contend that, rather than focussing the attention on abstract ideals or a natural concept of self, exploring the ways that our subjectivity is constituted through everyday encounters with the dominant discourses is more relevant to social change/action. This exploration can 'bring to light the anonymous historical processes through which our sensibility was constituted in an effort to create a critical distance on it' (Sawiki 1991:99). And, furthermore, exploring these encounters 'sings-up' the already existing, everyday ways that people have of not only complying, but also of resisting, oppressive circumstances, of creatively playing with or strongly challenging the games of truth and power that shape everyday life. This makes education for social change different from the work of people such as Freire. Instead of entering the context with some preconceived notion of liberation (conscientisation), Foucault was interested in the small, local, already existing points of resistance. It is important to recognise that although he thought liberation struggles limited (struggling for a sexual identity was implicitly accepting the notion of a fixed sexual identity in the first place), this was not to say that he did not believe in the value of them. His project was to add to them by challenging the very categories of normalisation processes that created the oppression in the first place.

[This] ...is also evidence that he did not entirely reject the notion of agency. The fact that one cannot guarantee the outcome of such resistance is no argument against it. It is, instead, a reason to continue to be attentive to the limits of one's own discourse and practices ... According to Foucault, our freedom consists in our ability to transform our relationship to tradition and not in being able to control the direction that the future will take (Sawiki:100)

H. Byrne-Armstrong PhD thesis 1999
Education, in general is a relevant context in which to explore these issues as it has very obvious connections with Foucauldian themes of knowledge, subjectivity and power. Firstly, its main purpose is to transmit knowledge, secondly, as a political and social mechanism it is imbued with/in power relationships, and finally, it is obviously one of 'the modes by which human beings are made subjects' (1983b:208). Radical/experiential education, with its particular interest in the freedom of the individual and social change, is an even more relevant context.

Foucault rejected all notions of 'a certain a-priori theory of the subject' (1988a:10). He believed that subjects were not substance, but form[ed], leading to his central question of not what is a subject, but how does the subject constitute her/himself through practices which were games of truth, applications of power (ibid.). He set out to examine the relationships between the different forms of subjectivity, pointing out that we have different relationships to ourselves - different subjectivities - and are constituted into different subjectivities in different contexts.

It is this rejection of humanism's coherent and transcendental subject that is contentious - especially in the light of the Enlightenment belief in the power of education to liberate the individual from the yokes of poverty and ignorance (see Lyotard 1992). It is understandable that those who have fought and struggled to make the world a better place will become insecure and frightened by the prospect of no safe ground/goal, values or aspiration. Yet, from my position, I would suggest strongly that goals and values are abstractions, and what is left after the death of the subject/truth/man [sic] is not nihilistic or fragmented. In fact, tearing down abstracted and generalised ideals brings us down to earth, challenging the transcendence/immanence hierarchy, and revitalising our embeddedness and embodiedness as finite and historically bounded beings.
The irony is that when ideals (such as the subject) or universal and ahistoric ideas of emancipation, peace, liberation etc. are critically examined, fragmented and deconstructed, it then becomes possible to see the many ways that subjectification operates at the micropolitics of everyday encounters, including through these ideas. Rather than promoting passivity, it promotes the active critical reflectiveness so loved by the Enlightenment.

By continually exploring what it means to remove the self-reflective subject from centre stage, Foucault made different approaches to rationality and activity possible. Thus the process of subjectification - central to political projects of varying persuasions and commitments - becomes open to critical scrutiny in ways not previously understood (Popkewitz & Brennan 1998:25)

This would seem an argument for a narrative epistemology.

**Manufactured Identities**

For Foucault, human beings are formed into subjects and objects in a myriad of taken-for-granted practices/language and discourses. He considered that there were three types of liberation struggle throughout human societies: struggles against forms of domination (ethnic, social and religious), struggles against forms of exploitation (feudalism, capitalism) and struggles against the moulding of the individual into a submissive being. He considered that at this point in our history, the latter is the most crucial, the ways people are moulded into subjects⁴, our subjectification (1983a:212-3).

His questions were about how the subject constituted her/himself through practices of the self that are related to power and knowledge (Foucault in Martin et al. 1988a:10). 'Technologies of the self' (ibid.) is the name he gave to practices (embedded in political structures) aimed at

---

H. Byrne-Armstrong PhD thesis 1999
managing the conduct of individuals; practices for self-improvement - operations of body and soul used to transform and assist people to find liberation, happiness or nirvana. He considered them the means by which the political apparatus (the macro) is connected to the individual (the micro). These practices imply certain modes of training and modification of individuals, not only in the obvious sense of acquiring certain skills, but also in the sense of acquiring certain attitudes (Foucault 1988:18). They are the exercise of institutional power at micro-political levels in society. Technologies of the self are 'not a thing that individuals invent ... rather they are patterns found in culture which are proposed, suggested and imposed on individuals by their culture, their society and social group' (Gore 1993:53). This imposition is not direct and personal. It has developed over two centuries and is embedded in language and social practices (discourses) to such an extent that its effect is invisible to us.

The authority for these discourses is located in the human science disciplines, which have burgeoned over the last two centuries (see Foucault 1975, 1977). Modern forms of government operate through these discourses to regulate human behaviour in invisible and discreet ways, and through them, 'production, regulation, surveillance, and labeling of human activities, has dominated western society from the eighteenth century' (Gore 1993:53). Education is one of the most significant discourses.

What is an education system after all if not a ritualisation of the word; if not a qualification of some fixing of roles for speakers, if not the constitution of a diffuse doctrinal group; if not a distribution and an appropriation of discourse with all its learning and all its powers (Foucault 1972:227)

Processes for self improvement and a search for identity have been demonstrated to have a long tradition in western culture back to the ancient Greeks, and probably beyond (see Foucault in Martin et al. 1988). Removing
them from moral, religious and scientific truth stories enables the exploration of the influence of truth stories on them, because as Foucault (ibid.) has shown, although the purpose changes (and will no doubt go on changing), the practices themselves seem remarkably stable. Clearly practices for self-improvement can be found in all cultures. The issue that makes them contentious today (in the practice of education as in other areas) is the truth story that informs them.

Foucault said, that in the late twentieth century western culture, unlike any other historical period, there is a conjoining of two phenomena that places the individual in a double bind. "The state's power (and that's one of the reasons for its strength) is both an individualising and a totalising form of power. Never in the history of human societies ... has there been such a tricky combination of the same political structures of individualisation techniques, and of totalisation procedures" (1983b:213). He believed that this was so because the 'modern western state has integrated in a new political shape, an old power technique which originated in Christian institutions ... pastoral power' (ibid.). Christianity not only brought a different form of ethics to that of the ancient world, but it proposed and spread power relations throughout the world (ibid.:214). It is the practices and functions of pastoral power (no longer dependent on the institution for their dissemination) that have transformed practices that 'care for the self' into practices that are elaborations of power. Care for the self practices become technologies that serve the agendas of the state rather than enhancing the life of the individual.

The pre-requisite in Greek life for 'knowing oneself' (the moral, truth seeking code) was 'care for the self', or 'concern for the self', the main rule for personal and social conduct; 'the notion of exercising the perfect mastery over oneself' (Foucault in Rabinow ed. 1984:348). This included disciplined systems of self-management. Diet and food were primary (ibid.);
health regimes, instructions from teachers, and forms of reflection such as meditation, writing journals and letters to friends, dialogue, dream interpretation, rural retreats, and rules about duties to family and society. Honourable citizens were required to 'occupy themselves with themselves' (Foucault in Martin et al. 1988:22) in order to gain knowledge of themselves through daily systematic activities.

According to Foucault, what is most significant about this is that caring for the self in Greek society was 'for the sake of it', for life in this world, for respect to self, each other and the society, an art form that was considered the mark of a good citizen. Self-care practices were part of an 'aesthetics of existence' (Foucault in Rabinow ed. 1984:378), a politico-aesthetic choice (ibid.:357) for mastery of oneself to live life on the earthly plane as ethically as one could.

The influence of Christianity altered the rationalisations for practices of the self. Although the same practices were present in the Middle Ages (Christianity borrowed many of the Greek practices directly), their purpose had altered. The generally tolerant lifestyle of Greco-Roman lifestyle was replaced 'with an austere lifestyle marked by a series of renunciations, interdictions, or prohibitions' (Foucault in Rabinow ed. 1984:361). From practices for this life, technologies of the self became practices for immortality and purity, for life in the hereafter. Body and soul were separated, and the body, attached to a secular realm, was to be renounced through austere practices. 'Christian morality ... makes self-renunciation the condition for salvation. To know oneself was paradoxically the way to self-renunciation' (ibid.:22). From the sense of a creating a self through self-care practices for this lifetime, we have now developed practices to renounce the self in this lifetime for salvation in another.

Into this arena came Descartes and his famous Meditations (a record of his practices of the self). His revelations are considered the beginnings
of modernism's atomistic self. Self-reflective practices were placed into a new 'truth story' – one to find the 'unshakeable foundation of truth' (Briton in Carson & Sumara 1997:50), his own awareness of himself as a rational subject in the face of his thinking and doubt. What this act of reflection did, (over and above any other implication, was to construct the unitary, universal subject so favoured by humanism. Briton (ibid.) writes, 'what Descartes was doing when he first recognised his awareness of himself ... his act of self-consciousness ... "an act of attributing perception to an underlying perceiver" (Lacan in Carson & Sumara 1977:114) ... the dictum Cogito ergo sum; I think, therefore I am ... was a revelation that prompted him to declare subjectivity and consciousness as coterminous' (italics in the original). This conjoining of consciousness and subjectivity was the basis for a transcendent subject.

Following Descartes, the educated self became one who was engrossed, not in the 'care and cultivation of a virtuous human nature, and not to the ascetic regime of piety separating the soul from the body, but rather in the personal identification with rational principles. Descartes did not construct rationality as an object of education; Descartes constructed rationality as constitutive of the educated subject' (ibid.:46). Critical thinking was born. As Foucault (1984b:371) said, 'the extraordinary thing in Descartes texts ...[is that he succeeded in] substituting a subject as founder of practices of knowledge, for a subject constituted through practices of the self'.

The door was opened for a new era. The goal was humanism's educated subject. This became the object for study and the institutionalisation of the human sciences began. Reason and the intellect dominated, strengthened in the eighteenth century through Kant's notions of an ethical universal subject developed through practices of self-critical and reflective and analytical questioning (see Foucault 1984:372). The
educated subject was both the examiner and the examined, her identity established through self-conscious practices to promote rationality and reason.

Over the next three centuries there was a proliferation and refinement of discourses about human actions and the regulation of behaviour and conduct (see Foucault 1977). Behaviour considered mildly eccentric in the seventeenth century, became, in the eighteenth century 'disturbing', and, by the nineteenth century, intolerable and requiring segregation from 'normal' society. In the Middle Ages the justifications given for segregation were religious, and by the eighteenth century, rational (legal and medical), supported by the burgeoning number of institutions designed to observe and control human mental processes.

Public definitions of behaviour arose out of the 'necessity' of institutional managers to manage deviant behaviours (ibid.). Defining, categorizing and segregating behaviour not acceptable to the public, led to more and more categories, justifying assignment to specialised institutions, prisons, mental asylums, hospitals or schools. A burgeoning economy arose. Especially designed spaces (i.e. schools), and carefully organised procedures (technologies of the self), to normalise individuals into preferred categories, discursively supported a proliferation of public definitions of mind and body.

These procedures were hidden behind a screen of individualisation - the endless self-examination that was encouraged to 'permit individuals to effect by their own means or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being', (Foucault in Martin et al. 1988:18). Practices of the self became normalising technologies of power disguised as self-empowerment, but transforming people into docile bodies (see Foucault 1977). The human sciences (including education), were born and practices of surveillance,
regulation and labeling to normalise behaviour became authorised and institutionalised. The institutionalised practices and techniques of subjectification were extrapolated by Foucault as the art of governmentality/truth stories and the relationship of self/self axis (1990).

**truth stories**...

For Foucault, knowledge and power are intimately related. Knowledge cannot be transmitted cleanly; it is always mediated through power relations. People are both knowing subjects and subjects of knowledge. So power is productive, it produces relationships that can be oppressive as well as empowering ... 'it incites, it induces, it seduces, it makes easier or more difficult' (Foucault 1983:220). The exercise of power, Foucault terms governmentality; 'the totality of practices, by which one can constitute, define, organise, instrumentalise the strategies which individuals in their liberty can have in regard to each other' (1988:19). In other words, this speaks to the ways in which we comply or resist, because subjectification always implies an individual as 'subject' to someone else by control and dependence (1986:12). Governmentality is the capacity for people to control and be controlled at the same time. 'If we take educational institutions we realise that one is managing others and teaching them to manage themselves' (1983a:250). The significant and difficult factor in these practices is that they are invisible - they do not require any materiality for their production - and, furthermore, are most frequently linked to techniques for the direction of others (as in educational institutions).

So, power for Foucault is not necessarily evil. His interest was not to ask the question, what is power, but how is power exercised? Power (he did not like to speak of 'power' without using the phrase, relationships of power - see 1988), he considered as productive. In saying this he was dividing his
ideas from commonly held understandings of power that evoke notions of oppression, constraint, coercion and complicity. Power is visible in the modes of conduct and behaviours through which people constitute themselves as subjects in their active engagement with the dominant discourses circulating in the environment. It is not a direct action on another but an action on the actions of others. In other words, power shapes and is shaped by the social practices of our everyday interactions.

Foucault (1977) identified several categories of social practices that are implicated in the exercise of power:

- **Totalisation** - practices that assign people complete identities, for example in the educational context, teacher, professor, research student, 1st year, slow learner, distinction student;
- **Surveillance** - practices for observing, avoiding being observed, classroom arrangements, non-attendance;
- **Normalisation** - practices that set and define normal (the Bell curve?), examinations, assessments;
- **Exclusion** - marginalising those that do not fit, for example - failure or excelling;
- **Classification** - dividing/differentiating people into groups. For example - classroom groups, year groups, learner competencies (the 'A' class);
- **Regulation** - controlling by rule. For example, rules for attendance, physical setting;
- **Self technologies** - process training to help individuals in their conduct. For example, conflict management, group facilitation.

Rather than power being in opposition to truth/liberation/freedom, it is a necessary condition for liberation to occur. Foucault proposed that without the presence of freedom, power could not be exercised. At the heart of the power relationship is a provocative tension: an ongoing tussle between action and reaction, submission and aggression. Knowledge of power

H. Byrne-Armstrong PhD thesis 1999
relations is necessary to 'give oneself the rules of law, the techniques of management and also the ethics, the ethos, the practice of self, which would allow these games of power to be played with the minimum of domination' (Foucault 1988:18). For example, it is helpful to my sense of agency to know that as a student in an educational institution, I, like others, am both a subject and an object of discourse. In the thesis writing and examination, I am the object and subject to the discourses regulations - I am under surveillance and normalisation (objectified) by the general guidelines of the institution. But the process of writing and the achievement of 'having written' and gaining a degree will mean that I am a subject of the discourse and constituted within the discourse by the subject position that having gained a degree will assign me.

Foucault asked, 'Why are we concerned with the truth and more so than the self? And why do we care for ourselves only through the care of the truth?' (1988:15). Much intellectual work is caught up in the desire and belief that one has to find the truth, the ultimate and 'right' answer. His project was to link up games of truth (knowledge systems) with power relationships, demonstrating the connections between forms of knowledge, subjectivity and socio-political agendas. He saw that the will to truth is not a matter of individual, agency or brilliance but rather many people acting and jostling around a politics of truth. 'Truth' is linked in circular relation with systems of power which produce and sustain it, and to effects of power which it indices and which extend it' (1980:133). A truth story is the way the connection between power and knowledge functions. 'Each society has its regime of truth, its "general politics" of truth: that is the types of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true' (ibid.:131). This functioning occurs through 'technologies of the self' (1988), practices for self-styling and self-disciplining that are acted out and through the body (as well as resisted). This is the exercise of power; the everyday practice of

H. Byrne-Armstrong PhD thesis 1999
the ‘truth stories that we are caught up in and which govern our lives and ensure that the political agendas of the day are realised.

**self-self practices ...**

The ways we relate to ourselves in the face of conventions, rules and regulations, are what are termed self-self practices (Foucault in Dreyfus & Rabinow 1983c:238-9). The educated subject has a particular stance towards knowledge, the willingness to undertake self-examination so that s/he can produce knowledge for her/himself (self assessment, peer reviews), be classified and categorised (grades, qualifications) and finally to confess, to produce individual knowledge for institutions of knowledge (reflective journals, self assessment questionnaires, etc.) (see Simola, Heikkinen & Silvonen 1998). This stance also can include the reasons given for shaping ourselves in certain ways, the material we work on, the techniques we use to shape ourselves and the types of being that we aspire to become.

Later in his work, Foucault began the project he called a genealogy of ethics (Foucault in Dreyfus & Rabinow 1983c). He thought of ethics as ‘the kind of relationship you ought to have with yourself ... and which determines how the individual is supposed to constitute himself [sic] as a moral subject of his [sic] own actions’ (1983a:238). This project examined and explored the history of the different ways that individuals have of negotiating the culture’s codes/rules/regulations in different contexts and for different reasons (1990). These different ways can have different focuses. For example, behavioural compliance may be the measure (abstaining from certain behaviours, or holding certain views about oneself, e.g. as a spiritual person), or undertaking certain practices for self-formation (education). The different contexts that we range over can change these processes. In which places do I fashion myself differently and to what end? To fit into a
group or to comply with another's wishes? If there is a group norm for peace and harmony what part of myself will I work on to comply or resist this rule? These processes Foucault (in Dreyfus & Rabinow 1983c; 1990) called the ethical substance - the material to be worked on - the 'part' that is worked on in order to produce a certain form of 'moral' subject.

Another aspect of the ways we negotiate our different subjectivities is through the 'mode of the subjection' - 'the way in which people are invited or incited to recognise their moral obligations' (Foucault 1983c:239). In the name of what are we doing this? What is our intention? In the local radical pedagogy, one of the most seductive pictures given is the notion of 'community'. In what ways would a subject conduct herself or himself in order to belong? What are the limits of belonging in this group?

The techniques for self-styling are the practices that we are invited into in order to fulfil our place within a group. In the broadest sense in the local radical pedagogy, the practices describe themselves in 'talk' such as co-learning, co-counselling, communication, collaboration, action research, facilitation, self direction, autonomy, conflict resolution, empathy. These practices are examples of technologies of the self, practices of governmentality that ensure that a certain form of subject is produced by the educational truth story. 'To govern in this sense is to structure the possible field of action of others' (Foucault 1983b:221).

The telos or purpose is the goal that people have in transforming themselves into subjects, the certain state of being that is the purpose for the project. 'Foucault proposed that people engage in action, thoughts and conduct with themselves because they strive for a certain state of being'. (in Martin, Gutman & Hutton 1988). This state of being can be many things, from the self-actualisation of Maslow (see chapter 3) to the goal of enlightenment in a Buddhist sense. Or, it can mean to be a worthy citizen or simply 'the self one truly is'.

H. Byrne-Armstrong PhD thesis 1999
the Problem of using Foucault...

Foucault mentioned education, but in passing (for example 1977, 1983a, 1988). Yet, it is obvious that he regarded formal education as part of the growth of the human sciences and disciplinary practices. In Discipline and Punish (1977) he provides a vivid outline of some of 'the multitude of minor processes ... at work in primary education at a very early age' (ibid.:138); pedagogic practices for the arrangement of bodies for writing and the arrangement of the space and the division of time (ibid.:150). As stated earlier, Foucauldian themes of knowledge, subjectivity and power are closely aligned with education. Education is one of the most significant modes for subjectification and it is therefore worthy of close scrutiny.

The local radical pedagogy is imbued with self-disciplining practices for surveillance of self and others (like any pedagogy - see Gore in Popkewitz & Brennan 1998). It even makes many of the, otherwise hidden, ways education operates on minds and bodies seemingly visible by articulating notions such as 'whole person' learning and co-counseling, co-learning and participatory research. But like any practice this one is also dangerous (see Foucault 1983c:231).

Like many feminists (Orner in Popkewitz & Brennan 1998; Davies 1996; Weedon 1987) I am using Foucault's work beyond the limits he established and to fit the project that I am wanting to undertake. Orner (ibid.:280) describes her use of Foucault's work as extrapolating from it to the site where her research questions exist, therefore employing his concepts and frameworks and strategies over the bounds established in his writing. This encourages me to pursue his methods in the light of my questions and my local practice.

This use can be seen as either simplistic or that I am resisting dominant discourses. In the first instance, I am at risk of being interpreted
as having misconstrued his ideas. I am using them at an individual or micro level not the macro level of society(s) that he engaged in. Gore says in her defense of using his work that 'society' can be conceived at a more local level whereby discourses and practices can contain a local politics of truth' (1993:56). In the second instance, and more closely aligned with my intention, is that I am critically reflective about what I am engaged in (a demonstration of the central purpose of this thesis).

Foucault's final and unfinished project was concerned with the different modes of conduct/interaction in the relationships with ourselves, others and technologies of power and he commented on this change, 'perhaps I've insisted too much on the technology of domination and power. I am more and more interested in the interaction between oneself and others and in the technologies of individual domination, the history of how an individual acts upon himself [sic], in the technology of the self' (Foucault 1988:190). As a feminist educator I am struggling to find processes for giving theory 'feet' - for transgressing the transcendent/immanence dichotomy and embedding knowledge-making into everyday practices. Foucault's methods/tools give me a voice to articulate much of my growing unease with process based education. And, like other feminists (see Lather 1991; Gore 1993; Orner in Popkewitz & Brennan 1998), I am grappling with ways of speaking about bodies/subjects (see narratives) that are not implicated in self-confessing technologies. I am also aware that this can become another truth story. However, an important part of my day-to-day work is the articulation of everyday invisible practices of power that shape bodies and construct identities/subjectivities that are useful to my life, and may or may not be useful to others.

H. Byrne-Armstrong PhD thesis 1999
the problem of Foucault - gender blindness ...

Criticisms about Foucault's exclusion of a gender analysis as well as feminism's appropriation of him are well known (see Brodribb 1992; Ramazanoglu 1993; Porter 1991). Did feminism anticipate his critique of the Enlightenment as just another appropriation by men of women's writing? (see Horsfall 1997:25). Other feminists (see Lather 1989) keep their distance from this question as well as being critically reflective about it. Lather argues that Foucault's is 'neither for nor against the Enlightenment. Foucault's position is, rather, against that which presents itself as finished and authoritarian, and for that which is indispensable for the constitution of ourselves' (Foucault 1977:43) - a permanent critique of ourselves, 'always in the position as beginning again' (ibid.:47) (Lather 1989:4). This, Horsfall (ibid.) believes, is a useful stance to take.

Fraser and Nicholson (1990) also acknowledge the tension between Foucault's work and Feminism but propose that the two discourses have much to learn from each other to 'integrate their respective strengths while eliminating their respective weaknesses' (1990:20). McNay (1992) also says, 'my main criticism of Foucault's work is that there is an unresolved attention between his commitment to emancipatory social change and his refusal to outline normative assumptions on which change may be based' (1992:8). This unresolved attention is, I propose, his strength.

While traces of the middle-class, male academic are scattered throughout his writing, that he was sensitised to oppression is obvious in the projects he undertook (making visible the discourses of the human sciences and their disciplinary practices) (see 1977, 1979). This probably came from his sexual identity and the experiences that emerged from this in his early years. Feminists' mixed responses to his work, however, have valid concerns. For example, there is the threat to the emancipatory project of feminism; giving voice and identity to women. Accepting Foucault's notions, which paint

---

H. Byrne-Armstrong PhD thesis 1999
a picture of a shifting landscape of identities, undermines the central
themes of early feminist scholars, whose arguments broke the silencing of
women's voice in order to place the feminine experience/identity on central
stage. In doing this he is seen as disabling attempts by women to gain
authority, agency and a political voice. This issue is an interesting one in the
light of further developments out of his work, in that Foucault's project
brought to light the limitations of early feminism, the silencing of many
different women's voices through the projection of a universal woman's
experience. Fraser and Nicholson continue by proposing that to take the
strengths of both discourses would be to 'forswear a single feminist method
or feminist epistemology. In short, this theory would look more like a			tapestry composed of many different hues than one woven in a single
colour' (1990:35).

To accept fully or totally reject Foucault's work is a complex decision
(and in the light of the ironic tension proposed as the heart of this thesis
does not need to be made). His work changed so much throughout his life, as
he himself stated (see 1983a). His rejection of humanism's subject has led
many commentators to believe that he therefore rejected all notions of
agency. From his later work, this would not seem to be the case. When
talking about the 'art of existence' he is alluding to a critically reflective
agent making decisions about her/his life. 'M)aybe the target nowadays is
not to discover what we are, but to refuse what we are' (Foucault
1983a:216). This agent does not achieve complete mastery over her/his life
and never can in the light of the dominant discourses and practices.
However, we can critically reflect on the subject positions that we are
constituted into within the network of power relations we in which we dwell.
'Foucault's subject is neither entirely autonomous nor enslaved, neither the
originator of discourses and practices that constitute its experiences nor
determined by them' (Sawiki 1991:104).

H. Byrne-Armstrong PhD thesis 1999
This account of Foucault’s position would align with early feminist notions that the personal is political. Although the social movement of feminism was characterised by grass roots consciousness raising efforts, there was always recognition that this consciousness had to be aligned with a political consciousness that addressed the social and political norms that oppressed women. ‘Feminism’s long-standing tendencies toward self-reflexivity provide some experience of both rendering problematic and provisional our most firmly held assumptions and, nevertheless, acting in the world, taking a stand’ (Lather 1991:29). That there will always be a tension between the efforts to liberate people and awareness of their victimhood may be a tension that is ongoing. Both positions, like all positions, hold partial truth. Living with this tension is a catalyst for resistance and the critical attitude that is required to recognise that everything is dangerous (see Sawiki 1991).

The other much articulated area of dissent about Foucault’s work is his refusal to provide any alternatives to his anti-humanist critique. In sidestepping any ideals for the future he has undermined an already tenuous emancipatory project (whether it be race, class, gender, or sexual identity). His critics are vehemently opposed to his ideas, their narratives wound around plots about nihilism, annihilation, political paralysis and fragmentation (see Habermas 1987). Wherever one positions oneself in this debate it is important to note that Foucault’s project has raised some very important issues for emancipatory projects. Much emancipatory work is embedded in notions of reason and rationality and many have deteriorated to forms of social engineering/rationalist planning (in Lather 1991). There are many examples of theorising about emancipation without any reflection that the very theorising employed is the root of the oppression (for example Giroux’s early work).
But all criticisms are forms of knowledge and therefore useful (to someone). As Sawiki says, 'there is an ironic tension in Foucault’s work' (1991:96). He refused to give any suggestions for a future vision, his specified aim was to free up the possibilities for new ways of living (in Dreyfus & Rabinow 1983). Sawiki goes on to say, 'He undermined humanism in order to prepare the way for new forms of experience. He was a pessimist committed to political activism' (op cit:96.). This ironic tension is at the heart of his project and is, I believe, extremely useful to any emancipatory project. It is best enunciated in his article 'What is Enlightenment' (Foucault in Rabinow ed. 1984) a comment on a little known article of Kant's in which he articulated the transcendent/immanent divide. The article speaks to the major aspect of Foucault's work, which is to embed knowledge in a material reality rather than pretend it is just 'ideas'. He does this by historicising knowledge - demonstrating its origins in everyday practices. In doing this he is not rejecting the overarching generalisations that Humanism and the Enlightenment depend on for action and change. He is criticising them, taking a 'limit-attitude' - one at the frontiers, neither in nor out, just analyzing and reflecting upon limits (1984:45). He asks 'in what is given to us as universal, necessary, obligatory, what place is occupied by whatever is singular, contingent and the product of arbitrary constraints?' (ibid.). This leads to research and exploration not of formal structures and universal ideals, but of the myriad events that make up our lives. What has led us to construct ourselves as certain subjects? Rather than asking 'why' to evoke transcendental ideals and visions, he asks 'how'. He is not seeking to make possible a metaphysics 'this work, done at the limits of ourselves, must, on the one hand, open up a realm of historical inquiry and, on the other, put itself to the test of reality...both to grasp the points where change is possible and desirable, and to determine the precise form this change should take' (1984:46).
This would seem again to, partially at least, align with much of the feminist project (and its insistence on the connection of the knower and known) and leads me back to the task at hand. Like Orner (op. cit.) I am taking up his offer, (see footnote 1, this chapter). His methods provide a useful way in which to analyse the practices of the self in the local radical pedagogy especially as his project was to analyse practices of power. I also reject the notion that power is an evil force. There have been too many instances in my life in which power has been an extremely productive force. In applying his techniques at a micro and local level, I think I am being consistent with his project (see Gore 1993), which is after all part of a lineage that aims to pull to earth the transcendent and universal claims of modernism. As Sawiki says, 'This is not liberation as transcendence of power or as global transformation, but rather freeing ourselves from the assumption that prevailing ways of understanding ourselves and others, and of theorising the conditions for liberation, are necessary, self-evident and without effects of power' (1991:56).

another problem - relativism ...

Immediately the hounds of relativism begin to howl once again. There is a long honour role with names of the respected fathers (mostly) of liberal education identified already (see page 2). To them and their philosophical stance, speaking any language that mentions the signifier, postmodernism or poststructuralism is heresy (for example Habermas 1981; Brodribb 1992; Ramazanoglu 1993). To question notions of liberation, truth, freedom is to tear down the safety rails that protect the ground for their work. Without 'right' and 'true' paths/practices, the anarchic and ethically disturbing 'anything goes' of relativism will intrude. But, to think about poststructuralism in this way, is, I have already argued, modernist (a fall
into the oppositional thinking so favoured by modernism) and a ‘thin’
description of the work of Foucault.

The issue is not that ‘anything goes’. The issue is not the ‘things’, but
the inter-action. The ethical stance of Foucault’s work is one of exposing
the embodied and concrete interactions and history of embodied human
beings and the way that political agendas are played out in the moment-to-
moment social practices we are born into. This would imply not that anything
goes, but that because the political processes that produce our
subjectivities/identities, our oppressions and empowerment, are made
visible to us, that we have a greater chance and choice to resist or comply,
an endorsement of agency and self-responsibility.

The plurality that I aim for in my practice is not a relativist position.
I am aiming for plurality that exists as it is, not the product of an arbitrary
selection of goals or reducible to some universal principles. Relativity is an
‘all roads lead to Rome’ affair, that people have different perceptions of the
same ‘true reality out there’. This implies that different methods and
different practices all at some time have the same end (in
radical/experiential education, some person’s notion of emancipation
presented as if it was the same for all). The poststructuralist stance that I
am taking is one of a pluralism in which material circumstances and social
positioning will determine the reality as well as what is to be done, who will
benefit, and in what circumstances (see Falzon 1998).

and another problem - foundationalism …

What is really at stake when we move away from foundationalism? Falzon
(1998), following Foucault, says that what ultimately historically shapes our
existence is that we relate in a reciprocal interplay of interactions. This
historical shaping of existence cannot be explained from a foundationalist
perspective. If one has a standpoint, a foundation belief, one can explain

H. Byrne-Armstrong PhD thesis 1999
everything except the origin of that standpoint. It has to be dogmatically asserted as though it already existed (a-priori). 'It is only if we reject foundationalist beliefs in favour of dialogue that we can account for the standpoint in terms of which we proceed, as having emerged out of historical dialogue' (Falzon 1998:8). To make our historical reciprocal interactions visible is to evoke our humanness. It 'sings-up' a concrete, embodied human being in living dialogue with her/his worlds, existing in the middle of history. In doing this we reject 'transcendental narcissism', the perception of ourselves as holding a privileged viewpoint, a godlike stance and mastery over the world.

This arrogant vision of the human being as 'Man' the sovereign, all powerful author or source of its world comes at the cost of a great blindness about ourselves, an inability to accept and acknowledge the finitude that is integral to our humanity, the concrete historicity and embodiment that makes us recognisably human (ibid.).

But human beings will continue to create social forms, general principles and universal prescriptions preached from a pillar of sand. It is the present day mechanism for coping with the day-to-day reality of multiple stories, different ethics and diverse religious beliefs bumping against each other. However, the paradox is that whenever we impose social forms on others it violates the very grounds on which many emancipatory struggles were constructed. But as humans we have the ability to detach, stand back a little and use our critical reflection, knowing that the very tools we use are implicated in the oppression we experience. What is needed is a re-think of reflective practices into a genuinely non-metaphysical formulation, to move away from the ostensional stances of modernism. We have to ask; who speaks? what is their position? what is being silenced?

H. Byrne-Armstrong PhD thesis 1999
what subjects are being created? how is power exercised? what relationships is it constituting? Our ethics, our liberation(s) and emancipation(s), our truths and realities are all constituted in these everyday questions, the reciprocal interaction with our world.

To conclude this chapter I would like to summarise the knowledges that this reading of Foucault have produced for this thesis:

♦ The emphasis in the research is the language and social practices that constitute the local radical pedagogy, rather than the people and their meaning making;

♦ How the individual is connected to the social and political agendas through discourses that are made up of discursive and non-discursive practices reveals the social practices at play in any field of action;

♦ Deconstructing these forms of subjectification opens the space for people to see the cracks and fissures in any discourse and therefore the spaces for resistance;

♦ Opening the space, critically reflecting on the social forms (interpretations) that we make as partial and contingent, produces discursive openness;

♦ The epistemological stance required for opening the space is a narrative epistemology. Foucault demonstrated this in his project;

♦ This is an anti-foundationalist stance but not relativist. It is not that there are different perspectives. It is that different people have different material circumstances and social positioning and this determines the perspective.

Recognising the power-knowledge connection that this difference produces, is an ethical stance. The practice of this stance is the examination of the language and social practices of a situation. This is where this thesis turns.
1 If one or two of these 'gadgets' of approach or method that I have tried to employ with psychiatry, the penal system or natural history can be of service to you, then I shall be delighted. If you find the need to transform my tools or use others then show me what they are... (Foucault 1980:65).

2 A full discussion of this is in chapter 5.

3 Foucault's own experience was an example of this (as a homosexual academic he was motivated to resist the categories of medicine, psychiatry and criminology). His strategy of resistance included deconstructing the games of truth and power to demonstrate their historical specificity.

4 'Subjects' as a term is used purposely to denote that we are both a subject and subject to, discourses. In this way it alerts us to look beyond the personal, to recognise that many practices of our culture treat us as objects to be studied and shaped. The translation of the word 'subject' into English separates the word from the notion of a self that the French implies (see Henriques et al 1998 reissue).

5 Foucault called these 'Regimes of Truth' (1977)

6 In doing this he was very careful to say that this did not mean that he thought the 'what' and 'why' of power were not important (see 1983a).

7 Michael White said that we 'live under the shadow of the Bell curve' (personal communication).

8 By this I mean that he did not do a detailed study of education. There is debate about whether the categories of social practice he identified in Discipline & Punish are transferable to other contexts. Considering that he used pedagogy as an example (and even the original place that these systematised process of power were exercised), I believe that they are. In his essay on 'The Subject and Power' (1983) he quotes the example of an educational institution overtly (see chapter 5).
Chapter Three

EXPLORING TRADITION: ‘SINGING-UP’
THE LOCAL RADICAL PEDAGOGY

Graduates of this course will be reflective practitioners who work with situations involving the interrelationships between people and the environment to create changes which are believed to be improvements.

The particular contribution of graduates will be a strongly developed ability to explore and help others explore, both the complex interconnections between aspects of a situation and the nature of change (UWS UG Degree Handbook, 1992).
Introduction

This chapter introduces the tradition of education that forms the context for this research. It traces the assumptions behind it, its lineage in humanistic psychology, radical/liberatory education, critical thinking and feminism. Each of these movements is explored in the context of the project in that they are briefly described and the forms of subjectivity (educated subjects) that they produce to form a critical reflection to build the poststructuralist stance of this thesis. I complete this critical review by reflecting that I am not taking the critical stance to tear down the valuable work performed by each of these movements. My stance is one of adding to knowledge rather than replacing it.

The tradition that I teach within is variously informed by/referred to in the literature as 'reflective practice' (Schön 1983), 'critical pedagogy' (Giroux 1994), 'radical education' (Newman 1993), 'critical feminist pedagogy' (Lather 1992) 'experiential education' (Usher & Edwards 1994) or just 'social reconstructionism'\(^3\), an overall term that indicates a concern with contributing to 'a positive role in the making of a more just, equitable and humane society' (Liston & Zeichner in Gore 1993:140). The ways that this tradition talks about itself is to use phrases such as action research, co-learning, cooperative inquiry, critical thinking, reflective practice, emancipation, whole-person learning and experience (Dewey's, 1938 notion that a genuine education comes through experience). In other words, a teacher in this tradition is concerned with individuals and their self-narratives, as well as the broader issues of the educational project and its implications in terms of social justice and ethics. There are several basic tenets informing this/my way of teaching:

- Education cannot be separated from the broader social and political issues in society or in the classroom;

---

H. Byrne-Armstrong PhD thesis 1999
• Education is concerned with promoting the self-responsibility and agency of the student;
• The process of learning is as/or more important than the content;
• Reflexivity is the heart of ethical practice.

These tenets belong to a story about education that has gained its identity through the 'othering' of positivism, a loosening of some of the rigidity of foundationalism, and a resistance to techno-rational methods of education and their abstraction from their social and political roots. My desire is not to 'other' this latter tradition in order to construct yet a new identity. As Foucault said, 'you can't find the solution of a problem in the solution of another problem raised at another moment by other people' (1983c:231). What I would like to do is add to it, to 'thicken' the descriptions of radical education practices by not proving it wrong according to some more advanced theory, but to extend its practice by adding another voice and therefore another set of knowledges.

In this vein, I identify from my perspective and positioning that this lineage is based on the notion of four ways that people can be 'improved' (see below). These improvements are embedded in what Lyotard (1992:97) described as the grand vision of humanism operating through education - the transformation of people into worthy citizens through the education project. They arise out of five basic convictions about people and their liberation:

1. Human beings have potential value in themselves - a latent potential power that can be liberated by education, so education is seen as a process of removing barriers to hidden potential;
2. Knowledge is gained through critical and rational methods - devices that distance people from their subjective experience. Education then is seen as a process of lifting restrictions on ways to think;
3. Human beings are social creatures. Lifting restrictions on ways of thinking is identical to becoming a socialised person;

4. The transparent subject is positioned at the centre of the universe; her individual subjective experience the foundation of knowledge. The conviction is that once people are validated, they will exercise free choice to emancipate their lives and create a civil society. Education is seen as a process of lifting distortions of perception;

5. Individual experience is the basis for knowledge rather than the context people are in or the medium through which experience is being expressed. Education is a process of lifting blocks to inner truth through validating personal experience.

The Lineage ...

The mothers, but mostly fathers, of this tradition fall into several interconnected branches, clustered around these five improvements:

1. Humanist psychology in the work of Rogers (1961, 1983) who with Maslow (1970) was engaged in developing the self responsible, autonomous individual through a validation of personal experience as being the foundation to learning, leading to the experiential education movement inspired by humanistic psychology (educators such as Cranton 1994, Knowles 1975, Boud & Walker 1991);

2. Enlightenment beliefs in Kantian and Hegelian philosophies, Marxism and the critical theory of Habermas leading to the radical/liberatory education movement - the work of critical pedagogies, represented by Freire (1970), Giroux (1983), Shor (1980) and adult and community education traditions such as Thompson (1983a), Newman (1994), Foley (1995). This tradition concerns itself with emancipation through the
development of rational and autonomous citizens dwelling within a
democratic and dialogic culture;

3. Cartesian notions of scepticism (doubt) leading to the critical
   thinking and reflective teaching movement so popular in education in
   the last 30 years. This emerged from Dewey’s (1938) seminal work of
   the spiralling process between reflection and action and more
   recently through people like Brookfield (1986) and Schön (1983).
   Reflection-in-action is a method that fosters the development of
   reason and rationality in adults and children;

4. Feminism and interlocking oppressions initially concerned with the
   development of self awareness and reflexivity in women
   (consciousness raising) and the inclusion of the whole person in
   knowledge production through a critique of the gendered nature of
   knowledge and the educational project. (hooks 1989; Lather 1991;

1. experiential movement inspired by humanistic psychology

   Education, founded on [humanism's ideal]
   of a self-motivating and self-directing, rational subject capable
   of exercising individual agency
   is responsible for the shaping these particular subjects.
   It's... key role [is] the forming and shaping of subjectivity and identity,
   the task of making people into certain kinds of subject

The Human Potential Movement (HPM) - a social movement which
emerged in the 1960’s - was influential in constructing a movement in
education closely aligned with experiential education⁵. To understand this
influence it is necessary to explore the HPM. The HPM had its inception

H. Byrne-Armstrong PhD thesis 1999
in the 1950's and 1960's, a reaction to the increasing dehumanising scientism of the human sciences (see Drury 1989). It emerged within psychology as a reaction against the increasingly powerful scientific approaches - particularly behaviourism (ibid.). It carried a banner to win 'a battle for man's [sic] soul' (Bugental 1967:9) through its emphasis on the study of less tangible aspects of human expression, such as emotions, feelings, spirituality and consciousness. Its central themes were:

- privileging of concrete experience over abstraction (phenomenological experience);
- autonomy, self direction and freedom of individual choice;
- person-centredness and the ideal of authenticity;
- the self-actualising potential.

The impact of the HPM over the last thirty years on our culture in the west is profound and its threads can be felt in virtually every aspect of daily life. This is particularly so in notions of individuality, self-image and self-aspirations and can be seen in the supermarkets of books and prescriptions for self-improvement, happiness and ultimately, 'self-actualisation'. Self-actualisation, then, is the basis for an educated subject, the highest expression of the 'use and exploitation of [personal] talents, capacities, potentialities' (Maslow 1970:150). Maslow, in his famous hierarchy of needs (ibid.), focused on the kinds of people that were capable of this pinnacle of human potential and he found that these people tended 'to be spontaneous and independent in their natures, given to deep personal relations, democratic in their character, creative in their approach to life, and able to rise above cultural limitations' (in Drury 1989:33).

The movement's influence on education came through the work of Rogers, a founding father of humanistic psychology who began applying these principles to classroom situations (1983). Educators such as

H. Byrne-Armstrong PhD thesis 1999
Knowles (1975), Kolb (1984), Boud & Walker (1991), Cranton (1994) - among many others - picked up and developed ideas from humanistic psychology and translated them into adult education pedagogy (or androgogy - the term Knowles popularised).

Education, from the humanist perspective as described by Cranton (1994:8), is 'learning as personal development resulting from interaction with others, or as non-directive facilitation of self-awareness... and the development of the individual as distinct from the collective'. Rogers' (1983:2) vision was that in a genuinely human climate - one which the teacher can initiate, 'a person can find himself [sic] ... and can make responsible choices', for living.

At the heart of the HPM is the transcendental subject of humanism, the conscious, rational human subject and her/his experience, the self actualised person who is healthy and creative rather than neurotic and unhealthy, - the real person, who is characterised by qualities to which we can all aspire (and design learning situations for). Persons who have or grow the qualities of free will or choice, are self-directed, autonomous, moving along the path of self-actualisation, and their subjective experience is the authority for learning. This is the educated subject in this movement.

The philosophical stance of this movement in education is phenomenology (see Rowan 1983; Sass 1990). It's practices reflect Rogers' (1983) endeavour to 'be with' another rather than coming from a particular theory. However, like any generalised theory about human beings, the HPM has fallen into the trap of scientism. In striving to validate its claims for a position in psychology, and allied fields such as education, it has perpetuated the objectivity of science by privileging some human qualities over others and then reifying them. Each of these qualities could be considered simply descriptive (in a phenomenological

H. Byrne-Armstrong PhD thesis 1999
sense) but their interpretation is most often reified and becomes prescriptive. There is a propensity for exponents to favour certain qualities (behaviours, attitudes and values) over others, holding the opinion that they characterise a 'normal human being'. Other common examples are, ideas such as 'pro-activity rather than reactivity', privileging personal goals before those to do with culture and society (Sass 1990), devising normalising prescriptions for human relationships and behaviour. Conflict is not a normal state, people should always be truthful, defensiveness is bad, openness is everything. It has also included an explosion of tests (scientism again), that explain human learning/behaviour in four boxes (see Hillman 6 1980).

My position is that, although humanist inspired experiential education was an improvement on traditional education methods, it remains prescriptive and a 'practice for life' in the classroom: an abstraction or detachment under the guise of values and humanness. It focuses on the individual and their 'inner' worlds and therefore the individualism of humanism is perpetuated. But, most significantly to my present enterprise, its rhetoric creates a humane guise under which educators can seem more enlightened but in reality the power structures remain and are often intentionally perpetrated (see particularly chapters 5, 6).

2. radical/liberatory education movement

The awakening of critical consciousness leads the way to the expression of social discontents precisely because these discontents are real components of an oppressive situation (Weffort in Freire 1993)

This is a large and extended movement ranging over many writers. I will take only those who have been influential in this project, for example,

Freire (1970) is undoubtedly one of this century's great educators. As Richard Schauull said in the forward to Freire's (1970, 1993) book, Pedagogy of the Oppressed, Freire's work has had a profound impact all over the world as it is realised that not only 'peasants' in north-east Brazil are illiterate and oppressed, so are many people in so-called 'first world' countries. His contribution was to propose that a lack of critical conscience, ignorance and apathy were due to social, political and economic forces. Education is implicated in this through the connection of literacy and oppression. Its relationship is a paradoxical and often contested one because education is an apparatus of the state so it can be used to promote the 'culture of silence' (ibid.) as well as to free those recruited into silence.

Freire's critique of what he termed 'banker' education - where the teacher acts as a transmitter of knowledge and the students as passive receptacles who become collectors and cataloguers of knowledge (see 1970:53) - was the starting point for a different metaphor for education. The direction of this 'lies in its drive towards reconciliation. Education must begin with the solution of the teacher-student contradiction, by reconciling the poles of the contradiction so that both are simultaneously teachers and students' (ibid.). This would seem promising to a central purpose of this thesis (making the everyday social practices of teaching visible) and is an important stepping stone to Foucault's work.

H. Byrne-Armstrong PhD thesis 1999
Giroux also talks about the teacher/student relationship. He considered the important factor is that knowledge is not given, knowledge is produced by the relationships in any given context. As a teacher, therefore, one 'can exercise authority in ways which do not establish the conditions for knowledge to be produced and engaged ... [or] you can exercise authority to establish conditions in which the central tension lies at the heart of how we teach. The latter method encourages self-reflection, learning from others, and refiguring forms of cultural practice' (Giroux 1992:156-7). This provides a platform for the ironic tension I argue for in this thesis.

Freire, like Foucault, recognised the limitations of internally driven learning methods. Education, he said, has an investment in regarding people as passive, manageable and adaptable (what Foucault, 1977 termed 'docile'). 'The more completely they accept the passive role imposed on them, the more they tend simply to adapt to the world as it is and to the fragmented view of reality deposited on them' (Freire 1970:54). Indeed the interests of the oppressors lie in 'changing the consciousness of the oppressed, not the situation which oppresses them', for the more the oppressed can be led to adapt to the situation, the more easily they are dominated' (ibid.:55). He believed that 'authentic reflection' always included the person dwelling within the world, not separated or abstracted from it. He considered 'consciousness and the world as simultaneous' (1970:62), a similar belief to Gramsci's making visible the everyday reality (see Simon 1982). For Freire 'consciousness of and action upon reality ... are ... inseparable constituents of the transforming act' (1974:52 - emphasis in original). An educated subject, therefore, is one that having reached a certain state of consciousness, will take collective action in the world.
Unlike other Marxist revisionist educators, such as Giroux (1983, 1992, 1994), Freire was explicit about a classroom practice. But putting idealistic and universalistic visions into practice has some difficulties which Freire (1970) acknowledges when he said that his methods were not necessarily transferable to other contexts. Firstly, his dream was for the 'humanisation of the world' (1974:55) - 'man [sic] and only man's [sic] ability to transform the world by denouncing dehumanising processes' (1970:25). He freely admits to being Utopian but does not define his Utopia beyond the concept of conscientisation of the world. Just what or who defines this conscientisation or 'humanising' ('possibilities for a person as an uncompleted being conscious of their incompletenes'- ibid.), is not clear. It is a concept difficult to grasp in the light of our obvious human characteristics and the reader is left assuming that it is an agreed universal ethic that will necessarily develop as people gain consciousness. People are either humanised or dehumanised under some invisible prescription, or universal social form. This is a contradiction if one turns to another thing that Freire said, 'every prescription represents an imposition of one man's [sic] choice upon another, transforming consciousness of the man [sic] prescribed to, into one that conforms with the prescribers consciousness' (1970:15).

This is not the only difficulty in Freire's position relevant to this thesis. He also leaves us with the notion that the revelation of personal experience will lead to political and social literacy and, in turn, lead people to take social and political action in their local contexts. This could be so, but it does not take into account the common occurrence that people reveal/uncover different truths, depending on their different locations within a context. What is oppression for one member of a family may not be for another. Contradictory experiences will always
be present and it is only when these have been adequately aired that people make decisions about action.

While Freire's optimism and ethical stance about the abilities of people to change the world are still central to the/my vision of radical/educational teaching practices, the universal and abstract nature of his theory can compound what it espouses to liberate. Over the last thirty years, as the lens on oppression has widened, it is obvious that these views did not take into account the diffuse and always present micropolitics of power which are found in the specificity and particularities of all people's lives and contexts.

'Feminist critical pedagogies aim at a situated theory of oppression and subjectivity, one that needs to consider the contradictions of such universal claims of truth and process' (Weiler 1991:455). Looking at radical/liberatory education through a 'gendered lens' (see Lather 1991: Luke and Gore 1992; Gore 1993: Weiler 1991) has not only illuminated the gender blindness of writers such as Freire, it also revealed some difficulties with utopian ideals which simplify oppression to universal principles. 'Marxists and feminists ... had not faced the disorderly polyphony emerging from decolonisation' (Harroway in Nicholson ed. 1990:198).

Furthermore there is little reflexivity in Freire's accounts. The privilege of the teacher's position is not spoken. The teacher is assumed to be on the side of the oppressed and will, through the facilitation of dialogue with the oppressed, unveil collective oppressions. 'The teacher is presented as generic man whose interests will be with the oppressed as they mutually discover the mechanisms of oppression' (Weiler 1991:454). This comment points to the absence in Freire's commentary about the power and privilege of the educator and the difference between this position and the position of the oppressed. This difference is not
necessarily a problem unless it remains invisible. There are (only), two subject positions in Freire's account, the one who empowers (and who therefore holds some authority), and the one who is being empowered. This reduction to a dichotomy silences the myriad of power relationships that circulate in any context and places his work firmly in Marxist structuralism and the Hegelian dialectic, two springboards for Foucault's critique.

Giroux (1992:157) warns of the possibility (and reality in most educational institutions) of being theoretically sound but pedagogically unsound. This is when the espoused theory is different from the in-the-moment interaction, the 'how' of teaching. Interestingly, this reflexivity has been the focus of much of the challenge to male critical educator theorist's like Giroux⁹ (see Luke in Luke & Gore 1992). In fact the language of 'teacher and learner as co-learners and co-actors in the fight against oppression' is common to both liberatory and feminist pedagogies, as well as humanist based pedagogies. True, acknowledgement of the different positions of teacher/student was not present in Freire's or other critical theorist' early writing (Giroux 1981, 1983; Shor 1980; McLaren 1989b), but neither was it explicit in early feminism in which the blind focus was on flattened egalitarian structures which rendered any power/authority/expertise invisible. Likewise, in Rogers' (1983) humanistic education writings the teacher was called a facilitator not a teacher. The result was that many radical educators (including this one) were thrown into confusion about the position of teachers. And, perhaps more significantly, in the light of espoused reflexivity, the institutionally sanctioned authority assigned to the teacher was rendered invisible as we strove to become 'equal' co-learners with our students. As a result, maybe because of the awareness of our responsibility (and more likely because the institutional shaping of our role) many of us changed 'expert'
hats. From being an expert in disciplinary content, we became experts in the process of learning.

But this critique more likely points to the historical times we have lived through, with their slow disintegration of many of the universal truths that we took for granted, than the specific influence of these educators. Radical/liberatory education writing has been an inspiration to my work. The central issues I have with it at this point of time are the construction of otherness and the reduction of difference to a dichotomy or a dialectic, and it is to this that this thesis turns (see particularly chapter 7).

3. the critical thinking/reflection-in-action movement

To come to be acting on rather than simply being subject to personal and social events requires a very particular kind of understanding

(Salmon in Browning Cole & Coultrap-McQuin 1992:239)

Since the 1980’s critical thinking and reflective practices have become mainstream in educational discourses (see Armstrong 1993). Rather than being empty vessels to be filled by knowledge, students’ personal experience and concrete knowledge was considered the essential ingredient in personal meaning making and the production of knowledge. Students were considered to have the potential within them for knowledge but lacking in the skills to access it. Activities such as journal writing, peer reflection, feedback exercises, and reflective projects proliferated to access this hidden potential. A proliferation of influential writers shaped the field with their theories and many prescriptions to
make a 'reflective practitioner' - the educated subject of this tradition (Schön 1983; Brookfield 1991; Boud & Walker 1991; Kemmis 1985).

Critical and reflective practices are designed to elicit students' personal stories including their social and cultural history in order to determine how their experiences affect their competencies in the present. Examinations, formal essays and evaluations of practice are replaced by peer reviews, reflective learning groups, reflective learning journals, and personally driven participatory research projects. However, these methods are not as emancipatory as they first seem to be (see Usher & Edwards 1994). The methods might seem different but the truth story\(^\text{11}\) that informs them is not. The goal of educational discourses is to produce a certain form of subject - the rational, centred, unitary subject (ibid.) - a subject with a particular form of self-knowledge\(^\text{12}\) that is considered the basis for an educated identity. This is achieved through training. Hence methods (self-styling practices) for assessing and constructing this subject are central to education's enterprise. This is the same in all forms of education. In techno-rational forms of education, training methods are constructed by abstract principles embedded in statistical norms as well as psychological assessments (technologies of the self) which examine and modify the subject. Radical/critical/experiential educators have their own versions of these methods. Learning 'styles', ideal speech situations, conflict resolution, group work, personality profiles, and quadrant differentiation models that reduce people's lives to four boxes\(^\text{13}\), are also 'technologies of self' (Foucault 1988).

This movement is epitomised in the writings of people like Schön's (1983) - The Reflective Practitioner, Brookfield's (1991) - Developing Critical Thinking, or Boud, Keogh & Walker's (1985) - Reflection: Turning Experience into Learning and Boud & Walker's (1991) - Experience and

---

H. Byrne-Armstrong PhD thesis 1999
Learning: Reflection at Work. Reflective practices are a reaction to the positivism of techno-rational education; a criticism of instrumental problem solving approaches based on generalised principles made rigorous by the application of scientific theory and technique (see Schön 1983). 'Professional knowledge is a hierarchy in which generalised principles occupy the highest level and concrete problem solving the lowest' (ibid.:24). Its aim was to redress this imbalance. The initiative for this movement came from outside the Academy in organisations and professions where, according to Schön, it became increasingly obvious that the divide between theory and practice was so wide, it created increasing dysfunction in professional areas (such as, medicine, engineering, architecture). This was expressed as conflicts of values, ethics and relationship, which arose out of the inability to recognise the limitation of generalised and universal principles in the face of the inevitable complexity and diversity of everyday life.

Over the last 30 years - particularly in education but increasingly in other areas of organisational and community practice - 'reflection-in-action' (Schön's term), or critical thinking, has formed the cornerstone of radical, experiential and community education. What are the characteristics of an educated subject from this point of view?

1. Rather than considering the student an empty slate passively waiting to be filled, a student is considered as already containing the potential knowledge that they require, but lacking in the skills to access it. An educated subject, on the other hand has the personal skills (reflection and critical thinking) to access and reach their potential. This assumes, that inside people's heads internal and individual skills can be accessed through a change in cognitive structure.
2. There is a connection between this form of behaviour and a worthy citizen. The assumption is that human beings are naturally social beings who co-habit peacefully. When a person reaches his/her potential s/he will exhibit behaviours that show her/him as socially competent and, therefore, natural human beings.

The central skill to be developed, reflection, is a 'generic term for those intellectual and affective activities in which individuals engage to explore their experiences in order to lead to new understandings and appreciation' (Boud, Keogh & Walker 1985:3). Many writers consider it a sequential activity that rationally occurs as a cycle. An event happens - we have an experience - we re-visit the experience in our minds, noticing any emotional response and re-evaluate it by thinking about our actions and their underlying assumptions, and considering if there are other ways of perceiving them (see Boud, Keogh & Walker 1985). Other writers (Boyd and Fales) simply define critical and reflective thinking as 'the process of internally examining and exploring issues of concern, triggered by some experience, which creates and clarifies meaning in terms of self, and which results in a change of conceptual perspective' (1983:100).

Reflection is an internal, cognitive function, an individual activity which is used to perfect practice and smooth operations (see Newman 1994). However, this internal focus is extended by some writers to include action\textsuperscript{14}, for example, Schön's 'our knowing is in our actions' (1983:50). Building on Polanyi's (1958) notions of 'tacit knowledge', reflection is considered by Schön as the source for a theory building in action. 'People often think about what they are doing while doing it. Stimulated by surprise, they turn thought back on action and on the knowing which is implicit in action' (1983:50). This notion of a magical connection between reflection and action is an interesting one as it

---

H. Byrne-Armstrong PhD thesis 1999
presumes that this is not necessarily so, implying the metaphysical stance that these writers take. Reflection, in this framework is passive, internal and non-action, separate from the social world, allowing us 'to make internal judgments, choices and decisions for ourselves' (Brookfield 1991:x). It is a cognitive re-structuring process that people can engage in because they have a 'natural' cognitive structure that is built for reflection. Unblocking our 'natural' abilities is the purpose of the reflective education movement.

The fact that we reflect in language and that reflection is a social practice is disregarded. In background assumption is the metaphysical subject who exists before engagement in the social realm (see Boud, Keogh & Walker 1985, Boud & Walker 1991). People are exhorted to work on themselves to individually develop these skills and reach their potential. By emphasising 'insight', the critical and reflective teaching movement perpetrates the rampant individualism of our culture.

There is, however, a connection made with the social, and it is this connection that reveals the other issue I have with this movement, its embeddedness in rationality. If people become liberated they will, by virtue of this liberation, become worthy citizens. Although reflection and critical thinking are considered as privately executed, they are seen to be concretely acted in relationship to others. The idea is that learning the abilities of critical thinking enables one to overcome the passions, prejudices and distortions of one's thinking, and behave correctly. In other words, how one acts towards others is seen as a measure of one's internal competencies and potential. So the ability to become a decent citizen is equated with learning to become a reflective and critical thinker. Reflective practices and social skills are seen as a developmental processes. And because this idea of social development is attached to a truth story about 'natural' human beings as part of a 'natural' social order.

H. Byrne-Armstrong PhD thesis 1999
(a notion underpinning much writing about learning/community/communication), the process becomes imbued with oppressive power.

As Parker (1997:47) says, 'the standards which determine what it is to be rational are intimately bound up with the standards appropriate to genuine communication and, indeed, to the foundation of liberal democracy. This can be found in the talk of this movement, for example, 'critical communities of enquirers' (Carr & Kemmis 1986:40), 'researching with people not on them' (Reason & Rowan 1987). Rational processes such as open-mindedness, sharing and cooperating, co-learning, including all parties in any decision making, are requirements for learning. Rationality is tied closely to learning democratically. A correct interaction for learning is the 'reciprocal recognition by each participant of the other as an autonomous source of both claims which have initial plausibility and demands for justification which must be addressed' (White in Parker 1997:49). Critical and reflective thinking therefore perpetuates the individualism that relies on a society in which isolated individuals with their different world views all compete with one another.

Furthermore, promoting an ideal person/community, resorts to practices of apolitical universalism. Reflective practices can be yet another humanist prescription for constructing a human subject as coherent, unified, rational and in control. What is lacking is any awareness of the gender blind, culturally specific, political agendas that these practices belong to. Chaotic, and weird, creative knowledges, culturally produced knowledges, and irrational processes that are also who we are as we act in the world, remain silenced and invisible.
4. feminism and interlocking oppressions

[Women are] ... pruned like a Bonsai tree
so that by the time [they are] ... adult[s] ...
this is seen as the natural state of affairs
(O'Hara 1995)

Feminism (in education) has been particularly concerned with the gender blindness of research into human learning - the inadequacies of theorising general education principles based on the experience of [mainly] white middle-class male subjects (Perry's 1970 research on intellectual development was a classic example of this). Feminism is a 'repositioning of women from the periphery to the centre of social analysis' (Luke in Luke & Gore 1992:25). Influential in feminism as it pertains to education was Gilligan's (1982) work on moral development in women and Belenky et al.'s (1986) work on the development of women's self, mind and voice in society. The distinctions that entered pedagogic practices were based in the notions of women's 'ways of knowing' (ibid.) as being connected rather than abstract, and relational rather than separate and individualistic (Gilligan 1982).

The other educational movements have female educators situated within them.24 However, while being a female version of these movements, they are not necessarily espousing a feminist philosophy/politics.25 In this section my aim is not to give an overview of feminist education26, but to explore how feminist philosophy and politics have influenced my pedagogy.

'The personal is political' has been the central argument of feminism since the 1970's. It alludes to what is perhaps the most important theoretical advance made by feminism; that there is a complex social relationship between material social practices and the construction of subjectivity/identity in language. Identity in this context is regarded

---

H. Byrne-Armstrong PhD thesis 1999
as an historical and social construction en-gendered through historically significant social forms of power and knowledge. This is another stepping stone into Foucault’s interest in subjectification processes.

During the early days of this critique (the 1970’s and 1980’s), most educational work was aimed at the structural inequalities between girls/boys, men/women in education (Kenway & Modra in Luke & Gore 1992). During this time there was also the development of a feminist pedagogy (ibid.) - a response to the dissatisfaction many women educators felt to the absence of gender as a category in most pedagogical theory (see for example, Giroux 1981, 1983; Freire 1970). Writers of the time, including Bunch & Pollack and Culley & Portuges reflected the essentialism of early feminism (in Luke & Gore 1992:8). The focus was on the development of a feminist practice, which reflected the perceived differences of men and women. This was supported by the 'lived experience' of feminist teachers as different from men. Rather than the experience of separation, autonomy, fixed boundaries and abstraction, women’s voices spoke of an embodied connection with life through diffuse boundaries and relatedness to the contexts through which we move (Luke in Luke & Gore 1992). This experience was relevant to classroom practices. While most of the theorists were male the practitioners were female. Teaching styles differed (and often still do).

Early feminism was characterised by the formation of grassroots women’s consciousness raising groups aimed at enabling women to find their own voice and speak their own oppression. Women’s studies programs both in and outside the Academy embedded their programs in this notion of speaking from a personal voice within a group context and in this way they could be seen as aligned with the humanist model. However, the need to maintain the tension between the personal and

H. Byrne-Armstrong PhD thesis 1999
political has always been present in feminist studies. hooks (1989) was one feminist who was vocal in arguing that when feminists collapse the personal into the political, reducing action to merely the naming of ones oppression and pain, then the likelihood of understanding the complex nature of domination is reduced. Conscious raising and political consciousness (see Cook & Fonow 1986), were considered equally important to awareness of structural based gender oppression. Because of this, feminists began to align themselves with critical pedagogies (theorists and educators such as Freire 1970; Giroux 1981, 1983; McLaren 1989; Shor 1980). They saw them as providing a better theoretical grounding for the political work that was deemed necessary. The feminist classroom was designed around these notions. More emphasis was given to emancipatory classrooms (see Lather 1992:9) with small group learning, cooperative problem solving, and strategies to suit the particular cognitive style and interests of women (Kenway & Modra in Luke & Gore 1992:142).

The early feminist critique of education demonstrated that it privileged the abstract, conceptual, rationalist discourse. From an essentialist gender lens this means that some 'ways of knowing' - reason and rationality - (mainly attributed to men) are privileged over 'others' - emotion, intuition and passion (attributed to women). The rational individual was regarded as being engaged in a duel to maintain 'his' reason and rationality over 'his' emotions, passions and feelings (which are represented by the 'other' - woman). This dichotomisation of experience was the basis for the underlying assumptions of education (whether it was/is mainstream, humanist, or liberatory) and to the continuing oppression of half of the world's population. Feminism's contribution has been to challenge dualistic thinking (another connection with Foucault). It demonstrated that dualisms such as reason and passion also

H. Byrne-Armstrong PhD thesis 1999
represented the effects of particular historically based discourses and forms of social power rather than existing as entities in their own right. As Harroway wrote:

"dualisms have been persistent in western traditions; they are systemic to the logics and practices of domination of women, people of colour, nature, workers, animals - in short domination of all constituted others, whose task is to mirror the self (in Nicholson 1990:219).

The very foundations of knowledge as a rational, dualistic and exclusively, male domain, were not merely epistemological issues but issues of power and politics.

With the influence of poststructuralism and the deconstruction of the male/female dichotomy as a metaphysical issue, viewing gender issues through an essentialist frame, although an important stance, is now considered simplistic and problematic (Weedon 1987). Placing the experience of women's oppression into universal categories silenced many voices and in this silencing, the feminist discourse became complicit in perpetrating the very oppression it was trying to contest. As Luke says in Luke & Gore;

"[Poststructuralism's] ... reworkings marked a subtle turn in critical educational studies ... It is a turn which highlights the complicity in all discourses in disciplinary power, and so shatters any illusions of innocence held by self-proclaimed emancipatory discourses (1992:9)

The door opened to many oppressions in many contexts, revealing that people (including students) do not begin on an equal playing field. To place this inequality simply into the man/woman dichotomy was to miss the
myriad of differences (through class, cultural, insider/outsider locations, sexual identity, and cognitive style), as well as gender, experienced in the classroom setting. This is not a proposal aimed at homogenising difference under one umbrella (a common rationalist practice), but of 'singing-up' different experiences of oppression in different contexts.

The alliance between many theorists in critical pedagogies and feminists has been a stormy one (see Giroux 1992; Luke & Gore 1992; Gore 1993). Feminist pedagogies continue to distinguish themselves through their situated practices. 'How one teaches ... becomes inseparable from what is being taught and, crucially, how one learns' (Lusted in Gore 1993:4). Embedded in day-to-day teaching practice much of their writing reflects the ongoing project of 'reshaping discursive and embodied relations in pedagogy' (Luke & Gore 1992:10). This thesis joins these voices.

To summarise this chapter, I would like to remember the historical specificity of knowledge. As the effects of the great social movements of the 1960's began to filter into the institutions (see chapter 5 for an example of this), changes occurred in language and literature. The important (feminist) voice (of difference) I want to bring into this thesis is that while I am engaged in a patriarchal project that encourages the critical analytic voice, I also want to stand by the work of educators in the tradition I operate within. There are limitations in all these forms of education, but there are also enormous strengths. The continuing strength comes from changing and developing the work to include the voices of the oppressed - to listen when someone with more expertise in particular categories of oppression speaks - and to change our behaviours to fit our new knowledge.

H. Byrne-Armstrong PhD thesis 1999
Thanks to colleague, Judy Pinn for this metaphor. I am aware that in living in Australia there is an extra meaning to this term (because of the influence of Aboriginal culture) - that I am implying more than a social constructionist view of reality. I do this on purpose. However I would like to keep an attitude of ironic tension about this, to not “pin down the meaning of this term – to let it stay in between a manifest and non-manifest reality, a foregrounding of something that may or may not exist all the time.

The term ‘radical’ means the collective nature of education (see Newman 1993). I realise that I am using this term more loosely than this. The local radical pedagogy is a composite of radical/experiential education. The term ‘radical’ in the thesis means a constitutional and non-conformist education.

This is the term I prefer, hence I call myself a reconstructionist teacher throughout the thesis.


Warner, Weil & McGill (1989) call it one of the villages of experiential education.

Hillman in the monograph has written an excellent critique on typology’s and how they distance people from their experience.

What Mike Newman (1993) calls the radical education movement.

Freire as well as Foucault was educated in a system influenced by French thought (there were connections between the university Freire attended in Brazil and the Sorbonne in Paris).

In a later book Friere (1986) addresses this issue but more from the angle of giving advice to the teacher about staying on the side of oppression rather than being reflexive about their social and economic positioning.

It is heartening to read the shift in his consciousness from one book to another – to the point where he states as ‘cultural workers we must be aware of the partial nature of our views’ (ibid). Yet, he still says little about what is partial about his own position.

See chapter 2.

In this case critical and reflective skills.

There are many theories and prescriptions on the market which give people an inventory of their lives by the use of questionnaires to categorise them into, for example learning styles, personality characteristics, optimism scales. These are part of the scientism of our culture reflected in much educational and psychological research and I consider a reduction of the complexity of human beings.

Brookfield, Kemmis (op. cit.) also.

A notion embedded in phenomenology especially Husserl (see chapter 1).

This can never be so because we use language for reflection and language is a social process.

Cultural and social positioning are eliminated.

Brookfield, Carr & Kemmis, Mezirow, Freire (op cit) amongst many others.

This emerges because the question is which social order are we speaking of.

See also Habermas (1981, 1987).

For example, Habermas’s ideal speech situation, Bohm’s dialogue groups.

The nightmare of relativism spoken about earlier.

Who judges is the important issue.

(Those cited were Keogh, Cranton, Thompson).

(with the exception of Thompson).


Chapter Four

KNOWERS, KNOWING, KNOWLEDGE(S): 'SINGING-UP' THE METHOD

Thought is freedom in relation to what one does, the motion by which one detaches oneself from it, establishes it as an object and reflects on it as a problem

(Foucault in Rabinow ed. 1984:388)
Introduction

This chapter follows the path of learning to the methodology and methods used in this thesis. Like the rest of the thesis it is written in a narrative form and traces the methodological approach taken, the influences that have led me to this approach, including the contentious issues resulting from this influence, and the research design. The aim is to describe the journey to a narrative epistemology. Firstly I discuss my view of methodology itself, then the history of the approach I am taking from the issues that I had with participatory action research. I then build the methodology of the thesis by discussing the development of a narrative epistemology. I do this by looking at some of the various forms of narrative pertinent to this context. I then discuss my growing interest in firstly hermeneutics and then poststructuralism and particularly the methods employed by Foucault. The chapter finishes with a description of the research design, which includes the structure of the thesis, and the methods used within it.

behind the methodology ...

The methodology chosen for this research reflects the assumptions that I, as a researcher, hold about the nature of epistemology and ontology. These assumptions imply an already existing view of the project. Morgan states that ‘the selection of method implies a view of the situation being studied’ (1983:19). The situations being studied are sites of radical/experiential education. Not only does my choice of research methodology reflect my assumptions about research, it also reflects the assumptions about research espoused by the genre of education that I am involved with.

Another aspect of the question of methodological choice is that the methods that are chosen, consciously or unconsciously, tend to reflect the
underlying conflicts that lead us into an inquiry. Smith states that ‘often the methods we choose to conduct research are wittingly or unwittingly an expression of the conflicting interests that are being served by the study’ (1985:12). This statement says two things to me:

- That research always involves, explicitly or implicitly, conflicting interests (if there weren’t any conflicting issues we would not be enlivened and curious about the issue underlying our inquiry), and:

- The methods we choose reflect our personal values and interests. They reflect a ‘view’, a ‘story’ about research and therefore will exert an influence on it. That I am choosing an interpretive/narrative and deconstructive methodology implies not only an existing view, but also what the path of discovery might be and the likely ‘outcomes’ of the research.

**writing the methodological history**

For my masters research, I chose qualitative and constructivist research methodologies embedded in liberal humanism. I argued against the traditional and dominant ‘positivist’ approaches where the emphasis is on methodologies that explain and predict, in a search for regularities and causal relationships between phenomena (see Burrell & Morgan 1979) - a tired (yet still very influential old argument) in 1999.

I situated myself within research that was viewed as a ‘reciprocal and relational process in which co-researchers are actively contributing to the design, content and method of the process’ (Armstrong 1993:59). Informing this was ‘constructivism’, a view of knowledge that proposes that there is no objective reality that we can know, separate to our knowing of it. Therefore the world which we construct is one of negotiated meanings. My research methodology and methods reflected this view. I chose a participatory action research - PAR - (Reason & Rowan eds. 1981), which was
based on co-reflection and cooperative meaning-making. I took the stance of ‘critical subjectivity’ (ibid:230) making meaning of the group’s experience through the process of kinships and connections and layers of reflection and analysis.

I believed that it was a fully collaborative project and, because of this, was sensitive (but kept quiet) about the issue of my attaining a higher degree through this cooperative undertaking. As a result (and I would be more frank about this now) the waters of the research became very muddied and after a session where I attempted to pull together the meanings for my thesis, the group rebelled and asked me to complete on my own. Only two of them wanted to read drafts and one the final copy. (Interestingly three have gone on to complete higher degrees).

In retrospect, this was excellent learning because it led me to question some of the assumptions of PAR. PAR is embedded in liberal humanism, which situates the human subject and their experience as the starting point for knowledge. ‘True’ knowledge cannot be reached until critical, rational and reason[able] methods or devices are used to distance the subject from this experience. The truth reached is universal and neutral; it transcends difference and is beneficial and benevolent. Furthermore, human subjects all have the potential in themselves to find this truth, proven by their creativity and moral intelligence. This latent potential can only be liberated by education; the belief being that, once liberated, people will exercise free choice to liberate and shape their lives and create a civil society (ibid) ... and the result will be wholesome, bathed in sunshine, smelling of hay, cider with Rosie, entirely free from red-back or funnel-web spiders’ (Newman 1994:20).

PAR is one such educational formula for doing this. Through the process of participation, personal consciousness and individual transformation occurs and the truth of the research is found. Social positioning and power relationships are buried under categories such as co-
research, equality and collaboration. The implicit interests (of the initiator and her context) served by the research are disguised in the notion that there is no clear outcome because it is participatory research. My group asked why, if it was collaborative, didn’t all of us get a degree!

Can there ever be full collaboration or participation when groups are made up of people with a complexity of interests and agendas? I don’t think so. Collaboration gets ‘totalised’ (Foucault 1977) by the sentimentality of the humanist ideal. The fact that collaboration is a paradox is hidden under the weight of humanism’s ideals and sentiment (its too ‘nice’ to contest – see Newman 1994 quoted earlier). For example, although people with common interests are brought together, one person has to initiate the research as well as call a halt to it. This action is a power-full act. In most cases the power is not explicit. The research always serves the interests of some people more than others (I received the degree). Also the questions and topics in any research belong to a certain narrative that serves the interests of the initiator.

It is important to regard research as a ‘way of seeing’ that serves certain people’s interests; in this case mine. But that it can have a ripple effect on others’ lives is also true. Following the research group mentioned above, people went about their education in very different directions, both informal and formal education. What I learnt from this experience is to be open and ‘up front’ about power issues from the beginning. And, although collaborative methodologies emphasise the constructed nature of meaning-making, embedded as they are in humanist thought, they give little attention to the dominant discourses that shape our projects and lives or how these might disturb the research process.

These are some of the issues that encouraged the exploration of poststructuralism (with its turn to language and its gesture away from the universal human subject as centre of the universe) and led me to

H. Byrne-Armstrong PhD thesis 1999
explore other ways of researching (and, as I will explain, a different approach to these ethical questions).

The Pathway to a Narrative Epistemology

changing directions ...

This project is informed by the turn to language and death of the subject discussed in the last chapter. In this discussion I said that there is a shift in focus in contemporary research away from the subject to the constitutive role of knowledge. This thesis is an account of my journey from methods that regard the human subject as central to the research to methods that regards language and social practices as constitutive of human life. It therefore employs methods that reflect this; hermeneutics and deconstruction, and it is these that I will now discuss. It began with a hermeneutic method, an interpretive method that regards itself as ‘just one example of an everyday process through which people make sense of their worlds’ (Rowan in Reason & Rowan eds. 1981:132). It was one step away from researching on people, to researching the texts/narratives of people.

Hermeneutics sets out to ‘inquire into, portray and interpret the realm of intersubjective meanings as constituted in culture, language, symbols’ (Shwandt in Guba & Lincoln 1990:264). The lesson of hermeneutics tells us that we are historical beings situated in a place at a point of time in a particular culture. This I agree with. Our assumptions and preconceptions are culturally and historically bound so understandings or meanings are reflected to a large extent by this situatedness. But, liberal humanism has far-reaching tentacles. Hermeneutics regards this as an ontological fact, a starting point for our understandings; understandings which ‘reach for an interpretation which is intersubjectively valid for all people who share the same world at a given time in history’ (Rowan in Reason & Rowan eds. 1981:133). But, in this sense, not only does it seek for a deep truth, a

H. Byrne-Armstrong PhD thesis 1999
hidden meaning that is right for all, in doing this it implicitly implies a
metaphysical truth, the foundation of liberal humanism. This was my point
of departure.

My thinking and practice moved towards the ‘turn towards language’,
not to find deeper meanings and truth, but to look for multiple
interpretations. Engaging in what Clifford Geertz (1983:34) called ‘an
elaborate venture into thick description’\(^3\), the method I am exploring, both
as a researcher and teacher, interrogates the meanings/stories in any
context, seeing this text as a social practice that produces and is produced
by prevailing practices of domination. This occurs in situ - at the local level
of practice therefore incorporating the interpretations/narratives of
others - and in this sense is hermeneutic. However, in the sense that the
aim is not to find a deeper meaning or generalisable truth - it is not looking
for a conclusion or a generalisable theory - the method is deconstruction
and poststructuralist.

In saying the work is both hermeneutic and deconstruction, I am
aware that it represents two contested streams of western thought\(^4\), an
issue that is the central tension of this thesis. Both share a significant
challenge to the metaphysics of modernity and its notion that language and
experience are separate and that we are in charge of language. Both agree
that it is the other way around - language is in charge of us. However, one
stream seeks to strengthen the movement towards unity and tradition by
emphasising the authority and truth of texts. The other emphasises the
indecipherability and uncertainty inherent in language and text, questioning
the concept and usefulness of meaning itself. Meanings are therefore
played with, the text interpreted many times, producing a multiplicity and
plurality of narratives. Within this multiplicity there is a variance of airtime
given to different stories.

My connection with each of these seemingly opposing methods is
that they represent the journey of this thesis. We don’t just story the

---

H. Byrne-Armstrong PhD thesis 1999
world, we story ourselves in a world (see Michelfelder & Palmer 1989). By choosing both interpretive and deconstructive methods I am clearly identifying with this perspective. As the thesis is written over time there is a shift within it from the interpretive methods to methods that include discourse analysis and interpretive analytics. This story represents the changing landscape of my self-narrative. At this time of writing I am clearly leaning towards the notion of text as shifting and changing. (I no longer feel like 'a lost sheep in the dried up pastures of metaphysics' Michelfelder & Palmer 1989:195). I have ventured into the rejection of a 'metaphysics of presence' (ibid.). And, as I write this, I recognise that my choice of methods is an expression of the conflict, which gave impetus to the study. It represents the changing meaning of a series of events that led me initially from an enthusiastic 'humanist inquirer' to a deconstructed and doubting view of the collaborative and participatory action research process. Collaboration now means just more of the same tired old pastures. From being an objective observer doing research on people as a positivist researcher, I became one of the 'objects' of the research but also held the role of objective observer (without acknowledging the power/paradox of this situation). Currently I regard the movement away from the metaphysical subject and the turn to language as a way out of this dilemma.

why a narrative⁵ pathway?...

This discussion will include an overview of my local use of narrative and then trace how I have come to regard narrative as an epistemology and a practice. Bruner said, '...good stories...gripping dramas...deal in human and human-like intention and action and the vicissitudes and consequences that mark their course. [They] strive to put their timeless miracles into the particulars of experience, and to locate that experience in time and place' (1986:13). I am using the term 'narrative' strategically, to shape an

H. Byrne-Armstrong PhD thesis 1999
intellectual and political project and an imaginative practice. In doing this, my use of the term, 'narrative' is denotative; it signifies my political and philosophical standpoint, and, connotative as it suggests many different images and associations.

My use of narrative speaks to:

- A form of knowing that articulates the connection between specific, concrete, local events and relationship, and abstract taken-for-granted knowledges (discourses), and therefore is:
  - A means of analysis; a way of deconstructing the means by which powerful and dominant discourses constitute people's lives, thus bridging the dichotomy between the socio-political and the individual.

In this sense narrative is:

- A political practice; the goal/outcome in itself, of participatory process, because in its performance it talks up existence. Because narratives are many, it highlights the partialness of our knowledge and 'sings-up' lost knowledges.

Narratives are also:

- An imaginative device to evoke alive and embodied images and associations of relationship and interconnectedness, and to entice the shy, oppressed silent voices/narratives.

What this means is that language and therefore narrative knowing, is constitutive of reality rather than just a representative or reflective of reality (positioning my use of narrative in poststructuralism). In this constitution of reality some narratives reach mythic proportions (Lyotard's (1984) 'grand narratives') - and the realities they constitute become cultural norms, and others are silenced and forgotten. Narrative as a political praxis critically examines this phenomenon. This is explored in the research narratives.
The other presupposition I hold is that giving voice to a story is a performance. The story and the storyteller become detached from each other. This characteristic of a narrative praxis constitutes a stance of critical reflection. ‘Author-ity’ means voice, and talking is an action that challenges the silencing of invisible narratives/knowledges. Whether this is overt or not, the performative aspect of narratives speak to other silenced narratives/knowledges. As people speak/listen to storied ways of knowing, and because of the verisimilitude of narratives, their stories are interconnected. In the performance the multi-storied nature of life is revealed. My current practices utilise the performative aspect to ‘invite others to listen on the margins of discourse and to give voice to muted groups in society’ (Langellier 1989:243). This is the political aspect of a narrative epistemology.

But my use of narrative has not always been in this way. My present use of narrative has been a journey over time from reading and being fascinated by stories/collective myths ... and then ... to viewing narrative knowing as a particular form of cognitive structuring ... and then ... to recognising its power in the development of culture ... and then ... to its place as constitutive of our lives. To provide a context for the use of narrative in this thesis, I will now discuss this journey.

**exploring the contours of narrative knowing...**

Why is the word ‘narrative’ part of the zeitgeist of the moment? Narrative as a word evokes meanings that capture attention, curiosity, dismissal and on some occasions, even derision and ire (they are not ‘real’). It is being used in a broad sweep of contexts, e.g., the ‘grand narrative’ of science and the Enlightenment (see Lyotard 1984), a cognitive schema as described in cognitive psychology (Bruner 1986; Polkinghorne 1989), a literary form (Eagleton 1983), an historical artifact (Foucault 1973), a
collective memory (Jung 1959; Campbell 1972), a children’s story or simply a fabrication of the 'truth'.

Narrative knowing is the primary way human beings give meaning to the world; a series of events are linked together into a coherent system of meanings (a plot) that shape people’s worlds. Narrative knowing is concrete and grounded in life. It has verisimilitude - life-likeness. Stories are about living beings and their relationships and interactions in a living context. It is an alternative to the dominance of abstract, causal and deductive forms of knowing. It is the oldest form of knowing of human beings (see Polkinghorne 1989), and the earliest structure of discourse available to children (see Langellier 1989).

The narrative epistemology that is the methodological resting point of this thesis developed over time. There have been three major influences; cognitive psychology, especially Bruner (1986), anthropology (Geertz 1983), and poststructuralism (Foucault 1973, 1977). I will briefly visit each of these and then complete this discussion of narrative with a summary of the characteristics of narrative and how they are used in this thesis.

**narrative as cognitive schema ...**

In psychology, writers like Bruner (1986) and Polkinghorne (1988) view narrative as one cognitive schema amongst others - a way we have of structuring phenomena into meaningful units through the structure of our brain processes. This statement gestures to the philosophy that informs this form of narrative: that meaning-making through language is an inner, biological process belonging to an individual human subject. Narrative as a cognitive schema is described as the earliest form of knowledge transmission in human beings and one that until recently has been little understood (ibid.). ‘There are two modes of thought ... a good story and a well formed argument ... both [convince] ... arguments convince of their
truth, stories of their lifelikeness’ (Bruner 1986:11). One deals with the universal and the other with the particular. Both could be considered forms of imagination, one striving to transcend the everyday by reaching higher and higher levels of generalisation and abstraction and one dawdling in the particular, locating experience in commonplace events of the here and now (ibid.). In terms of this thesis, this provided me with the recognition of why learning through stories and personal connection is easier (for me) than learning abstract concepts and theories. As a student I always looked for the coloured boxes alongside the text that often included a personal story of the particular theorist being discussed. However, although recognising this was important, I still considered stories as reflective of reality rather than constitutive of it. While this separation occurs, stories remain in the realm of fantasy, imagination and not reality.

**narrative as culture ...**

This assumption was challenged by a book/film, Umberto Eco's story, *The Name of The Rose* (1985) which is a dramatised version of the power of language and interpretation to rule our lives and led me to the hermeneutic method described earlier. Knowledge is passed from generation to generation through narrative accounts and this transmission performs the important function of the passing on of culture. Natural phenomena and social practices are 'explained' through narratives or myths. To the present day we use narrative accounts to describe personal and social histories, and to explain others' behaviours. And, we are fascinated by stories (films, images, books, TV) of others' lives, which provide us with a vicarious experience of living. These narratives shape our lives in ways that are out of our experience, and they serve to transmit the values and beliefs that weave cultures and societies together (see Barthes 1974). Traditionally, they were in oral form and in the telling and re-telling, narratives kept in

---

H. Byrne-Armstrong PhD thesis 1999
touch with their localities, and renewed and changed according to their purpose (sometimes getting lost), and through this process shaped culture and social practices. They were an embodied knowledge, a set of explanations about social practices that were handed from person to person in relationship and in local community (see Geertz 1983).

As the written word became significant, manuscripts were copied, re-authored, and interpreted anew, ensuring that meaning making continued as a living process. Increasingly, as the power of the word became evident, political agendas took over, interpretations were controlled, and interests served by the transmission of some narrative accounts rather than others (Umberto Eco's story is a dramatised version of this). Stories became controlled by vested interest, and, with the advent of the printing press increasingly reified, consolidating power and political agendas. In the reification, and in the hands of those wielding power, stories became disconnected from their sources and increasingly promoted as universal truths (helped of course by the might of the bible and the sword).

This process continued even after the revolt of the peasant classes and in the subsequent rise of capitalism and the new middle classes, shaped cultural narratives (discourses) for political and economic gain (see Foucault 1973, 1977). Ways of speaking, rules and regulations for the government of people and their social lives became institutionalised (through disciplines such as the human sciences) and began to gradually re-shape culture through the discursive connection between power and knowledge (ibid.). Many knowledges were/are silenced and many lost.

Narrative as part of the zeitgeist of the moment is largely formed by the information age which has made visible the presence of multiple narrative versions of history and culture. One cannot turn on a TV/PC without one's existence being bombarded with alternative accounts of life and culture. And, paradoxically, while dominant narratives of science relegate 'narrative' to 'anecdotal evidence' or the realm of poetics - to

H. Byrne-Armstrong PhD thesis 1999
literature and fiction - strong resistance to this is present in the current emergence of narrative accounts from previously silenced knowledges. The presence of this profusion of narratives has led to the questioning of why some people consider narrative as fiction rather than fact, and why some narratives gain airspace and others are silenced. The connection between power and knowledge (viewed as a narrative) becomes more visible.

narrative as political praxis ...

If we think of narrative in its most generic form as referring to any form of spoken or written text, then within this definition, theory is as much a narrative as a children’s story. Scientific ‘facts’ are a narrative as are medical diagnoses. Personal experience is a narrative as is social policy. The signs and symbols of language, images, our readings of situations, are all living texts or narratives. They are connected to people who created them. Thinking in this way maintains the material basis of knowledge. All texts are a narrative with a history; they are embedded in a series of events/social practices/political agendas at time/place and connected together to form meaning for particular personal agendas.

For example, the ‘grand narrative’ of reason and rationality, (or for that matter, patriarchy, the Christian myths) has a history and a material basis in the social and political agendas of a particular time (Lyotard 1984). And, it is still has a pervasive influence on and through us at every moment. It shapes our talk (e.g., this thesis), our relationships (e.g., with readers and examiners) and social practices (e.g., the degree), the way that we approach things (is this rational, coherent argument, well-structured etc.) and the solutions (what is the goal, the outcome). As Davies (1996) said, ‘we speak ourselves into existence through everyday talk’. Language is not a fixed reflection of some immutable reality, which, if contemplated, will reveal the truth. Through these grand narratives we give life a form, which

H. Byrne-Armstrong PhD thesis 1999
in turn constitutes the nature of who we think we are (the discursive construction of identities).

When narratives are organised into systems of statements which become the organising principle of social institutions and processes (see Weedon 1987:35) they become discourses. Discourses connect power, truth and knowledge. They shape our lives as conventions, rules and social regulations. In their everydayness, they become split off from their material and embodied history and therefore we rarely question their presence, or get irritated when people do.

The significance of discourses is that they are implicit in our making sense of the world and constitute meanings and actions in situations out of our awareness. Yet they do not just represent reality or even reflect it, they constitute it. However, they are also necessary social forms that enable shared understandings between people. In the intertwining of power/truth and knowledge various subject positions are constituted and people are shaped as subjects and objects of the discourse. These subject positions are not a product of any individual, but are invitations and conscriptions that are already systematised and organised. Such discourses are the fields of action we are born into. They are historically localised, culturally specific, social forms (see Stenner 1993).

To conclude this section I want to 're'-state that in using the word 'discourse' and speaking from a stance of poststructuralism, I am not talking about a 'worldview', a window that an individual looks through to frame their world (following Goffman 1974). There is no pre-social experience before our participation in the world that shapes and forms our world. Discourses are systems of knowledge that we are born into, and are historically formed by, as they circulate through and around us, shaping us into certain ways of thinking and being through specific social practices that are so familiar to us we no longer think of them as practices/knowledges. This distinction is important as it problematises the

---

H. Byrne-Armstrong PhD thesis 1999
discourse endemic in our culture, that of individualist psychology, which invades every nook and cranny of our lives. It challenges the knowledge/assumption that an individual is a unique being born into the world with some separate, 'intrapsychic truth', or psychological trait.

Therefore, the aim of using narrative in the frame of poststructuralism is not to find a hidden/deeper meaning, or an inner truth, or to amplify a dialectic or even to describe a set of contradictions. Its aim is, that in the telling, the unequal distribution of voices/knowledges are made visible. Mumby in Langellier proposes that ‘storytelling is not a simple representation of a pre-existing reality, but is rather a politically motivated production of a certain way of perceiving the world which privileges certain interests over others’ (1987:114). This is narrative as political praxis - a politics of storytelling - some narratives are heard and reach grand proportions and some are silenced. Why is this so historically?; who is heard?; who speaks?; and who is silenced?, are the questions to be asked.

**positioning the thesis in a narrative epistemology**

To complete this discussion the following points summarise the stance of a narrative epistemology and the expression of this stance in this thesis:

- Narratives have verisimilitude (how I love that word!). I have called sections of the thesis, 'narratives', because my knowledge production is through concrete, embodied relationships. These relationships happened in places and spaces that have a theme or plot. The space of (my) pedagogy is a 'geography', shaped by the discourses moulding the relationships and the self-narratives of people within it;

- Narratives are not thin, abstract, sanitised versions of events (as, by their very form, theories tend to be). Their geography is full of lively extensions, intersections, byways and blind alleys. In the thesis they show the complexity and chaos of lived experience, the nice and the not

---

H. Byrne-Armstrong PhD thesis 1999
nice, the tensions and the conflict, the unresolved issues as well as the 'happy ever after' ones. This helps the notion of research as a lived experience, a dance through imaginary landscapes, shared and anchored in some plot, always moving, never still;

- A good story is one with rich descriptions as well as riveting events. Some of the classroom practices were riveting events for me. And, to be true to my learning along the way, I have woven theory-stories into the method/practices because this is how I make sense of my dilemmas. I read. I look for what others have to say. I sit at a crossroads and flip in and out of others' experiences through books and conversations, until I decide to try a different pathway. This makes for rich descriptions;

- Narratives are clustered around a plot. A plot is a meta-view, a theme that shapes the events. Each narrative in the thesis is shaped around a plot identified by the philosophical stances informing the lineage of education that is used to explore the overall proposal (Humanism, Feminism, Neo-Marxism/Critical Theory, Poststructuralism). The title of each narrative within the thesis evokes the exploration within it. These plots also follow themes of Foucault's work, power/knowledge self/self, truth/power, power/desire and body/power. The overall proposal shapes the 'meta-plot' of the thesis and is implied by the four phrases identified later\textsuperscript{12};

- Narratives are constructed around time. They have temporality (part of their verisimilitude) and make this visible. In doing this they show how knowledge is produced. In the thesis I use the device of 'thickening-descriptions' (following Geertz 1983) to evoke this process. I want to bring awareness to this temporal aspect as a way of demonstrating knowledge production. Knowing that we know is a retrospective phenomenon. It is only through writing histories (narratives) that we can keep knowledge grounded in its origins (and therefore its social and political agendas;
Narratives remind us of the profusion of realities that make up our worlds. In the thesis I have used the phrase 'singing-up' many times to remind the reader that these realities/knowledges/practices are embodied actions embedded in a view (i.e. poststructuralism), that reality is being constituted in the languages and social practices I describe;

Narratives are action filled. They are never passive, they describe people doing things. Reading them is also an action. The use of a narrative form is a political action to throw a 'pie in the face' of those who think that action never happens in poststructuralism. Actions are here in our words. As we read and write we connect narratives. As we read and intersect with narratives we form other stories and other realities;

The narrative is a vignette of relationships and interconnections constructing/and being constructed, in a discreet context. Because of this discreet quality the form makes visible and tangible the way that power produces our actions and our knowledge(s). In the thesis I use this discrete quality as a means of showing that small, insignificant statements and social practices constitute reality.

Methods To Fit A Narrative Epistemology

The methods that I want to utilise emerge from Foucault's form of discourse analysis, interpretive analytics, and its connection with the narrative form. I will discuss Foucault's methods, especially the connection with hermeneutics and the fact that his method expresses a hermeneutic process that is situated in poststructuralism. I then describe the discourse analytic method I use that emerges from this, including the paradox of doing this work and its possible advantages.

H. Byrne-Armstrong PhD thesis 1999
Foucault’s influence...

Foucault’s way of analysing discourse which he called an interpretive analytics, is the best ‘fit’ for what I want to do, hence the centrality of his work in this thesis. As discussed in the last chapter, his lifework was an exploration of the transmission of ‘right’ knowledge and the production of a certain form of human subject, and as these are also the main aims of education, his work would seem relevant to this exploration. Furthermore his method of interpretive analytics is an applied philosophy, in that he does not distinguish knowledge from everyday practice and experience. This is the political stance of this thesis and is why the methods I use as a researcher are the methods of the pedagogy.

In his form of discourse analysis he abandoned hermeneutics, challenging it in its search for deep meaning. He said ‘serious speakers know what they mean’ (in Dreyfus & Rabinow 1983:124). By this he meant that people who try to disguise or distort their meanings do so not because there is some deeper truth to be revealed, but because they, as actors, although they may sense the distortion, are motivated by some self-interest to ignore it.

For Foucault, interpretation was not the search for a hidden meaning but the means of uncovering multiple meanings. He thought that there was no real meaning or underlying truth hidden in surface behaviours - (if people are exhorted to find truth, the truth is usually an interpretation of the authority directing the search)14. For Foucault, ‘the more one interprets the more one finds not the fixed meaning of a text, or of the world, but only other interpretations' (ibid:124). These interpretations are not part of some natural order, but imposed and created by people. ‘The universals of our humanism are revealed as the result of the contingent emergence of imposed interpretations’ (ibid:108). In other words claims of objectivity mask subjective agendas in pursuit of power. ‘Since the hidden meaning is

H. Byrne-Armstrong PhD thesis 1999
not the final truth about what is going on, finding it is not necessarily liberating; in fact it can lead away from the kind of understanding which might help the actor resist the current practices of domination’ (ibid.:124).

While this form of interpretation is one in which the researcher shares involvement in the situation and distances herself from it (as in PAR), ‘it does not claim to correspond either to the everyday meanings shared by the actors or, in any simple sense, to reveal the intrinsic meaning of the practices. This is the sense in which Foucault’s work is interpretive but not hermeneutic’(ibid.). The result is a material reading of practices found in the ‘talk’ circulating in a situation.

There are two aspects to Foucault’s method. The ‘archeological’ aspect, represented in his first book (1972) had the purpose of enabling him to detach and look at the hidden aspects of our taken-for-granted world: the formation of discourses through rules and regulatory practices and the connection between power and knowledge through these discourses.

The analysis of discourse changed later in his work as he focussed less on the discourse itself and more on the rules and regulations that limit and institutionalise discursive formations (see Dreyfus & Rabinow 1983:104). This is the genealogical aspect. My interest is the latter.

The ‘genealogical’ aspect of an interpretive analysis recognises that social practices are not meaningless but actually productive in shaping individuals and their lives. This is more significant than theories or abstract principles because ‘the genealogical side of analysis deals with series of effective formation of discourse: it attempts to grasp it in its power of affirmation ... the power of constituting objects ...’(Foucault 1972:26). In this, Foucault searched for the inconsistencies, the trivial, the small details and everyday events, rather than searching for hidden meaning or true depth. ‘The methodological point is that, when viewed from the right distance and with the right vision, there is profound visibility to everything’ (in Dreyfus & Rabinow 1983:107).

H. Byrne-Armstrong PhD thesis 1999
discourse analysis ...

The notion of discourse that I have proposed, implies certain social relationships and regulatory practices, and emerges from Foucault's genealogical analysis (see Macnaghten in Burman & Parker 1993). It indicates a form of discourse analysis that sits within a poststructuralist view. This assumes 'that our experience of reality is constituted in and through discourse ... the aim of the analysis is to unravel the processes through which discourse is constructed and the consequences of this discourse' (ibid:54). It does not only look at language but at all observable social practices that together comprise a certain shared understanding.

The essential tool for doing any narrative and discourse analysis is to take a critical stance away from language in order to study it - to engage in an 'externalising conversation' (see White 1989) with the text. The researcher is interested in three areas: power relationships, how power is being exercised, and the subjectivities and identities being constituted.

Firstly, in interpreting a text, the researcher is looking for the relationships embedded within it; looking for the material grounds of the knowledge. Who is speaking in a text? To whom? About what or whom are they speaking? What can, cannot be said in this text? What are the rules and regulations embedded in the text? This is the sense in which this method is ironically more connected to everyday life than the methods that we usually associate with this ideal (like phenomenology and hermeneutics).

Secondly, the researcher is seeking the social practices that are embedded in the statements. Foucault (1977) identified several categories of social practices that are embedded in the language and daily routines of institutions that constitute our lives. The second aspect of the discourse analysis is to look for evidence of these practices in the statements that shaped the events. The questions would be - How is difference being
homogenised? What normalising practices are being exercised? How is surveillance operating? What regulations and rules are being spoken? What evidence is there of self-technologies?

Finally, questions asked of the text imply 'subject positions' or locations within the discourse, which are assigned to people by the discourse. As Harré & Davies (1990:43) put it, 'the constitutive force of each discursive practice lies in its provision of subject positions. A subject position incorporates both the conceptual repertoire and a location for persons within the structure of rights for those that use the repertoire ... and among the products of discursive practices are the very persons who engage in them.' These subject positions are either implied or overt. The subjects of the text imply the objects. For example, the subject position of an expert implies an object position of a novice. These subject positions are found in the statements and relationships within the context.

The statements are not the products of any one category of person. As the categories, (e.g. in gender discourses, the categories of 'man' and 'woman') are constituted within the discourses, statements are not necessarily attached to biological gender\cite{15}. This is part of the ironic tension that this thesis 'sings-up'. The ways we inhabit subject positions are contradictory, paradoxical and unpredictable. The significant issue is what subject positions are available to particular categories of individuals? Who is privileged by a particular discourse in a particular context (power as producing privilege)? and, who is objectified by the discourse (power as producing oppression)\cite{16}?

Subjectivity is made possible by the categories (e.g. black/white men/women, old/young) available in a discourse and the hierarchy of privilege assigned to one part of the oppositional categories by the rules and regulations of the discourse\cite{17}. This hierarchy can be demonstrated in the language and social practices which makes visible (marks) some subject positions and leaves others - the more privileged - unmarked.

H. Byrne-Armstrong PhD thesis 1999
(unmentioned/not noticed) (see Connell 1987). An example is the statement, ‘There were three women on the Board’, or ‘There were six blacks in the restaurant’. People are not conscious that their language and social practices are to do with their social positioning as the more privileged position is not mentioned (unmarked). They cannot name that their actions are to do with being privileged/male/white, as personhood, (sense of I’ness) and identity are synonymous (see Davies 1994). This can be illustrated in an event that occurred in a cross cultural setting in a group that I was asked to facilitate. This is a report from my journal;

40 students from 15 different countries had requested a session with Australian students that would be a forum for them to celebrate their different cultures. Half way through the event a white Australian woman got up and said:

‘I do not know why you all insist on stressing your differences. We are all the same and I teach my children this every day’.

There was an expectant hush in the room and many eyes turned towards me, many knowing my position. I decided to stay silent for the moment. Then a woman from Nigeria got up and went over to the woman.

‘What do you see when you look in a mirror’, she said.

‘I see a woman’, replied the white woman.

‘Well, look at this’, said the Nigerian woman, pointing to her arm, ‘This is black. When I look in the mirror I see a ‘black’ woman. That is why we are different’.

Unless one can recognise the category of subject assigned to one, in the talk of the culture, this category remains invisible.

Analysing the possible subject positions available in any field of action opens the space for the possibility of these processes to be made manifest. The social practices that form the subjectivities in the first place are made visible and invitations to take them up or not, more explicit.
acknowledging the paradox in this method ...

How can someone be objective about the things that they study if the very tools people use to study it are the things they are studying. It requires the ability to hold a position of ironic tension. Doing a discourse analysis in this way requires an ironic attitude. The researcher is both in the discourse and standing aside. I know that being fully objective is not possible, a stance found in PAR\textsuperscript{21}. However, I am not looking for a deeper truth. My aim is to multiply the interpretations of an event and therefore broaden my/your understandings of it.

possible outcomes ...

By using this form of analysis I will show that even so-called alternative forms of education are implicated in a paradox. Rather than being complacent and self-satisfied that alternative forms of education do not reproduce the problems of mainstream education, teachers should realise that they too are intricately bound by dominant discourses. But this is not the only purpose of this method. 'Singing-up' the pluralism of interpretation alludes to the reality that there is more than one knowledge. Furthermore, seeing the power difference in the various knowledges leads us to a critical awareness that is the basis for resistance. The quote at the beginning of the thesis from Grumet says what I hope (my) appropriation of these methods will achieve, that in the multiple interpretations of a series of pedagogic events, more and more cracks will appear in the practices of domination (found in the discourse), representing the space for 'mobile and transitory points of resistance' (Foucault 1981:96), the (new) creatures that will peek through and disturb our complacency.

In unpacking a discourse an important thing occurs. While we are led to believe that these discourses are coherent, total and pre-determined in their effects, what becomes obvious in the unpacking is that within any
discourse there are multiple and contradictory subject positions available. These are the creatures that pop up between the nooks and crannies of the discourse and represent the possibility for agency. The agency that I gained from this exercise is an example of this as is a story from one of the students (see next chapter). Other than this, the goal of this exercise is intangible. It has led me to more knowledge about the situation, more sense of the limitations and liberations available to me and to the students. These may seem intangible things, but knowledge is productive and in this case from the letter sent to me by one student (see story at end of chapter), it was also productive for another. Yet another of these students received first class honours last year and has a scholarship to do her PhD in this area. She too produced knowledge and learning that continues to be beneficial to her life.

**Research Design**

**walking the talk ...**

As stated in the preamble, in this thesis, I do not make a distinction between empirical and philosophical research. Throughout the thesis, I blend theory and practice. The central philosophy of the thesis is poststructuralism, so this is appropriate\(^2\). The research data is written as discrete narratives to demonstrate that knowledge is produced over time, that theory and practice are not separate and that the methods are the emergent knowledge rather than pre-designed recipe.

**the arrangement of the research ...**

The feminist stance of the thesis is found in the initial methods. Early in the research (chapters 5 & 6), I employ a hermeneutic method, that is, I have focused on the utterances and descriptions of a series of pedagogic events to interpret them, recognising (now) that the

---

H. Byrne-Armstrong PhD thesis 1999
interpretations/narratives produced were more to do with my self-narrative than with some hidden meaning. And, this is stated with some irony, because in acknowledging this connection, I am implying the feminist view that there is no separation between the knower and known. Whatever method I utilise, this will be the case. The use of the narrative form maintains this connection and fits what Polkinghorne (1983) termed a 'philosophical hermeneutics'.

The poststructuralist stance of the thesis is added to this to demonstrate what the thesis proposes, that it is by keeping the discursive space open for multiple interpretations, that people begin to see the cracks and fissures in otherwise seemingly coherent dominant knowledges. In arranging the research as a series of interpretations/narratives I am alluding to this notion. Foucault contrasts 'real places' ... messy, ill constructed and jumbled' (1986:25) with the 'fundamentally unreal spaces' of Utopias which exhibits society in a 'perfect...meticulous'...(ibid), singular arrangement. The former he called Heterotopias. In using a combination of hermeneutics, the narrative form, and discourse analysis, I am producing in the research narratives a 'heterotopia', a representation of the messy, unstructured and chaotic process that constitutes a lived learning/research/knowledge production and pedagogy.

I am aiming to keep the space open (discursive openness) to demonstrate the power of social life (or the habitus\textsuperscript{23}) to direct our stories. The assumption is that social life is an 'external space', the actually lived (and socially produced) space of subject positions constantly moving within relationships of power, delineating each other as they move and change, creating a geography of space and imagination. This produces what (Foucault 1986) called 'fields of action'. Foucault said that our narratives have 'milieux, immediate locales, provocative emplacements which effect thought and action. The historical imagination is never completely spaceless ... it is always time and history that provide the primary variable containers'.
in these geographies ... an already made geography sets the stage, while the willful making of history dictates the action and defines the story line' (ibid.:14). The research narratives are the containers that I have created in order for time and history to dictate a story line.

The 'research' chapters are containers in that they are discrete narratives shaped around a plot (theme) that follows the educational themes identified\(^{24}\) and their philosophical underpinnings. They represent the play with the postmodern, me 'walking the talk' of the thesis - that the pedagogy of the argument is the pedagogy being argued for (see Gore 1993). They trace the encounters with truth/self/power in the classroom that led me to occupy the theoretical position of this thesis and to develop and practice a narrative epistemology.

I use several repetitive phrases/metaphors\(^{25}\) throughout this thesis to structure the material;

◆ 'singing-up' which denotes the poststructuralist view that the ways we talk and imagine ourselves and the taken-for-granted social practices and language games that we engage in every moment, are actions that constitute reality\(^{26}\);

◆ 'dead-certainties\(^{27}\)', a play on words and a metaphor to gesture towards the ironic tension in modernism/postmodernism debates. The 'dead-certainties' are the events/exercises and theories in the thesis that hold this ironic tension. They are not examples of practices that are bad, or outmoded. The term is chosen to throw into sharp relief the paradoxes, tensions, displacements, dilemmas and ironies that occur in any practice;

◆ 'local-knowledge\(^{28}\)', to gesture towards the notion of local, concrete and embodied knowledge production - knowledge(s) that are not separated from their history and location, that are grounded in actions and interactions. In this production, there are always forms of resistance, actions that emerge as more comprehensive understandings of the
behaviour of individuals in relations to the subjugating practices of our culture, are 'sung-up' - the narrative epistemology that this thesis proposes. The 'local-knowledges' represent the discourse analyses of the thesis, and:

- 'thick-descriptions' (Geertz 1983), to imagine the richness of realities/stories/knowledges/truths when there is discursive openness. In the thesis the thick descriptions represent my re-configured practices in the light of my learning. Whether this learning is a theory story or a practice story, the 'thick-descriptions' expand the available knowledges through several examples, thus giving the reader an opportunity to dialogue with the text in several ways.

My aim is to demonstrate the move towards a narrative epistemology through my praxis. For the events/knowledge under the category, 'dead-certainties' I have chosen several classroom events from a research journal (in which I recorded events, reflected on practices and asked myself questions) based on practices at the time. These emerged from a core learning subject (in critical pedagogies) which I taught over two semesters in 1994. In these classes a third year student undertaking an Action Research project assisted me. We acted as co-researchers to gather material for her Action Research project and this thesis. The data was collected in a variety of ways. There were sessions that were taped and transcribed, our research journals, a learning group that my co-researcher formed, and conversations. The Action Research project provided much of the initial data for this thesis, but the theoretical underpinnings of the two research projects differ markedly. This difference marks my changing narrative over the last three years and, because of this, I would like to speak to these beginnings as the history of this thesis and the poststructuralist turn it has taken.
My co-researcher designed a project that would explore and explicate what she termed ‘transformational learning’ (see Gebbie 1994), a condition characterised by the move from dualism to contextual relativism (see Salner 1986). I quote from this project:

‘Salner (1986) makes the comment that students’ understandings of systems concepts (and holistic learning) appeared to be limited by the kinds of root assumptions through which they filter the meaning of what is presented. The assumption is that systems thinking can’t be adequately understood or applied until students’ thinking has developed and they have integrated particular epistemological assumptions into their worldviews. Salner reduces intellectual development to three major stages.

1. **Dualism / Received knowing**
   This is an epistemology in which the student makes a clear distinction between self and the external world. The student assumes that knowledge resides in the external world and that he or she is a receiver of truth in an absolute sense. Students’ learning from this position involves a search for learning from an absolute authority. Differences in points of view are reduced to true - false, right - wrong categories. The student often expresses frustration with ambiguity ... because it is interpreted as unnecessary confusion and a failure to identify an authoritative reference in the external world’ (Salner 1986:226).

2. **Multiplicity/ Subjective Knowing**
   The second stage Salner (ibid.) identifies is multiplicity. This is generally seen to evolve out of the impact of pluralistic social experiences on a dualistic thinker. Under the pressure of exposure to conflicting points of view (both socially and intellectually) the student must find a way to incorporate or make intelligible the diversity represented by people very different from her. A more grey area arises between the previously held right - wrong categories. The movement into multiplicity recognises that rather than a single absolute truth there are many truths and that these many truths are existent in people’s own viewpoint about what is true. The self begins to take on more importance as a source of knowledge.
   The movement into multiplicity is often accompanied by the attitude of ‘you have
your reality and I have mine'. The student may stress the importance of her [sic] gut feelings about something and challenge authority.

3. **Contextual relativism/ Connected knowing**

Contextual relativism is said to arise out of the frustration encountered in the multiplistic stage. The subjective emphasis of the multiplist means logically that every point of view can be considered as good as any other. With this emphasis it is impossible to choose anything to which one can make a commitment. The movement in to contextual relativism represents students' increasing awareness of the importance of contexts in defining truth and value. 'Epistemologically this stage is dialectical and interactive in that it does not look for truth in the world (as the dualistic thinker does) or in the self (as the multiplistic thinker does) but in the interaction between self and world that results from committed, or we might even say, existential action in the world' (Salner 1986:226). This is an epistemology concerned with contexts, one that sees a dialectical relation between knower and known that sees the source of truth neither in the world or in the self but in the (human) experience of patterns' (Gebbie 1994).

I have quoted at length from this document here because it illustrates the position that we were taking at the beginning of this project. Our interest at the time was whether reflexive awareness (see Armstrong 1993) - my version of contextual relativism - could be taught. Using the characteristics of each stage of development described above as the measure, my co-researcher interviewed students, met with them in a learning group and studied the transcriptions of tapes and student journals to identify the learning stages, and any changes /development through the learning stages.

As the project progressed and we passed through many experiences together, the disturbances - the struggles, the conflicts and the lack of response by (some) students to invitations to become autonomous learners - began to interest me. The more that I considered this position the more I became aware of the inadequacies of (my) individualistic epistemology. Stages of individual growth in learners were not enough to explain the
struggles students had with radical/experiential learning, or the sense of failure that I felt as an educator within it. There was more to it than just the practice of a reflexive awareness or contextual relativism. For example, in groups, it seemed that who/what was listened to, had more to do with who spoke (and their position), than whether they were practicing a contextual relativism/reflexive awareness. There had to be more than this. Continuing experiences of ‘hanging out’ in groups both as a teacher/facilitator and as a student/member provided a powerful launching pad for me to explore the connections between power and knowledge, the poststructuralist critique that, I feel, is still missing from much radical/experiential/systems learning, writings.

This journey is the narrative of this thesis. The events that occurred, and the reflections I had at the time, provided many challenges to my knowledge/practice. They led me to question much of my work (‘dead-certainties’), to engross myself in theory and look for its local presentations (‘local-knowledges’), and to the reconfiguration of practices (‘thickening-descriptions’). I use these three headings to gesture not to a progression towards something better/truthful/more correct but to gesture towards a narrative epistemology. I am adding to, and expanding my praxis over time, rather than refining it to a single truth.

My present stance of non-foundationalism comes about because of my resistance to the perceived necessity of a universal understandings/theory (emancipation, liberation, freedom, choice, autonomy) in order to practice as a reconstructionist teacher. In fact I think that this necessity is contrary to radical/experiential practice. I consider that the more that we can have access to many knowledge(s) the more that we will keep the spaces open for a plurality of knowing. Life is not developmental (growing into some perceived maturity, consciousness or advanced spirituality), but temporal. Hence also my use of narratives. They represent, over time, the way that knowledge is produced. I intend to
demonstrate through the narratives, that, by 'singing-up' the tension spoken about at the beginning of the thesis, and unpacking it, the nooks and crannies of the cultural narratives constituting our lives, are made visible. This expands the space of possibility, and it is this space of possibility that provides opportunities for students' knowledge production and therefore agency.

This thesis is a momentary, contingent and playful encounter with (my) theoretical passions of the present. I am imagining a Heterotopia (see Foucault 1980d) rather than a Utopia, a field in which the many paradoxes that are a part of any encounter between the might of policy and governance of institutionalised education and the dynamism of an emancipatory project can play. This encounter represents the daily encounter of students and learners in and outside the academy and myself as a teacher and as a student writing a thesis.

To 'deconstruct', then is to reinscribe and resituate meanings, events and objects within broader movements and structures; it is, so to speak, to reverse the imposing tapestry in order to expose in all its unglamorously disheveled tangle, the threads constituting the well heeled image it presents to the world' (Eagleton in Soja 1989:12).

My practices and the 'truth stories' informing these practices have changed over time. Not in any linear, consistent way, but in a 'higgeldy-piggeldy' fashion in and out of theory building and theory tearing down, of trying new things, momentary passions, excitement, reflection, slumps, conversations, journal keeping and conflicts. For the purpose of writing a PhD, I have put these in a more orderly fashion than actually occurred in my research and learning but I have tried to retain some of the chaos and spontaneous moments (another example of the ironic tension).
concluding...

I want to conclude with a lengthy quote from Dreyfus and Rabinow (1983). This quote embodies my personal and ethical position (at this point of time) as a researcher and practitioner interested in social and political change, as well as the reasons why the content, structure and style of this thesis is embedded in poststructuralism.

We can no longer do theory.

We are no longer searching for deep, hidden meaning.

Yet since we take the problems or our culture seriously, then we are drawn ineluctably to a position like Foucault's. In any sense it is the only position left that does not regress to a tradition that is untenable, nor play with trendy analyses of the 'free play of signifiers' or desires ...

this does not imply that some form of interpretive analytics is currently the most powerful, plausible, and honest option available. Since we share cultural practices with others, and since these practices have made us what we are, we have, perforce, some common footing from which to proceed, to understand, and to act. But that foothold is no longer one which is universal, guaranteed, verified, or grounded. We are trying to understand the practices of our culture, practices which are by definition interpretations. They quite literally and materially embody a historically constituted 'form of life' to use Wittgenstein's phrase. This form of life has no essence, no fixity, no hidden underlying unity. But it has nonetheless its own specific coherence

(Dreyfus and Rabinow 1983:125)

H. Byrne-Armstrong PhD thesis 1999
1 Like others (see Kuhn-White 1997) I think that methodology and method are two related notions that cannot be separated. Methodology related to the assumptions that we bring to our research (our epistemology and ontology) and the methods are how we collect the data and practice our research.

2 Liberal humanism can be considered an indistinct philosophical movement in western thought - a general perspective on life rather than a set of doctrines or theories. It was a reaction to the positioning of the supernatural, transcendent domains (the divine) into the centre to the universe. Furthermore, the fact that human's could live without the supernatural demonstrated the power of rational thought and therefore the classification of human beings as part of the natural order.

3 My reading of Geertz's term 'thick description' is that rather than referring to more and more detail in ethnographic writing, he was referring to an iterative process of returning to a situation in order to expand the description already made - hence "thicken".


5 Before embarking more on an exploration of narrative I need to acknowledge that there is a vast array of literature on narrative that I will not include in this discussion. My interest in narrative ways of knowing is strictly in the realm of a poststructuralist, political praxis. Literary narratives (Russian formalist and French structuralist approaches), philosophical approaches to narrative, historical narratives, narratives and children's development, psychoanalytic approaches to narrative, (Langellier 1989) are not part of this thesis.

6 Performance in this context does not mean necessarily a formal performance to an audience. The performative aspect is present also in everyday life each time we speak to another.

7 Zeitgeist is the spirit of the times (see Watzlawick 1984).

8 Knowledge belongs to people who have been rendered invisible by the dominant accounts (women, people of colour, other than mainstream sexuality etc).

9 I am using grand narrative, discourse or cultural narrative interchangeably.

10 I am using power in the sense that Foucault did as being constitutive of social relationships.

11 For the purpose of a thesis one is required to position oneself. For this project I am positioning myself in a narrative epistemology. This is to also be regarded as not idealising a "truth" but exploring a momentary encounter with a social form - a narrative epistemology.

12 'Singing-up', 'dead-certainties', 'local-knowledge' and 'thick-descriptions' discussed at end of chapter.

13 We do this in a variety of ways, eg. silence, non-verbal communication, joking, rationalising, violence.

14 For example in a therapeutic situation a person is exhorted to find the truth because the therapist's frame tell her that there is one -and this truth will be the therapist's interpretation of the events.

15 Meaning that women as well as men can produce sexist talk.

16 Foucault's power as exercised and productive (1983a).

17 See Derrida 1991

18 This can happen verbally and non-verbally.

19 This occasion was in 1994 in the Faculty of Rural Development. After writing it I found a quote from a male giving an account of a similar occurrence about male/female in Davies (1994).

20 Another example that happened to me recently is that a male student - involved with the men's movement - brought me a tiler of a workshop they were running for men. It was called 'The Scent of a Woman'. He was surprised when I queried why they were running a workshop for men that was advertised with the category 'women' in the title.

21 This follows somewhat Reason & Rowan's (1981) 'subjective objectivity'.

22 Central to poststructuralist and postmodern discourses is the collapse of the dialectic. A discussion of this is in chapter 6.

23 Bourdieu's (1990) term.

24 See chapter 3.

25 Mentioned in Chapter 1.

26 As it is in Aboriginal culture.

27 I have chosen this title to capture the ironic tension that runs through this chapter, especially the first section. I have later found it in a Hargreaves (1994) book, Changing Teachers, Changing Times, London, Cassells.

28 Local Knowledge is the title of Geertz's 1983 book (see Bib.) - a collection of essays which have strongly influenced this thesis and my ideas.

29 For a discussion of thin cf. thick descriptions see Geertz 1983 (p89-90).

30 This subject was called 'Learning Processes' at the time and in an undergraduate degree in the then School of Social Ecology, UWS.

31 Third year students at the time embarked on a third year project based on action research methodologies.
Chapter Five

FEMINISM & POWER-TRUTH ENCOUNTERS

What diversity do we silence in the name of 'liberatory' pedagogy?
(Ellsworth 1992:91)

We are concerned with developing a critical perspective ... we are concerned with developing practical skills (UWS UG Handbook 1998)

'Politics kills art'

(heard on 'Arts Today', ABC Radio 5/10/98)
Introducing the Narrative

This narrative is the story of an incident in the undergraduate course mentioned in chapter 4. The 'dead-certainties' involve an account\(^1\) of a classroom event, called by students, 'The Famous Fishbowl Incident'. This event reached mythic proportions through its telling and re-telling over the ensuing months (some would say a very successful pedagogic event because of this!). The activity was a response to a request from women students in the class to the perceived lack of gender awareness within the group.\(^2\) The narrative tells the story first, then gives an interpretation of it from a feminist perspective (the 'dead-certainties'). It then interrogates the narrative again from the position of a discourse analysis, interrogating the social practices present in the talk and the subject positions (available to me as the facilitator and to the students), constituted in this talk - the 'local-knowledge'. The 'thick-description' is a peek at my current practices in the light of what I learnt from this process.

This narrative is a critical one in terms of the evolution to my present practices. I now view it with some irony as I can see that the first interpretation comes from a particular stance; a stance that I needed at the time to help me order and make sense of the experience. However, it also sanitised the event, alluding to a (feminist) Utopia. It was a discursive closure, which increasingly became dissatisfying in the light of new knowledge. This led me to interpret the text through a discourse analysis. The discourse analysis revealed the underlying social and political agendas informing the event and in doing this, demonstrated that more than one interpretation can lead to greater understanding (as well as distancing me away from a politics of the pointing finger). It showed the value of the discourse analytic process in making visible

---

H. Byrne-Armstrong PhD thesis 1999
the way that power-knowledge constitutes life in/through language and social practices and the complexity of any conflict and difference.

'Dead-Certainties' - The Famous Fishbowl Incident

introduction ...

Feminism as an integral part of the philosophical and political underpinnings of my pedagogy and that of the degree course³ (see UWS UG Handbook 1992, 1998). Sessions on a politics of difference (see Yeatman 1995) including gender issues are part of the general curriculum. However, while there had been many references to feminist knowledge and its influence on broadening academic knowledge(s) to include women's voices, some students (a group of women who were mature-aged students) considered that this was still abstracted from their everyday experience. Their agenda was to introduce experiential work on feminist issues into the classroom. They requested that a session be designed in which the issues of sexism in the everyday classroom environment would be addressed. Their experience of university classrooms was little different than has been reported elsewhere (see Luke & Gore 1992). The taking up of physical and verbal space, the use of body language, exclusion of various forms of knowledge and the form and direction that discussions take were daily occurrences to these women - and of course go largely unnoticed by men. Their goal was to confront these largely unchallenged patriarchal practices/environment, something they believed was rarely challenged at the level of everyday practice. The students' idea fitted explicitly the aim of my pedagogy at the time, curriculum as an ongoing collaborative process, the notion of 'giving theory feet' and an explicitly political agenda. As a feminist teacher, I am conscious

---

H. Byrne-Armstrong PhD thesis 1999
that to talk about issues of feminism and to ignore the effects that this talk has on classroom interactions is to perpetrate the very hegemony I am trying to address.

The process I used is called a 'fishbowl technique', a community activity emerging from the socio-drama tradition aimed at providing a space for differences to be aired. This process fits the ideas/talk so loved by radical forms of pedagogy, such as 'embodied learning', 'dialogue', 'giving voice to the marginalised', 'safety' 'emancipation'. It is useful for dealing with conflict in a team, group or community when there are a number of people and a polarised debate. The aim is to create a space for more than one knowledge to be aired in a ritual for listening, a space for multiple meaning making. The space is set up in two circles, an inner circle in which people identified with 'one side' of a debate sit together and share their experiences of that side of the issue. The people in the outer circle are silent witnesses. The two groups then change places. After this, the groups merge with each other for a large group discussion.

In this case I suggested that the group might like to divide along gender lines and talk together about their issues in a climate of 'post-feminism'.

**setting the scene**

The students had watched a video on gender at work. People were reluctant to come back after the tea break. They entered and sat in clumps around the edge of the room, talking and muttering amongst themselves. The atmosphere was electric and tensions running high. A discussion began. There were strong divisions in the room. A woman spoke of her experience in education, and the connections between it and the production of knowledge.

---

H. Byrne-Armstrong PhD thesis 1999
with its exclusion of women. The non-verbal signals in the classroom were frequent and intense. There was a shuffling, some people appearing uncomfortable, glancing at each other, others appearing bored and disinterested. There was a silence.

Then a woman said, *I wonder what the men are thinking*⁶ (in the face of information about gender and knowledge).

A younger man replied, *There are always two sides of the story. I've been oppressed by education too.*

There were nods of agreement with this from men and women. In my experience, this is a common interchange in gender discussions. Men have been oppressed as well as women. There are a limited number of subject positions available to them under patriarchy, for example, breadwinner, pragmatist. This is true to some extent if one considers the more postmodern notions of intersecting oppressions (see Yeatman 1995) but the timing of these statements and the shift of focus away from women talking about their experience, raises a crucial point. They are both statements embedded in the patriarchal discourse; the first, a woman taking the position of carer, and the man using the totalising practice of reducing difference and homogenising experience.

These statements served to build on each other and to gradually silence many voices in the room including the women who had first spoken out. This is the point at which I suggested to the group that we both learn and have an experience of a process that could assist the discussion. The room was arranged to accommodate two circles. I asked the group for volunteers, thinking that the women would begin. This was an example of egalitarian process often found in feminist classrooms working against the

---

H. Byrne-Armstrong PhD thesis 1999
aim. In retrospect I should have used my institutional authority to suggest that women go into the centre first. This I will discuss later in the chapter.

the incident ...  

Six young men (a 'spontaneous choice' they maintained afterwards) volunteered immediately to become the inner circle. They tended to be the younger and more outspoken men in the group. They settled themselves in the middle and looked around. Other men were unwilling to join them feeling that the group had not discussed the issue enough.

The young men sat in the middle surrounded by the rest of the group. They began by talking together about what issues they would like to discuss. Their main theme was one of reducing difference between men and women - they have more similarities than differences - that the world was a violent and oppressive place to men and women alike, that they personally did not treat women differently and they personally were not abusive, violent or aggressive. They expressed an annoyance at the continual focus of gender in the course. The discussion was directed to contemporary issues as being generic/human problems rather than being gendered problems.

This is boring, How about (the topic) of approaching women for a date, a young woman (facetiously) called out.

Others in the group howled her down.

One man in the group cautioned against this topic calling it a loaded question. Older women in the group cried sexism.

Younger women defended her, she was only joking.

I reminded them that the role of the outer circle was to remain silent and listen.

The men in the middle began to respond to the uproar.

Do you want a date, said one, the outer group responding with rippling energy. What's wrong with wanting a woman?
There was a more vigorous response in the group from the different positions in the debate. Women identified with feminism accused the men of sexism/abusive talk, proving to them that things had not changed.

Other (younger) women retorted with vigour that it was *just good fun* and the men were just playing.

Other men joined in and tried to quell the energy.

I asked for the class several times to remember the exercise we were doing and therefore for silence from the outside group. Anything that was said by the group in the middle was fiercely debated. I said to the people - both men and women - that if they wanted to join in to move to the middle. I asked two men who were particularly disruptive to join the centre circle. They refused and I persisted several times, but to no avail.

The outside group became more vocal and the debate polarised. A few (mostly) older women who spoke from a feminist position moved in but the younger women stayed on the outer and loudly backed anything that the men said. I made the only decision I could at the time. I went with the flow.

I joined in the debate. I used my positional power but shifted to voice my feminist concerns, talking about the objectification of women that had been present and supporting the struggle for women's self-determination and autonomy.

The men insisted that they were different from their fathers; that they had embodied feminism; that they had different attitudes. They cited instances of friendship with women, of growing up in a feminist era and being aware of gender issues. Some, particularly the younger women, agreed with them, citing examples of the freedom they experienced around some of the men. There was non-verbal support and acknowledgement given to these women as they supported the men. I suggested that dealing with oppression exclusively at a personal level might not necessarily give a complete picture or a sociological understanding. I cited statistics around violence and abuse.

One young man cried out passionately: *but its not only women."

Another said: *I'm not like that, its different now.*

---

H. Byrne-Armstrong PhD thesis 1999
A woman replied: no it's not, you're just the same, after all you're a man!

Well what can we do?

Nothing!

The men in the centre (and others) were angry and worn down. They felt silenced and rejected and they did not like it. Time was up. I tried to draw things together a little by suggesting that we sat in silence together. Many refused. Some left.

**More 'Dead-Certainties' - my first interpretation ...**

After the event I fled to books to try and make sense of the event for myself. The first interpretation is the result. It is a hermeneutic interpretation in that I examined the text to find deeper meanings (in the light of feminist literature). It was useful in making visible the assumptions operating in the situation and gave me understandings that I had not had at the time.

I now view this interpretation with some irony. From the position of this thesis, it is a form of discursive closure (driven by an agenda), and other interpretations are shut out. At times it seems judgmental and filtered through a psychological discourse. However, situated, as it is, in an essentialist feminist interpretation, it reflects the assumptions of this view of the world. This process is not 'bad' in itself, it was in fact very useful in that it allowed me to regain my assurance, but as a form of discursive closure, like any closure, it assumes that this is the 'truth'. What I want to demonstrate is that by also using discourse analysis, it shows that this interpretation, while valuable, is also limited.
a feminist interpretation ...

Six young men (a 'spontaneous choice' they maintained afterwards), volunteered immediately to become the inner circle. They tended to be the younger and more outspoken men in the group. They settled themselves in the middle and looked around.

This is another example of the subtle non-verbal soup of gender issues in which we are all swimming. From a group process view, it is important to ask, who takes up the space and whose voice is the first heard. There is much evidence (see Davies 1993, 1994) that men in these sorts of situations are more likely to take these roles. In being egalitarian and asking for volunteers, I was not taking this into account.

Other men were unwilling to join them feeling that the group had not discussed the issue enough.

The class had within it a broad range of men including two young men who were deeply interested in a 'pro-feminist' stance. Their presence had a reining-in effect on the behaviour of the more boisterous men in the class. It also speaks to the importance of recognising as a teacher/facilitator that universalising men's experience can exclude some men.

The young men settled themselves in the middle surrounded by the rest of the group. They began by talking together about what issues they would like to discuss. Their main theme was one of reducing difference between men and woman—they have more similarities than differences - that the world was a violent and oppressive place to men and women alike, that they personally did not treat women differently and they personally were not abusive, violent or aggressive. They expressed an annoyance at the 'continual focus of gender' in the course. The discussion was directed to contemporary issues as being generic/human problems rather than being gendered problems.

H. Byrne-Armstrong PhD thesis 1999
This was a provocative beginning for all in the group. In dismissing/diverting and then homogenising the differences and issues of the women, men were reclaiming the space for their voices - an occurrence that happens constantly in the face of feminist issues and women's concerns and highlights a common practice in much progressive education with its aims of smoothing conflict into universalising principles.

This is boring. How about (the topic) of approaching women for a date, a young woman (facetiously) called out.

This young woman was uncomfortable with any feminist talk. She was a supporter of the men in the class and refused to regard herself as different in any way. She is an example of a younger woman who, in mixed-gender classrooms and feminist settings, is caught up in a web of sexual dynamics and contradictions. 'For younger women, at times still caught in the glare of sexual exploration and identification, the feminist classroom can feel threatening' (Lewis in Luke & Gore 1992:180).

Support of the kind expressed in this statement (from women) only highlights the power of the gender discourses. Social conditions often conceal/create a discourse that disguises the hegemony it promotes; for example a woman's experience will depend on the particular form of sexism which her social and cultural heritage has created. Many of these young people are from poor, working class backgrounds. The women are still shaped by traditional concerns that they have no choice but to subsume their experience into caring for men. 'Women know that historically, not caring has cost us our lives; intellectually, emotionally, socially, psychologically and physically' (ibid.:175).

Others in the group howled her down.

H. Byrne-Armstrong PhD thesis 1999
One man in the group cautioned against this topic calling it *a loaded question.*
Older women in the group cried *sexism.* Younger women defended her - *she was only joking.*
I reminded them that the role of the outer circle was to remain silent and listen.
The men in the middle began to respond to the uproar.

*Do you want a date?* said one, the outer group responding with rippling with energy.

*What's wrong with wanting a woman?*

There was a more vigorous response in the group from the different positions in the debate. Women who identified with feminism accused the men of sexism/abusive talk, proving to them that things had not changed.

Other (younger) women retorted with vigour that it was *'just good fun'* and the men were just playing.

The dismissal of gender analysis by the framing of talk into *'just good fun'* or *'he was just joking'* is another frequent occurrence in these settings (see also Lewis op. cit.). This is always a choice point for me - the time when I personally weigh up the difference between the desire to act, yet know the conflict that acting can produce. I act differently in different contexts. However, to dismiss sexist jokes, as just good fun, is to mask the (sexist) discourses informing the field. In this context I chose to unpack the remark, to suggest what it was like being thought of as a commodity or a need (the objectification process), and how these sorts of statements shape the relationships between men and women. As usual the response to my action was mixed, there was relief from some and discomfort and edginess from others. Classroom tensions heightened and there was an awakening of caring practices from women towards the men coupled with anger at me.

H. Byrne-Armstrong PhD thesis 1999
Other men joined in and tried to quell the energy. I asked the class several times to remember the exercise we were doing and for silence from the outside group. Anything that was said by the group in the middle was fiercely debated. I said to the people - both men and women - that if they wanted to join in to move to the middle. I asked two men who were particularly disruptive to join the centre circle. They refused and I persisted several times but to no avail.

People standing on the outer yet being a vocal and rowdy part of the ‘inner’ discussion can be viewed from several points. It could be a resistance to my authority and to the exercise in the first place. But with the dominant discourses informing the space, it seemed more like a form of power - the power to stand outside and comment ‘on’ but not be identified ‘with’ the participants in the middle.

The outside group became more vocal and the debate polarised. A few (mostly) older women who spoke from a feminist position moved in but the younger women stayed on the outer and loudly backed anything that the men said. I made the only decision I felt I could at the time. I went with the flow.

I joined in the debate. I used my positional power but shifted to voice my feminist concerns, supporting the struggle for women’s self-determination and autonomy.

The men insisted that they were different from their fathers; that they had embodied feminism; that they had different attitudes. They cited instances of friendship with women, of growing up in a feminist era and being aware of gender issues. Some, particularly the younger women, agreed with them, citing examples of the freedom they experienced around some of the men. Men and women gave non-verbal support and acknowledgement given to these women as they supported the men.

This seemed yet another example of the subtle practices that support the subject positions of women as carers. Men were rewarding women with attention. It also supports the proposition that although personal accounts
of experience are valuable they may not be helpful in understanding sexism in a broader sense.

I suggested that dealing with oppression exclusively at a personal level might not necessarily give a complete picture or a sociological understanding. I cited statistics around violence and abuse.

One young man cried out passionately; But its not only women.

Another said; I'm not like that, its different now.

A woman replied; No it's not, you're just the same, after all you're a man!

Well what can we do?

Nothing!

The men in the centre (and others) were angry and worn down. They felt silenced and rejected and they did not like it. Time was up. I tried to draw things together a little by suggesting that we sat in silence together. Many refused. Some left.

One of the women who had initiated the session reported later; A learning experience for me happened in one of the gender sessions. J. and P had been given a really hard time. We were doing a 'finishing process' and everyone was sitting together in a circle - I noticed that the guys had separated out and were on the outer. Something snapped in me, it was a really desperate place, I was shocked by the depth of what I was feeling. I recognised it had something to do with memories of feeling unloved, being on the 'outer' in my family. Before I knew it I was up and walking across the room saying we couldn't do a 'finishing process' without them feeling included. It's funny it wasn't just personal, another part of me was furious. This is what society always does to people that are different. Here we are doing the same thing. It felt like it wasn't even me speaking and moving like that, but some energy flowing through me ... I mean I wouldn't agree with the sorts of things they were saying but they do have a right to say it.
Situations can be constructed around researched evidence about women's continuing oppression in society and there will still be on most occasions at least one woman who will spring to the defence of men (Lewis in Luke & Gore 1992).

After this incident there was little support for feminism - or me.

- Poor guys got no support from H. (from a young woman)
- H. was judgmental and biased and used her power inappropriately. She was not caring. Men are sick of gender issues. (from a young woman)
- The exercise sucked.

What this lack of support says is that stories of our experience are always mediated, which can blur or conceal, as much as illuminate, social reality. ‘there is difficulty in assuming that people have the same understanding of the [cultural] determinants ... so that the method [experiential learning] by itself does not automatically lead to liberatory practice’ (Brah & Hoy 1989:74).

reflecting on new knowledges...

Like Lewis (in Luke & Gore 1992), I am always surprised when radical education practices fail to address the specifics of women's education as simultaneously a site of desire and threat (ibid.:172). The classroom space can get caught up in a 'tyranny of niceness' (Armstrong 1993) and hence these two things are ignored. Any challenging of dominant cultural narratives will create a backlash and there will be strong reactions. Gendered discourses do not occur 'somewhere out there', they pervade and mould our every practice. A classroom that is a 'practice for life' can remain within the tyranny of niceness. A classroom in which 'life is lived in the classroom' will be one of threat as well as desire. This would seem like a description of a

---

H. Byrne-Armstrong PhD thesis 1999
classroom in which the material production of knowledge is made visible. Yet living life in the classroom in this explicit way is not without its difficulties and tensions. Other feminist teachers (Lewis in Luke & Gore 1992; Lather 1991; Ellsworth 1992) have articulated this and my narrative speaks to the fact that the encounters I have are no different. My experience is that there is usually a 're'-action to anything labeled as 'feminist' or 'women's' experience - and an antagonistic reaction by both men and women. So teaching within this frame creates an ironic tension for a teacher and student alike and this is particularly so for women. Lewis (in Luke & Gore 1992) talks of the experience as a pull between desire and threat. This is illustrated in this narrative. Rockhill demonstrated that for women in educational settings 'the knowledge and power made potentially available through becoming literate contradictorily also repositioned them in such a way that it threatened familial, conjugal and ultimately, economic relations. In the feminist classroom, this contradiction that women experience is compounded by the way in which feminist politics challenges the everyday lives that they have learned to negotiate' (ibid.:171). In the 'famous fishbowl incident' this tension was evident in my experience of the event as well as the students. Learning to negotiate the pull between the desire to know and to teach and the threat that doing this produces, has led me to (currently) work with these issues in different ways.

I also know that in choosing to tell this story I may be putting myself at risk. Teaching in this way is a risky and heartfelt business. Firstly, to write about it is a risky business because reproducing moments in classroom practices out of their context takes them away from the local and particular, prevailing knowledges and therefore leaves them open to abstract and universal judgments. Secondly, to employ critical, radical and

H. Byrne-Armstrong PhD thesis 1999
embodied strategies within a feminist frame (the personal is political) is also risky. I cannot predict what will occur and how situations that emerge are reacted to, given the landscape of personal histories, identities and subject positions available within any classroom. From my experience and those of colleagues, attending to feminist politics (or any politics of difference) in the classroom, is heavy weather for both students and teachers. New understandings are usually reached with resistance and difficulty and are often not expressed until the person moves contexts. That they have a ripple effect into student’s lives that can be empowering and/or problematic also can impact back on the learning environment.

Finally, in any analysis of a situation, the danger of totalising people is always real. This example is no exception. There are obviously multiple roles, both dominant and oppressive in multiple situations. At the time the thinking that informed my practice was Gramsci’s notion of hegemony, a concept ‘designed to explain how a dominant class maintains control by projecting its particular way of seeing social reality so successfully that its view is accepted as common sense and as part of the natural order by those who in fact are subordinated’ (in Jagger 1983:151). But like Ellsworth (1992) and Lewis (in Luke & Gore 1992), when this was implemented, it was not only chaotic, at the time it seemed unhelpful. It served to exacerbate the conditions that we as a group were attempting to address in the first place (the overt and covert sexism and racism found at the university). Many of the social practices in classroom practices are invisible. ‘Singing-up’ their visibility at least provides the space for people to take up other roles/subject positions. It also highlighted the discourses operating/shaping the context. It is to these that I would like to turn.
'Local-Knowledge' - a second interpretation...

My next interpretation of the event was performed through a discourse analysis (see chapter 4). I explicated three cultural narratives/discourses, and called them:

- **Masculinist Discourse** dominated by subject positions of detached observer, consumer, and coloniser;
- **The Rights Discourse** dominated by the teacher/student as liberating agent and subjects to be liberated;
- **Duty of Care Discourse** dominated by the subject position of mother-teacher;
- **Control Discourse** dominated by the subject position teacher-as-authority;

To embark on the discourse analysis, I asked of the text, two questions:

- What social relationships are implied in the text? What are the subjects (people who speak/are spoken about) and objects (types of people constituted) in the text. In other words what subject positions (similar to 'roles' (in psycho-social terms), are being spoken to. How do they shift through the text?
- What categories of person does the discourse legitimate? Whose interests are they serving? In the name of what? What is forbidden?

In the analysis, I have identified the practices that are embedded in the talk as well as the possible subject positions constituted within the discourse. As stated in chapter 4, discourses are not necessarily discrete or complete. Although I have made distinctions between discourses/statements for the purpose of this analysis, they intersect and weave around each

---

H. Byrne-Armstrong PhD thesis 1999
other. Within any discourse there are always traces of other discourses. Sometimes this will mean that statements will be found as examples in more than one discourse.

unpacking 'truth stories' ...

Within the four discourses, the language games, statements and social practices are arranged under the categories of social practices identified in chapter 2. This helps to tease out and deconstruct the 'field of action' (see (Foucault 1986) of the discourse. I have also added other labels to clarify the meaning of these categories in this context. The statements (from the text given earlier) are in italics and are accompanied by an explanation of the social practice and its implications for the field of action14.

Masculinist Discourse

The masculinist discourse can be encapsulated by the statement, 'we have more similarities than differences'. I have used five categories to explicate this discourse.

Totalising...homogenising practices ...

These are the practices found in statements that generalise and universalise different experiences into a single experience (one that fits the agendas of the speaker):

◆ The world is violent for both men and women. It is not only women;
◆ Problems are generic human problems, not gender problems.

Statements are made under the guise of humanness and empathy making connections through 'shared' experience and appeals to Utopian ideals of a world where harmony exists, thus alluding to talk of difference as divisive

H. Byrne-Armstrong PhD thesis 1999
and conflictual. The statements can allude to a sense of threat about recognising difference - (if there is always difference how can my understanding ever be complete?):

♦ We have more similarities than differences;
♦ I'm not like that, it's different now.

This talk assimilates diversity and difference. The assimilation process serves to reject inconsistencies and differences and claim back air-time for a particular regime of truth\(^\text{15}\) (see chapter 2). In doing so, it silences any talk of difference or disagreement. Discursive closure occurs because there is a prevailing 'tyranny of niceness' (Armstrong 1993), another intersecting discourse that determines the rules for what is polite or not polite to speak about - a pervasive characteristic of (the mainly middle class culture) of educators. What are the objects of this position? In the above process 'otherness' is dismissed - rendered invisible - or in this case, assimilated, by classifying it in terms of the sameness. In these statements, 'other' is dismissed and negated:

♦ As a man, I've been oppressed by education too;
♦ The world is violent for all of us. It's not only women.

colonising practices ...

♦ Six young men volunteered immediately;
♦ They settled themselves in the middle and looked around.

The gendered practices of males colonising physical space in air-time and non-verbal posturing are well known in classroom settings (Davies 1993, 1994). The collapsing of personhood into masculinity apportions to men more of a certainty about who they are and therefore the subject positions available to them are greater in public arenas such as the classroom within

---

H. Byrne-Armstrong PhD thesis 1999
this discourse. In this process others are marginalised and excluded. Davies' (ibid.) research has shown that boys and men are more likely to take up offers in these settings - including the answering of questions and initiating processes. This implies the power of this discourse in shaping these situations.

Within this discourse, women are othered and objects. The choices of subject positions they have are much reduced. The rules of the discourse forbid, especially, but not exclusively, women to take up subject positions that initiate or are public and visible. Women negotiate this forbidden territory in very different ways:

♦ One that women often occupy is that of 'silent observer'. There were many silent women in the room, though not exclusively women - e.g. a young man identified as pro-feminist remained silent/was silenced on several occasions;

♦ The position of the joker\textsuperscript{16} is another as this is supported, e.g. when somebody supported the young woman and her joke, \textit{She was only joking};

♦ Another subject position is one that is compliant or supports the dominant positions;

♦ \textit{Men and women gave non-verbal support and acknowledgement to these women}. This is a subject position often taken by women in gender classes. It is usually associated with 'caring' practices (see Duty of Care Discourse) and is legitimated in the name of maintaining power. To support the dominant positions is to stay within the rules of the discourse. This is a discursive process that maintains the territory of the discourse.

It is also the way marginalised groups are assimilated into the dominant culture (I have seen it many times when working with reconciliation

---

H. Byrne-Armstrong PhD thesis 1999
groups. There will often be present a black person who will support the
dominant white hegemony - and their intervention often brings a sigh of
relief to the white side of the room!). The non-verbal support given to the
young women in the class who supported the men in their positions was an
example of this. Women (or people of colour) who do not support the
dominant discourses are classified as 'hard line and over-critical,
recalcitrant and unwilling to negotiate'. This is yet another example of the
discursive power of dominant discourses. People who don't comply are
further objectified by pathologising, categorising and normalising practices
(see Foucault 1977).

classification practices ...

Even in a silenced/oppressed space, the men had a voice. They were able to
express their displeasure through classifying categories to support their
displeasure (and therefore separate themselves from the group). In their
rejection of this they maintained their powerful subject positions within the
discourse:

♦ I'm not a chauvinist ... so why can't they (women/women staff) accept
that and stop going on about it. In a way I've become more chauvinistic
because I'm sick of it all the time;

♦ I'm annoyed at the continually focussing on gender.

These statements intimate unmarked/privileged subject positions in the
gender discourse. That the statements imply a choice about whether to
focus on gender or not, or to behave in certain ways or not, indicates this
privilege. It is possible, in this subject position, to dismiss the framing of
gender as a problem. Positions that are 'other' (or objects of this discourse)

H. Byrne-Armstrong PhD thesis 1999
do not have this privilege. And, when they do take up positions that challenge the discourse, then practices are introduced to exclude them.

**surveillance ... distancing practices ...**

Surveillance practices (an example of the Panopticon\(^{17}\)) support the other practices. A subject position that is central (and unmarked) in this discourse is the 'detached male observer', a subject able to stand back, judge a situation, and generalise principles to apply/assess it:

- *There is*[sic] no common understandings and shared values.*

This position is one that is considered value free - the observer able to detach her/his social and cultural positioning from the observation. This enables the observer to retain her/his view as the 'truth' and render any other view unscientific and invisible. 'This largely unmarked position is characterised by a blindness to the multiplicity of being that occurs with not being the one who is positioned by others, but rather always able to position oneself and others as deemed appropriate' (Davies 1994:19).

The objective observer always has the overview. Another example of these practices are statements that legitimise an individual's right to stand outside and not participate fully in a discussion:

- *There are always two sides of the story.*

This speaks to a privileged position - the right to be separate and have a legitimate voice; in this discourse a more legitimate voice, the one of the liberating agent, judging from a neutral position. Distance, neutrality and liberation are linked. Anything that is not this, (is too immediate, personal) needs to be liberated by objective rationality as it is considered impossible to be personal and immediate and make sound judgments and have neutrality:
Feel that staff (H.) sometimes impose personal values rather than being facilitators;

H. was too personal.

These statements are judging and imply an 'other', whose knowledge(s) is forbidden by the discourse and therefore negated. I was identified in these two statements as this other - the subjective, particular, (too) personal, other (usually associated with feminist ways of knowing).

Joking is another common way of maintaining distance/objectivity from a difference or contradiction, and of masking the discourses that are shaping the statements:

- She was only joking;
- Just good fun, men were only playing.

Joking is a common practice in masculinist discourses. A joke, generically speaking, is a form of communication dependent amongst other things, on the classification of people. In this case, the person (in the first example) is, and the men are, repositioned into the subject positions of 'children' thus excusing their behaviour. To take a joke seriously is to spoil the fun; to join it is to help perpetuate the hidden assumptions that inform it in the first place. The choice point I have at moments like this is whether to intervene or not. To make this choice I critically reflect on the social relationships that are informing the context. In this case - in the context of teaching and learning gender stuff - it was a clear choice to intervene. But, on most occasions, I do not.

normalising practices ...

- Do you want a date?
It was a younger woman that made the statement. Her subject position was one of supporting the men. Within the masculinist discourse women are sexual objects. By making this statement she was reasserting her position in the discourse (and speaking to any implicit assumptions people may have that because she was a women she could be a feminist). Wound up with this position is the traditional notion of needing support of men to survive in the world. As an attractive younger woman she was popular with the blokes:

- **What's wrong with wanting a woman?**

And, as objects, young women are vulnerable to sexual exploitation and are under threat of exclusion/marginalisation if seen to be 'pro-feminist'. However, as Foucault (1977, 1983a) has informed us, power is not merely coercive, but also productive and can be associated with pleasure and identity as well as oppression. Women are subjects of, as well as subjected to, the discursive practices of patriarchy. 'Women actively produce the forms of femininity through which they are also controlled: they are never merely victims' (Pringle 1995:207). This particular woman acted with great enjoyment of her 'objectification', and she was identified as having a powerful position in the classroom.

(Ironically a year later the limitation of this position became obvious to her as she struggled in a workplace assignment with a boss who sexually harassed her).

- **What's wrong with wanting a woman?**

Besides its masculinist roots, this statement is also part of another discourse, the 'needs' discourse, a discourse that has only been around since the 1960's and the 'ME' generation (see Gergen 1991). It was promoted by Maslow's (1972) famous 'hierarchy of needs', a model firmly entrenched in the rampant individualism of the era (see chapter 3). In this case it implies that the subject 'man' has a legitimate right to 'want' the object, woman.
What Maslow's needs discourse misses is a critical reflection about the basis of the concept, 'need' -Whose needs are we talking about, Whose needs get more airtime? How is 'need determined? By whom?

**The Rights Discourse**

This can be encapsulated in the statement, 'everyone has a right to be heard and I couldn't express my views'.

*totalising ... universalising practices ...*

These statements indicate a set of assumptions about a universal category, 'social justice', the rights of the oppressed (see Yeatman 1995), and the ideal way to claim rights:

♦ *Some people were not heard;*
♦ *But they do have a right to say it;*
♦ *Everyone has a right to be heard and I couldn't speak my views.*

This discourse specifies universal values for equality and freedom, and presupposes sets of commonly understood practices (rights) that will attain them. Unless this common understanding is present then there is the threat of its opposite (oppression, injustice etc.). The idea of 'rights' is evoked from the idea that there are universal values and attitudes shared by all humanity (e.g. Habermas 1987). That there can be rules and regulations legislated which serve all situations. The principle of the ideal is not the problem. The problem comes when it is used to hide the personal and social agendas of a group that evoke it. Dominant groups often use 'Rights' as a means of discursive closure. (The 'right to speak' is a contentious one in the [Hanson] political climate of contemporary Australia. It was used by the
Prime Minister of the time as the reason for not acting/replying in the face of racism, but actually hid political agendas).

surveillance practices ...

The subject position that oversees who has a 'right' or not, can be termed the 'liberated agent'. This person is liberated, and therefore can ordain freedom for others:

- *I mean I wouldn't agree with the sorts of things they were saying but they do have a right to say it.*

Social relationships are centred on the fount of knowledge/wisdom/expertise that this agent possesses (and by implication which others do not). 'Women, children, indigenous people and the colonised have all been interpellated as potentially but not fully human within the modern universalistic discourse of freedom and equality' (Yeatman 1995:49). Liberation can only occur through the power of this agent. Appeals to the authority of this position serve to reproduce it.

Authority is also supported by other social practices, e.g. classification practices, and regulation practices. In my occupation of this position, this is evident in the following statements:

- *I cited statistics about violence and abuse;*

- *I voiced my feminist concerns, supporting the struggle for women's self-determination and autonomy.*

Statistics - scientific evidence supports this position, as does the institutional role that I held. One could ironically comment that holding notions of emancipation/liberation of women in one hand and the notion of justice and rights in the other, I finally, (in this position) evoked rights and

---

H. Byrne-Armstrong PhD thesis 1999
personal ideology to convert the oppressors and liberate the oppressed (an example of how *politics kills art*!)

**Duty of Care Discourse**

This can be encapsulated in the statement, 'she did not protect us'.

**totalising practices ...**

The duty of care discourse positions 'women' as primarily nurturers. As well as this being a subject position that I fulfilled, students were also open to its invitations:

- *Men were only playing;*
- *Poor guys got no support.*

Within these statements, attention is diverted or re-focused back towards the men and therefore airtime for alternative knowledges is eliminated. Men become objects - positioned in the children/weaker (just having fun, needing support) position. This implies that they cannot take up responsibility for themselves, that they require a nurturer to do this. They become infantilised - unable to have agency for themselves, unable to learn without the support of a 'woman', unable to play, because someone spoils the fun. Needless to say, these practices are not productive of knowledges that enhance self-responsibility and responsibility to others in relationship.

**surveillance practices ...**

Another form of this (within this discourse) are practices for excusing behaviour or placating, which are common amongst marginalised groups looking for recognition within the dominant discourses. For example, drawing

---

H. Byrne-Armstrong PhD thesis 1999
out silences and sympathising with the dominant group in the face of space
given to marginalised voices, providing the detached overview:

♦ I wonder what the men are thinking?
making amends,
♦ I wouldn't agree with the sort of things they were saying but they do
  have a right to say it;
and, smoothing the sharpness, normalising things,
♦ Guys had separated out and were on the outer;
♦ Society always does to people who are different.

These were several subject positions available to people. I have called these,
mother/student and sister/student. Age seemed to be a factor here. The
older women in the classroom tended to be identified with the above
statements. Caring practices amongst students are common in experiential
classrooms (see Luke & Gore 1992) and the positions they produce can be
(following Foucault's notions of power as a relationship that is 'productive),
oppressive, or, empowering. Although these identities were taken up, there
was also resistance:
♦ No it's not, you're just the same ...

Other women (the younger ones) tended towards the 'sister'
positions. This is congruent with their being at an age when sexual tension is
at its height, but as well as this many young men and women in the class
spoke later of productive and cooperative relationships and friendships,
which did not include sexual exploitation. In the context, the position is
more of a sister identity than a mother or a lover identity, (although the
caring practices are still obvious). It gains support from the many subtle,
non-verbal interactions that pass through the classroom:

H. Byrne-Armstrong PhD thesis 1999
Nodding heads and verbal acknowledgement were directed towards the women who spoke.

Obviously it is difficult to separate the particular behaviour from the dominant discourse and its positioning of subjects without their presence and an analysis in cooperation with them. From descriptions they had of communication and relationship, there was a genuine attempt to reconfigure gender relationships into friendship and away from sexual exploitation.

Other comments speak to another subject position in the discursive field, that of the 'mother/teacher' (see Walkerdine 1992) which most feminist classrooms are organised around:

- She did not protect us;
- Lecturers' responsibility is to make group safe.

However, this subject position is more than the mother/teacher - she is, in fact ... 'a strange creature - neither father or mother' (Pagano in Gore 1993:69). This strange creature is produced by the complex subject positions that she holds - the tension between the authority assigned to her subject position by the institution, and the subject position of nurturance assigned to her by the discourse of patriarchy. That the classroom became a contested field of threats and potential 'violence' rather than a nurturing haven, was a shock to many students. This would suggest that my position gestured more towards one of 'mother-teacher' than of authority. But from the statements this is not fully so (see below). The shift that this event precipitated was that I did not fill either position adequately, and this was the source of student anger:

- We had a fairly heated gender session. A few people felt really nailed during it...some people and the guys concerned felt confronted and angry

H. Byrne-Armstrong PhD thesis 1999
and really betrayed. They felt they couldn’t speak their views. A lot of people felt like we didn’t have a safe space any more;

♦ Fishbowl exercise was judgmental, contradictory and biased;
♦ Mass of contradictions, every worldview is meant to be heard and I was judged and attacked;
♦ ...From being enthusiastic and loud in the group I have become threatened and wary...feeling these things around people’s judgments/opinions of my contribution. My expressiveness was gagged before I could articulate it;
♦ Everyone has a right to a point of view; how do we make a decision as to who is right and who is wrong.

These comments are aimed at the lack of safety and support in the group, attributed to my dropping the position of the mother-teacher and joining the debate. Yet, when I took up the authority of the other subject position fully, I became more of a threat. Blame was assigned towards this betrayal and the discourse of rights (evoked to justify it).

regulatory practices ... ground rules for groups ...

This illustrates the double bind that educators are in when faced with group issues around safety and trust, especially in any educational environment that fosters desire and a social and political agenda. Whilst I attempt as a teacher to provide a space where a cacophony of voices can be heard, and I use my authority at times to ensure this, ideas such as safety and trust are difficult to put into practice. The difficulty is that the success or not of these issues is entirely dependent on assessment from a subjective position. These categories are socially constructed abstractions, and within a diverse field of multiple subject positions and personal histories, one cannot know which ‘safety’ or which ‘trust’ is being promoted.

H. Byrne-Armstrong PhD thesis 1999
People's subjective experience is externalised - they take up positions of vulnerability - infantilised - that speak to the subject position of both 'mother teacher' and 'teacher as authority'. In either case, their vulnerability becomes the responsibility of the teacher position. This creates a paradox; judgments about safety are only, in exceptional circumstances\textsuperscript{18}, publicly assessed by members of the group, collectively. Usually, it is dependent on individual people's notions of self-responsibility. Taking up the invitation to become responsible for safety and trust, perpetrates the abstract nature of these concepts. Discursive closure occurs and the possibility of promoting different social relationships or a local knowledge of safety and trust is lost.

Gossip after the event was aimed at the subject position as mother/teacher. I had not protected people (who had volunteered):

- Personal conflicts inhibit me from being more part of the community;
- I felt threatened and wary in the group;
- This makes me feel threatened and unsafe;
- We got no support from H.

The mother/teacher did not provide a space that was a safe, trusting and sharing environment for people to learn in. There was a strong protest against the threats that occurred in the face of the betrayal by the mother teacher. She was no longer the all-accepting, all embracing subject. But the only other position in the field that was available to me at the time was the 'teacher as authority' and this too needs unpacking.

Control Discourse

This can be encapsulated in the statement, 'the lecturers don't know how to facilitate groups properly'. Control and mastery are central themes,
particularly in modernist education. Mastery is the idea that we can gain full control over ourselves and the world through rational means and self-examination. It alludes to the fixed, coherent, absolute subject. In classrooms where the 'cultivation of desire' (Usher & Edwards 1994) is present and the chaos that is part of this playing field, emerges, the subject positions of this discourse are constituted.

surveillance practices ...

Statements like this speak to the transgressions I made in my position as teacher-with-authority. There are rules and regulations on the behaviour of authority; I did not fit this standard:

♦ Inconsistencies and double standards from staff H;
♦ The lecturers don't know how to facilitate groups correctly;

As the 'authority' I should have been coherent, in charge, detached, consistent and objective. These formulations have traces of the first and second discourses discussed earlier. Part of this discourse is that the expert, the fount of knowledge is also in charge to 'fix' problems. This is present in the statement, Well, what can we do? spoken (sarcastically) by a young man at the end of the session. Action and doing are privileged as correct responses in this discourse. The expert is accorded the responsibility to come up with the solutions, to problem solve, to 'do' something, rather than 'just' listen.

The resistance by young men in the class to my interventions and suggestions was a challenge to the subject position of teacher-as-authority. It emanates from resistance to the object position in this discourse, the student-with-no-authority:

H. Byrne-Armstrong PhD thesis 1999
I reminded two men who were particularly disruptive to join the centre circle. They refused and persisted on interrupting;

I reminded them of that the role of the outer circle was to remain silent and listen;

I asked for the class several times to remember the exercise we were doing and therefore for silence from the outside group.

The fact that my gender is female heightens this resistance. It is an example of practices that undermine women who take up positions of authority. Women are not expected to take up the full power of their institutional positions. Many of my female colleagues and I watch our male colleagues being listened to and rarely challenged by students, whilst our experience is that we are constantly interrupted and challenged - by male students especially (see also Culley & Portuges 1985). This speaks loudly to the discourses shaping the environment, as well as our abilities to find agency in the face of their dominance. It also illuminates the ironic tension inherent in my analysis. As a reconstructionist teacher, my goal is to promote resistance to dominant discourses. Therefore being challenged in the classroom would seem to signal success! The question still remains, were these male students resisting a dominant discourse or joining it?

As we are constituted by these discourses it is impossible to stand back and make this judgment (see Davies' 1996 - p93 quote). In addition, any interpretation and answer will depend on the subject position of the reader and can never be finally answered. However, from the subject position of the author, I am aware that as a woman in a gendered society, I need to claim subject positions of author-ity for the constitution of my own life as well as a model for others. The authority that I have accepted as an

---

H. Byrne-Armstrong PhD thesis 1999
academic is liberating to my life, particularly as I, like many other women of my culture and class have been taught that to be powerful is inappropriate and to be deferential to men is appropriate. 'The question of asserting authority and power is a central concern to feminists precisely because as women they have been taught that taking power is inappropriate' (Weiler 1991:461). Taking up this subject position of authority is therefore shaping of my life in positive ways, which if used reflexively can be transmitted to others in ways that will lead them to self-agency.

However, the subject position of 'authority' that I occupy within a hierarchical and hegemonic institution, and the position of agent for that authority in the classroom situation, is full of contradictions. I am a member of an organisation, which upholds certain practices. 'By occupying certain places within a discourse, the subject, according to Foucault, is empowered to act according to the identity prescribed by that discourse' (Crowley & Himmelweit 1992:280). Power is activated as people assume subject positions/identities that are included in prevailing views of the world. I am seen to be supporting the hegemonic and oppressive practices of an organisation (assessments, grades, examinations, disciplinary boundaries). I engage in 'feminist' pedagogical practices - group learning, dialogue, interactive exercises, group assessments, etc. In doing this, I am subject to a gender discourse. I am also subject to the power exercised in the organisation (critique from colleagues, job security, competitiveness, gender blindness), which at the time led me to turn ever more sophisticated acrobatics to maintain my position.
regulatory practices ...
Confusion about subject positions of authority also occurs within the experiential/radical classroom in the light of its emphasis on the 'how' rather than the 'what' of learning, rendering the classroom into a contested 'process-based' field. The contest is between individual understandings of the innumerable methods of facilitation and popular theories/practices that compete with each other under the watchful eye of the mother/teacher or teacher as authority who is responsible for controlling the space:

- We want a class where we are given information about facilitation;
- There is not enough taught about facilitation;
- The class is too big for one facilitator - she can't attend to all of us;
- We need ground rules.

These are statements that, with their traces of the patriarchal discourse, speak to positions students took up around the practice of control and rights. Practices for control and the demand of 'rights' belong to a class of practices that I have called 'discursive closure' (see also chapter 9). Judgments and rules, regulations, and the demand for information belong to this practice of discursive closure. When the dialogue/interaction is closed down in this way, authority becomes confused with control. Rather than being a place where there is a discovery by interaction, the classroom becomes a place where desires clamber for the airwaves. This is what Usher & Edwards termed 'the "cultivation of desire", the engagement of the whole person with their conscious and unconscious feelings, wants and needs' (1994:187), which, they suggest, can be problematic because conflicts and power plays ensue:

- Mass of contradictions; every worldview is meant to be heard;
- I was judged and attacked;

H. Byrne-Armstrong PhD thesis 1999
Conflict in the group has ruined the sense of community; 
There is bad communication between us and the staff.

These statements throw into sharp relief one of the central issues facing (me as an) educator(s) within a feminist and radical pedagogy. Giroux said:

one can exercise authority that does not establish the conditions for knowledge to be produced and engaged. I would call this authoritarianism … or you can exercise authority to establish conditions in which the central tension lies at the heart of how we teach (1992:156-7).

The problem is, as a feminist educator, the subject positions available to me within the prevailing dominant discourses in the context are different20 from my male colleagues. This event demonstrated to me the constant vigilance that I need in order to be aware of this issue. This is a double whammy - more self-surveillance. However, the discourse analysis has provided me with more knowledge. Now that I have more understanding of this event, I will make other choices if put in a situation like this again.

I thought I was attempting Giroux's latter alternative when in the fishbowl incident. But in retrospect, as a feminist/woman educator, I was at a disadvantage in this situation. I represented the subject position of the institutional authority and, as a woman, and a feminist, I was arguing that women are disadvantaged in educational settings! This is an ironic tension that I only now understand, although traces of this awareness occurred when I made the decision not to do gender workshops without having a male colleague (with feminist sympathies) as a co-facilitator - to reduce the likelihood of early discursive closure. But as well as this, these

H. Byrne-Armstrong PhD thesis 1999
understandings have led me to embrace a slightly different practice, one more embedded in a politics of intersecting oppressions (Yeatman 1995).

Giroux continues by proposing that it 'is possible to be theoretically correct but pedagogically wrong' (1992:156). This is what the women who requested this session were commenting on when they proposed the session. But facilitating classroom practices that are embedded in a political ideal can perpetuate the dominant discourses that one is trying to contest. The fishbowl incident could be an example of this:

We also need to understand how knowledge is understood within the contexts of experiences students bring to our classes. We are not there merely to produce knowledge so it can be debated but also to be self-critical ourselves and learn from the forms of knowledge produced as they come from the class...as cultural workers we must be aware of the partial nature of our own views (ibid.)^{21}.

This does not, in my view, mean that I, as a middle class white woman, should not bring my own values into the classroom debate (impartiality is inappropriate if not an impossible goal). It also assumes that my position reifies my views. From my perspective it is possible only to be partial. I would also argue that to remain silent and passive in the face of such debates is not impartiality or even 'good' facilitation practice. In fact, in the position of facilitator, to remain silent could be read as a use/misuse of positional power. To make my position visible, and to herald my partiality is to make visible the power-truth discourses.

There are many students who come to the learning environment having had their voice silenced and their experiences distorted. Do I use my authority to provide a space for them to be heard? Or, if I do, is it a misuse
of my power and authority? Ironically, part of this authority is also to
recognise that there are some 'silenced' voices that I might not want heard
in the environment!

There is always a question of the authority inherent in any position in
the institution. The issue is not one of denial, but of the development of a
self-critical awareness of authority and how and in what ways it is
exercised. 'This points to the need to exercise authority as a politics of
engagement rather than as a politics of assertion or as a politics of the
personal /confessional' (Giroux 1992:157).

The Famous Fishbowl Incident was the most talked about event of
the year! A learning event mentioned by most students in learning journals
as the one that 'stood out'. It was also an important learning event for me.
It has led me to critically think about the issues at hand - particularly my
position as a teacher - in this tradition of education. Oppression/power is
not often made explicit/visible in experiential/radical pedagogies. Dealing
with personal experiences is a minefield because any experience is
constituted in dominant discourses that blind people to oppressions through
discursive practices. Every encounter is constituted by dominant discourses.
This one (and this thesis) is no exception. Pedagogic practices have to
include an unpacking of the ways we are being constituted in the context. It
is from doing this that the chance of learning (in the sense of increased
agency) is made possible.

reflecting on new knowledges ...

Untangling the discourses informing the fishbowl incident has been a very
helpful activity. It has led me to critically reflect again on the social
practices that shaped the situation and to re-constitute my life in different

H. Byrne-Armstrong PhD thesis 1999
ways. Now I would not apologise for the event (see chapter 7). I am more detached from the subject position of mother-teacher, which I too easily fall in to. I also take up my authority more firmly than I did at the time, and not within the subject position of authoritarianism with practices of boundaries, rules and control but in my form of authority which practices limits, fluidity and consultation. In addition to this, the spaces I now create are more structured, and, more importantly, have taken a discursive turn to sidestep the minefield of subjective experience as the authority for learning.

A post-script: a student wrote to me...

The 'Fishbowl Incident' as we students called it created many discussions in facilitation groups and in informal meetings amongst students. Most people blamed you, Hilary for letting it happen. I stayed quiet for the whole time. I was too scared but I also felt angry with you. I was angry over the reflexivity exercise as well. I thought it inappropriate to have to dredge up my past like that. But after the fishbowl class something shifted for me. You see I grew up with a violent and alcoholic father. He would fill the house and our lives with his goings on. We never had any space to think or to be. As I watched the fishbowl it reminded me of this and I started to understand what the feminists were on about. Not that I want to know much else. It seems too painful at the moment. Funnily enough the experience got me thinking and I have decided to leave the course. Not because I feel bad about it. But somehow I have the strength now to do what I really wanted to do -something everyone said was a man's job - and as a female I am going to do it. She had left the course.
'Thick-Descriptions' ... singing up new practices...

So in what different ways am I acting in the world (and the classroom) in the light of these new knowledges?

burying certainty ...

The following two stories from my practice illustrate the changing attitude to power (and therefore gender, race, class) that is being shaped in this thesis. This signifies a change from thinking of power as a thing that is possessed and therefore able to be transferred (one person empowering another), to recognising power as a relationship that as moving in and around us and 'constitutive' (shaping) our moment to moment interactions at every level of society (as illustrated by the discourse analysis). This means it can be both positive and negative, life giving and/or denying. These relationships of power circulate through our language and communication, our narratives/discourse or ways of knowing. For example, here are two narratives from my practice. They both demonstrate social practice-power relations that shape the particular field of action.

The first one is to do with gender categories and illustrates Foucault's point that power is not possessed (1977, 1980).

**narrative one:** I was fascinated the other day to hear that a male colleague had just chosen a new personal assistant on the grounds that she was not 'into power'. As the information was second hand I am not sure what his meanings were, but my friend's analysis of the situation was that his previous personal assistant had often challenged him (with irony and humour) in response to what she described as his 'power clothed in a velvet fist'. This description had upset him; he worked hard as a change agent to 'give'
her power and to empower her. It was up to her to take it and instead of
doing this she kept challenging him. He would reply by denying that there
were any power issues in the relationship and described her as being too
sensitive and projecting her issues onto him. This denial she found silencing
and oppressive. The relationship ended.

The second to do with racism, illustrates that power and knowledge
are facets of each other, and ... power is war continued by other means ... see Foucault (1977).
narrative two: A lone Aboriginal student was sitting in a co-learning group.
There was a theoretical argument going on. Two people in the group were
talking about a theory. Each one was adding to and challenging what the
other said. The discussion was getting heated and went on for nearly twenty
minutes. The others in the group were silent, the atmosphere oppressive.
Suddenly she could bear it no longer. She collected her books and left. The
group was angry at the sudden departure. She spoke to us afterwards. 'Why
didn't they just have a physical fight, that's what my family would have
done!', she said.

The 'more dead-certainties' of this narrative illustrated what
happens when one set of certainties is replaced with another. What is
produced is another narrative/knowledge/certainty (in this case a feminist
analysis) to replace the dethroned 'other'. The discourse analysis on the
other hand demonstrated that there were many certainties/ knowledges/
narratives circulating and shaping the environment, which added to each
other and shaped the shifting landscape, expanding the understandings and
representing the complexity of the event. Its aim was not to displace the
other certainties, or to replace them. This process illustrates the position

H. Byrne-Armstrong PhD thesis 1999
of ironic tension that I am proposing; that education should hold people in
the space of discursive openness (as demonstrated in the discourse
analysis), rather than preach certainties (discursive closure).

Finding classroom practices that do this is a constant challenge. The
first change for me is to use practices that externalise social
oppression(s) in order to connect them with local social relationships
(materialising knowledge). This means interrogating the language and social
practices of a context rather than practices that simply look towards an
individual epistemology for examples of the social. This would seem a subtle
and perhaps inconsequential shift, but it has been, however, a significant
one, especially when dealing with topical minefields such as race, class and
gender issues. The following are examples of fragments of classroom
experiences that I am using with people in situations both inside and outside
the university (in organisational, community and local government workshops)
that now address gender (as well as class, race and sexuality) issues.

Taking Yeatman's (1995) concept of interlocking oppressions, I
formulated activities to explicate these issues in the everyday lives
of students.

Using images of a 'Billboard Family' (see Armstrong 1996), the man usually
taller than the woman, all white, mid-30's, possessing certain physical
characteristics, dressed in a particular way, with certain images (car, home) around
them as a starting point, I ask students to identify how this image speaks to them -
whether it fits their world, and if not what they would, as marketing people, put on
a billboard to entice people - I ask them to think of the images of their 'culture' (in
a broad sense), that they are being coerced into aspiring to, or what they think that
the culture would have them aspire to.
The students then brainstorm the categories of persons represented in a diverse
series of images and how this measures up against the perfect image. As a group,
they discuss all the categories of oppression that are represented by the images. (Racism, sexism, classism, ageism, materialism, spiritualism, rationalism, body appearance-isms). They then form groups of three or four and I ask them to think of the context they are in (at the time of the exercise), and to discuss who in the group is the most privileged in terms of this particular 'ism' and what category of person they represent.

This exercise starts the process of people beginning to recognise the power of discourse/image to 'talk up' intersecting categories of people (or subject and object positions). Their discussions lead to the recognition that persons can occupy multiple categories of oppression, which shift according to context and the historical time. So the idea that there is a human subject who is universally oppressed or empowered by the simple categories such as gender, class, race, ethnicity and sexual identity is deconstructed. The exercises alert students to thinking in terms of interlocking oppressions (Yeatman 1995) rather than a 'politics of liberation' in which 'oppression' is a universal core category, or, even a 'politics of difference' (Young in Nicholson 1990) where there is a hierarchy of importance given to different oppressions.

The difference between these two latter constructions is an interesting one and a learning outcome for me in this thesis. Yeatman (1995:55) writes, that this 'emphasises that nothing privileges our identity or its utterances before they come to be heard within particular historical and locational contexts of communication and struggle'. She goes on to say that this is why she, like others, 'take issue with identity politics where identity is assigned a given and prior status according to the politics of difference' (ibid.).
We cannot know the subject positions that are available until we act in a particular context or field of action in relationship to, and dialogue with particular others. What oppression means will depend on the narratives, and subject positions constituted by that local context. Since we will be assigning meanings interactively, that is, in an interlocutory relationship to each other's narratives, it is all too likely that these meanings will be contested and changing (ibid.).

I then divide the students into pairs and ask who would be the marked (mentioned, visible), who the unmarked (invisible, unmentioned) category of person in the following contexts\textsuperscript{24}: university classroom, domestic contexts, banks, clothes shopping, gym, child care centre, stock market, camping, spiritual matters, florist shop, relationship matters, rugby club, and many more.

This creates the conditions that Yeatman (1995) talks about. The contexts chosen are, of course, imaginary, but people use their past experiences. In spite of this, the exercise always creates lively discussions and contested dialogues that illustrate to students the interlocking nature of oppression(s) and the necessity for a politics of difference, not based on fixed, global and victim identities but a notion of shifting landscapes of oppression(s). It materialises Foucault's notions of power as exercised and embeds this theory into everyday life, making it more relevant to students. In terms of the more widespread oppressions such as gender and race, it seems to keep the space open - this is particularly so with gender issues.

concluding the narrative...

This completes the first research narrative. In it I have shown the way knowledge is produced in everyday interactions in classroom situations which are 'living life' rather than a 'practice for life'. I have also shown the complexity

---

H. Byrne-Armstrong PhD thesis 1999
of interactions and intersecting narratives weaving in and around any interaction. The discourse analysis thickened the descriptions of the event. It became a richer story, full of learning and knowledge production. It demonstrated how subjectivities and identities get constituted and that dominant narratives control the interactions between them. But, its aim was not to disavow the feminist interpretation but to add to it - to sit along side it and keep the space open - the interpretations do not need to finish here. In doing this the space of ironic tension is demonstrated. I am proposing that education/pedagogy should be designed to hold people in this space, rather than preach certainties. My present practices are examples of this.

1 From my research journal and the transcription of the tape.
2 This course was the core learning unit (a subject now called, Critical Pedagogies) in the first year of an undergraduate degree at the University of Western Sydney.
3 See endnote 2.
4 Source unknown but it is used in psychodrama and socio-drama circles. There is nothing written on it that I can find.
5 This account is based on the journal I kept. The student statements are from the transcript of a tape used to record the event. When I directly quote from the journal I use size 10 font. Italics are used when student quotes from the tape are used. (see endnote 6 also)
6 From this point I will not use quote marks to denote conversation, just italics.
7 This use of size 10 font (see endnote 5) is used throughout the thesis narratives, when directly quoting from my research journal or the research journal of my co-researcher.
8 See quotes throughout text.
9 The agenda is an essentialist Feminist agenda - one that I latched onto because of my need for understanding and reassurance/confidence after the event.
10 Fictional initials for students names
11 This is a mute point. Two colleagues said that after the event their facilitation groups (discussion groups that met every week) talked long and hard about the event. This could therefore be deemed a successful learning event.
12 I have chosen to use the term masculinist rather than patriarchal to begin to "mark" the category 'man's experience.
13 See Davies and Harré (1997) for a discussion on this. Briefly, they propose that role, as a notion, is too fixed and unitary. Within a discourse the 'role' changes and shifts. They therefore think the notion of 'position' is a better one. It evokes the fluidity that occurs within the constitution of the relationships. This is illustrated by this analysis. The position I occupied shifted and changed in relationship to the students available positions.
14 This format is followed throughout the thesis.
15 I use regime of truth and truth story (my term) interchangeably.
16 For joking as a social practice see below.
The Panopticon was the state of the art prison designed by J. Bentham. It consisted of a circular building with rooms and back-lighting (from a small window so that prisoners could not see out of the cells but they could be watched from a central tower (see Foucault 1977). Gradually they began to behave as though they were being watched all the time - the external surveillance became internalised.

A deliberate representation of the word authority and perhaps less than my male colleagues. An interesting reflection considering Giroux's subject positioning.

This is more fully explained in chapter 6. This is an important learning for me because in the years of social actions POP (Mindell's work) was engaged very firmly in a hierarchy of oppressions - the politics of difference. Race was more important sexual preference, than class which was more important than gender (is it a surprise that gender is the least important?) etc. I am, in the spirit of this thesis not proposing this as right or wrong, but trying to hold the ironic tension, so that the space is left open for the possibilities that this may not be so for all contexts.

For example, two young men discussing who would be marked and who unmarked when going to the gym together, realised that the one of them who was tall, muscled and fit would be unmarked - invisible. The shorter, plumper one would be marked.)
Chapter Six

HUMANISM & INSIGHT/OUTSIGHT
ENCOUNTERS

There is a troublesome side to critical reflection. It makes you doubt yourself.
For me this raises a question about the relationship of critical reflection to the self.
Can self-doubt be a positive impetus for change? Are we not, in critical reflection,
questioning something very basic about ourselves (Carson in Carson & Sumara
1997:79 Reflective Journal)
Introducing the Narrative

This narrative is the story of a journey into the 'truth stories' that inform the use of reflective practices. The 'dead-certainties' involve an account of a reflective exercise used to explicate the connection between the personal and political. I used this exercise as part of the pedagogy in the introduction to the course in critical pedagogies¹. The narrative traces the experiences of my co-researcher who had done this exercise two years earlier as a first year student and now found herself repeating the exercise as part of her action research² (the 'local-knowledge'). The sequencing in this narrative is important. It follows my learning and therefore is a different sequence to the previous chapter/narrative. The first interpretation is hermeneutic, interpreting the experience that my co-researcher had, and the impact of the exercise on students. This created a ripple effect into my narrative and led me to examine the theoretical underpinnings of my work; the first explorations of poststructuralist understandings (more 'dead-certainties'). This was the first inquiry that I undertook into practices of the self³ (in this case, reflective practices) in the light of Foucault's writing. It led me to different interpretations (more 'local-knowledge') and a deconstruction of the 'truth stories' informing local reflective practices. The presence of confessional practices was made visible and I return to the narrative to illustrate this. This deconstruction demonstrated how internally focussed reflection can perpetrate the individualising practices I was trying to contest. In the light of this knowledge, the 'Thick-descriptions' are examples of some playful encounters with self/subjectivity/discourse in my current practice. Taking in the knowledge gained from the genealogical exploration led me to explore a set of practices, 'externalising conversations'⁴, in which the 'truth story' (rather than the person) is

¹ H. Byrne-Armstrong PhD thesis 1999
objectified and examined (in the light of student's personal genealogy). To thicken this description more and follow my path of multiple stories, I have done a narrative analysis on their feedback, examining these practices in the light of the propositions of this thesis.

**Dead-Certainties'... discovering a 'self that one truly is'...**

The course's handbook stresses the importance of student's developing a critically reflective stance to life (akin to Salner's 1986, contextual relativism'). 'Learning such as this cannot be assessed in terms of a test of knowledge, but you can become aware of your progress by reflecting on your capacities in reference to the sort of skills graduates will acquire' (UG Handbook 1998). Activities were designed for students to reflect on their learning processes and their actions in the present contexts (learning journals, facilitation groups, peer reviews). The example used here is an exercise that asked questions to assist people to identify some of the events of their lives and embed them within social and cultural contexts, making links between the events, the context, and people's activities in the present. The aim was to show how the personal is political; why many of our attitudes are not individual and innate, but socially and culturally produced.

In Armstrong (1994), I framed reflective exercises as mostly passive and perpetuating of individualism; an inner process, part of thinking rather than doing (ibid.). Reflexive knowing, on the other hand, I considered an activity which included the notion of 'engagement' and it is this engagement which is the significant factor in any reflection. Embedded in notions of a socially constructed reality, 'reflexivity is the awareness that we construct our reality in a reciprocal interplay with the world, and, that this awareness is part of our constructions' (Armstrong 1994). Reflexivity is an active process, a weaving of the inner and outer worlds and is

---

H. Byrne-Armstrong PhD thesis 1999
fundamental to the social and political rhetoric of the local radical pedagogy. My presupposition was that the activity of reflexivity is a human cognitive activity, a spiral in which moments of attention are shifted between the 'inner/outer' 'past/present' experiences. The exercise described below was designed to promote people's awareness of themselves as embedded in a social/cultural and political context.

It is a small part of the pedagogic practices and curriculum of this course, but it provided for me a springboard into a different arena of knowledge production and the beginning of the narrative epistemology proposed in this thesis. The exercise will be described, then what happened after the event. The interpretations centre around my co-researcher's engagement with, and reflection on, the exercise, as well as the student response. A fuller report can be found in Gebbie (1994).

**Reflexivity Exercise: who am I? ...**

Individuals were asked to think about the questions in the two columns (see below) on their own, to write answers and make connections between the two columns. Initially this is done as an individual and private activity, and subsequently people are invited to discuss with others the connections or learning they had. The exercise takes about half an hour.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What year were you born?</th>
<th>What are your current interests, work, hobbies?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What was happening in the world country and place at that time?</td>
<td>What talents do you have that you use/are dormant?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What have been your educational opportunities?</td>
<td>What projects are you doing?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What life events have you experienced; accidents, achievements, family deaths, break ups, mentors, people who have influenced you?</td>
<td>What beliefs do you have, religious, spiritual?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is your gender, colour, ethnicity, age, family background (class, privilege, income etc.)?</td>
<td>What brought you to this course</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Where were you positioned in the family?</td>
<td>What are you passionate about?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

General comments from student demonstrate the mixed response that exercises such as these evoke:

- *The reflexivity exercise was not relevant. I don't see the point in delving into the past;* 
- *Having to bring in personal stuff is an invasion of privacy;* 
- *It was like a therapy workshop;* 
- *I left the group before completing the process;* 
- *My past is painful enough. I have not come to university to reflect on it;* 
- *The reflexivity exercise was very powerful. It made me connect stories from different aspects of my life and I was able to see why I do what I do;* 

H. Byrne-Armstrong PhD thesis 1999
This was a fantastic process and we continued talking about it together over the weekend. It was really connecting;

The exercise made me realise there is more than one way to look at any experience;

I think I have always thought people were different. The exercise showed how this might be so.

This mixed response is one that can be expected when using reflective exercises (see Lather 1991; Carson in Carson & Sumara 1997), and for many teachers engaged in pedagogies aimed at personal empowerment is puzzling and disheartening. My response in the past was to accept this as part of the complexity of life, and soldier on. But T.’s presence in the group as a co-researcher and student (who had done this exercise two years previously), led to a realm of critical reflection and a different pathway of understanding. She reflected in her action research project on the resistance of students.

This is a very challenging exercise. It looks fairly simple from the outset but it actually causes us to look quite closely at life experiences and be very clear and honest about how they are framing the way we see the world. As a critical thinking exercise it causes us to become clear about our psychological history which is a first step in becoming aware of the assumptions that these might frame for us. (critical reflectivity, reflexivity). The assumption in this statement is that we have to access quite deep levels of understanding of ourselves in order to access unconscious perceptual windows through which we see the world. The process of doing this can often appear threatening and uncomfortable. This discomfort was prevalent with some members of the group. There were lots of questions about the relevance of thinking about what the world situation was at their birth and how impossible it was to know this.

Resistance to an exercise such as this can be easily interpreted as someone not understanding its relevance i.e. what importance could my life experiences possibly have on learning the ‘facts’- I’m not a part of knowing the world. But
also it can mean that there is unresolved pain or personal dilemmas in an individual life, which it is very confronting and uncomfortable to reflect on. This would seem to point to the importance of the development of an inner life, a conscious self-examination and understanding of our inner make-up in order to develop the ability - the tool of reflexivity. The paradox is that to do this in the first place is a reflexive exercise (Gebbie 1994).

‘Local-Knowledge’... the first interpretation...

’singing-up’ the narratives ...

Both T.’s reflection (above) and the exercise are embedded in the humanist discourse. The assumptions that underpin this discourse are visible in the text. I will explore these briefly before discussing the theoretical exploration I made pertaining to these issues which led me to revisit the first interpretation.

Three assumptions can be identified through the statements from T’s reflection (identified in italics) that ‘singing-up’ these practices:

1. Experience is developmental. Some experiences hinder development and some help it. Unresolved experiences stunt development;
2. Experience is a deep inner truth, which can be revealed. It makes experience visible to us;
3. Making our experience transparent transforms it - through;
4. Reflection, which is the means of resolving ‘bad’ experiences.

1. Experience is developmental.

Becoming clear about our psychological history;

First steps in becoming aware.

These are phrases and statements that belong to the imperatives of the humanist psychology discourse that regards maturity as a developmental

H. Byrne-Armstrong PhD thesis 1999
process that is dependent on our childhood history and our knowledge of it. They allude to the basis of confessional practices and therapeutic discourses which have as their foundational assumption that our success as adults is determined by our childhood experiences (see following discussion). Furthermore, some experiences hinder development and some help it. Unresolved experiences stunt development.

Unresolved pain or personal dilemmas in an individual life.
This implies the notion that struggles, painful situations and dilemmas, which are the complexity of human life, can be resolved. This is also an imperative of the psychological discourse which goes something like, a human being is not whole unless s/he have dealt with her/his unresolved issues.

2. Experience is a deep inner truth, which can be revealed. It makes experience visible to us.
We have to access quite deep levels of understanding of our selves in order to access unconscious perceptual windows through which we see the world.
This statement alludes to the humanist belief in a 'deeper and more meaningful' understanding of life available to a human being. The 'truth' lies deep inside a person and is accessible through a process of self-examination. The notion of the unconscious has been a powerful and influential idea in western thinking since before the time of Freud. It has led to Christian imperatives such as 'know thyself' and practices for self-examination and self-confession (see chapter 2), and become fully developed as a psychological practice with the advent of psychoanalysis.

3. Making our experience transparent transforms it.
Be very clear and honest about how they are framing the way we see;
As a critical thinking exercise it causes us to become clear;
A first step in becoming aware (of assumptions).
These statements belong to the belief in the transparency of self, an idea, at the centre of the humanist project (and one that the reflective practice purported to challenge!). The assumptions, however that are implied by the statements are the assumptions behind the practice. They allude to the phenomenological reduction, or bracketing: that one can step back and see oneself clearly and honestly, and one can critically think about, and rationally become aware of oneself and one's thinking processes (a very Cartesian notion\textsuperscript{11}), because they exist (hidden from rational mind) as the metaphysical subject.

4. Reflection is the means of resolving 'bad' experiences.

- People not understanding its (reflections') importance;
- Importance to the development of an inner life. Very confronting and uncomfortable to reflect on;
- Threatening and uncomfortable.

These statements like those in number one imply the possibility of a superior metaphysical self, capable of reflecting, to discover the truth. In addition, these statements allude to the probability that this reflection process will be arduous, setting a moral tone to self-reflective practices\textsuperscript{12}. There is also the implication that our true existence lies within, and this must be revealed for people to be "healed" (alluding to some perfect state again).

On examination, T.'s reflection, mirrors the assumptions that I brought to this exercise. While speaking the rhetoric of challenging the individualising techniques of humanism, I was actually still promoting them through this exercise. But the story continues.

T.'s response of support to the students in their discomfort and resistance to the exercise came from her own experience of the exercise two years earlier. At that time, she thought that her story was too powerful
and overwhelming to be shared with others. She had found it painful and
difficult, and had felt angry at having to reveal herself 'to herself' in this
way (even though the exercise could be a private one). Two years later she
did the task again. She wrote:

Doing this exercise for the second time provided me with more perspective
- something about being able to share it as a way of helping people learn
about the relevance of our personal history to our world view helped give me
the courage to fully engage in the process. This time I went public, I told the
class about the breakup in my family when I was in my teens. The effect on my
life of the breakup included suppressed rage and pain that manifested in
extreme anger/rebellion in my late teenage years as I sought to disassociate
myself from the world in which I was brought up. The corresponding nihilism
and depression was expressed in my involvement in the 'punk' culture of the
late seventies, and considerable drug abuse. The world was wrong, the world
powers were about to commit planetary suicide through nuclear war and my
disgust was expressed against my own body. The illness I caused myself and
support from my family eventually led to my involvement in therapy and
personal growth organisations. This internal work eventually led me back to
university (the world of privilege).

She then reflected:

The experience of sharing this with the group was very strange. I still have a
lot of fear about expressing my 'truth' especially such intimate and revealing
sharing. The group was completely silent all staring at me, I was stunned. My
reaction was 'oh God, I've been really inappropriate'.

Again, T.'s talk is embedded in the humanist and psychological
discourse of the exercise and context. My reaction at the time was to
applaud her courage for speaking up. Unlike T., I reacted to the story by
being touched, rather than shocked, by it. And, from the response of
students at the time (some came up and spoke to her) there were obvious
connections that people made with the story - something that was validated in their learning journals/interviews.

The event led me to a different sort of reflection. I became fascinated about the power of the performance aspect of this episode. I wrote in my research journal at the time, the following reflection, which, in retrospect was the first time I linked together the work I had been doing with the notion of narrative as a political praxis.

This process demonstrated the power of being reflexive. T., in telling her narrative was engaged in a reflexive social practice or inter-action. By action I do not mean a random 'doing' but a ritual of purposeful languaging - a performance\textsuperscript{13}. Perhaps akin to the early confessional which was a communal and public activity. The 'audience' reads the narrative like a living text that can be read and re-read (following Ricoeur 1981). Reflexivity is both a narrative to be told to oneself, as well as a narrative to be told to others. When we language our self-narrative, we toss the knowledge that we live by into the social arena. We connect with an audience (which can be ourselves as well as others). In doing this, we demonstrate its partiality (if we were totally the narrative we would not be able to tell the story). This performative dimension of reflection is vital in the move away from thinking of ourselves as a totality of one story.

Another aspect of this performative dimension of reflection is the ripple effect. Performing our narratives creates echoes in the lives of others. If they, in turn, voice their story (and this can be through a subtle response or a reciprocal telling), it then ripples back on our narratives. This is the process of learning and empowerment through reflexivity. Giving voice to our knowledges in dialogue with others sings up hidden and silenced voices, making a network of connections and linkages that are not dependent on coherence or completeness of connections but on momentary intersections of life and experience. The spoken re-presentation of our narratives again and again, contributes to the re-authoring of self- narratives whilst maintaining our self- responsibility and connectedness.

H. Byrne-Armstrong PhD thesis 1999
T.'s initial response to the reflexive exercise was one of disempowerment. She did not 'perform' her story; she was silenced by the exercise. She described herself as living in a trance during her first year, 'not engaging or being there', again attributing the blame to herself (another example of the power of the individualising processes of the psychological discourse). The second time she did the exercise, it was again difficult until she communicated her experience of it - and her story - to the others. The class went quiet, the effect of her story profound (a ripple effect response). She was shocked. She interpreted it as a negative response. In her locating her story outside the social and cultural milieu she assumes that it is individual and unique - a 'truth story' embedded in Cartesian thought which atomizes us through the separation of the subject and object.

The feedback from students differed from her perception:

- **When T. shared her story I knew for the first time that I was not a freak, I always thought I was the only one who had messed up life. And look at her;**
- **T.'s story stayed with me. I went home and spoke to my family for the first time about how I felt about the divorce;**
- **Telling her story was very important to me. She was so courageous;**
- **T.'s story gave me heart. It strengthened my resolve to get this degree.**

It seemed that the performative aspect of her story provided important learning for students. It was as though in revealing that she was 'not as coherent as she might look'\(^{14}\) it seems that there are several advantages to the performative dimension of language which are illustrated by T.'s story and the student responses. Performing stories to others (an 'audience');
- **separates us from the story;**
- **helps us break out of the feeling that we are encapsulated and isolated\(^{15}\).**

T.'s story also illustrates Polkinghorne's point that, 'interpretation is not [simply] a tool of knowledge; it is the way human beings are' (1983:224). There is no objective understanding of life; to be human is to be

---

H. Byrne-Armstrong PhD thesis 1999
interpretative. Understanding is a shared thing which does not arise out of methods which 'guarantee a truth undistorted by human desire' (Polkinghorne 1983:224). Knowledge is built through engagement and interaction. Understanding is already performed for us by the world in which we exist, through the social meanings contained in language (ibid.). There is no pre-social, pre-linguistic experience to be made transparent through reflection. There is no split between subject and object, inner and outer realms, in fact, language and being in the world are one (Van Manen 1990).

reflecting on new knowledges...

This story was the beginning of my involvement with narrative as a political praxis. The interpretation above led me to some of the central motifs of this thesis in the context of self/subjectivity; the move from examining 'people' (an internalising conversation) to narrative and the examination of discourses (an externalising conversation)\(^{16}\) and hence to poststructuralism.

From a poststructuralist point of view, to end this story here is to practice discursive closure. The story has one interpretation, which though useful, begs many questions. Was T.'s different experience due to 'deeper understandings of herself'? Why did/do the students have a mixed/negative response to a relatively harmless self-reflective exercise? What are other ways of looking at the response that they had to T.'s story? What might be the influences on T. that led her to find the exercise more palatable the second time around? My first response was to turn from practice narratives to theory narratives and Foucault's later work on *Technologies of the Self* (see 1988). This was/is followed by a second interpretation of T.'s narrative.
More 'Dead-Certainties'

a genealogy of reflective practices ...

Our (liberal humanist) belief that we are the architects
of our own consciousness and our conscience
is as much the result of discourses we have been subjected to
(constituted by) as anything else (Davies 1994:3)

As can be illustrated by comments made by students in the first stage of
this narrative, frustration at reflective pedagogies is always present (see
also Lather 1991; Ellsworth 1992). This is usually explained away as the
initial stages of students moving towards self-direction in their learning. It
is seen as a necessary step for this agency (see Mezirow's 1981, 1991's
'disorienting dilemmas') and represents the 'internal' shifts that students
are required to make in order to become autonomous learners - the
resistance'\textsuperscript{17} therefore that they show, framed within the boundaries of the
dominant discourse.

Reflective practices are not new in the history of knowledge. They
are the basis for much western (and eastern) philosophy\textsuperscript{18} and are regarded
as our heritage as a human subject and the means by which we come to know
ourselves as a human subject. Reflective practices in education are an
important counterfoil to the 'banker learning' approach (Freire 1970)
commonly drawn upon for pedagogic practices, but they are not without
their problems. More recently these ideas have come under scrutiny as
recursively perpetuating a truth story constructed by their tradition (see
chapter 3). Prevailing practices that focus on the inner person (eg.
confessional practices and arts of governmentality (see Foucault 1977,
1983b) reproduce the apolitical individualism that, as a reconstructionist
teacher\textsuperscript{19} (Gore 1993b), I am wanting to contest. However, it is not the

---

H. Byrne-Armstrong PhD thesis 1999
practices of reflection themselves that are at issue. Assumptions about the self as educated through internally focussed and self-reflective practices have a long history (Foucault 1983). When the history of these practices is unpacked, it can be demonstrated that the encounter between education (and especially, radical education) and the self-to-be-liberated, at this particular point in history, is contentious.

Foucault (1988) thought that the endless 'examination of one's inner self (McNay 1992:86) was a dominant characteristic of modern society. However, rather than leading us to more knowledge about ourselves he suggested these practices are '... more the result of a forgotten coercion' (McNay 1992:86). Freud thought that practices for self-knowledge gave people power over self (see Hutton in Martin et al. 1988). Foucault demonstrated that through these practices, power shapes knowledge of the self, and subjugates self (ibid.). In this way he was considered by some as an anti-Enlightenment figure (particularly in his earlier works). However, Foucault's project was not to damn practices of the self but to alert us to their potential danger. Both Freud's and Foucault's propositions have merit. 'The liberatory practices of the Enlightenment give us knowledge/power but also shape us into more docile and confined human beings' (Sawiki 1991:22).

So technologies of the self, while a form of subjectification, are also sowing the seeds for autonomy through processes that adopt a posture of self-criticism and an exploration of less totalising forms of identity (see Foucault 1983a).

This is what Foucault considered the political double bind of the individual in contemporary society. How is this so? Significant in the discourses that perpetrate and perpetuate technologies of the self is that they render the society transcendent - an inversion of the Cartesian subject in which the individual self was transcendent. The modern self is no longer bounded by an epistemological border that is personal and individual.
It is shaped by a social and transpersonal context grounded in such terms as
nation, class, race and economics (see Fendler in Popkewitz & Brennan
1998:50). The responsibility for self and subjectivity is transferred to the
state. Under the guise of caring for the individual, institutions of the state
(because they know the truth) are justified in producing knowledge 'by
appeals to rationally apprehended "realities" beyond personal and
(subjective) experience and specifically grounded in social (objective) terms'
(ibid.)\textsuperscript{20}. So, in the name of a just society and caring for the individual,
technologies of power shape and limit subjectivity, submitting us to '...a set
of very specific patterns' (Foucault 1983b:214), the normalising, fixed
identities and categories that shape our everyday life.

As both subject to, and object of, these socially constructed
identities, the modern educated self is somewhat paradoxical. As the
investigator of knowledge s/he is endowed with far-reaching perceptive,
disciplinary and regulatory potential in the name of good citizenship and the
state. At the same time, as the object of this examination, s/he is moulded
and shaped by power through so-called scientific technologies of the power
with their economic and political agendas. As Foucault so eloquently wrote,
'this form of power applies itself to immediate everyday life which
categorises the individual, marks him [sic] by his own individuality, attaches
him to his own identity, imposes a law of truth on him which he must
recognise and which others have to recognise in him\textsuperscript{21}. It is a form of power
that makes individual's 'subject'\textsuperscript{22}.

The surveillance, normalising, and dividing practices (see chapter 2)
that are elaborated through institutional power remain hidden behind the
veil of freedom, which is dependent on our abilities to tell the 'truth'.
Reflective practices are embedded in confessional practices and Foucault
believed, the confessional is the central technology of these practices that
control the body, self, and the general population. In the west at least, it
has become a particular discourse that is so tempting that we have no qualms about inserting ourselves into domains (medicine, law, therapies, education) where we allow ourselves to be examined about our most personal details. We take for granted (self) examination practices without often even a passing thought as to how this examination of ourselves is tied to powerful ideologies of religion, science and moral codes (ibid.).

In modern day versions of the confessional (e.g. reflective education practices), truth and power are separated and seen to combat one another. If one finds the deepest truth about oneself, one will be free (liberated and empowered) ... 'confessing frees, but power reduces one to silence' (Foucault 1978:60). Truth and power are seen as independent; where truth is uncovered, power will be reduced; truth is attached to freedom (ibid.).

But Foucault argues truth and power are inextricably bound together. The confessional in all its different contexts is a ritual elaborated within a relationship of power. There is always another party, one that is not only the questioner but is the authority who appreciates, prescribes, judges or punishes, forgives or consoles (see Foucault 1978:61-2). Furthermore, the confirmation of 'truth' is through the adversity it has to overcome in order to be spoken, 'a ritual in which the expression alone, independently of its external consequences', produces a change in the person (ibid.). Foucault argued that ... [the] 'liberating effect of ... therapeutic practice is illusory, since, in effect, it serves to implicate individuals even deeper in the network of disciplinary power instilling in them the urge to confess' (in McNay 1992:87).

The discourses that exhort us to tell the truth in the name of freedom, are so deeply engrained in the modern subject, that confession is regarded as an act of self liberation rather than an act of coercion. We are enmeshed in an intricate set of power relations ... 'with those who claim to be able to extract the truth of these confessions through their possession
of the keys to interpretation' (Dreyfus & Rabinow 1983:174). Power and truth are not separate. Rather they are enmeshed in this relationship. The power of this deep inner truth to free one, resides not with the speaker, but with... 'the one who listens and says nothing: not in the one who knows and answers, but in the one who questions and is not supposed to know' (Foucault 1978a:62). And, furthermore, it is considered that only one person is changed by this discourse of truth, not the listener, but the one who confesses.

So are the reflective practices that are considered central to becoming an educated self, liberating? There are many instances when people tell us that they experience liberating effects after coming to 'know themselves'. The problem is that in the present day context, the self-knowledge that is sought is attached to a truth story that is externally determined, i.e. self-knowledge is always constructed within/by the presence of an authority/teacher/discourse (who/that holds the 'truth'). This situation points to the discrepancy which Gore called 'inconsistencies between the pedagogy argued for and the pedagogy of the argument; inattention to technologies of the self' (1993:150).

The reflexivity exercise described earlier (like many other activities, for example, personal learning journals, learning histories) while promoting conversation and often reducing isolation, is positioned within the relationships of power and authority of an educational institution. It, and all the above activities, therefore operate within the discourse of the confessional, 'epitomising disciplinary power whereby the individual participates in her or his own subjectification through forms of rationality that emphasize the need to disclose oneself' (ibid.). Reflective practices are always situated in pedagogical relations of power... 'one confesses in the actual or imagined presence of a figure who prescribes the form of

---

H. Byrne-Armstrong PhD thesis 1999
confession, the words and rituals through which it should be made, who appreciates, judges, consoles, or understands' (Rose in Gore 1993:151-2).

More 'Local-Knowledge'...a second interpretation...

the narrative re-visited ...

To illustrate these ideas further, I would like to return to the story told earlier. I quoted the following passage from T.'s Action Research document:

I told the class about the breakup in my family when I was in my teens. The effect on my life of the break up included suppressed rage and pain that manifested in extreme anger/rebellion in my late teenage years as I sought to disassociate myself from the world in which I was brought up. The corresponding nihilism and depression was expressed in my involvement in the 'punk' culture of the late seventies, and considerable drug abuse. The world was wrong, the world powers were about to commit planetary suicide through nuclear war and my disgust was expressed against my own body. The illness I caused myself and support from my family eventually led to my involvement in therapy and personal growth organisations. This internal work eventually led me back to university (the world of privilege) (Gebbie 1994).

Critically thinking about the presence of reflective practices in the light of confessional practices leads me to another interpretation of this situation. Clearly T.'s statement is one that would fit the discourse of confession practices. Present is a 'self which one had to examine' (Foucault 1983:248) in order to find the real self. It is 'an account of oneself' (ibid, 247). It 'speak[s] the indescribable, reveal[s] the hidden, say[s] the non said' (ibid. 247). It is the telling of the ...'deepest truth about oneself' (ibid.) There is a confirmation of 'truth' through adversity (anger, nihilism, drugs) that has been overcome in order to be spoken. There is the evocation of the planetary condition, which she was personally accountable for. The notion of

H. Byrne-Armstrong PhD thesis 1999
liberation through returning to university and the 'privileged life', and the self-accountability for the relationship disintegration happening around her.

Even in her reflections after the event there are traces of the confessional pattern. Afterwards T. said:

The experience of sharing this with the group was very strange. I still have a lot of fear about expressing my 'truth' especially such intimate and revealing sharing.

Above, I argued that the cultural narratives that exhort us to tell the truth in the name of freedom are so deeply engrained, that confession is regarded as an act of self-liberation rather than an act of coercion. Clearly, for T. both were present (see Gebbie 1994) T. said:

The group was completely silent all staring at me, I was stunned. My reaction was 'Oh God, I've been really inappropriate'.

If the assumption framing this story is one that proposes that truth and power are independent, then this story of T.'s and the activity could be regarded as liberating, - 'when truth is uncovered, power will be reduced' (see above quote). I certainly had this hidden assumption. I wrote in my journal at the time:

I was interested in reflexivity as an activity, not just a passive reflection (which I now recognise it never can be). T., in telling her story was engaged in a social practice or inter-action. By action I do not mean a random 'doing' but a ritual of purposeful languaging. Perhaps akin to the early confessional which was a communal and public activity.

A closer examination of the reflexive exercise makes me realise that as a modern subject, I too am deeply engrained in the notion of the confessional as an act of self-liberation rather than an act of coercion.
The following is an extract from my journal;

H. Byrne-Armstrong PhD thesis 1999
T.'s story illustrates this point. Her initial response to the reflexive exercise was one of disempowerment. She did not 'perform' her story; she was silenced by the exercise. She described herself as living in a trance during her first year, 'not engaging or being there.' The second time she did the exercise, it was again difficult until she communicated her experience of it - and her story - to the others. The class went quiet, the effect of her story profound. She was shocked at the response. She interpreted this as a negative response.

Now, I recognise this statement also fits a narrative of coercion. While recognising that I had the first glimmers of awareness of the confessional as a social practice (found in a wider context than simply religious settings), my awareness of the relations of power and authority that I was implicated in at the time would seem minimal.

Back to T.'s journal again:

This is a very challenging exercise. It looks fairly simple from the outset but it actually causes us to look quite closely at life experiences and be very clear and honest about how they are framing the way we see the world. ... The process of doing this can often appear threatening and uncomfortable. This discomfort was prevalent with some members of the group. Resistance to an exercise such as this can be easily interpreted as someone not understanding its relevance i.e. what importance could my life experiences possibly have on learning 'facts'- I'm not a part of knowing the world. ... it is very confronting and uncomfortable to reflect on ... I found it painful and difficult and had felt angry ...

This passage could be considered a communication to me. The interesting thing is that at the time of T.'s first attempt at the exercise, we had just changed our relationship from one of close friend/mentor in the everyday world, to one of student/teacher within the academy. This may have influenced her response to the exercise.
Foucault said:

What makes the analysis of techniques of the self difficult is two things. First the techniques of the self do not require the same material apparatus as the production of objects, therefore they are invisible techniques. Second, they are frequently linked to the techniques for the direction of others. For example, if we take educational institutions, we realise that one is managing others and teaching them to manage themselves (1983b:250, my underline).

Her first resistance may have been part of an awareness of power relationships learned during the time she spoke of living as a 'fringe-dweller' (refer to her story), and something that she may have had more awareness of than I did. Foucault (1977) comments that it is at the margins of the culture that we can learn most about the power (in social practices/discourses) that controls our lives - hence his investigation of the history of mental asylums and prisons. Reflective exercises, although potentially useful, are imbued with power and hidden under a guise of innocence. In a climate of individualising technologies and confessional practices, resistance to them might be a first step on the path to critical awareness. But this is not a simple answer. A critical awareness must hold the tension between practices (such as reflective practices) being both potentially liberating and potentially coercive. Resistance is a common phenomenon and usually one that is explained away within the discourse with psychological explanations (as T. does when she reflects back on herself at this time). After this reflection, I view resistance in a different light. Resistance to the coercive power of dominant discourses is, I now consider, the beginning of alternative narratives of agency and choice. This re-authoring of resistance has been the key to my production of a fuller understanding and illumination of the social practices that we take for granted as liberating.
Two years later T. did the task again. This time she did not resist. At the time she had completed her first two years and was moving rapidly towards graduating as one of the few students with merit (the equivalent of distinction). She reported:

Doing this exercise for the second time provided me with more perspective - something about being able to share it as a way of helping people learn about the relevance of our personal history to our world view helped give me the courage to fully engage in the process.

Her framing of this change was within the ‘truth story’ of liberation through a deep inner truth (a reflection of the humanist discourse). However, this statement also contains something else. It is an example of the partiality and contingency of discourses. Within it she identifies two (at least), useful subject positions now available to her in the educational discourse, a ‘liberated learner’ with more perspective, and the second one, a ‘successful-student-who-can-help-others’. This is present in the statement when T. talks about being helpful in the relationship between her and the students. The empowerment that she feels, then, could also be interpreted as an example of the power/knowledge connection (Foucault 1980). Within the context of the educational institution, she has a more positive ‘subject’ 24 position in terms of the other students within the discourse shaping the relationships.

So, as well as/or rather than, having found some deep liberating truth, the agency implied by this statement could also point to the power assigned to this subject position within the academy. She had gained agency through her success as a student and was opening up her available subjectivities within the discourse. Over the three years, she shifted (one of) her subject positions from a disengaged learner (see statements earlier)
to an active and empowered learner/teacher, one of the few who graduated with merit, and who went into the world into a successful career. Many would see her encounter with the local radical pedagogy as a successful one.

**reflecting on new knowledges...**

This narrative shows the field of paradox on which a radical educator plays. Reflective practices are social practices, and can shape a self with agency; they are also surveillance mechanisms. It is easier to recognise, having interrogated these practices and their influence in shaping an educated self, the often-contradictory response that any form of reflection invites from students. Some students find them empowering and liberating; others find reflective practices in the education setting, invasive, coercive, and a form of surveillance and policing.

Foucault (1983:216) said that the task of contemporary society:

> is not to discover what we are, but to refuse what we are ... not to liberate ourselves from the state, and from the state’s institutions, but to liberate us both from the state and the type of individualisation which is linked to the state. We have to promote new forms of subjectivity through the refusal of this kind of individuality, which has been imposed on us for several decades.

As a reconstructionist teacher, it has been important to me to find a pedagogic practice that assists people to constitute themselves in ways that are not dependant on our ability to transcend our past, confess our present, or even mediate our different perspectives, - and yet recognises the often empowering nature of these things. It is also important to remember that any 'reflective' practice is a technology of the self in that it is imbued with the power relations belonging to a discourse that has as its central motif, the separate, rational, transcendental subject. To promote internal
reflection could be to promote the rampant individualising processes of our culture.

As an educator it is also important to recognise that all social practices are potentially 'dangerous' (see Foucault 1983). But, reflective practices are particularly so as they are often found in settings in which people are particularly vulnerable to power and coercion (therapy, religious settings, personal growth groups, spiritual contexts). At this stage I do not use this particular exercise.

Finding a practice that can hold the tension between the potentially 'liberatory' effects of reflective practices, as well as notice how they exclude and prohibit, might seem an impossible task. Furthermore, exhorting students to reflect on themselves in the learning process as learners, and address how they learn as much as what they learn, may be more problematic than was first thought. As Foucault (1977) has demonstrated, focussing on what is inside people's heads serves the political apparatus that shaped them into certain types of learners in the first place. The aim as a reconstructionist teacher should be, 'not one of changing people's 'consciousness' or what is in their heads; but the political, economic institutional regime of the production of truth' (Foucault 1977:14).

'Thick-Descriptions'...singing up new practices

externalising conversations

We have to promote new forms of subjectivity through the refusal of this kind of individuality, which has been imposed on us for several decades

(Foucault 1983a:216)

H. Byrne-Armstrong PhD thesis 1999
The regimes of truth that shape peoples' lives are compelling. It is difficult to imagine that anyone can move beyond discourse when we don't know how to catch ourselves in the act of constituting ourselves ... inside the very categories that we want to move beyond' (Davies 1994:2). But, as already stated, (see chapter 1), discourses constitute people in contradictory and partial ways. The first step is to step back (as much as possible) from the discourse informing the practices, in order to examine it (the performative aspect). This allows people to see the partial and contradictory ways that they are positioned within any discourse. As stated previously, because discourses shape peoples' lives in contradictory and partial ways, a politics of possibility opens up, and the tenuous pathway for some autonomy and self-agency is revealed.

The obvious discourse to engage with in this way, in the educational arena (and in the context of a subject on critical pedagogy), is the educational discourse. The way to encourage the activity of 'stepping back' is through an 'externalising conversation'. An externalising conversation is one that re-politicises experience (see White 1994). It is a form of discursive practice and the central skill required to develop a narrative epistemology. Instead of examining what happens inside their heads (for example, using a learning styles profile or a personality test, - examples of internalising conversations), students are encouraged to interrogate the language and social practices shaping the context. In the interrogation, they expose ways that the discourse shaping the context, objectifies and totalises them into objects (to be worked on), or into subject positions that are helpful (or not) to their lives (see T.'s example).

The conversation is called an 'externalising conversation' because it interrogates language and social practices (the mediating influence shaping relationships), and including the subjectivities and identities necessary for
its perpetuation. It encourages outsight as well as insight (hence the title of this narrative). Foucault said:

Take for example the educational institution: the disposal of its space, the meticulous regulations which govern its internal life, the different activities which are organised there ... the activity which ensures apprenticeship and the acquisition of aptitudes or types of behaviour is developed there by means of a whole ensemble of regulated communications (lessons, questions and answers, orders, exhortations, coded signs of obedience, differentiation marks of the 'value' of each person and the levels of knowledge) and by the means of a whole series of power processes (enclosure, surveillance, reward and punishment... (1983a:218-9).

Interrogating the physical context

Interrogating the discourse begins with an exposition of Foucault’s (1977) categories of social practices (refer again chapter 2) using the educational discourse as the current example.

In groups, students are asked to discuss how/whether they have experienced these social practices and their purpose. An externalised conversation is designed and introduced to interrogate the immediate geography of the classroom.

A Geography of Power

1. In what ways does that the space, and how it is set up, encourage them or not encourage them to speak and dialogue with each other, with the teacher?
2. What relationships will be shaped under these conditions?
3. What types of subjects/identities will be produced by these relationships?
4. How does the space work to strengthen/perpetuate the discourse?
5. How would different configurations change the relationships? - including the egalitarian circle of chairs found in radical classrooms.

H. Byrne-Armstrong PhD thesis 1999
One group of students\textsuperscript{29} after having engaged in this interrogation demonstrated their immediate ability to be critically reflective - to step into 'contextual relativism' (Salter in Gebbie 1994):

- *I learnt about the structure and patterns that shape our lives through schooling and the education system, and how we carry these through life with us;*

- *Learning how we are all under surveillance, e.g. student to teacher (and visa-versa). It is something you do not always think about, you just go along with it. And it's interesting to know that;*

- *I learnt how life is classified (not experienced);*

- *The underlying structure of education and how this has affected your own life.*

Foucault said that the question to be explored is, how can the 'growth and capabilities be disconnected from the intensification of power relations?' (1984b:48). This interrogation of 'the forms of rationality that organise ... ways of doing things' ... begins this disconnection process. It seems that the move to contextual relativism may be more than an individual cognitive maturing. I, as a teacher, and the students through this interrogation, are challenging the power relationships constituted by the discourse. My role in the power relations is revealed, as is the power of the arrangements of time and space. This enables students to be critically reflective of the discourse, rather than just being passive objects of it. They begin to glean a 'freedom with which they [can] act within these practical systems' (ibid).

**Interrogating the self/subjectivities produced by the discourse**

The concept of an externalised conversation can also be employed to interrogate how power/knowledge shape 'personal' histories - without becoming an internalising focus.

\textsuperscript{29} H. Byrne-Armstrong PhD thesis 1999
Learning Histories

1. What positions (roles/attitudes in psycho-social terms) did people in your family take up in connection to learning/education when you were growing up?
2. Were some positions considered more authoritative than others?
3. How did you respond as you noticed a hierarchy attached to these positions?
4. How did this knowledge shape the way that you thought about yourself in the context of education?
5. How did it influence your decision to come to university?
6. Was there support for this decision? What other decisions have you made to support your preferred direction in life? When you make decisions for your life, how do people respond to you?
7. Who supports you in making choices for you life including your present endeavour?
8. If there is little support, what steps have you taken to step away from unhelpful notions that discouraged you from your preferred path?

This externalised conversation interrogates the way that one has been constituted by the particular (in this case, educational) context one has grown up within. It provides students with more competencies in discursive practices, this time at a 'personal' level.

What is the difference between this set of questions and the reflexivity questions described earlier? There are several differences:

- It is an interrogation of the context and social practices. It is not asking people to examine themselves. One way of explaining this is in terms of orientation. Taking a spatial metaphor of inner and outer as a starting point, this exercise, instead of examining what is 'inside' a person, (looking to the unconscious to find true meaning), asks people to orientate 'outwards'. In doing this, they become aware of the discursive
practices shaping them and the tendency for individualising is lessened. This is because an externalising conversation:

- implies a narrator, and author (who has author-ity, response-ability) of a story. In this it encourages detachment and disconnection. It can resist totalising practices;
- interrogates openly the power structures and the material connection between power and knowledge. It also alludes to a history of resistance, people's ongoing negotiation, evoking the notion of agency;
- evokes relationships with others as constituting life. In the evocation of relationships, it implies several choices of subject positions available to the author, thus once again challenging the notion of a single subject/object/truth;
- is also a social practice that, like everything, is potentially dangerous (see Foucault 1981). It is imbued with power - it is being used in an education institution in which I am assigned positional power. It could be seen within the framework of the confessional, or as a practice category of surveillance. It can also be seen within the framework of an aesthetics of existence (Foucault 1983b), as a practice of the self to create oneself as a work of art.

Initially this form of conversation is strange to students, but once engaged the participation is lively. The most interesting response (for this teacher) came from a group of women students of NESB. They initially had great difficulty with the exercise and I spent some time with them playing with the ideas as they pertained to their contexts.

It turned out that none of the group wanted to be at university. They were there because their families had said they must go. Once they understood that the exercise was one that encouraged them to 'think for themselves' (as one put it) they had a lively discussion. Some of their comments after the exercise were:

---

H. Byrne-Armstrong PhD thesis 1999
• [I learnt] how my education has set the boundaries for my life. What I would like is to think more clearly and not be restrained;
• I have learnt about questioning my role within my family and life. IS it where I want to be or where I have been moulded by others?
• The questions made me realise just how much my family has had an effect on me. In my decision making mostly.

Others began to open up their 'histories of struggle' with the educational discourse and many had stories of survival and identified people who had helped them through:
• I still feel like a victim of education. I just keep going/learning;
• Looked at own family and appreciated the support with my own choices (amazing family);
• What was helpful is to meet people who have been through similar situations as me.

**More interpretations ...challenging educational truth stories...**

At the end of this particular class, I had asked students to write and tell me if they had learnt anything useful in the morning session (this is a commonplace part of my pedagogic practices). Interestingly, much of their feedback was positioned in the categories of social practices identified earlier.

The first set of statements by students implied a regulation of the educational discourse that was being challenged:
• [I learnt] it can be fun when learning, there is no right or wrong, there is just talk;
• Learnt that at Uni., it's not wrong to laugh and have a good time within classes;
Learning through practical tasks are 'much more happier' than learning through writings. I would try to make things funny to remember them.

Doing funny group work with new people helped me to get to know people.

These statements are implying that something was different in the present classroom. It implies that classrooms are usually serious, and to do with abstract knowledge. They are not places in which one usually enjoys oneself, or for that matter where one gets to know new people. The statements allude to the sort of expectations students bring to the classroom most probably based on their prior experiences. These statements express that the categories of totalisation and normalisation (see chapter 2) are being transgressed. This classroom is regarded as different and not a normal experience. As one student said:

It was quite different and it was a change from a normal classroom routine. It was fun. (student's underline)

This was expressed also in terms of my position in the classroom:

I learnt that there were different ways of teaching and my thoughts on their effectiveness;

I learnt when teachers use group work and fun activities, it brings the students together and breaks down the barrier or animosity that there has been between us;

Today I felt more confident and relaxed in class than I ever have before. I learnt about myself and how I relate because I remember and take in what the lady said as her speech and lesson was fun and full of activities as well as interesting and the notes precise and very clear.

There were also statements that implied a challenge to social practices, this time, totalisation. Totalisation is the category of social practice that assigns people an identity that becomes complete and absolute. The 'externalised conversation' exercises had the anticipated effect of
distancing people from their experience. And in doing this the technique of
totalisation was challenged:
♦ I learnt how I pigeon hole myself;
♦ People have many different ways of looking at life, the way they live
  their life and thinking about consequences;
♦ People are different when you talk to them. I learnt to respect people's
  individual stories more;
♦ I learnt that people are different than I think they are;
♦ Different people have different ideas on all sorts of things;
♦ Taught me to give people a go - acknowledging that people are different
  and sometimes similar.

In these statements identities are being fragmented. Students are
expressing that this is a valuable learning. Instead of looking for sameness
they are valuing difference.

The dividing practices of the classroom were also challenged. People
expressed the joy of talking to others that they had not connected with all
term. As one student said;

That by interaction and socialising you are given more knowledge of
people around you and the effect you have on them and they have on
you and also that we can work together in groups.

These statements would indicate that a space was constituted in which
students were able to find nooks and crannies in a dominant discourse and
practice resistance within it. That the learning was 'fun' seems one set of
statements that would suggest a refusal to the dominant discourses'
insistence that education is serious business. It also opened the space for
those people (the class had a high proportion of NESB students) who found
book-learning difficult, to engage in different ways (and therefore occupy
different subject positions).

H. Byrne-Armstrong PhD thesis 1999
That students were interested and critically reflective about their objectification within the educational discourse would seem to indicate that a critically reflective stance is less to do with a developmental stage (i.e. contextual relativism) in learning (and the individual abilities of people) and more to do with the context. Student responses to this class were varied and showed many different subject positions, suggesting that the space was open for this. This group of students had not experienced me as a teacher before this class. The interactive nature of the class was a surprise to some, but comments would indicate that, some people at least, found this empowering.

reflecting on new knowledges...

In conclusion, this class was certainly a different experience to be part of as a teacher and I think provided students with the knowledge that there is more than one way of learning. This is not a relativistic statement but a political statement. By this, I mean that I am not advocating multiple ways of learning. I am informing and giving student’s immediate exposure and skills to recognise that some ways of learning and knowledges have precedence and power over others.

The last word, however, should go to a member of this class:

I thought the lesson proved successful in some sense. I don’t know what I have learnt, when I usually do learn something however I don’t know that I have learnt until I need to use it.

Well said!

concluding the narrative...

This concludes the second research narrative. The dominant discourse of humanism has been revealed to hold many assumptions that, while purporting to be universally true, are shown to be embedded in
power/knowledge practices. Staying alert to the way that these practices shape our lives is an important learning. Confessional practices abound in the culture; the implications for practitioners who encourage this function are many. However, from this exploration, I am more assured in my use of reflective practices and am beginning to glimpse how they can be both helpful and not helpful at the same time. Like Orner (in Popkewitz & Brennan 1998), this does not mean that I will stop using them, but that I will have an attitude of irony about them.

The other offering in the narrative is the connection between power-knowledge, resistance and agency. In deconstructing the narratives, the arbitrary assumptions of the humanist discourse become more visible, and in this visibility, its fragility and contingent nature become more knowable – and therefore the possibilities for resistance and agency more accessible. This point will be taken up further in following chapters.

1 This course was a core learning unit in the first year of an undergraduate degree in Social Ecology the University of Western Sydney (as previous chapter).
2 The action research project is described in chapter 4. All data collected at the time is identified by the use of Italic. This includes student feedback, T’s action research project, her learning journal and my research journal.
3 See chapter 2.
4 See footnote 14 this chapter.
5 UG Course Handbook 1992, University of Western Sydney.
6 See chapter 5 for fuller discussion of this.
7 Quoted from data gathered in a reflective learning group and interviews conducted by T. for her action research project.
8 The notion of resistance in this context is an interesting one. It is being used in a modernist sense, framed as a problem. This is different to resistance as I am using it in this thesis and will be fully discussed in the conclusion.
9 Using the metaphor, *singing up* is to remind the reader that this is not just talk but a manifest action.
10 See discussion following in more ‘dead-certainties’.
11 See chapter 2 - Descartes Meditations.
12 Something also reflected in much of the writing about reflection as the answer to many woes (see Boud & Walker, Brookfield etc.)
13 The notion of performance gave me the first seeds of using/developing ‘externalising conversations’ (see later in chapter) as a pedagogic tool.
14 Michael White says that none of us are as coherent as we appear to be (seminar 1997).
15 There are others like us. (If we are not encapsulated we can talk about ourselves to others). Staying out of the capsule requires courage, this is only possible when we reach out for others).
16 These terms are more fully explained in the ‘thickening-descriptions’ of this narrative.
17 In a poststructuralist sense.
18 Examples are, Descartes’ *meditations*, Husserl’s epoché, and the meditative practices of all the great religions e.g. Christianity - prayer, Buddhism - meditation.
19 One involved in the preparation of students who can play a more positive role in the making of a more just, equitable and humane society.

H. Byrne-Armstrong PhD thesis 1999
An example is that statistics show 'conclusively' results that are often at odds with our personal experience.

I have chosen not to comment on the sexist language by the insertion of [sic] so as not to disturb the flow of the quote.

There are two meanings to the word *subject*: subject to someone else by control and dependence, and tied to his own identity by a conscience or self-knowledge. Both meanings suggest a form of power which subjugates and makes subject to [1983a:212].

The episode related earlier would not seem to validate this.

As a third year student marked by success, she became a 'subject' of the discourse as opposed to being just an 'object' of the educational discourse.

Others could say that she was formed to be part of the dominant discourses into a more 'docile body' (Foucault 1977).

By this he means that the issue of reification and truth seeking is always present. There is not one theory or practice for every situation.

This is a term used in Solution Focussed, Narrative and Systemic Therapies. See White (1994).

For critique of this see Walkerdine (1992).

This was a group of students within the same UG degree (four years later) who were taking the same subject. The subject was coordinated by someone else and I was asked to come in and do a session of narratives, self and learning.

Non-English Speaking Background, I am aware that I am marking these categories. I do this because these student responses demonstrated a cultural difference that I was alerted to.

They were being 'good' students or they had learned something useful.

This is fine but not enough. To be critically reflective we and students need to recognise the connection between power and knowledge, that some ways of learning and knowledges have precedence and power over others.

H. Byrne-Armstrong PhD thesis 1999
Chapter Seven

RADICAL EDUCATION: CONFLICT, POWER, DESIRE AND 'OTHER' ENCOUNTERS

In actuality, dialectics does not liberate differences;
it guarantees, on the contrary,
that they can always be recaptured
(Foucault in Falzon 1998)
Introducing the Narrative ...

This narrative is the story of another incident in the course described in the previous narratives. The 'dead-certainties' involve a narrative account (from my research journal and the tape) of a classroom event that occurred chronologically several weeks after the fishbowl incident.

Student participation and attendance had become an increasing source of conflict between students and staff. Attendance was poor, lateness rife and extensions for assignments the norm. Staff became increasingly disturbed, irritated, and disillusioned about the local radical pedagogy - bemoaning the lack of responsibility in the student body and their inability to take up the offer of self-direction as learners. The student body was vocal about the double standards of staff and their disquiet at being treated like naughty children. The situation between the two camps became increasingly polarised and came to a head when a colleague decided to confront the class and suggested an attendance log. He was greeted initially with a heavy silence. Then some students responded very strongly, accusing him of being really heavy and dumping on them. One said:

- The attendance problem doesn't apply to me personally - I come, but what pisses me off is the attitude, the school kid routine. It was very patriarchal in a way I don't even know if I've got the energy to deal with. It feels like a lifetime struggle with these attitudes.

After a student meeting, I was approached by a spokesperson for the group who requested that the conflict be 'worked through' in our next session. This is the basis for the 'dead-certainties' of this narrative. Using an approach to mediation and conflict based on Mindell’s work, (informed by Hegelian notions of the dialectic and enantiodromy), the conflict was worked on as a teaching and

---

H. Byrne-Armstrong PhD thesis 1999
learning session. The 'dead-certainties' are a narrative account of this process. The activity was part of a series of classes on conflict resolution and the common assumptions and theories that informed different methods and the methods themselves.

The ripple effect of this session amplified the sense of failure that I (we), as a staff, had begun with. This sense of failure made me curious and the discourse analysis is a result of this (the 'local-knowledge'). It was the means for me to re-open the 'space', and led me to another theoretical exploration and to reconfiguring practices for negotiating difference and conflict (more dead certainties). This heralded a change from thinking in terms of the dialectic, to thinking of a conflict in terms of a politics of difference⁵ and the necessary condition for this, discursive openness.

To demonstrate this in action the 'thick-descriptions' is a brief account from my practice of an event that occurred in another setting⁶. Its purpose is to play with the ideas that emerged from this exploration and it is an illustration of dealing with conflict using the tools of a narrative epistemology. It is an example of a small but commonplace event in the experiential classroom; students asking for mainstream pedagogies that enable them to fill the passive role of objects of education. It is an example of small and tawdry acts of resistance (from the student and the teacher's position). It illustrated the point that engaging in a dialectical argument about the issue (as happened in the 'dead-certainties') was less productive than keeping the space open by interrogating the cultural narrative/discourses shaping the conflict in the first place.

'More thickening-descriptions' is another example from my practice of a form of externalising conversation. It tells the story of the use of theatre (in this case, Boal's (1992), Forum theatre) as another means for keeping the space

---

H. Byrne-Armstrong PhD thesis 1999
open for 'other' resistance to be heard. Theatre as a form is excellent for encouraging the development of a narrative epistemology. Not only is it active and participatory, it encourages detachment and the interrogation of discourse.

'Dead-Certainties'

a geography of power setting the scene ...

When approached by the students to work on the conflict, my interest was in the promotion of what Elasser and Irvine (1992:32) called:

new speech communities...where teachers and students work together to promote educational equity... [in which] students and teachers initiate and/or support actions which challenge inequitable power relations in and out of the classroom.

This is along the Freirean lines, quoted earlier⁷, the 'drive towards reconciliation ...the solution of the teacher-student contradiction' (1970:53). I set aside a time to talk about the conflict and I suggested a process that was a method⁶ for working with conflict, which could be useful to the students in life/work contexts. This was discussed with all parties present and the time was set aside for a meeting.

the conflict⁹...

The students sat in fragmented and disjointed clumps around the room. The energy felt heavy. Their spokesperson began by saying that since staff had been 'angry, and conflict had been present in the group, that people were feeling a tiredness and low energy'. Statements included:

---

H. Byrne-Armstrong PhD thesis 1999
• The lecturer's are vague ... If I don't understand something I just ignore it and concentrate on something else ... I am so tired all the time ... I don't understand this shit;
• Double standards abound;
• We need to know about conflict not be in it;
• This course is confusing. Why don't they (staff) agree on one thing and tell us what to do;

As a 'group' they were;
• Disjointed and disconnected since the 'fishbowl incident (see chapter 5) and an outburst by (another) staff member over attendance (reported earlier). We're angry at the hypocrisy of staff.

They perceived a double standard operating, espousing autonomous and self-directed learning on one hand and then monitoring and checking up on them on the other.

There was a variety of opinions in the class:
• We are here for education, to learn in our way, our time; that was the attraction of the course;
• I want uniform directives to make me feel safe;
• I don't like the lack of communication amongst the staff, the values and beliefs of not validating my experience;
• Pre-conceived judgments have ruined my engagement with the learning community;
• I am not part of this community because my experiences and explanations are gagged before I can articulate them;
• There are a lot of different opinions on things. Staff has a point;
• I can't see the point of these 'processy' exercises. I'm here to learn not navel gaze;

H. Byrne-Armstrong PhD thesis 1999
* Being able to write from my experience has given me a voice, this stuff takes it away;
* I have come to learn, how can people learn if they don’t attend;
* Easily, I take responsibility for my own learning;
* Why do we have to do this stuff, this is not what I am here for;
* Classes can be a waste of time ... a normal class has got information in it so I can listen and take notes. Something a bit more concrete;
* I like more information so that you can go away and say you have learnt this and that. I like things to be clear cut;
* I know what I know, I do not have to be told;
* I'm used to going away and researching something and writing about it and not writing and thinking about me, experience and reflections - I find this stuff really hard;
* Learning isn't about lectures, attendance, and stuff, it's about ... the personal ... personal growth not just facts;
* Scary to think of the fight because I don't want to be seen taking a stand;
* Personal conflicts inhibit me from being more part of the community;
* I feel threatened and wary in the group;
* There are no common understandings and shared values - this makes me feel threatened and unsafe.

The staff position was represented in statements like:
* We are busy people and we bend over backwards to accommodate you;
* We are disappointed. We have put a lot of effort into creating a space where you can develop yourselves as autonomous learners;
We have had discussions re the usefulness of class sessions and would like your feedback;

Radical learning is about engaging. It is unfair to staff to have to continually chase people up.

As the discussion continued it became obvious that the possibilities for resolution were becoming increasingly slim. The conflict became more polarised around the above issues, and increasingly dominated by a few loud voices. The rest of the group was increasingly silent and I became interested in this. I asked myself, what voices are silent in this dialogue?

mapping the conflict - and a first interpretation...

Giroux (1992:32) said that, 'critical educators need to provide the conditions for students to speak differently so that their narratives can be engaged critically along the consistencies and contradictions that characterise such experiences'. I remembered Mindell's idea that expressing communication in more than one perceptual channel can often facilitate movement in stuck debates. I suggested that people move in the room physically, so that the positions that they were representing were visually and materially manifest. This suggestion was based on several assumptions:

- That the concept of 'positioning' is physical/material as well as linguistic, and physicalising it 'helps focus the attention on the dynamic aspects of encounters' (Davies and Harré 1990);
- The physical intervention would 'externalise' the positions, demonstrating to students the geography of the knowledge/power nexus by mapping it onto the physical space. Another example of an 'externalised conversation';
There are always power imbalances in a conflict - a politics between the positions. Physically representing them helps people to see the different subject positions inhabited and the differences in power between them (the power relations);

Following Mindell, by amplifying the polarities of a conflict, there will be an enantiodromy. In practical terms this means that if one amplifies a process to its extreme it will switch to its opposite\textsuperscript{12}.

Initially there was resistance to moving (an example of the above):

\begin{itemize}
\item This will stop us talking and sharing;
\item We just get into things and someone makes us do something.
\end{itemize}

A student came to my rescue:

\begin{itemize}
\item I want to learn how to deal with conflicts like this so lets try it.
\end{itemize}

Eventually people moved\textsuperscript{13}. I asked them to represent the conflict in a line diagonally across the room. To create the structure I asked three-four people to represent each end of the line (the polarities in the discussion) and for others to position themselves where they 'stood' in the debate. The majority positioned themselves along the middle, and some outside the parameters of the straight line. I asked them to identify the two polarities/identities of the line. One student spoke from the position of freedom and choice very strongly (the 'student' position):

\begin{itemize}
\item This is meant to be autonomous learning; I can make my own choices. This is the freedom to learn that the course espouses. I manage my own learning. Staff has no right to say when and where I should be. They are being tyrannical. They do not have control over me.
\end{itemize}
The other people immediately moved away from him. People looked rather anxiously at me to gauge my reaction to this.

*That's too strong,* somebody said.

With a smile I moved to that end of the room to join him, saying, 'that would be my position too, if I was a student.' Others were encouraged and joined in:

- *Don't know what you are worrying about. I AM learning. I've become more self-aware…;*
- *I know what I know and I don't have to be told;*

A student took up the 'staff' position and spoke from there:

- *You are all here to get a degree, there is learning contracts that you engage in when you enter university. This has to be fulfilled. You have paid and I get paid by the university to teach you. People should turn up. One cannot learn unless one attends. There is lot of preparation that goes into classes. Students cannot be trusted, we have to check up on you all of the time. We have given you freedom and you abuse it.*

There was silence in the class. The dominance, and oppressive force of the hegemonic voice became apparent. I realised that at this point the conflict could go underground, silenced. I stayed in opposition to the hegemonic voice and, (using my institutionally sanctioned position) spoke more strongly from the student position. I articulated resistance to the hegemony, challenging its tyrannical attitudes, hypocrisy, double standards, turning people back into little kids - bad ones and good ones. This brought cheers of agreement.

A student then demonstrated an interesting thing - his ability to see both sides. From the end representing the 'student position', he said *Just trust us!* He then ran to the end representing the staff position as he
noticed his thoughts changing and spoke from the opposite position. We want to trust you, but you keep letting us down.

A student added to this from the end supporting the staff position. He said:

- There were standards, self-responsibility, responsibility to others, learning to be a student and following the rules. If we don't have these things the course will not be worth anything.

There was another silence in response to this. There was also a growing awareness of the silence from the centre of the room. The centre was a space peopled by most of the students, who had not exercised a voice in the activity. I did not want to ask for participation. A tension that I juggled was between the use of my authority to demand participation and respecting people's silence (see Shor 1996; Lather 1991). Later (see chapter 8), this issue was talked about by some of these students. In retrospect it was at this point that I realised that by using the simple notion of polarities, discursive closure was occurring more than I would have liked. Then a student asked the people in the middle if they would speak. Many said no, but one young woman said:

- This is pointless, I can see everyone's point of view, so what's the use of arguing (an example of Salner's 'multiplist' position[17]).

There were many nods of agreement from the other students in the centre. Two spoke:

- I want to be treated like an adult. But some people are not reading; people do not make an effort to engage with learning and have fake assumptions and values within their own lives and classroom interactions.
Whatever we do, we are students—the reality is that we are part of a degree in a university and so are the staff.

These statements seemed like a reality check for the student body in more ways than one. While there was some truth in the statements, it also articulated the discursive power of the discourse. As younger members of the class, the oppressive force of educational institutions (the experiences of schooling) were recent, and they saw what we were doing as banging heads 'against the brick wall of authority'. The younger students' way of dealing with things was to 'knuckle under' and 'get on with things', meaning submitting to dominant educational practices. They were impatient with any attempts to empower students or change staff/student relationships. They saw it as 'a waste of time'. These statements alerted everyone to the fundamental power relationships that were shaping the space in the moment. They seemed a personal expression of the power of the staff position. One person however resisted these invitations and moved out of the line and stood on her own:

I want to remain stubborn, I am not going to comply. I understand the staff position, but my stand is a principle. There is a 'Clayton's' attitude to self-direction. The staff say you are self directed learners, but if you don't like the course, leave.

I recognised her as a person who would not negotiate; who would and did continue to exercise her resistance not in a 'local character of criticism' (Foucault 1980:81), but in terms of oppositional revolution.

She spoke to the staff directly:

I have been oppressed all my life by institutions and have undertaken endless journeys of self-reflection to overcome this. This time I will not
be (oppressed). You are in a position of power. I won't let it happen. You have to trust us.

This seemed a full amplification of the 'student position'. I also remembered Foucault's (1980:81) statement about the insurrection of subjugated knowledges; and 'that it is through the re-appearance of this knowledge, of these local popular knowledges, these disqualified knowledges, that criticism performs its work' (ibid.:82). This seemed one of those moments. What she was 'singing-up' was the knowledge (that all students have) of the power relations in the institution. It also heralded her 'outsight' (see second narrative).

I realised too that this moment could be an example of Friere's (1970) point about the first problem of education being the reconciliation of the student/teacher relationship. I acknowledged that she had 'talked up' the discourse constituting the arena, thus making visible the power relationships in the arena. I was about to ask her where we should go from here, considering we were both in an institution and governed by its rules when another student interrupted:

- In the gender workshop you didn't 'walk your talk' and support everyone in their positions, especially the guys, who were 'set up'.

That her criticism of my practice was possible, spoke to the space of resistance in the room. It also provided an opportunity to 'walk my talk'. It was, I consider, a critical moment for a (this) teacher. I decided to respond in a personal and heartfelt way.

I spoke briefly about my experience of the event, and the contradictions, and difficulties that I faced as I reflected on it. I agreed that I could have done differently and would if I had the opportunity again. There was silence - a comfortable silence. People thanked me for what I

H. Byrne-Armstrong PhD thesis 1999
said. They seemed satisfied that the event was due to my 'poor management' and my admission acknowledged this. After a break, I asked the group to reflect on what we had achieved and learnt through working with the conflict in this way:

- *This session has been important to me. I am becoming aware of me as a person. I have connected stories from different aspects of my life (in education) and am able to see why I do what I do and who I am;*

- *I am noticing my tendency to categorize people and make assumptions about them. For instance, when I notice people who aren't involved I decide it is because 'they are this or that type of person'... today in more than one case this categorising was completely wrong. I am learning to control this and become more my real self;*

- *Seeing the embodiment of the positions people take was instructive and connecting. When people were in a circle you couldn't see it;*

- *It was as though the huge differences in the class were invisible until we moved;*

- *Movement broke down the sense of hierarchy.*

Now, as I relate this, I see several ironic tensions at play. Was I engaging in 'confessional' practices here? And if so, was this to subsume the difference that existed between the students, and between the students and me, over this event? What would it have been like if I had kept the tension alive? What dialogue would we have had if the neat discursive closure (of confessional practices and conflict resolution methods) had not occurred. There were many other positions in the class. What knowledges were subsumed in the dialectic assumptions inherent in this method?
These questions led me to perform a discourse analysis on the statements by students in the conflict. By examining the statements, it is possible to explore the wealth of discourses informing the event. When these were teased out, simple conflict resolution methods based on polarities, became obviously inadequate.

'Local-Knowledge'...a second interpretation

how is power exercised? ...
Tracing through the statements and practices in this conflict narrative led me to identify (at least) two discourses for the purpose of my discussion. I have called these;

♦ Banker Education Discourse
♦ Discourse of Autonomy

Statements often include traces of more than one discourse and as such, may be quoted more than once with the emphasis on a different phrase. In this discourse analysis, I do not identify the social practices explicitly as in the previous two. In this discourse analysis, I aimed to deconstruct the conflict. Therefore I interrogate the statements in the conflict to unpack the meanings and more fully elicit the hegemonic cultural narratives that are informing it.

Banker Education Discourse ...

The first conflict expressed by students was the conflict represented by the following statements:
A normal class has got more information in it so I can listen and take notes. I am used to going away working on my own and learning something set by the teachers and writing about it ...;

I like more information so that you could go away and say I've learnt this ... I guess its more propositional knowledge but I like things to be clear cut and I'm not getting this ...;

The lecturers are vague ... classes are vague ... if I don't understand something I just ignore it and concentrate on something else (of my own choosing) ... I know I won't be examined on it ...

These students are speaking from a habitual position of passive learners (the object of mainstream educational discourse). They are envisaging a classroom situation in which they can be recipients of a didactic learning situation. In binary reasoning, they are speaking to what they perceive as a missing subject position in the experiential/radical classroom, that of 'teacher as expert'.

Experiential/radical learning texts are full of the issue of the problem of students taking up self-direction and autonomy in radical classrooms (see Mezirow 1981; Knowles 1975, 1990; Candy 1991; Boud, Cohen & Walker 1993). One simple response to this conflict is to classify and categorise students such as these, as a 'problem'. For example, Knowles (1975, 1990) terms these students 'immature' and even 'neurotic' as learners! (This is a good example of discursive closure - falling back into the hegemony of humanist, objectivist practices to close the dialogue).

Actually, the position of the self-directed, autonomous learner was also present:

We are here for education, to learn in our way, our time; that was the attraction of the course;

---

H. Byrne-Armstrong PhD thesis 1999
Learning isn't about lectures and attendance and stuff; it's about...the personal...me...and others...personal growth not just facts;

This is meant to be autonomous learning; I can make my own choices. This is the freedom to learn that the course espouses. I manage my own learning. Staff has no right to say when and where I should be. They are being tyrannical. They do not have control over me.

What is this conflict speaking to? As self-directed learners, why are these students still expressing frustration? These statements lead to the examination of another assumption supporting the rhetoric of this tradition. They allude to the shift found in radical/experiential classrooms. The shift from a 'teacher centered approach' to a 'learner centered approach', or from the content of the learning experience to the form/process (see Brah & Hoy 1989). However, the conflict arises, because this shift is euphemistic (another reversal of the hierarchy of a binary). The position of expert still exists. The shift is from a teacher who is expert in a discipline to a facilitator who is an expert in how people learn! (see Foley ed. 1995). The practices may have changed but the truth story (see chapter 2) has stayed the same.

Evidence can be found in the supermarket of universalising theories about the facilitation of learning and how learners achieve this (even though the research as to the effectiveness of these approaches is inconclusive - see Foley 1995). Instead of didactic teaching and prescriptions of knowledge, discursive closure is imposed on the learning arena through prescriptions about what makes a safe group or a trustworthy facilitator, recipes that encourage self reflection, manage conflict and chaos, universalistic rules for ethical practice, global recipes for harmony, group...
process (see Heron 1977a; Rogers 1983; Reason & Rowan eds. 1981), the list
goes on. 'Most of what goes on in mainstream education - the transmission
and acquisition of skills and knowledge, the vocational and intellectual
dimensions of education is [considered] unimportant' (Foley 1995:42).

The conflict arises because students are still the 'objects' of these
practices; they have shifted from being objects of a discourse that
constitutes them as empty vessels to be filled, to objects that need to be
organised, arranged and uncovered for learning to occur. The voice of
protest was loud and clear evidence of this:

♦ I like more information so that you can go away and say you have learnt this
and that. I like things to be clear cut;

♦ Classes can be a waste of time ...a normal class has got information in it
so I can listen and take notes. Something a bit more concrete;

♦ I am used to going away and researching something and writing about it
and not writing about, experience, reflections, and me - I found this
really hard;

♦ I can't see the point of these processy exercises. I'm here to learn not
navel gaze;

♦ Why do we do this stuff. It's not what I'm here for. Classes can be a
waste of time.

This conflict should alert teachers who are trying to teach in
different ways, to the danger in any method (Foucault's 1983a, 'everything is
dangerous' again). Thinking in terms of a pedagogy based on changing the
hierarchy of the binary opposition (from content to process), or even
practicing eclecticism (a 'bit of everything'), does not necessarily create a
situation that challenges the metaphysical presence of dialectic thinking or
the adversarial relationships that it produces, (as well as the terminal uniqueness of the Absolute Subject)\textsuperscript{18}.

**Discourse of Autonomy**

...we have a tradition of treating the student as a complete human being, with total responsibility for what he or she does (Rowan 1983:169).

The ‘self directed, autonomous subject’ is a goal that epitomises the ironic tension of radical/experiential education. Does it not represent the archetype of skin-encapsulated individualism, as well as being potentially capable of freeing people from the agendas of the state? That this subject position can be present in two discourses demonstrates the slippery boundaries and elusive nature of discourses\textsuperscript{19}, and the importance of keeping a critical eye on the way we move between them without noticing incongruities (inconsistencies\textsuperscript{20}). While we think we are challenging a hegemony, we (also) may be supporting it. This reveals the importance of discursive practices in showing the elusive and slippery nature of discourse and the reason why resistance/empowerment needs to be framed at local and particular levels. This is demonstrated in this event.

Autonomy is a compelling discourse that feeds conflict in radical/experiential classrooms:

- *This is meant to be autonomous learning: I can make my own choices. This is the freedom to learn that the course espouses. I manage my own learning. Staff have no right to say when and where I should be. They are being tyrannical. They do not have control over me;*

- *I know what I know and I don't have to be told;*
I want to remain stubborn, I am not going to comply. I understand the staff position, but my stand is a principle. There is a 'Clayton's' attitude to self-direction. The staff say you are self directed and autonomous learners, but if you don't like the course, leave.

The primacy of the freedom of the individual and their right/capacity to make choices about their lives is an idea deeply steeped in the Enlightenment tradition\textsuperscript{21} - in the notion of 'free will'. The above statements 'sing-up' the 'liberated agent' or 'autonomous subject' - one of the most widely described categories and contradictory commands\textsuperscript{22} in the humanist tradition of education (Rogers 1961; Cranton 1994; Brookfield 1986; Candy 1991). This notion, I would argue, is one of the most compelling for students, and the one that creates the most conflict.

Different writers view 'autonomy' from different perspectives. For example, Brookfield (op. cit.) defines autonomy as knowing that there is a range of options and responsibilities, whereas Rogers (op. cit.) considers it an innate disposition that develops as a person matures through learning. Candy believes that a person is autonomous when s/he 'can conceive of goals and plans; exercises freedom of choice; uses the capacity for rational reflection; has will power to follow through; exercises self-restraint and self-discipline; and views himself or herself as autonomous' (1991:125). For Knowles (1990) this subject is highly motivated and has skills to find the resources he/she needs to meet their own objectives in a chosen content, thus exercising the right of free choice:

The attendance problem doesn't apply to me personally - I come, but what pisses me off is the attitude, the school kid routine. It was very
patriarchal in a way I don’t even know if I’ve got the energy to deal with. It feels like a lifetime struggle with these attitudes.

This subject is also 'mature', autonomy being the singular factor that marks a 'mature' subject. In a developmental (humanist) structure, 'learners mature from dependency (little free choice) to independence (autonomy) in their learning' (see Knowles 1990:55). Independence is characterised by people being 'responsible for their own decisions, for their own lives' (ibid:58). Brookfield and Candy agree that becoming an autonomous subject is becoming free of distorted meaning perspectives - gaining the mastery so loved by the Enlightenment tradition. This would seem to imply that not only is this mastery possible it is highly desirable:

- I am noticing my tendency to categorise people and make assumptions about them. For instance when I notice people who aren't involved I decide it is because 'they are this or that type of person'...in more than one case this categorising was completely wrong. I am learning to control this and become more my real self.

One conflict arises because, although the rhetoric of this position would promote the autonomous learner, autonomy can never be achieved because the context is shaped by a discourse that precludes autonomy. Any educational setting, by virtue of it being an institution, will have difficulty constituting autonomous learners. But, local resistance is possible. However, any 'resistance' is usually embedded in humanistic psychology\textsuperscript{23}, and pays homage to subjective experience as the final truth. The fire of the conflict is fuelled by this truth being associated with the notion of 'free will' and Maslow's\textsuperscript{24} needs discourse. How is this so?
Subjective experience is considered the foundation for learning and growth (see Rogers 1961) and is the basis on which this tradition was developed (see Mezirow 1975; Knowles 1975, 1990). 'Experience is the foundation of, and stimulus for, learning' (see Boud, Cohen & Walker 1993).

- Learning isn't about lectures; it's about the personal ... me ... personal growth not just facts;
- I'm learning ... I've become more self-aware;
- I know what I know, I do not have to be told.

Subjective experience in this discourse, is a fixed entity that exists in its own right and comes with a person into the learning arena. In other words, it is pre-social and reified. It comes from the a priori stance of metaphysical subjectivity (see Falzon 1998). It is the view of a separate, individual psyche that stands outside culture and society and looks on the world through its individual perspective. The perspective of such a psyche is shaped by an individual's 'inner' life. In this discourse, the inner life is the source of meanings, the origin of explanations and the authoritative evidence that arbitrates what is known. As Rogers (1961:23) said, 'experience ... is the highest authority ... no other person's ideas, and none of my own ideas, are as authoritative as my experience'. In other words, it is the source from which we learn and that which explains our perspectives - a solipsistic twist.

'Free-will' underpins this discourse and 'development' within it. The development is from dependence to autonomy. When this is challenged the discourse of rights is evoked:

- This is meant to be autonomous learning; I can make my own choices. This is the freedom to learn that the course espouses. I manage my own

H. Byrne-Armstrong PhD thesis 1999
learning. Staff has no right to say when and where I should be. They are being tyrannical. They do not have control over me;

- I want to remain stubborn, I am not going to comply. I understand the staff position, but my stand is a principle. There is a 'Clayton's' attitude to self-direction. The staff say, 'You are self directed an autonomous learners, but if you don't like the course, leave';

- I don't like the lack of communication amongst the staff, the values and beliefs of not validating my experience.

The problem with this (and the source of the conflict), is that subjective experience is never fully subjective. The conflict occurs because of the inconsistency between the selves demanded by the two intersecting discourses; the demand for autonomy and free will expressed through subjective experience, and the demand for compliance in a institutional setting also expressed through subjective experience. So-called subjective experience is an interpretation occurring through language, discourse and social interaction. As our contexts change, so do our subjectivities and identities. Experience is a narrative; it is discontinuous, arbitrary, fragmented and contingent. This partiality and ambiguity can be explained in at least two ways; firstly it is partial in the sense that people are situated in time and space, therefore their experience is limited by a particular location. Secondly, it is partial in the sense that people hold different positioning in a social sense - from different social classes, roles and occupational categories. These complexities of location will create differences, similarities, and contradictions in perception. We need recourse to an outer social life to make sense of them. Subjective experience, therefore, can never be generalised without re-presentation (see Mangena
1994), and the subjectivities/identities that we are so convinced about are but flimsy cardboard cutouts in the winds of life. Subjectivity cannot be separated from the social conditions that construct it. Giroux puts it beautifully:

Educators [should] problematise how the act of knowing is related to the power of self definition, how experience can be understood within its discursive construction ... it is not individuals who have experience, but subjects who are constituted through experiences. Experience in this definition then becomes not the origin of explanation, not the authoritative evidence, the ground that is known, rather, that which we seek to explain, that about which knowledge is produced (1994:120)

From this perspective the notion of a self directed, autonomous subject and its truth (subjective experience), is problematic if we think in terms of autonomy as 'self governing, independent and subject to one's own laws'. The autonomy that we gain is not a private and personal achievement, but is shaped by, and a constant negotiation with, the social and public contexts we inhabit.

Autonomy also has built into it the notion of a subject who is a 'whole person', for example, 'experiencing [the inner world] fully, vividly, selflessly, with full concentration and full absorption... at this moment the person is wholly and fully human'. (Maslow in Rowan 1983:114). Statements abound in the literature on the importance of 'knowing oneself' (see Rowan 1983; Mezirow 1991; Knowles 1990; Candy 1991). Rogers emphasises the whole person as 'the will to be that self which one truly is ... is the responsibility of man' (1961:110). For Maslow (1970) anything short of this was considered neurotic, unhealthy or psychologically unbalanced. The revealing
of the 'real' self from the folds of the distorting images we build up - and their defence mechanisms produced by these distortions - is an important goal and the drive behind the notion of 'whole person learning' (see Rogers 1983; Mezirow 1991; Cranton 1994). According to these writers becoming a whole person opened the door to a mature and self directed learner with control and mastery over one's life/situation.

- *I am learning, I've become more aware, this is a personal process;*
- *I know what I know, I do not have to be told.*

Students, in this lineage are encouraged to share their feelings, to enter into the learning arena with 'heart as well as head' (Rogers:ibid.):

- *I'm scared ... I don't want to be seen taking a stand;*
- *Personal conflicts inhibit me from being more part of the community;*
- *I feel threatened and wary in the group;*
- *There are no understandings and shared values - this makes me feel threatened and unsafe.*

The whole person has entered the arena and with it contestation and conflict. The result is that the counseling and/or learning continuum dances in the nexus between mastery/order and desire\(^{27}\)/chaos. This is the often invisible field of action that a teacher in this tradition must negotiate. The conflict arises because our wants, needs and desires are not private, finite, or individualistic, but incomplete, culturally shaped and intersubjective (see Usher & Edwards 1994), hence the ever present potential for disruption and chaos in the learning space:

- *Double standards abound;*
- *We need to know about conflict not do it;*
This course is confusing. Why don’t they (staff) agree on one thing and tell us what to do.

Efforts to control and master classroom processes (in the modernist sense) will result in shaping the space with the alienation and isolation often characteristic of modernist classrooms. However, when limits are loosened and conflicting discourses and desires named or tolerated in the radical/experiential classroom, the door is opened to a flood of hidden desires and needs and the potential disruption from persistently intrusive behaviours:

- I want uniform directives to make me feel safe,
- I don’t like the lack of communication amongst the staff, the values and beliefs of not validating my experience;
- Pre-conceived judgments have ruined my engagement with the learning community;
- I am not part of the community because my experiences and explanations are gagged before I can articulate them.

This places the educator in a paradox, walking the ironic tension between:

- Controlling the space through various forms of discursive closure (from behaviour modification to conflict resolution methods);
- Opening it for the ambiguity and chaos of multiple realities and a politics of difference, or;
- Simply ignoring the conflict and continuing the tasks at hand.

While the situation continues to be dealt with through more mainstream ideas, including recipes for conflict and group work, the discourses constituting the conflict remain unexamined. However, all that these
methods effectively achieve, is to reinforce the power inherent in the institutional structure. 'Responding simplistically to ... conflicts by being endlessly supportive, basing this response on the [humanist] assumption that the group will ultimately achieve a satisfactory and healthy outcome' (Newman 1994:75), at least, perpetuates the implicit power in the situation, and, at the most, inflames it.

If complete knowledge or mastery is not possible in a modernist or a humanist sense, it is sentimental and naive to think that eternal harmony is possible; the signified is always the signifier for the next thing and end points are fuzzy and boundaries fluid and changing. This is the dance alluded to earlier, and the response must lie with individual teachers and their comfort around chaos within their institutional responsibilities. While there is a duty of care in the radical/experiential classroom, recognition of the tension inherent within this duty is important. At this point of time, and after testing the ground, I agree with Newman's commentary on the work of Foley (see Newman 1994):

Foley says, [the teacher] should make explicit what is expected of the learners by setting clear boundaries between themselves and the learners, by being more prepared to challenge learners and by resisting being emotionally and intellectually dumped on' (ibid.:75).

I would also add to this. Boundaries are fixed things. There is no reified structure between students and teachers; only a discourse with rules and regulations. To understand the rules of the discourse and to be critically reflective allows limits to be negotiated, local, and fluid (the 'limit attitude' that Foucault talks about²⁹). In any field of action, paradox, difference and contradiction exist. To acknowledge limits without resorting
to a construction of otherness (and therefore rigid boundaries) is to practice a narrative epistemology.

reflecting on new learnings...

Obviously this conflict was useful to some people. It was dissatisfying for staff and led me to want to explore more. Although an innovative method for working with conflict, it did not seem to shift the cause or to be helpful to students who were looking for more agency as students. It was useful to me in that it sent me on another exploration of the theories informing the work and the assumptions that I was operating from.

More ‘Dead-Certainties’
conflict, desire & other ...

Cixous constantly asks: what about the possibility of a movement towards other with no need to overcome or negate, that is destroy; a desire in which the other, and the otherness of the relation between is not only acknowledged but welcomed? It is precisely this relation which points to the impossibility of an absolute knowledge, knowledge in possession of itself (in Game & Metcalf 1996)

Hegel was the modernist philosopher who struggled with notions of desire and otherness and formulated them into a framework that would become the basis for western social relationships. He was one of the first philosophers who critiqued the abstract, metaphysical subjectivism/truth that had dominated philosophy up until this point (Falzon 1998). He presented consciousness/knowledge as the desire to dominate the external
world (the 'other'). This, Hegel thought, was done by a process of questioning the categorical frameworks that people use because they can apprehend that, within these frameworks, there are always contradictions - the presence of an 'otherness' that can never be resolved. Hence, for Hegel, understanding or resolution was not possible; it would always be finite and partial:

In this state of satisfaction ... the consciousness of oneself has experience of the independence of its object. Desire and the certainty of its self, obtained in the gratification of desire, are conditioned by the object; for the certainty exists in canceling this other. In order that this canceling may be effected, there must be this other. Self-consciousness is thus unable to negate by its negative relation to the object to abolish it; because of that relation it rather produces it again, as well as the desire (Hegel in Watzlawick 1984).

This would seem an advance from the Kantian and Cartesian notions of a complete knowledge based on a abstract, metaphysical 'truth'. Hegel gave theory feet. He heralded the beginning of the movement later taken up by Marx, then Foucault and other post-humanists, that re-wrote knowledge as material and historically constructed; that there was no deep meaning in things, or consciousness that existed separate to action; knowledges are narratives produced by people in a particular place and time to fit certain agendas.

But, Hegel also restated an Aristotelian idea (of logos) when he said that 'what is important in human activity is not the actions of people seen simply as events, but the thought and consciousness of which actions are outward expressions' (see Taylor 1993:49). So, although Hegel pointed the way to giving theory feet, he would not go so far as to 'surrender entirely to
[a material] and historical interplay' (Falzon 1998:25). By proposing that there is a consciousness before human action he has fallen back to the standpoint of a metaphysical subject (Absolute Subject). From this standpoint;

the movement of history is interpreted as the process of the Absolute Subject's self-development and actualisation, through the various historical forms of life, in the course of which reason comes fully to govern social and moral practices (Falzon 1998:29)

If the thought processes that underpin conscientization 'are logical and, because they evolve dialectically in the synthesis of the relationship between self and other, then history itself is inherently dialectical' (Taylor 1993:49). Our apprehension/desire of other and the conflict and contradiction it provokes is resolved into a synthesis; the transformative moment of knowledge. This rational synthesis is organised according to the self's (Hegel's Absolute Subject) sense of self-certainty (and consciousness) over its own understandings. Furthermore, the transformative moment is a moment that reassures this self-certainty, so the desire for an alienated other is actually the desire for other as a mirror of the self - a colonised 'other'.

This is why feminist scholars31 in particular, (women are one of the construed 'others') have heavily critiqued Hegel's notion of desire. As Benhabib said, Hegel's model privileges metaphysical subjectivity;

... even when attempts are made to understand intersubjectivity and the relation between selves, they are construed in terms of the interaction of consciousness 'from my mind to your mind, from my consciousness to your consciousness', rather than in terms of a social and linguistic interaction which constitutes the self. In other words,
in the philosophy of consciousness, individuation precedes sociation, rather than seeing individuation proceeding only under conditions of situation (1986:242-3)32

Hegel's dialectic construction is problematic in, at least, two ways:

- any movement towards other is so that the self can come back to its self, more sure and more knowing than before, so the result is a colonised other, and;

- the 'other' is only determined by what is not self - an 'other' that is negative and alienated.

As such, 'the supremacy of the self is never decisively challenged or subverted by the encounter with that which is other. In the form of the Hegelain dialectic, the interplay between self and other is ultimately a one-sided conversation in which the self takes back what it has lost, overcoming that which is other and returning to itself' (Falzon 1998:24).

This is this issue that Foucault and other French post-humanist thinkers have challenged. As Foucault said:

> In actuality, dialectics does not liberate differences; it guarantees, on the contrary, that they can always be recaptured. The dialectical sovereignty of similarity consists of permitting differences to exist, but only under the rule of the negative, as an instance of non-being. They may appear as the successful subversion of the Other, but contradiction secretly assists in the salvation of identities (Foucault in Falzon 1998)

Although Hegel's dialectic appears to make room for the other, it does not. Hegel's scenario 'I desire the recognition of an other, I need the other to
act as a mirror; but if you are to be my mirror you must be the same as me, any
difference would threaten my identity\textsuperscript{33} precluded this.

If the space is open for otherness to be given a voice, a contested
field will be constituted. In the 'dead-certainties' of this narrative, making
the dialectic process visible and working with it to reach a 'reason-able'
resolution, was to negate the existence of otherness as otherness. From the
response of many class members, it silenced otherness. The discourse
analysis demonstrated the complexity of any field of action and the
varieties of difference and otherness that existed (in spite of appearances
to the contrary). From this complexity, it is also possible to see why
simplistic recipes for conflict resolution, while appearing to 'work', actually
work to suppress difference and colonise the 'other'.

Inviting the other in - implicitly a negated and alienated other -
subsumes it into the dominant narrative. Freire spoke about 'the right and
the duty of the liberating teacher to undertake the transformation of
student consciousness' (Shor & Freire 1987:176). This implies that student
consciousness is 'other' than the teacher, is therefore negative and alien,
and needing to be transformed into the consciousness that the teacher
holds. The teacher gestures towards this 'other' in order to pull it into the
(higher level) consciousness\textsuperscript{34} (which s/he holds). That Freire would propose
this is not surprising, considering his embeddedness in Aristotelian logic,
Marxism and in the notion of the dialectic (see Taylor 1993)\textsuperscript{35}. But, in a
world where difference is a daily occurrence and more voices are being
heard, a re-working of Hegel is necessary. What would classroom practices
look like if the other which is other had a place, in which both parties were
kept alive (Andermat Conley 1992), a life giving desire which as Cixous said,
'would keep the other alive and different' (in Game & Metcalf 1996).
'Thick-Descriptions' – singing up new practices...

other as other ...

What follows is an account of an event that was the first time that I put these ideas into practice\textsuperscript{36}. The students were mature aged and had been working together for several months.

A story from my journal

Following a lecture on the formation of docile bodies (see Foucault 1977), the students asked questions about surveillance and self-policing (internalised self-criticism). They were curious about the difference between viewing this mechanism from a humanist position and a poststructuralist one. I invited an (external) criticism to illustrate the point. One quickly came.

*Why don’t you just tell us clearly what to do – an essay topic, the number of words and teach us how to pass. This course is too vague.*

My first response was a stab of fear; I faltered to catch my breathing in the act of stopping. This was the life and death struggle that Hegel (op. cit.) talked about. The moment when the other is challenging my world and the demonic force to colonise this other was upon me. I let my breath go to detach. I began to feel excited. These are the moments that I feel alive as a teacher, a moment when I live the tension of my position, challenged and provoked.

*‘Tell me more’: This invites openness, and quells the monster that has appeared from the depths. It is the beginning of the life and death struggle, the struggle between colonising and not colonising this other into my being, between attacking back or defending against the ‘attack’ and then subsuming her knowledge into my own (and thus homogenising the difference), or leaving it free, as other. This is not like a normal class where one is lectured at, given an assignment and asked to submit it. We interact so much it becomes pointless. I don’t want to hear from others. I want to hear from you. You know this stuff. Just tell us.*

---

H. Byrne-Armstrong PhD thesis 1999
I checked out with the rest of the class. Nobody (owned up) to agreeing. There was a tense silence in the class.

I decide to take a stand for social action rather than for psychology! I asked her permission to explore the issue more before I answered her directly. She nodded. I asked the class:

What discourses are operating in the statements? What subject positions are being constituted and what sort of relationships are present here?

The students identified the (now familiar to them) dominant social practices of education constituting the classroom space. These ranged from the subject position I inhabited, as 'expert', 'passive learners', and the position of the 'critic', the social practices that were usually associated with this (silence, counter-attack, defence), and the social practices that were informing her 'talk'. They were also fascinated that my asking them this had side-stepped these usual social practices and had left the space open for other things to occur.

After the deconstruction and ensuing discussion I asked the class if this action had changed the criticism and how. Someone said that it had been useful to gain another view of the conflict and a deeper understanding of the 'assumptions' behind the statements. This took the heat out of the conflict, as well as acknowledging the presence of the 'other'.

But another student disagreed:

You can't just process things like that, you have to address her issue.
I replied, I am addressing her issue.

The first student said, But what about the needs I expressed?

I replied, Your needs are important to you. They are also your responsibility. My responsibility is to try to lessen the impact of dominant discourses on this classroom space.

The rest of the class joined in. The space was constituted differently. People began to share stories about teaching situations they had been in when they were not heard, when a conflict was ignored, or when they had felt criticised, and a teacher

H. Byrne-Armstrong PhD thesis 1999
had ignored a criticism and pathologised them. They talked about the difference between this way of dealing with the conflict and other ways.

The first student reported to me next week: *that was an important moment for me. As a trainer I have always been scared of criticism so I have kept a very tight reign on the class. Now I have loosened off and I am more willing to let things flow and listen to people more openly.*

**dramatic interrogations ...**

Another way of working with the ever-present dance between conflict, power and desire within a narrative epistemology (working to interrogate the discourses and therefore the meanings that people bring to a conflict, rather than the people and their consciousness) is the use of dramatic pedagogies. Boal’s Theatre of the Oppressed and Forum Theatre (see Boal 1992) is one example of this. It is a particularly useful tool in demonstrating how subjectivity is produced through the coercive power of discourses and therefore the interplay of agency and subjectivity. Even though it is associated with radical and neo-Marxist education (and therefore based on the idea of people developing a higher consciousness), I have found it a very useful form to use for interrogating discourses - another form of externalising conversation within a narrative epistemology.

Theatre in its oldest sense is the ability that we, as humans, have of ‘making ourselves object of ourselves’ (see Armstrong 1994), to observe ourselves thinking, laughing, moving, breathing, the ability to even observe ourselves in the act of observation. In this way it is useful in encouraging the performative aspects of narratives and therefore our disconnection from reified truths (see chapter 5).

---

H. Byrne-Armstrong PhD thesis 1999
Boal (1992) saw theatre as a profane ritual making visible, what author, David Malouf in a recent interview called, 'the little sacraments of the everyday'. In this way it is also fitting of a narrative epistemology. In the performance of everyday practices (and therefore the disconnection from taken-for-granted knowledges), there is exposed, the objectifying, and often coercive practices of the discourses constituting the field (and the subjectivities within them). As this is played with, the fissures and cracks in these discourses are also made more visible, thus the room for agency is constituted. Theatre, then, is particularly suited to the paradoxical play between agency and subjectivity, and another means of holding the space open for this ironic tension to be fully explored. As a pedagogic form, it also helps reflexivity and accountability - making sure that the pedagogy of the activity fits the activity of the pedagogy.

How it holds the space open is:

♦ It de-centres the teacher, thus opening the space for more voices in the classroom. In Boal's work, the audience is never passive, they are invited into the drama as spect-actors (Boal 1992) to enact and offer alternative narratives and solutions. The drama is also chosen by the group as a whole, ensuring that multiple knowledge(s) are present and expertise in common oppressions is acknowledged. This in turn leads to a collective pooling of knowledge/action and experience (the aim of Boal's theatre within Freire's project);

♦ As a form of externalising conversation, it materializes knowledge and thus demonstrates the concrete and historically constructed nature of it by exposing taken-for-granted practices as the means through which people, in these contexts, make sense. It shows that oppressions and problems of any form are not just abstractions, they are actions on living

H. Byrne-Armstrong PhD thesis 1999
breathing bodies whose response is visible and tangible through gesture
and movement as well as language39;

- The dramatic form is all embracing of this connection; the gestures and
  movements of the body in theatre create the verisimilitude of the
  narrative. The abstracted dialectic and binary forms (and their
  discursive privilege) are disrupted and disturbed and the space is opened
  for other knowledge(s) to be produced in the immediacy of the event.

What follows is an account from my journal of a group of students using
forum theatre to explore issues of power in their work.

Another story from my Journal
The group40 divided into several groups. Their responsibility was to tell stories
about particular incidences of power/oppressions in their work/lives and to create a
scene that would be played in front of the rest of the class in the format of Forum
Theatre. In this format, the scene is acted completely from beginning to end, once.
It is then repeated and members of the audience (spect-actors) are invited to call
'stop' at any time and go into the scene and take over the role of the protagonist.
The aim is to see if the ending of the drama can be changed through an intervention
that sings up a change of plot.

One group had two members who worked in an old person's Nursing Home.
They chose as a group to show a scene which represented to them the power and
oppressive nature of the medical discourse. The scene represented an occurrence at
the Nursing Home the day before in which one of them had been present but felt
unable to intervene.

the scene...
The man severely disabled by a stroke, sitting or more descriptively lolling in a
chair, his eyes unfocussed, his head lowered, a hand tied to the chair arm, his legs in

---

H. Byrne-Armstrong PhD thesis 1999
front of him, one functional and one skewed to the side. He was dressed in his dressing gown. Although seemingly unable to respond, he obviously was in some way from the agitation that showed in his body when people spoke. A woman, the man's wife, was standing next to him, obviously very agitated and anxious to have him home, but she knew that to do this she needed help. The doctor was in a rush. He was flitting from bed to bed and only interested in telling her the medical diagnosis and its ramifications rather than consider and hearing her requests for help.
The group played out this scene to an end where the wife was in tears and helplessly sitting beside her husband whose demeanor had become more and more dejected and lost. The doctor had hurried on.
The group played out the scene once and the group discussed what was going on.
They then repeated the scene and spectators entered it.
Intervention one: A spect-actor came in and gave support to the woman, physically and verbally, using her youth and her knowledge to challenge the doctor's behaviour.
The doctor upped the display, asserting his greater authority/power/knowledge.
Intervention two: Another came in and appealed to his humanitarianism.
The doctor did not respond.
Intervention three: A spect-actor came in and suggested to the woman that she take her husband and leave the hospital. She replied that she was too scared to do that because something might happen to him and she would feel responsible.
Intervention four: A spect-actor came in and suggested to the doctor that he had done all he could and that his role was now over.
The doctor looked most surprised and then relieved and thanked the person and hurried on.
The group agreed that this had been the only intervention that had made a difference.
Discussion after the event included:
♦ The breadth of power assigned to the medical discourse. Many thought that it was broader than its capabilities. The group thought that
the role of the doctor should be limited to a technical one. The group discussed whether the dismissal of the doctor was a 'support of the medical discourse or a challenge to it'. There were divided opinions on this.

- The fissure in the medical discourse that the spect-actor had seen was the hurried and harried demeanour of the doctor. This view gave the clue to the intervention that s/he performed;

- Group members thought that this intervention needed to be expressed as a collective one; that it heralded the necessity for more individual agency in health and well-being.

Performances like this enable people to see the complexity of interactions that people are immersed in every day. Because the drama is a framed activity that is bracketed off from the everyday world, a stance of critical distance is more readily available to people. I have noticed that what usually happens is that the group requests that the scene be acted not once, but several times before the spect-actors feel ready to intervene. This was especially the case one night when a group presented a sexual harassment drama. The first reaction seemed one of trance. There was disbelief and denial about the social practices portrayed in the event. It was not until the group had enacted it several more times did people begin to intervene. There could be several interpretations of this. In these dramas, when social practices are made apparent there is often an emotional response. This adds a quality of engagement to the space, but it often takes a while for students to disengage from this response (in the face of the dominant rational discourses constituting the educational space) and to join in. In the last example, it could also have heralded the power of gendered discourses. The closer we are to the unmarked categories (see chapter 4) in these discourses, the less likely we are to be disconnected from them. The

---

H. Byrne-Armstrong PhD thesis 1999
performance enables this disconnection, but at times this takes several attempts.

reflecting on new knowledges...

Used as a 'disciplined art form' (see Salvio in Carson & Sumara 1997), forum theatre offers a way of analyzing situations in terms of the social and political agendas that are shaping them. Through them the web of connections between daily interactions and dominant discourses can be unpacked and spread before us. Self and subjectivity are therefore examined in the acts of construction. This immediacy leaves no-one on the outer, thinking that they are privileged and exempt. The interventions are always creative and often disruptive to 'other' subjectivities as well as other's agency.

In a conversation after the event, the student reported that seeing this drama had changed her attitude to her work at the nursing home. No longer was she just there to divert people away from the reality of their existence. She became aware of the politics of the situation that the patients were in and began to intervene more confidently when she saw someone depersonalised by the system. She became a diversional therapist of a different sort; collecting their stories; listening to their histories and engaging in 'externalising conversations' to ease their pain. She also formed a group and asked people about their experiences of the hospital; a sort of 'patient's action' group.
concluding the narrative...

This completes this chapter and its investigation of conflict. Re-configuring conflict through poststructuralist notions of power and desire has been a fruitful journey. It has revealed the subtle ways that humanism/modernist discourses maintain power and control against so-called resistance and radicalism. Any illusions that I may have held about 'resolving' conflict have been deconstructed, and this process has strengthened my convictions about the importance of the power-knowledge interface in shaping conflict and difference. I regard a narrative epistemology as the means by which understandings can be reached rather than conflicts solved. After this investigation I think that it is problematic to reduce difference and 'solve' it (this is just another colonising process). What I think is more important is to acknowledge the difference and find the underlying discourses of power/truth that are informing any difference as well as the assumptions and actions that these produce. These understandings lead people to act and interact in different ways. We do not need prescriptions to guide behaviour, we need understandings to re-author narratives.

---

1 Again the core learning unit in the undergraduate course in Social Ecology, UWS.
2 Their framing of it.
3 See chapter 1.
4 Enantiodromy from the 44th fragment of Heraclitus 'changing into its opposite is the harmony which permeates the opposition' (Watzlawick 1984).
5 See chapter 5.
6 A masters subject in Introduction to Critical Psychology.
7 Chapter 3.
8 This work was the first methods for working with conflict in large groups in Process Oriented Psychology. For the latest book in these methods see Mindell (1995).
9 Reported from research journal and tape transcription.
10 Positioning is a poststructuralist interpretation of the psycho-social notion of a 'role' the fixed and static aspect of a person (described by Mead 1934), that emerges as we interact with our social environments and take up identities within them (nurse, teacher, policeman) (see Connell 1983). A role

H. Byrne-Armstrong PhD thesis 1999
refers to fixed and individual characteristics thus emphasising the fixedness of identity rather than identity being fluid and changing. A 'position' rather than a role, alludes to this fluidity - to the relationship that constitutes it, a dynamic, fluid and shifting relationship.

See footnote 4 (see also Armstrong 1994). For Mindell, a conflict will come to a temporary rest if both sides are heard, if they can step into each others shoes, and if the feelings can be expressed and understood.

Perhaps the might of the authority of the institution and my position within it was too hard to resist!

Another example of using my authority to assist the process.

From the Greek term 'hegemon', meaning ruler or leader. In the 20th century, hegemony is the term used by the neo-Marxist, Gramsci to mean the invisible taken-for-granted ways that the ruling classes gain/maintain economic and social power.

Another example of footnotes 13 & 14.

See chapter 4.

See Hegel (1977) - a discussion of this is further on in this narrative.

In the Archeology of Knowledge, Foucault says that it is not possible to reduce discursive practices to familiar categories of individual worldviews or academic disciplines. The regularity emerges in its articulation not before it (1972).

I.e. we don't really have to verify them to produce a coherent self. In fact we operate with 'incoherent' selves and believe them to be unitary and skin encapsulated.

And, in this context most frequently found in the writings associated with experiential learning and humanistic psychology.

When people are seen as not autonomous their inconsistencies generate the notion of hypocrisy which in turn legitimises 'rebellion', which is mistaken for 'resistance'.

And therefore based on defiance of 'contradictory' instructions which can be seen as rebellion against authority, social justice, rights etc.

See chapter 3.

Macquarie Dictionary.

Even Freire was captured by this discourse when he talks about the humanisation process (see 1970), although for him this included the context as well as the inner being.

Desire is being used in a poststructuralist sense as the constant gestures we have towards other for knowledge. A desire that can never be fulfilled.

In which the teacher responds from the position of the 'lifelong learner' - one who continually adapts either to a social order or to the needs of the individual learner with the ultimate goal of universal peace and harmony (see Newman 1994).

See chapter 2.

The famous image used by Hegel is that of the different worldviews of the master and slave. Hegel proposed that consciousness of the self demands the recognition of the selfhood of others. The slave master, by not seeing the slave as a human being, deprives himself of knowledge of his own humanness (in Freire 1982).

See for example, Cixous in Andermat Conley, Irigaray, Benhabib (see bibliography).

Quoted in McNay (1992).

Quoted in Gane & Metcalf (1996).

Precisely what Marx meant by 'false consciousness' and 'ideology'.

He speaks of 'the dialectic operation which most characterises human beings' (quoted in Taylor 1993:47) and is informed by the notion of people reaching freedom through stages of consciousness.

This event occurred in a masters course on Power, and Social Dynamics within a masters degree in critical psychology. It was several weeks into the term and students were undertaking a discourse analysis of their practices. Each week a different group would present their findings and the class would discuss them. This student was used to a more 'traditional style of teaching and was obviously frustrated by interactive learning. The group were discussing the Panopticon (see Foucault 1977).

See chapter 6.


See footnote 7 - chapter 8.

H. Byrne-Armstrong PhD thesis 1999
This occurred in a subject titled, *Power, Therapy and Social Dynamics* in a masters program in critical psychology.

*This student was employed as a 'diversional therapist'.

See chapter 6.

This was written as a project for her assessment.

Chapter Eight

EMBODIMENT: 'SINGING-UP' A BODY OF KNOWLEDGE

Written on the body is a secret code
only visible in certain lights:
the accumulations of a lifetime
gathered there.

In places the palimpsest is so heavily worked that the letters feel like Braille.

(Winterson 1992)
Introducing the Narrative

This narrative is the story of an incident in the undergraduate course described in the other narratives. The 'dead-certainties' involve a narrative account (from my research journal and tape) of a classroom event that occurred spontaneously (in that it was not part of the curriculum plan) at the end of the conflict session reported in the previous narrative. I was at the time engrossed in the phenomenological world of Mindell's process-oriented psychology. Following the communication signals in the group led me to suggest an activity to finish off for the morning; the description of this is the 'dead-certainty'. The activity was initially a non-verbal exercise that involved movement and arrangement of bodies within the classroom space.

It was one of the many times that I had overcome the cultural norms of the classroom space and utilised non-verbal body/movement as relevant to the classroom and knowledge production. Then, like others, introduced to Foucault's Discipline and Punish (1977), I became hesitant, (a hesitancy only reinforced by his later works on the confessional - see chapter 6). A theoretical exploration (more dead-certainties) led me away from, and back to, using physical forms of pedagogic practices.

The 'local-knowledge' in this narrative is not a discourse analysis of the text in the 'dead-certainty'. It is the description of practice that is a form of discourse analysis. This is done to bring together research and the practice more visibly. It is the story of another initially non-verbal/movement activity which uses all the tools of a form of 'external conversation' to reveal the body's conversation with the classroom space. It deconstructs the taken for granted practices that arrange the body to fulfill certain social and political agendas in the classroom space.

The 'thick-descriptions' are two stories of pedagogic practices that demonstrate a challenge to the binary construction of the mind/body split.

H. Byrne-Armstrong PhD thesis 1999
They describe the ways that self is constructed through conversation and through writing; an exploration of the connection between knower/known. In each description there is a demonstration that complex theories are embodied; self is a shifting landscape of engagement in conversation and writing; an art form which is constructed through resistance to dominant cultural narratives.

The chapter concludes with an afterword on the ironic tension that is present when practising in this way; a discussion of the paradox of these activities and the necessity for someone engaging in them to be aware of their implication in the disciplinary practices of surveillance and regulation.

'Dead-Certainties' - the body speaks its mind ...

Report from my Journal

The previous session had run out of steam. There was a silence in the room. I let it 'hang' for several minutes. After some time I suggested we had finished. No one moved. In fact there was a quiet stillness in the room. I was fascinated by the lack of movement. I let the silence run. Nobody stirred. The room of 30 odd people remained quiet and still. I noticed the lack of movement again. This 'lack of movement', in Mindell's terms is a communication signal in the perceptual channel of movement. My choice was to pick this up and amplify it. Eventually, I decided to take a punt and I said:

I would like you to imagine that this space bounded by the chairs is representative of this learning community. Move and position yourself somewhere in the space to represent where you would position yourself in terms of others and this group as a whole.

People, without hesitation, quickly and quietly moved. Several stayed on the outside, there were a couple of heaps of people. Some lay down, others sitting both singly and in groups. People were facing different directions around the space, three were on the edge holding hands. One young man on the outside

H. Byrne-Armstrong PhD thesis 1999
of the circle did a headstand against the wall, another on the outer edge, knelt and faced the door. One very active and outspoken student did not move and sat with his arms crossed.

I asked everybody in and out of the circle to say something from the position they had chosen:

- *I can be in the middle and on the outside - depending where I am in the moment.*
- *Compared to first session*, we are now taking responsibility for ourselves as members of this group;
- *The 'I and we' are both present.*

The group asked the man who had stayed in his chair (outside the circle why he was there. As another student said:

- *You are a member, you are one of the strongest and most powerful energies in the group, why are you out there?*

He replied:

- *I feel as though people push their worldviews on me and mine is not heard. I want to be different which at times is lonely - AND I want to be heard and accepted. We are a group and we should listen to each other and respect each other's opinions.*

The woman replied:

- *There is no 'we'. Don't speak for me please. That was an example of you pushing your worldview onto me.*

The man was puzzled until I suggested that the use of the pronoun 'we' may have connoted an enforced cohesiveness. He stayed where he was, then, as others began to speak he moved into the centre of the circle.

Others commented that engaging in this activity was more powerful than the previous session:

- *I want to say that this is the important stuff - getting on with each other. This is what learning/communities should be about, being together and being real with each other.*

Others added to this:

---

H. Byrne-Armstrong PhD thesis 1999
♦ I am usually a silent one. I am one of the criticisers of this sort of thing. I want to say that this morning has been very valuable to me, particularly now, and I am actually enjoying this.

This student's voice opened the space for other silent people to join in:
♦ I am also a silent one. I am a shy one, but I do have opinions. I choose often not to bring them out. This has helped me;
♦ Me too, and I want permission to be shy and silent around the group.

The young man who had done a handstand spoke about belonging and not belonging:
♦ I did a handstand on the edge of the group because coming to University is like flipping my life upside down. People who are spinning out all the time surround me on the outside and coming here seems the opposite, so often I don't feel fully a part of this- or have difficulty fully being part of it;
♦ I come in and just join the group and leave. I haven't really become part of it. Go away from sessions and do what I do in the world. It is bonding though to hear from people.

The young man who had just arrived in Australia from a war-torn zone spoke from the edge, where he was kneeling half turned to the door:
♦ I stay on the outside of the group to protect the back of my friends as well as get out the door quickly should there be trouble.

Someone laughed. People looked around at each other. Eyes met and there were smiles and quiet talk. I asked people if they felt completed. They said they did, and the session closed, people staying around chatting to each other.

More 'Dead-Certainties' ...

In retrospect, this activity fitted the notion of 'whole person learning"¹¹, an invitation to gestures, desires, emotions, and feelings to enter the educational space; a seeming challenge to the notion of learning as an abstract phenomena connected with the 'mind' rather than the 'body'.

H. Byrne-Armstrong PhD thesis 1999
Academics (especially feminist academics) have written extensively about the mind/body opposition, especially the hierarchy inherent within it that leads to the objectification of the body and its use as a site for disciplinary practices (Jagger & Bordo 1989; Luke & Gore 1992; Grosz 1994). As a feminist educator in the Academy, I have been fascinated by this discussion, as a particular interest of mine has been to challenge this binary and to include 'embodiment' as (another) form of text (but a living breathing one) in the classroom. My position has been that 'embodied theory, as ... figurations in space and time, alters the character of knowledge through its refusal to distance thinking from moving, knowing from being, thought from material specificity of bodies' (Brown in Stanley 1990:134). In using movement and space to imagine connection and community, I am standing for knowledge as being grounded in everyday practice, although my truth story at the time was that promoted by Mindell (see footnote 17, chapter 1), that perception is a whole person phenomenon, and the more perceptual channels are opened the more the communication can flow (an idea embedded in humanism and individualism - and supportive of the mind/body binary).

Texts on the body and the corporeality of knowledge are copious. It is a huge and intriguing topic, written about extensively in, feminist literature (see Irigaray 1985; Braidotti 1989; Grosz 1996). Feminism's project has been, amongst other things, to challenge western philosophy's promotion of the binary opposition of male-mind/female-body and the privilege given to the primary terms (male-mind). Knowledge (read 'legitimate' knowledge), based on reason is considered a characteristic of mind (read male). Any other knowledge, the irrational, passion, imagination or emotion is connected with body (read, female). Therefore feminine/body knowledge is not legitimate knowledge. In the above
exercise, the movement and feelings expressed by the students would be considered subjective and unsubstantiated, an illegitimate knowledge.

In separating mind from body, two significant and power-full things occur:

* Knowledge becomes abstracted - separated from its origins. Knowers are disassociated from the processes and material origins of their knowing, as are texts from their authors. Knowledge is separated from the human agendas pushing its production. In the separation it is objectified, reified and proclaimed as a truth. The objective truth holds the power and any knowledge attached to a subject is questionable;

* The body is objectified, an object that is studied, classified and scientifically created. And, in this creation not one, true, and natural body is produced, many forms of bodies are constituted. Many knowledges produce many bodies depending on the agendas.\textsuperscript{14} Therefore the body is never neutral. It is ‘sung-up’; or as some French feminists\textsuperscript{15} say, written on, inscribed by knowledges formed in social, historical and cultural contexts (see Rothfield 1988). From this view, therefore, language, ways of thinking and social practices constitute bodies. So, any practice must include a critical reflection about the various forms of embodiment that are being produced.

The above activity was one such social practice, situated within a truth story about whole person learning. A critical reflection of it would produce knowledge that practicing in this way is not without its ironies and tensions. After all, education has depended since its beginnings as an institutionalised form on the disciplining of the individual body as the means of producing a disciplined social body. Foucault’s (1977) grim expose of the practices for disciplining bodies is a chilling account of how the physical body can be inscribed through practices of power and
constituted as a 'docile body' to suit the agendas of the wider body politic.\textsuperscript{16}

As a reconstructionist teacher (Gore 1993), thinking of 'whole person' learning as part of classroom knowledge production, would therefore, seem contradictory. But, as a reconstructionist teacher, reflexivity is a vital part of my work. The tension is that to include the 'body' in pedagogic practices is to challenge the dominant educational discourses. To not include, as well, a critique of the practices of education as implicated in the production of 'docile bodies', is to perpetrate the hegemony that we are attempting to challenge.

After 20 years of practice that has included the 'body', I feel myself in T.S. Elliot's (1963) words from the \textit{Four Quartets}, 'returning to the beginning and knowing the place for the first time'. I have developed greater confidence (including a new-found uncertainty and set of paradoxes) in my inclusion of the active physical body as a living, breathing text for knowledge production. Over the years, my purpose for an embodied practice has shifted and changed. Firstly, I worked exclusively with the physical body\textsuperscript{17}, and my truth stories were firmly entrenched in the medical discourse. This gradually shifted as the recognition of the connection between physical health and mental well being was presented to me every day. In fact this knowledge led me to return to education and into my work as an experiential/radical educator in and outside the Academy. At this time, I was operating from a premise that mind/body split could be addressed by simply introducing more embodied activities into the learning environment. Now I realise the simplicity of this construction. The following is an extract from my journal demonstrating this.
'Local-Knowledge' - body-mind narratives ...

It was another morning of a student, P., questioning and criticising - this time about the community activity. With the view that disturbers have useful knowledge that should be heard, I invited her to speak. She kept saying it was like everything else, just all-in-the-head. When I suggested that this had not been fully the case (in that people had moved around the space, she replied with a shrug of the shoulders and the answer;

♦ It's just my experience and if I talk about it is just 'head-stuff.

Any questions that I asked, would she be more specific/what did this experience speak to her of, she said;

♦ You all 'talk' too much - are all-in-the-head. You have separated heart and head, - there is no passion, it's all from the neck up.

Statements like this are examples from the popular talk found in the local radical pedagogy to describe the popular notion of a split between the mind as located in the head and the rest of the body. This talk is still positioned in the binary of mind/body but is an attempt at an inversion of the hierarchy - i.e. knowledge(s) residing in ideas (mind) are considered irrelevant, abstract and disembodied. And furthermore, talking and conversation is a mind thing, which is separate to action and practice - a body thing!

Like other educators, I began slowly to realise that changing the hierarchy of opposites in a binary was not necessarily empowering (see also Ellsworth 1992; Lather 1991, for their versions of this). In fact, reversing the binary, is perpetrating it (see Foucault, chapter 2). What is required is a challenge to the metaphysical presence of the binary in the first place and a subversion of it. The mind/body split, the separation of the physical body from mental and intellectual processes is a truth.
story\textsuperscript{18} - a discourse implicated in the production of power/truth that itself, needs deconstructing.

Our contemporary western world is constituted by discourses that shape metaphysical binary oppositions (see Derrida 1991a) such as mind/body, reason/passion, head/heart. This is the (in)famous Cartesian split so favoured by western philosophy. In it bodies/actions heart/feelings are regarded as impediments to objectivity and reason. They are in opposition to mind, they are associated with practice, emotion, passion and irrationality (and women). Bodies are silenced, expelled, suppressed and negated by their superior counterpart, the mind;

Body is ... not mind, what is distinct from and other than the privileged term. It is what mind must expel in order to retain its 'integrity'. It is implicitly defined as unruly, disruptive, in need of direction and judgment, merely incidental to the defining characteristics of mind, reason or personal identity through its opposition to consciousness, to the psyche and other privileged terms within philosophical thought (Grosz 1994:3).

Erasing these binary oppositions, places all human activities, speaking, reading, thinking, experiencing, feeling, dancing, moving, writing, as 'embodied'. Whether knowledge is embodied (or not) is not the issue. All knowledge has a material base. What is significant is that metaphysical binaries are informed by an investment of power - a discursive practice that positions some forms of knowledge as more truthful than other forms, investing them with power (Foucault 1972, 1980b). The truth story relevant to the mind/body binary is the one represented by the 'sciences of man' [sic] which regulates and legitimises mind with knowledge that is objective, abstract and rational, to be determined by independent observation/evidence and empirical

H. Byrne-Armstrong PhD thesis 1999
generalisation. Any knowledge that is opposite of this (e.g. knowledges that are local, subjective, creative, physical, concrete, bodily) is 'othered'; it is regarded as negative, trivial, unreliable, worthless, and too local to be considered seriously.

Grosz (1994) describes three ways the body is produced, to perpetrate the mind/body binary. Each one is illustrated with common social practices from the local tradition of education:

1. As an object for the natural and human sciences. Thus the body is considered an organic instrument that is merely physical to be shaped, examined, classified and dissected - (pacified in action i.e. sat at desks, controlled and shaped by management, i.e. timetables);

2. As an instrument or machine at the mercy of consciousness; a possession or property of a subject that can make choices and decisions about how to manage it. (rights', ground rules, processes for management);

3. As a signifying medium, a vehicle of expression, a means through which the invisible and intangible (feelings, thoughts, emotions etc) are given expression. A body that is transparent...it's corporeality ... reduced to a predictable, knowable transparency' (ibid.:8-10) - (personal therapies, reflective practices, personality tests, learning style profiles, experiential learning).

reflecting on new knowledges...

Hence, in this tradition, while advocating a stand against the privilege of mind over body, traditional notions of 'whole person learning' can still perpetrate these hegemonic discourses, but disguised under the cloak of liberation. This does not mean that educators should cease practices that seemingly challenge dominant discourses, it means knowing that when they invite 'whole person learning' into the educational space, they

H. Byrne-Armstrong PhD thesis 1999
could be perpetrating the mind/body split rather than challenging it. However, if educators acknowledge this, and participate in classroom practices in which the power-knowledge remains visible, they also invite in, more visibly, desire; that pressing and pushing movement people have towards the other and their knowledges\(^9\) To invite unconstituted knowledges is to invite the participation of (often) - unconscious emotions, wants, and needs, rather than the constituted knowledges/persons that educators are used to (the reified, rational knowledge/person) dealing with.

Using the body -and 'whole persons' - as mediums for knowledge production in the curriculum, therefore, is more than the simple addition of exercises, following communication signals and spaces for movement, gesture, sensation and emotion, although these things are a part of it. Rather, including the body is an interpretive event, one that challenges and transgresses the rational. The body is one of the multiple forms of text in the classroom, in this case a living, breathing text. Davies wrote:

> What might otherwise remain at the level of an idea expressed through talk becomes more real as it is observably lived out through the material body as it moves across those boundaries that we might have thought were in some sense static no matter how much we might talk about movement. Male-female; body-landscape; human-animal; fact-fiction are some of the binaries I have seen thoroughly called into question in theatre, and in particular, dance. The imagination is opened up to unthought of or unspoken possibilities through the medium of the body (1996:1).

'Unspoken possibilities' (ibid.) a 'space\(^{20}\) for change' (Freire & Macedo 1987:126), curriculum as a geography of space and imagination -these phrases imagine what happens when pedagogy becomes an interpretive event that refuses to subjugate and deny the body and its physical

---

H. Byrne-Armstrong PhD thesis 1999
expressiveness as situated in time and place. A pedagogy that allows the body to speak its mind is one that celebrates corporeality in ways that are not restrained by language and abstraction, and that touch us so that we can know ourselves by what we are rather than only by what we are.

The challenge for this 'dramatic reconfiguration of curriculum' (Norman 1997) is to ask the question what would it mean to teach in ways that mediate the Cartesian split without producing another regime of truth that perpetuates it? Is it possible to do this, knowing the ways that the social body controls and manipulates the body, especially in institutions. Our ability to hold a sense of agency in the face of this subjectification, is complex and transitory. Agency and resistance occur in mobile, elusive, fleeting montages in everyday life. ‘Aspects of our identities, our desires and beliefs ... are inscribed in the terranean as well as the subterranean quarters of our consciousness’ (Salvio 1997:248). Incorporating knowledge is not about some notion of a deeper, true self or a whole person. It is to do with an interaction between self-as-constituted, and the discourses constituting self. Sometimes, in some locations, people are shaped into active speaking subjects, empowered and alive, relating stories with joy and enthusiasm. For example, in the activity described in the dead certainties, several usually silent people spoke up for the first time that morning. At other times they are shaped into silence, mouths clamped shut and vocal cords frozen (see Horsfall 1998): subjects shaped by the circulating knowledge(s) into a ‘silent other’, their knowledge(s) unsung.

It is easy to criticise when people take up dualistic thinking, just as it is easy to romanticise notions of people resisting (by transgressing disciplinary boundaries and refusing subjectification or identity

H. Byrne-Armstrong PhD thesis 1999
categories). However, Savio agrees, 'resistance to regulatory control and culture's continual attempts to grip the body is, in reality (and particularly in schools), wrought with forms of resistance that are marked by painful struggles, misunderstandings, confusions, and feelings of betrayal' (1997:249-250). (See the report of the 'famous fishbowl incident').

Nevertheless, if, as a reconstructionist teacher my aim is to create spaces in which the possibility of resistance is real, then taking a risk and modeling a local disruption of established classroom discourses is helpful. This can be done purposefully by:

- 'Singing-up' the living body (it's breath, muscles, movements, blood, bone and narratives), as a knowledge situated within knowledge production;
- Shifting the dominant medium of classroom practices from text-as-represented-exclusively-in-words to 'text-as-living-body';
- Unsettling the dominant forms of safe and 'closed' interpretation (discursive closure). Interpretations (and bodies) are left open, swinging and elusive. Uncertainty, diversity, difference are suspended in the space and more able to resist capture;
- Challenging the abstract character of ideas as expressed only in linguistic concepts. These ideas, in being lived out through embodied experience, are made manifest;
- Destabilising the talk and the politics of conversation shaping 'normal' classroom relationships - the regulatory practices that define who is heard, e.g. voices/bodies who assert before voices/bodies who meander in conversation, gendered voices/bodies, the silent voices/bodies;

H. Byrne-Armstrong PhD thesis 1999
• Challenging notions of the classroom as an apolitical space by demonstrating the immediate presence of abstract ideas and their possible social and political agendas - embodied in the here and now.

Regardless of how dominant knowledges constitute the narratives of people’s lives, we are more than one story. Dramatic and embodied pedagogies can enhance this knowledge. Discourses shape people/selves in partial and fragmentary ways, creating cracks and fissures that make space for resistance and alternative narratives. This is a knowledge that needs to be encouraged. Foucault argues for ‘an attitude, an ethos, a philosophical life in which the critique of what we are is at one and the same time the historical analysis of the limits that are imposed on us and an experiment with the possibility of going beyond them’ (in Rabinow 1984:50). To look for cracks and fissures (as I have through this exploration) is to critique the knowledges that subjugate and totalise the body/self, and to experiment with the variant meanings that space, motion, emotion, voice and gesture can provide opens the possibility to go beyond these knowledges. It is this possibility that I would like to turn to. But, before doing this, I would like to return to the ironic tension. While I am now more comfortable thinking of ‘embodied’ activies in terms of discursive practices, I still would use the activity described in the dead certainties. However there would be some modifications. Rather than asking each person to talk about their experience of where they positioned themselves, I would ask them how the environment they were in influenced their choice of position. In doing this I am emphasising the interplay of the human with their environment, rather than their internal experiences.

It is also important (for this educator) to realise that using any active embodied pedagogies can perpetrate practices of objectification and

H. Byrne-Armstrong PhD thesis 1999
perpetuate dominant knowledges by controlling the meaning making, for example:

- Any activity has within it an in-built set of rules and regulations. How one, as a teacher, deals with any disruption of these rules is a critical and especially significant moment in the form of pedagogy that I am proposing;
- De-briefing and/or integration/feedback are forms of disciplinary practice as the teacher shapes and moulds the meanings that are produced;
- Engaging the body in interactive activities where there is an 'audience' promotes the practices of surveillance. As a teacher, awareness of this informs my attitude to people's choices about participation.

The ironic tension is, as I see it, that while engaging active bodies in learning objectifies them, the quality of relationship in the participation can simultaneously work to defuse this. And, the negotiation of this participation is the space of learning for both students and teachers. There is a delicate edge to negotiate and this negotiation makes curriculum planning and learning objectives uncertain. Readiness to practice in this way comes from an openness to change the program in response to students. This does not necessarily mean changing the curriculum, it more often means changing the mediums through which one delivers it. It also informs the ways that I introduce these activities and invite students to participate in them. It includes knowledge of the pressure they feel to conform, and the resistance they have to do something different. We talk about this.
'Thick-Descriptions' - the art of self-making...

Following are several stories of ways that I have been working that embraces this knowledge; ways that hold the ironic tension through the basis of relationship with students and the institution.

1. interactive geography ...a poem I wrote...

   An army of desks and chairs
   Stationed on alert
   Lecture tiers in numbered rows
   Obediently waiting
   Under lighting blinding with fluorescent zeal

   Bodies arrive
   Moving in slow motion
   Mute, sleepwalking into position
   As they comatose,
   Fashioned by the space into slumped statues

   An expert enters,
   Proclaims the space
   Highjacks the voices
   Silences the bodies and flattens resistance
   With proclamations of knowledge

   The lesson has begun

As mentioned in chapter 4 the sites we inhabit are more than people and things bumping around in a void. 'It is another space ... actually lived and socially created spatially, concrete and abstract at the same time, the habitus of social practices' (Soja 1989:18). The everyday habitus of social practices are a rich source of knowledge production. For example, when teaching poststructuralist constructions on power as not possessed or a function, but a relationship of positivity that is constitutive of life, the immediate habitus can be used as a place to demonstrate this. The following activity is an example from my current practice; using bodies and space to teach students about the constitution of 'docile bodies' (Foucault 1977). It
is an example of an external conversation\textsuperscript{22} between our bodies and the environment.

From my journal

The classroom was a 'flat floor' space with rows of desks and chairs for 50 students. Two thirds of the class present. It was a Monday morning, 9.00 a.m., wintertime and cold. It was the first class of the week, a week that from this place seemed to drag into infinity. Students were gathered at the back of the classroom, arranged in various poses on chairs, desks, the windowsill and the floor. There was a lot of yawning, scraps of breakfast and a smattering of gossip. Some people greeted me lazily and without much interest. There was an atmosphere of heaviness, boredom and an isolated pocket of flat expectancy. My heart sank at the thought of waking them up to words and visuals, telling me of my reluctance about the performance that I would have to initiate ... soon ... The planned class was on 'Discourse and Power'. I looked around the environment and the bodies draped upon it. It was a smallish classroom ugly in its autumn tonings, dull in its lack of light and cluttered with the inscriptions of the institution. I remembered how enjoyable the drive to work had been in the wakening dawn, how my body had responded to the opening vistas of pastures and animals that greeted me as I arrived at this unique institution. What had occurred in the last 15 minutes? I did not need to look around again to have some idea!

I remembered an activity that I had read in Boal's (1992) \textit{Forum Theatre}. I invited students to join an activity exploring the arrangement of the classroom. I framed it in terms of an introduction to the topic for the morning. I put a table, six chairs and a bottle (donated by a class member) into the centre and asked people to gather around it. The activity was to arrange the eight items so that the bottle had the power. One at a time, students came into the centre and arranged the furniture and the bottle. Sometimes the chairs would be in rows like an average classroom with the bottle sitting on the table out the front, at others the bottle would be sitting on a table surrounded by a circle of chairs. There were endless variations. Sometimes the bottle was removed from the room, at other times the chairs tipped on the floor with the

\footnote{H. Byrne-Armstrong PhD thesis 1999}
bottle triumphant on a table. People moved around the space re-arranging it, finding different and more creative variations. Some joined enthusiastically, others watched. As late comers arrived, I asked them to join. After a number of variations, I temporarily halted the process and asked the class to choose the most traditional configuration. The bottle was put on the table at the front and the chairs in neat rows facing it. I then asked people to go into the space one at a time and take the power away from the bottle. One person entered and stood on the table behind the bottle. Another then came and stood in front. One at a time people moved into the space and took ‘power’ from the previous person. No words were used.

My framing of the exercise (after the event) was that the activity challenges the notions of the classroom as an apolitical space and demonstrates the interaction between human bodies and their environments, showing how environments compose the relationships of the space and therefore the type of knowledge produced. Furthermore, an activity such as this one throws into sharp relief the immediate, material presence of abstract ideas and therefore their relevance. It therefore served as an excellent demonstration of power/knowledge, dominant discourses and how they constitute people’s lives.

After the exercise people recognised that they experienced different energy levels in the classroom after the exercise. This led to a discussion that this was so in other settings. They talked about the different contexts they walked through in their daily lives and how these different contexts are shaped by dominant discourses with their rules and regulations. They realised how this influenced their relationships with others and their agency and identity. As well as teaching them about the relationship between social/political agendas and the individual, the experience enabled them to see a fluidity and malleability in the interplay between people and their physical settings.

The space for change was created. After this, on most Mondays I would come into the classroom to find a space that had been purposely and collectively created. Students were taking agency over the meanings of classroom setting. In doing this they were monitoring the conversation between their ‘selves/identities’ and the context. In this sense this process is part of an

H. Byrne-Armstrong PhD thesis 1999
informed self-making process. Rarely did I find the egalitarian circles of chairs. Sometimes there were neat rows of desks and chairs shaped for a lecture; another time my place was at the back of the room as students managed the class, another time, no chairs and a request to move outside. I had created a monster!

2. **playing with selves**

I had been invited into the first year UG\textsuperscript{23} class to do a one-off session called 'The Self, Narratives and Learning'. The class was a composite class from different degree strands. They had been meeting for a semester in a large hall space at the university because they could not be accommodated anywhere else. It was a brisk autumn, Monday morning. When I arrived, students were standing around outside the hall, lazily talking and smoking. There seemed little impetus for learning. As I arranged my work near the stage, students wandered in, and sat, scattered around this large space in two distinct groups. There was little interest in me.

I decided on a simple 'warm-up' exercise - for my benefit as well as the students. I wanted to play with an idea that I had been having about designing activities that would capture the notion of a fluid subjectivity. It could be regarded as simply a 'getting to know one another' exercise, but it has a more serious aim. This activity provides the experience of a self that is not fixed, but changing. Its aim is to play with fluid subjectivities and identities and to recognise them as produced in language. It provided a good beginning for the topic of the class.

I signalled to the group to get up, mill around and find one other person. One person then the other was to briefly tell a story of what happened in the weekend. On a signal they were to find another partner and tell the new person the story they heard from their previous partner, embellishing it, as if it was their own. Partners are changed several times, and each time, people are asked to appropriate the story they just heard and to embellish it and make it their own.

From the letters students wrote after this 'preliminary exercise', it provided some of the most powerful learning of the morning.

One student wrote:

---

H. Byrne-Armstrong PhD thesis 1999
I wonder why I started by telling the same story of beer and pubs, it is the truth, that’s how I used to live. In one way it is bragging in another it is giving people a bad impression of me. In some ways I am not the same addicted person - I do not know how to define myself anymore, ... But in the long run I guess this is good. Starting with a clean slate. But also sometimes I feel I have got to be so much more.

In establishing oneself as a work of art, it is, according to Foucault, necessary to have a limit-attitude (1984b). 'For an individual, freedom from normalising forms of individualisation consists of an exploration of the limits of subjectivity' (McNay 1992:89). This student was engaged in exploring the limits of his identity. Foucault believed one first had to establish the limits of the subjectivities we inhabit in order to transgress them, and therefore open the possibility for new forms of subjective experience (1984b:46-47).

Another student put this limit-attitude in another way;

I have learnt about, according my own evaluation of the Education system, the positive and negative effects of school life and how it has hindered and in some places enhanced my personal development, physically, mentally and socially - also academically.

Other students commented in various ways about limit-attitudes:

It was easier telling someone else's story than my own. I learnt how to communicate better with people I don't know;

I learnt that I am capable of talking to strangers, something that I thought was impossible;

Learnt how to communicate with total strangers which is alien to me. I do not usually do this.

The comments demonstrate that they have produced knowledge about the limits, gesturing the beginning of a shifting sense of self/subjectivity. This exercise is another good example of subverting the body/mind split and the
social practices that perpetrate it and creating spaces for new identities. It does this in several ways:

- By colonising another's story, as one's own, detachment from self-narratives, occurs;
- Language is seen as a performance rather than a truth. This encourages detachment;
- In the disconnection, reflexivity begins (see above);
- By embellishing the narrative, interconnections with one's own story are made;
- By telling another's story as one's own, individuality is subverted and relationships built. Through this subversion, resistance to dominant discourses (that constitute people into often-unhelpful subjectivities) can occur - as is illustrated in the comments above.

These are just some of the ways where students can be assisted to begin to challenge the dominant discourse that would shape them in certain ways. Sometimes, of course, these subjectivities and identities are useful (mine as a teacher is), but at other times not. These processes alert students to the social agendas and to resist by finding the cracks and fissures that enable them to make choices about compliance or acquiescence.

3. writing the self

I believe it is better to try to understand that someone who is a writer is not simply doing his work in his24 books... but that his major work is, in the end, himself in the process of writing his books ...

(Foucault 1986:184)
Reflective journals and learning journals are, in the local radical pedagogy, considered the vehicle for learning about the relationship of self to self. They are seen as a place to express one's feelings, let the imagination fly, to give a voice to inner truths, to discover the real self. But where is the self in this writing? The following extracts are from student learning journals. Sometimes student accounts are purely descriptive, the self absent from the text, for example:

Today's lecture was on the self in learning. Firstly we gathered into groups of five people and we discussed several questions about our learning history. After that we listened to a lecture and a series of slides and overheads. This was followed by a discussion in which I learnt the following things ...

Another example is the presence of a confessional self in an invisible relationship of power with the reader, confessing their actions and reactions to this unseen source:

I wanted to let you know that this exercise has been an enormous challenge in my life. My early life was not easy and I have always had issues with my mother. When you told us in class that we had to get our assignments in on time, and not ask for extensions, I was reminded of my mother and realised that I had to work on myself...

Yet another example, a narrative - autobiographical - and the self speaking in the writing:

I felt really scared when I had to get up in class and give a talk. My heart was racing and I remembered that I had always had this reaction even when I was at school. This reminded me of the lecture on the Panopticon...I remember the "action on the actions" of the atmosphere in my family...

H. Byrne-Armstrong PhD thesis 1999
What is the purpose of a learning journal? Who do students write them for/to? Who is the author? When the truth story informing the use of learning journals is a philosophy of consciousness, journals represent the reflective dimension of learning. This can be either to prove one's accountability - the writing, therefore, is a disembodied representation of some external reality (see first example previous page). In this form, the connection between the author and their agendas and the writing is invisible. A systematic set of statements are used to convince the reader that they represent a reality that is independent of the words that describe it.

In the second example, although the self seems present, it is present as a confessing self, a self intertwined in an invisible play of power/knowledge. In this web of power the confessing self has no truth and the invisible (priest) reader is the judge/arbiter of truth. In the presence of this arbiter, the (true) self can reflect on itself, its blocks and shortcomings in order to peel off the opaque layers and find the inner potential. In this truth story, the self is absolute, transcendent, beyond society and culture, trying to find its 'real me' deep inside. This relationship can be found in the statements that convey explanations for the behaviour which resort to the objective frame of the first piece of writing. In it, causal explanations are used to fix the behaviours in a reality separate from the language, the author and reader. But here the reader is represented as the truth holder, the arbiter of knowledge.

The third piece of writing begins as an autobiographical piece - the telling of a story begins the 'memory work' (Haug et al. 1987). The story is written and the descriptions thickened in order to get a narrative that is as close as possible to direct experience; a narrative stripped of justifications, judgements and explanations in order to make clear the social practices that form people's subjectivities and identities. In this example, the story is woven with other stories, to seek more personal clarification and meaning.
It is the beginning of a demonstration of a self in contact and connection with an outer world, weaving between its constructions and the environments that produce these.

This last piece of writing is coming closer to a particular view of writing-the-self that fits the assumptions of this thesis. If writing is regarded as a performance of self - an ongoing constitution of self in an interplay with the power/truth nexus of the discourses shaping our lives, how would this change the writing of reflective journals? Foucault (1984a) said that self, voice and imagination are not things waiting to be expressed, but are historical events that are continuously performed (see also Butler 1990; Walkerdine 1994). So instead of a piece of writing in which the self is absent or a piece of writing that expresses or reflects an inner truth, writing the self, constitutes it.

Derrida used the phrase, 'we are written only as we write' (1978:26) to convey the notion of our agency in writing, to alert us to the fact that we are active in this process of cultural production. The writing itself is a movement of the body; a dance between the paper and pen or screen and keyboard. 'The moving writing self is a material self rather than a disembodied consciousness, and, thus, writing the self is connected with the idea of writing the body' (Game & Metcalf 1996:103). I inscribe my materiality in the text on the page. In the text and the words are my heart and soul, traces of my living breathing body. Writing is a performance of (my) self, and in the writing, (my) self is changed and also changes my writing. There is no schism between writing and the living body. The text and the act of writing is a performance of this living body. And the performance is forever changing; a deep inner, fixed truth does not struggle to the surface to reveal itself on the page. There are continually shifting, shifty self-narratives, wistful, sometimes shy, sometimes bold, but elusive,
as they speak through the rents and fractures of the words and phrases, embedded in dominant discourses.

The movement occurs because of the performative dimensions of language: language as uncertainty, a space of possibility, a 'field of imagination' rather than a mirror of reality (see Foucault 1986). Writing flows and unfolds. It transgresses its own boundaries and vagrantly resists its own limitations. Language is not representative of reality but performative, and not purely along the lines of social expectations, but often performing a resistance or disruption of these expectations. In doing this language disturbs the space. As Foucault said, 'In writing, the point is not to manifest or exalt the act of writing, nor is it to pin a subject within language; it is, rather a question of creating a space into which the writing subject constantly disappears' (1984a:102).

To make sense of this is to recognise that the language and style of writing, the act of reading and the reader are all injected into the text and 'the writing subject cancels out signs of her/his particular individuality' (ibid.:102). So 'author' is a shifting landscape rather than an essential, congruous, individual quality. 'Writing the self is a process of sealing and splitting that can only trace fissures of discontinuity, not reveal or confess the self as coherent or organic' (Benstock in Schafisma 1998:266). Through writing people occupy different subject positions, different self(s) along a narrative of knowledge production (as does the reader), re-authoring both lives through the fissures and rents in the landscape of discourses shaping our particular identities.

How can a teacher encourage a writing of the self that avoids, as much as possible the inevitable power/truth nexus of the confessional, yet is personal and constitutive of students' lives? An important question, but, as Orner (in Popkewitz & Brennan 1998) says, 'the fear of sounding confessional, of getting read as confessional, has become a disciplinary

H. Byrne-Armstrong PhD thesis 1999
technology in its own right' (ibid.:286). To use practices of writing as another pedagogic tool to promote agency, we need to be aware of the presence/power of confessional technologies. I may not change my practices. But I am shifting their focus, moving towards a practice in which the notion of a learning journal is modified from an objective account, or and account of oneself, in which one brings to light the unconscious (see Foucault 1983a:247), to one more along the lines of what Foucault called the hypomnemata in which transpires a writing that collects the ... 'already said, to reassemble that which one could hear or read, and this to an end which is nothing less that the constitution of oneself' (ibid.).

This, I think fits the 'thick descriptions' that Geertz (1983) talks about. Writing constitutes the self through a 'spirituality of the surface' (see White 1997), rather than along the axis of the transcendent/immanent. In this form of writing, the descriptions of the already known are disseminated, reaching outwards, playing with accounts and interpretations and exploring on the page byways and alleys, nooks and crannies. And, in this play 'we assume a self (or a truth) never complete, but always in movement towards an other' (Game & Metcalf 1996:104 - my addition in brackets).

Letter writing, as journalling, is one process that I have explored with a group of students. Each week they were asked to write to me giving an account of their connections with the subject being taught, the links they made with readings and whether this has been taken into the rest of their life. At this particular time, my interest was for students to have a continuous record of their changing 'selves' over the semester. As a 'performance of self', rather than a representation of learning, I told the students that I would not reply to these letters.

However, near the end of semester, we did an interpretive analysis of the letters. Together we looked for the dominant and shared themes. In this sense, the letters ceased to be individual. Cultural narratives were
identified as speaking through the letters. Students were fascinated by these different discourses present in their texts. In the interpretation, we looked for phrases that seemed to have a similar narrative (see Goodfellow 1998), both in an individual series and collectively. Not surprising was the very collective presence of the dominant educational discourse in all the letters. Students wrote phrases like:

- One must be perfect;
- Every time I speak out there is someone that sits on me;
- Trying to get it right;
- I don't speak up in class because to disagree is too risky;
- I'm not as good at this as others;
- There are some people that talk and some who don't, being here is difficult,

These statements indicate the presence of the normalising, objectifying, surveillance, categories of social practices (see Gore in Popkewitz & Brennan 1998). This in itself created a discussion and a shift of relationships within the group and with me (see the letters following). There were also other statements and phrases:

- Finding a voice;
- Quieting my mind-talk;
- Personal and social empowerment;
- Connecting with friends;
- Breaking silence;
- Listening and being listened to;
- Resisting dominant voices.

These indicated an alternative collective narrative. People began to identify moments of resistance to the dominant discourse, to this class that was different, if they thought about it, to the connection they were developing with each other, and this rippled out to other classes. One student who had

H. Byrne-Armstrong PhD thesis 1999
not spoken in front of a group before did a presentation in another class supported by the people who had read her story in this class. Instead of commiserating with her about how awful it must have been getting over her fear, they congratulated her on her performance and asked her about the strategies that she had used to do what she did.

At the end of semester and in response to their final submission, I wrote each student a letter and included some questions that I had formulated as a result of reading their submissions and the letters. The following are extracts from their replies to these:

1. Dear Hilary,

   In reflecting what I have learnt this semester I have come to the realisation that in the future I need to remind myself that my thoughts, opinions and experiences are important and valid. I have become aware that I needn’t worry so much about what people think of me, that I should follow my instincts and not sell myself short. I have had difficulty in trying to identify the dominant story that created my fear of speaking up ... I guess it stems from childhood experiences and school ... only speaking when being spoken to. Who cares, it does not matter now. I had a think about how I come across in class and felt as if I had dug a hole for myself by not talking. Going from being silent to participating in class discussions is difficult because people tend to notice when you do say something ... I did realise that one problem that I have is not what to say but when to say it. In a large group discussion it is hard for anyone to find a space to talk and sometimes when you do your point of view has now become irrelevant because the discussion has gone onto another area. Now I (and others) have to work on timing ... Each time I speak my mind since attending this class I feel more empowered, the class has been great in helping me ...
Once again thank you for the class. I have really enjoyed the work which is an unusual thing for me to say...

This letter was from a student who had been silent in all classes up until this time. He did not speak and had seemed disengaged for the whole year. This letter demonstrates that he has disconnected himself from this action and is starting to interrogate it as something 'separate' from him (finding the fissures and rents and the partiality of the discourse). The letters helped him in this process of disconnection. He went on to talk about the strategies he is using and what had been helpful to him. The writing of the letters also helped him to thicken the descriptions of his preferred narrative - to sing it up into more reality. This was confirmed by other teachers on the program saying that he was participating more in other classes.

2. Dear Hilary,

It would be only fitting to finish off the semester's work with a final letter to you... the elective has been difficult going - but rewarding. I have been challenged by the postmodern discourse and as a critique I have yet more to learn from it. I am aware that our dialogue has not been without its subtle tensions; but it would be no dialogue at all without at least some of that. Something of the dream I had when returning to Uni. was to find a place of dialogue with others as well as being exposed to different perspectives .... As you are aware I am no postmodernist - though I do suffer along with much of our culture, something of the postmodern condition! If we were to put a label to it, I guess I would be more likely to work within a 'critical theorist' model - so among other things, I don't believe that everything is socially constructed. I also confess to a powerful impulse to explore the questions which seem to me to be universally human ... As Marx asserted, the evidence of human history suggests that our thoughts are largely

H. Byrne-Armstrong PhD thesis 1999
fashioned by the lies involved in social morality. 'Largely fashioned' but not in totality. That's the truly remarkable thing - this potential faculty we have of reflexivity...

Anyway as time had further allowed, these are some of my reflections in response to the questions you posed for me after my semester's work. It has prompted me to clarify something of my belief system, to be reflexive about the theoretical framework out of which I make sense of the world, as well as encouraging me to dream about the alternative story. I am grateful to this...

And later;

I have been thinking about my learning over the semester and particularly your elective just recently. I thought of writing this letter and clarifying my position, to continue the dialogue with postmodernism... In responding to the questions you posed for me, I became aware of a tension, springing as I now believe from my encounter with postmodernism. I was grateful for the opportunity to reflect a little more on the dominant narrative of my life... I have always been open to others stories, but it has occurred to me lately that we cannot dialogue without first having a firm grasp of our own... I use this framework to put flesh to my search for meaning and cultural identity. In this sense, as Philip Adams puts it, I am a 'hunter gatherer of ideas' and relish making new connections via my explorations in philosophy, theology... that adds to the fecundity of cross reflecting and cultural exchange... when I feel I have something to say, I can't help saying it! I can only blame your elective for adding fuel to the fire of that tendency...

These letters express this student's intellectual struggle with some of the ideas in poststructuralism. He used the space of the letters to reflect that he had intellectual differences to mine and to struggle with these.
differences and to resist those things with which he disagreed. The letter writing in this way then moved away from a confessional task to a critical and intellectual dialogue. We had many discussions, managing to hold the tension of our roles within the institution and our gender differences - at times, an edgy tension. But, it also provided some of the most interesting dialogue in the class.

3. Dear Hilary,

Something I used to get into trouble for at school was the way my writing is so personal and colloquial ... I really like the intimate quality of words and have often been praised for the way they make people feel as if I am directly talking to them. I actually think writing is a great strength for me ... most of my letters this semester have been quite detailed and intimate (particularly the four-page mega letter after reading the body as text)...

It's a good idea getting me to ponder on what the strategies were that I used to get my assignment in - perhaps if I do heaps of pondering, I'll find ways to bring those skills into the rest of my life!! Actually, I have been amazed at myself in this subject, because I have handed all my work in basically on time, which is, sadly, kind of rare for me ... I find it pretty strange that I often run late with things...perhaps it's a kind of messy bedroom syndrome that afflicts me so often.....

Sitting back, reflecting on the way I'm feeling right now, I'm seeing patterns from the whole semester. I see that I've had a bit of an ongoing issue of feeling misunderstood, and misconstrued ... What is it all about ... What's the message here?...

The last two letters are also examples which demonstrate that this letter writing space provided students with a (slightly detached) position from

H. Byrne-Armstrong PhD thesis 1999
which to resist and argue with me. The positional power of a teaching role in
the institution is such that even the most well-intentioned educators find
themselves in the company of silenced students. Letter writing in this form
seemed to distance this power relationship enough for students to find a
voice of resistance. This shows the process as another way to keep the
discursive space open for resistance in the face of dominant discourses.

reflecting on new knowledges...

The letters demonstrate the very different ways that people were engaging
in their learning. At no time did I get a letter that was a simple description
of 'what happened'. As students found their voice in the letters, they began
writing more and more (and some still write to me three years later). They
were initially angry that I did not reply, the main criticism was that they
didn't know if they were 'getting it right or not'. But gradually they began to
enjoy the process as a process that was a self-creating activity - Foucault's
idea of the self as an art form (in Rabinow 1984:351). As the letters were
placed beside each other and viewed from the position of being a knowledge
producing activity, people began to see themselves in the process of
producing knowledges and their letters, in turn, reflected this.

One interesting reflection a student had was that initially, the
letters, as a series, seemed to lack continuity. But this was also an important
reflection for recognising that the self-as-written is a changing, shifting,
restless process. One student commented, I thought somebody else must
have written the letters. They don't seem to be much like the me that I am
now - yet they are in my handwriting.

The use of letters seemed to produce the effect that I was looking
for -that the act of writing is an act of self-creation. This has certainly
been the case in my own writing. I cannot write unless I am writing about
something that has passion or is a dilemma in my own life. In writing I am

H. Byrne-Armstrong PhD thesis 1999
gesturing towards the unknown, towards the other, imagining and dreaming.

As I write this thesis, the self that I produce shifts and changes, my writing loosening and tightening, sometimes wild with imagination and at other times, tamed by the restrictions of academia. I find myself constantly pushing at the edges and boundaries of the unknown, pushing at Davies’ version of Barthes ‘texts of bliss’ to disrupt the cultural norm of a thesis:

A text of pleasure: the text that contents, fills, grants euphoria; the text that comes from culture and does not break with it, is linked to a comfortable place of reading. A text of bliss in contrast is one that disrupts the familiar; Text of bliss: the text that imposes a state of loss, the text that discomforts (perhaps to the point of certain boredom), unsettles the reader’s historical, cultural, psychological assumptions, the consistency of his/her tastes, values, memories, brings to a crisis his [her] relation with language (1994:102).

This is what I hope to continue to encourage my students to do.

concluding the narrative...

This research narrative is filled with stories from my more recent practice. The knowledges that I have gained through researching the use of the body and implications of this in the light of the rampant objectification practices of our culture leads me to practice in different ways. I wanted to take the principles/practices/knowledges of discourse analysis into the classroom and experiment. This is the result. Thinking of classroom practices in terms of ‘outsight’ has given me a greater creative space as a teacher and mediator. Writing is one element of it, as are the activities of the dramatic pedagogies that have been described. The shadow of the confessional and the binary will always be present. But singing up practices which include a critical reflection alerts me to the dangers of this truth like any other.

H. Byrne-Armstrong PhD thesis 1999
Initially in Chapter 4 and then examples in other chapters
I had left a space for people to share their different experiences of working through the conflict. Slowly the talk ceased and there was a silence in the classroom. When I suggested we had finished nobody moved.
A brief description of my involvement is given in narrative 1. For a fuller description see Armstrong (1994) or refer to the bibliography for Mindell’s writings.
See footnote 5.
The ‘dead-certainies’ reported in the previous narrative.
A communication signal can be verbal or non-verbal, and is observed as being congruent with the context/words spoken or incongruent. The signals occur in perceptual channels; visual, auditory, proprioceptive kinesthetic. There are methods for the observer to pick these up and bring them into the process (see Mindell’s books quoted in bibliography.).
Mindell’s process for working with signals (see previous footnote for references).
This, in Mindell’s terms, would mean that I was correct. I had picked up the invisible thing (movement and relationship) that was trying to occur.
The conflict session in narrative four.
A rather ridiculous notion. Is the classroom peopled by partial persons?
Because, I think of my history as a physiotherapist.
This is not promoting the body as simply written text. The body is breathing, emotional and alive. As Salvo (in Carson & Sumara 1997:249) says, ‘Bodies blush, texts do not. Bodies experience pain, their flesh can be torn, their hearts broken, their muscles made firm’. Texts and bodies are, therefore both intertwined and differentiated.
This is evident in everyday television and advertising, in medical discourses, ballet, sports fields, natural therapies, psychology.
See Irigaray, Kristeva, Cixous.
For example, the confining of children’s bodies behind a desk on a chair, the regimenting of prisoners into individual cells, of patients into rows of hospital beds, visiting hours restricted. The way there is a dress code of business suits.
As a physiotherapist
See chapter 2.
And all the inherent risks that this brings – see chapter 7.
The use of spatial metaphors has become commonplace in critical, feminist and postmodern pedagogies (see Giroux 1992, Spivak 1993, Bhabha 1994). They herald the attention being given to the problematised notions of positionality and voice in relation to power and authority (see Edwards & Usher 1998).
The art or method of arranging in one composition pictorial elements borrowed from several sources so that the elements are both distinct and blended into a whole, through techniques such as superimposition.
See chapter 6.
Two undergraduate degrees, University of Western Sydney. This exercise is a description of the beginning of the session described in chapter 6, ‘thickening-descriptions’.
I have left the sexist language uninterrupted by [sic] as there would be too many and this would disturb the quote.
Autobiographical and confessional writing always unfold in a power relationship (Gilmore in Schaufsma 1998).
Embedded in phenomenology and the notion of a naked individual who can be revealed through conscientisation (see chapter 2).
This is an example also of the story in the thick descriptions (previous narrative and this one) when I asked the class to shift their focus to the discourses informing the conflict.
The Greek version of a personal diary (see Foucault 1983a).
This was used in the subject on Power in which the ‘bottle and chair’ activity was done. The curriculum had within it a theoretical element and an experiential element.

H. Byrne-Armstrong PhD thesis 1999
Chapter Nine

TOWARDS A NARRATIVE
EPISTEMOLOGY:
THICKENING THE DESCRIPTIONS

Imaginary Biography

First childhood, no limits, no renunciations,
no goals. Such unthinking joy.
Then abruptly terror, schoolrooms, boundaries, captivity,
and a plunge into temptation and deep loss.

Defiance. The one crushed will be the crusher now,
and he avenges his defeats on others.
Loved, feared, he rescues, wrestles, wins
and overpowers others, slowly, act by act.

And then all alone in space, in lightness, in cold.
But deep in the shape he has made to stand erect
he takes a breath, as if reaching for First, Primitive.

Then God explodes from his hiding place.

Rainer Marie Rilke
(trans. 1981:170)
Introduction

This completes the narratives that have constituted my practice and self over the 'recent time'. The purpose of this chapter is to re-visit the ironic tension that began the thesis and to articulate a narrative epistemology as the stance needed to hold this tension. But in doing this, I go back to the beginning to remind the reader of Foucault's point that 'everything is dangerous' (1983a). This thesis could be regarded as another truth story, and, if so, it should be also considered as not the only/ultimate one. The theories and practices are a story of a local knowledge and a local practice. My inclination would be to leave the narratives as is, to not interpret or try to draw them together into yet another refined story (in order to prove their truth). However, I am also writing a thesis, an academic exercise in which conclusions and final truths are favoured. This chapter, is an example, then, of the ironic tension that began this thesis. My aim, in it, will be to clarify, thicken and sing, in crescendo, the already-said.

Also in the spirit of the thesis, I will name again, but only briefly, the forms of (social) practice constituting the narrative epistemology that was demonstrated in the narratives. To go down the track of describing them in full constructs them as tools or skills - a 'how to do it' manual for a narrative epistemology. This would mean I am recruited into dominant discourses that separate knowledge and practice, something that I have been arguing against in the thesis. Rather I will keep exploring the knowledges that I have produced, thus thickening the descriptions and following the spirit of its beginnings.
'Singing-Up' the ironic tension ...

For Foucault (see 1972, 1980) the episteme or the structures of thinking of a particular culture and age are determined by the discursive fields at play. 'Discursive fields consist of competing ways of giving meaning to the world and of organising social institutions and processes. They offer the individual a range of modes of subjectivity. Within a discursive field ... not all discourses will carry the same weight or power' (Weedon 1987:35).

These competing ways of talking and practices remain largely invisible to us as they are so deeply embedded in our conversation, our practices and the symbols and forms of culture. They determine the nature of knowing, the sort of subjects/identities produced and the relationships between communities/organisations/institutions/groups and individuals. Within the discursive fields of the late twentieth century (within the culture I live), the scientific and rational discourses, the white, middle class, and the Christian and patriarchal discourses, have predominance over other competing discourses. But other cultural narratives also exist. This thesis is part of a political action; to ‘sing-up’ and give air-time to other ways of knowing, other discourses. And, in doing this I am embedding myself in the discourse that I am ‘singing-up’ (part of the discourse), trying to maintain the ironic tension of a limit attitude, being in it and out of it all at once, commentating from the margins.

This ironic tension has become the central motif of this thesis. The idea began the project, the theory informed it and the narratives have demonstrated it through the metaphors of ‘dead-certainties’, 'local-knowledge' and 'thick-descriptions'. Rather than being a problem needing to be solved it has become the solution. It seems to me that this

H. Byrne-Armstrong PhD thesis 1999
contradictory and uneasy space is the space where knowledge is produced.

Paradoxically, our modernist predilections call this a 'space', gesturing to it as an 'empty other' existing between and eliminating it through the dreaming up or production of universalising principles. What this thesis has shown is that this space is not a space, but a habitus\(^2\) filled with the ongoing interplay of social practices; an agonism, an ongoing, playful contest between interacting social positions that are partial and finite. This interplay is not simply linguistic and discursive, but material, visible in non-discursive practices of power. So rather than an empty in-between, the space is a habitus of social practices characterised by an ironic tension between the competing power-plays of the social positions, or 'beings-in-relation' as Cixous (in Andermat Conley 1992:70) called it, a contradictory and uneasy place to inhabit.

This is the place that this thesis has inhabited. It follows Wittgenstein's advice\(^3\) to drop our theories of what might be going on and to look at what people are doing, in context and in the full concreteness of their situations. As each of the stories were performed and repeated through other interpretations, the habitus was revealed as a contradictory and uneasy montage. At times the tension was so great (as in the fishbowl incident) that the need to solve and resolve was overwhelming. Modernist ideals would impose a universal principle (a refined description/theory story) to relieve the tension. Not necessarily because of some corruption of the habitus through domination (people silencing/oppressing others, or not acting according to some universal moral principle), but because imposing a discursive closure, relieves the tension.

---

H. Byrne-Armstrong PhD thesis 1999
However, it is the interplay between self and other that creates the uneasy tension that I consider to be the heart of the matter. One conclusion of this thesis is that this ongoing interplay provides the conditions for knowledge to be produced.

'Singing-Up' desire, resistance & agency ...desire...

Accepting that there will always be an other, and that this other is separate and different, acknowledges that any knowledge is incomplete, and because of this incompleteness, becomes desire. Rather than desire being an anti-social condition (as Freud thought) it is the impetus through which we become social beings. We enter the social order of language and communication and through this entry, subjectivities and identities are constituted by the language systems we have entered⁴. And, with this entry is the realisation that there are many knowledges/identities and we are captured by a desire that will never be complete. Kristeva thought both desire and subjectivity present analysts with a particular difficulty, since both are constituted by and through an active sense of becoming' (in Fuery 1995:91). This is desire as the impetus for, the necessary condition of, and the outcome of, our drives for knowledge. In fact, 'desire is that which cannot be oppressed and as a consequence is inherently revolutionary' (Cixous in Fuery 1995:83). Rather than desire being anti-social, it is a social catalyst. Desire pushes us towards the unknown, the negated other, not necessarily with the aim of colonising the other's knowledge, but to interact and learn from it. As such, the creation of a space within which desire is explicit would seem at the least a necessary, and at the most, an essential condition for

H. Byrne-Armstrong PhD thesis 1999
knowledge to be produced and therefore for an ethical educational practice§. This is another conclusion of this thesis.

resistance...

As Foucault said, domination does not occur outside the habitus and its social practices (see 1983b). Domination is part of the interaction, it emerges out of the everyday, ongoing communication and is characterised by the establishment of unifying principles and the overcoming of other (see Falzon 1998:88). The same is so for resistance. Resistance§ does not only come from people recognising/dreaming up a Utopia in which difference and conflict will be overcome and consensus will rule. Rather, resistance is the 'singing-up' of new and othered voices⁷ that have been silenced under historical and concrete forms of social practices. Resistance therefore heralds a filling of the habitus with many voices, many songs, a cacophony, breaking the (temporary⁸) silence and oppression (Falzon 1998). The blips on the screen of these voices are always/already present. They are the cracks and fissures of the incomplete discourses, the clues to narratives that resist dominant (unhelpful) conventions. So resistance is not something that we create or construct but an already present phenomenon that constantly emerges to challenge discursive closure and domination. Another conclusion of this thesis is that acknowledging this presence is a necessary condition of knowledge production.
...& agency...

But within this how does agency and action occur? Desire, resistance, and agency are entangled in an ongoing process of engagement. Knowledge building is not finite, something that can be possessed or complete but a process and a flow. And within the flow, social forms are constituted. They are a necessary product of our social habitus. By standing back and recognising that the social forms that human beings dream up are problematic, a space is opened 'for that which resists, that which is other or different' (Falzon 1998:89). Cultivating a detachment to reveal the incompleteness of social forms and therefore the fluidity and fickleness of the identities and subjectivities that are constituted, is a moment of agency. As social forms are revealed as partial and finite, people find the cracks and fissures in which to express themselves in more useful identities. This is what I am calling agency, the moments in which people accept or resist; the moments when a space is opened to reveal other narratives, and this critical reflection represents agency. At this moment, Cixous (see 1992) suggests, our task is, to have without holding, to own without grasping, and to rest momentarily in the flow of desire.

Making connections with the thesis...

encounters with feminism ...

In the encounter with feminism, the ironic tension 'dead-certainties' are the tension between the universal structural oppression still experienced by women in the world today and the complexity that one finds if this fact is regarded as a universal truth in day-to-day practices. The tension

H. Byrne-Armstrong PhD thesis 1999
is experienced in the narrative as I traverse the rocky path of being a female educator within the Academy, of being a feminist educator in a mixed gender classroom, and all in the context of feminist pedagogy and a gender discussion. For the students, this event led them to alternative narratives and explorations of gender issues in their ongoing studies. It also perpetuated the dichotomy - and dominant discourses that 'other' women or are anti-men.

The tension could have been eliminated (discursive closure) if I had used my power and controlled the classroom (even giving a lecture on the oppression of women). It could also have been eliminated if I had used my power to refuse the initial request. Instead, although I recognised some of the tension likely to occur, I decided to walk-my-talk and explore the territory. In doing this, the dominant discourses shaping the situation became more flamboyant later to be firmly quelled by my first interpretation.

Subsequent interpretations revealed again the flamboyance as the contingent and finite nature of the discourses circulating in the classroom, (and therefore the identities and subjectivities that were produced), were revealed. I am reminded of Foucault saying that thought is freedom through our ability to detach from it and study it (in Rabinow 1984). This activity of deconstruction of this event has shown me the fissures and cracks in the 'dead-certainty' of the truth I began with. It also showed the ironic tension that many female educators feel as an unease; the ability to take up power in ways that resist the invitations to subjectivities such as 'mothering'. Equally, for students to find subjectivities and identities outside the mother/child dichotomy and the tyranny of a patriarchal institution that objectifies them. Desire was

H. Byrne-Armstrong PhD thesis 1999
cultivated, which was demonstrated in the ways that the students and I resisted dominant discourses by asserting our difference/objections to the relationships created as well as being coerced into them.

**encounters with humanism ...**

In the encounter with humanism, the 'dead-certainty' is the domination (in the local radical pedagogy) of the philosophy of consciousness - that people need to examine themselves and grow to a greater internal awareness in order to be educated subjects and student resistance to this. The habitus is filled with particular practices of the self, reflective practices. The first interpretation opens the space by recognising the performative dimension of language. But ongoing student resistance to reflective practices required a greater search than this. Rather than regarding this resistance as a 'block' to their potential, or a rebellion against power, I was curious about it (opening the space for more interpretations). A genealogical inquiry revealed that practices of the self like reflective practices, have a long history; other truth stories (social forms that have come and gone through the ages) are told, showing how practices can be the same but the truth stories informing them can perpetrate invisible agendas (i.e. confessional practices). What is demonstrated in this narrative is how humanism holds assumptions that purport to be universally ‘true but reflect discursive power/knowledge practices'12. And, the stories that we choose to explain and judge social practices, such as reflective practices, creates the meaning of these practices. We accept them without question, yet these stories are embedded in personal, social and institutional agendas.

---

H. Byrne-Armstrong PhD thesis 1999
However, also present is resistance (in a poststructuralist sense), which illustrates that domination and resistance to any social form is ongoing, ever present and productive. As an educator I see my ethical responsibility is to keep the space as open as possible so that dominant social forms do not control it and resistance can continue to occur. Hence the ‘thick-descriptions’ are the first attempts to do this. Externalising conversations create a conversational space (maintaining discursive openness) in which people’s histories of resistance to social forms can be storied. This is knowledge production.

**encounters with radical education ...**

The ‘dead-certainties’ of the encounter with radical education are found in a conflict resolution method that was used to work through a conflict between staff and students. The method used, while embedded in the dialectic, made the habitus visible through a mapping of the conflict onto the space. The focus of the debate was the two extreme points of view in the room. What mapping the space did, was show the dispersion and multiplicity of otherness in the debate. Most people would not be pigeonholed onto one side or the other. This could have been individualised and explained in terms of people not yet having developed a critical awareness (reflexivity or contextual awareness). But, maybe these students had intimate experience of the discourses of institutions, and realised that there could not be a resolution in the field of action they were are part of (the institution). Yet others recognised that the institution, while being oppressive, was also potentially liberating. This is the tension that will always be present in any educational setting with an aim of social justice. Trying to resolve it would be a mistake, as the

H. Byrne-Armstrong PhD thesis 1999
resolution will be the domination of yet another social form that would silence difference. The discourse analysis vividly demonstrates this. It establishes the complexity of habitus and the limitations of resolution.

**encounters with embodiment ...**

The encounter with 'embodiment' traces the 'dead-certainties' of the body/mind split - a binary opposition much favoured by experiential learners. It is firstly explored through an activity using the body as another site for knowledge production in the classroom space. But beginning to wake up to the disciplinary 'technologies of the self' concept, led me scurrying to the books. Using other than 'chalk and talk' practices have a long and enthusiastic following in experiential classrooms. But there has been little examination or interrogation of this (perhaps because to have these alternative practices is a resistance to dominant pedagogies and one I personally would not like to discourage). Basically in the presence of humanist discourses there is the ever-present problem of hidden power and especially the objectification of the body in western culture.

However, instead of deciding to be seduced back into dominant forms of pedagogy, this exploration produced a new found confidence, as well as unease, about using non-traditional forms of learning - the ironic tension again. The narrative continues by exploring practices that challenge the truth stories that inform oppositional thinking and which encourage the development of new forms of subjectivity. Collapsing the research method into the pedagogy - by using an external conversation in the classroom between the body and the environment - created a body of talk. Different selves/subjectivities are created and students began to
represent themselves in the limits of their identities and as fluid subjectivities rather than fixed selves. In doing this they expressed the detachment so critical to knowledge production (a form of epistemic cognition), and in this, the glimpses of the presence of agency.

**Reflections and connections ...**

The research chapters are a form of discursive closure, (each is only one story amongst many that could be told about the events). However, as the quote that begins this thesis implies, whatever story I choose to tell, in the performance and the reception, other stories (your stories/theories) will creep in and inhabit the cracks. Some of these are stories that follow prevailing conventions (dominant discourses) and others resist this. This is therefore an example of the ongoing resistance that keeps the habitus alive, unsettled, and potentially transformative.

How can I show that I am not deluding myself? Am I, in this project, demonstrating the tension and holding it for ‘other’ to be expressed, without practicing humanist recipes that promote openness under the guise of control (e.g. recipes for conflict resolution, reflective exercises, quadrant models for human personality)? This is the impetus that began this project; those insidious forms of domination clothed in sentimentality - the ghost of Pollyanna. Have I managed to stay at the margins of the humanist and other dominant discourses in order to interrogate them but not destroy them?

One reply is that people (you and I) are in the habitus all the time - we can’t avoid it. This is life as concrete embodied human beings. We interact, play, dominate, resist, order the world into social forms and we

H. Byrne-Armstrong PhD thesis 1999
tear them down, and, despite our constant struggle to organise the world, otherness persists and resists - and this, in turn, impacts upon us.

It is precisely that which escapes from our control, that which we cannot organise, predict or domesticate. It is that which is new unexpected, that which shocks, surprises us, takes us aback, challenges our beliefs, and threatens us with transformation (Falzon 1998:89).

The local radical pedagogy is no exception. As a reconstructionist teacher, I will be shocked, disturbed and surprised and at times feel a failure. If this is so, I am doing my job. If I insulate myself from this, I am captured into a dominant social form that silences me, unwilling to notice the everyday because agendas are to avoid this\textsuperscript{13}. If there is no room for otherness I would be deluding myself, as someone interested in some loose notion of ethical practice and social justice. The initial events that I chose to explore were events that disturbed (even shocked me) and evoked curiosity. Mindell\textsuperscript{14} frames this in terms of individual perception. That things outside our awareness, at the margins of our knowing are the ones likely to fascinate and disturb us - the 'other'. This would seem similar to what Foucault spoke about in one of his last books when he talks about a 'passion for knowledge', not from a Hegelian view to colonise it, but to look for difference, 'a readiness to find what surrounds us as strange and odd' (1987:8). Narrating these events also feels risky and exposing, a sign that would suggest 'an edge\textsuperscript{15}', a place where my categories of knowledge are likely to be disturbed and unsettled, but the place in which they are also likely to be transformed. This is a hard place to fake.

H. Byrne-Armstrong PhD thesis 1999
It is this uncertainty and unease that characterises the ironic tension that is the heart of this thesis and my pedagogic enterprise. I am not sure whether living this tension is an ontological condition or an epistemological maturation, but the instruments/beingness that I have found necessary for creating this tension (as an educator) are best described as a narrative epistemology/ontology.

'Singing-Up' A narrative epistemology ...

A narrative way of knowing is not an individual cognitive arrangement (like reflexivity, or epistemic cognition, or conscientization). It is not some 'natural' state that exists 'inside' people's heads to be accessed through education/therapy/prayer. A narrative epistemology is another discursive practice - a systematised set of language and social practices that, like any other discourse, has rules and regulations that construct and maintain it. I will describe these rules and regulations in the following paragraphs to show how it operates as a discourse and social practice.

Firstly, I would like to contrast a narrative epistemology and an individual epistemology, not from the viewpoint of the pointing figure, but to gesture a change of emphasis in classroom practices. I have depicted this with flowing arrows (see below) to visually indicate that this is not an either/or narrative/discourse. Both discourses can exist. The important issue/action is to voice that there is power/privilege assigned to one discourse and the other is silenced in particular contexts. For example, in my experience a narrative epistemology is not the norm (by any means) in the education environment. Power and air-time is mostly assigned to an individual epistemology. In fact narrative

H. Byrne-Armstrong PhD thesis 1999
ways of knowing are disowned and invalidated as being too subjective, anecdotal and unreliable. The power and might of the scientific, rational
discourse issues proclamations and 'evidence' that makes any claims to
the contrary difficult.

From the chart it can be seen that the change of focus is from
the people to the habitus of the classroom space. In this, the emphasis is
on the talk and social practices shaping the arena; the institutional
practices and power shaping the subjectivities and identities in the
context. My interest and research is not the people and their meanings
but the social practices that shape their meanings (see chart).
Gesturing Change

Individual epistemology
talk reflects reality

Learning is an internal process
depending on individual growth
of cognitive skills.
Reflection/insight creates learning

Narrative Epistemology
talk constructs reality

Learning is a cultural
practice relying on discursive
resources, outsight and a
dcentred self

A narrative epistemology gestures towards social practices and language, to
demonstrate how social and political agendas produce the individual. It is not aiming
at personal meaning making or global action, but small, tawdry acts of resistance and
resilience.

Individual epistemology
individual responsibility

Success or failure is due to individuals’
responsibility and ability to deal
with strengths & weaknesses

Narrative Epistemology
collective responsibility

Success or failure due to
institutional practices and power
of social practices and cultural
resources to shape individuals

A narrative epistemology takes the emphasis off the individual, and
places it on the talk and social practices. Research is gestured away
from individuals and their meaning making onto the social practices that
shape their meaning making.

H. Byrne-Armstrong PhD thesis 1999
What are the categories of social practices in a narrative epistemology?

♦ **De-centring the subject.** The focus of study is not the agent/subject but the discourse that constitutes that subject/person in the first place. This means objectifying the very thing that objectifies us - turning the tables and using the method so loved by scientific objectivity and realism, back interrogating itself with its own tools - a recursive turn.

♦ **Externalising.** This means a change of emphasis - a gesture towards 'outsight'. There is no fixed truth 'out there' waiting to be responded to by peoples' internal perceptions, there is language and there are social practices. Peoples' perceptions form according to culturally defined ways of speaking/social practices.

♦ **Partiality.** There is no fixed, universal truth. There are interpretations that are partial; they shift and change depending on context and history.

♦ **Contingency.** Social forms assemble and disperse over time, not in any teleological way but through contingencies.

♦ **Historicity and Temporality.** Dominant cultural stories are, however, material, and can be traced over time in their materiality as belonging to historical periods. These discourses belong to social and political agendas that have gradually and explicitly been implemented over long periods of time (see Foucault 1973, 1977);

♦ **The personal is political.** The aim is to encourage people not to find out who they really are but to reject the identities and subjectivities that they are shaped into by the power of dominant discourses;

♦ **Particularity.** Knowledges (narratives) are local and particular.

---

H. Byrne-Armstrong PhD thesis 1999
The plot of each research narrative is the journey from a set of practices embedded in a philosophy of consciousness to those embedded in a narrative epistemology. In the telling, I have demonstrated a narrative epistemology operating in the arena of the radical/experiential classroom. Each narrative contains the practice/knowledges that have become vital to my life/work as an educator, and around which I design learning activities.

These are:

- Framing language/talk as performance (see particularly Chapter 6);
-Disconnecting from dominant discourses - the use of externalised conversations (especially Chapter 5 & 6);
- Interrogating and questioning of the field of action - the use of discourse analysis/deconstruction (Chapter 5, 6, 7 & in pedagogy Chapter 8);
- Promoting discursive openness - the use of drama/questioning processes (Chapter 7 & 8);
- Authoring resistance and new forms of subjectivity (Chapter 6 & 8).

But, the learning activities presented in this thesis are not described to add another recipe to a burgeoning pile of educational manuals. Although there has been much written about the influence of poststructuralism on education, rarely have there been attempts to articulate its practice. I have done this, but as a narrative - another example of the ironic tension so central to this thesis.
Concluding the thesis ...

Unfortunately, as a form of knowing, a narrative epistemology is not useful to prevailing political agendas, hence it is not institutionalised. It enables us to 'refuse what we are' (Foucault 1983a:216), to challenge the discourses that constitute us as some category of person who is 'in' or 'out'. In exposing social practices, it is, in fact, subversive and potentially threatening to many political agendas. This is obvious in the rules and regulations of dominant scientific discourses that insist on universal principles, on objectivity, on truth and on action. Narrative epistemologies are necessarily defamed (e.g. 'that's not true/real', 'its only anecdotal', 'too small, personal and subjective', unable to be rigorously proven', 'it's nihilistic'), and rendered invisible.

Much of the criticism of this way of knowing is framed within the epistemology that is challenged by poststructuralism - an epistemology embedded in the modernist discourse. This is a problem. Poststructuralism is a different discourse; it operates with different conventions, rules and regulations, so it is not possible to judge it from a modernist epistemology. The criticisms thrown at it are being framed within a set of rules that themselves are up for question.

However the challenges at the heart of these criticisms are, at the end of the millennium some of the most important philosophical questions, and a fitting ones to close this thesis with. The question as I see it is, does the death of truth and the death of the subject lead to nihilism, anarchy and moral degradation?

H. Byrne-Armstrong PhD thesis 1999
In advocating an 'ironic tension', 'dead-certainties' and 'local-knowledge', I am advocating a position as an educator. I am proclaiming the usefulness of death of truth and the death of the subject as advocated by poststructuralism. I am rejecting a notion of a universal reality (foundationalism) and metaphysical subjectivism and promoting a discursive openness that gives voice to multiple realities and intersecting, contextual oppressions. This position is considered, in the political, radical education arena (and others) as politically dangerous and theoretically problematic.19

There are two current challenges; in one, the main issue seems to be security20 - that not having some agreed, collective metaphysical quest, will lead to anarchy and relativistic nightmares of moral disintegration. In the other, allowing multiple voices/realities and keeping the interaction between human beings open means holding a critical and ironic view about social forms and unpacking them. This will mean 'anything goes', which will lead to difficulty in making the judgments considered necessary to act with others for a better world.

To me, there is a problem with both these challenges; one insisting on universal principles and the terminal uniqueness of the subject for security/morality, and the other, the postmodern idea of tolerating all difference as equally valid and ethical. In the first challenge, universal principles are narratives (the position of this thesis) - and human generated. There is clear evidence from (particularly) women and people of colour that the effects of universal principles based on abstract and transcendent (white, male) imposed notions of Utopia - reached through proper and right (white, rational, middle-class, male) communication (see Habermas 1981, 1987), are oppressive. In the second challenge, people
share the planet. The exaggerated belief that the 'other' can be only understood on its own terms and any attempts to understand it on any other basis is to distort and colonise it, is, to me, a re-inforcement of skin-encapsulated individualism (a concern at the beginning of the thesis). It alludes to a mass of unique individuals all bumping around together in a neutral or even empty space with little connection. Furthermore, an exaggerated respect for other as autonomous, is remarkably close to liberalism, (that free individuals should be free to do what they want - tolerating all world views). A single unifying principle (foundationalism) has been replaced with local and multiple unifying principles. Both these challenges to poststructuralism, then, are unifying principles in which the basis for tolerance becomes 'leaving the other alone' (see Falzon 1998:93).

Once again we are recruited into the dichotomous nightmare of modernism - focussing on the journey as map and/or territory. From a poststructuralist point of view there is no journey. There is only the habitus of social practices through which people are shaped and shape their interactions and learning; a geography of space and people influencing one another, an intersubjective space of constant negotiations and unexpected possibilities.

Human beings will continue to create social forms, categorising and controlling their interactions, and these social forms will come and go. Rather than this idea being nihilistic and fragmentary, it opens a space (habitus) that is richly filled with our interactions as concrete embodied human beings. We cannot isolate ourselves from these interactions and the failure of both the modernist approach and the

H. Byrne-Armstrong PhD thesis 1999
liberal one is to deny the existence of this habitus, the first replacing it with transcendent ideals, and the second, with a relativist nightmare.

It is to the habitus of social practices that a narrative epistemology turns - not to find a 'pure' communication or the 'real' story, but to critically reflect on what we are - to use the reflexive turn of poststructuralism to acknowledge the language and social practices that constitute us. We are all implicated in these social practices, they govern our lives and this is a productive thought. If we are all implicated in them we can also change them. The challenge we have in the light of the poststructuralist view is to detach ourselves from what we are - to maintain discursive openness and expose the exercise of power in everyday social practices. A narrative epistemology helps us do this. Why should we bother?

Here I revert, temporarily, and with irony, to a foundationalist belief. There is no separate "other". People walk the planet together, and breathe it's air, and drink it's water. They also create social forms to manage this. It is not that we create social forms that is a problem (the modernist interpretation of poststructuralism), it is that some social forms, (and this is the influence of poststructuralism) are more colonising than others. Power, and its coupling with truth and knowledge, is the factor that produces the "what" that we are; ie. some people have been shaped by more persuasive/coercive social forms than others.

'There may not be one ideal, transcendentally grounded form of life, but there are still forms of social order and unity. They emerge all the time, as contingent constructions, fabricated ensembles, arising out of dialogue to the degree that some forces are able to impose themselves on others' (ibid:95).

H. Byrne-Armstrong PhD thesis 1999
This is why the colonisers need exposing and the colonised need a voice. But, whether the oppressive colonising forces of a political dictator or organised movements of resistance in a social group, or a primary school curriculum, social forms are finite and partial. There are always cracks and fissures for the creatures of resistance to peek through.

The position of this thesis and a narrative epistemology doesn’t mean avoiding absolutisms, but having an attitude of ironic tension to them. It is not the social forms, per se, that are the problem, or even perhaps, how they are maintained and imposed on others. It is recognising that they are never total. Foucault said we have to find ways to move out of the political double bind we are in - to find ways of disconnecting the growth of capacities from the ‘intensification of power relations’ (1983b). We don’t abandon all forms of social unity. We challenge their totalising tendencies and open the spaces for alternative forms - forms of resistance and transgression that can assert themselves in the production of new/subjugated knowledges and forms of life. This is the purpose of a narrative epistemology and the task of a (this) reconstructionist teacher.

---

1 A phrase used by one of the students to be specific and vague at the same time.
2 Bourdieu has written extensively about habitus, the system of structured dispositions that construct objects of knowledge - constituted in practice and oriented to practical functions. The practical world that is constituted in relation to habitus, acting as a system of cognitive and motivating structures, is a world of already realised ends - procedures, paths to follow, paths to take - and of objects endowed with a permanent teleological character ... tools and institutions’ (1990:53).
3 In Harré and Stearns (1995)
4 Lacan whose theory this is, believed that our drives were not anti-social but were the means by which we entered the ‘Symbolic Order’ - the social world.
5 Many of us as students have experienced the opposite; educational spaces in which the thirst for knowledge is quelled by strict agendas and ‘dead’ knowledge.

H. Byrne-Armstrong PhD thesis 1999
Resistance/rebellion in humanism usually comes from perceiving inconsistencies between exercises of power and so-called espoused beliefs/practices/rights - a sense of injustice. Rebellion/resistance therefore in a humanist sense implies loyalty to the dominant discourse.

This voice can be our own 'othered' self-narratives or the marginalised others of our social world.

Temporary here refers to the fact that all narratives which are viewed historically are temporary transitory - even if they last for hundreds of years - which doesn't sound helpful if one belongs to a silenced group. I have found the converse to be true. Recognising the historical construction of knowledge helps the detachment.

Including their embeddedness in culture and history.

We do this in language/action. Decisions, choices, interpretations are all social forms.

The less we recognise this process the more likely we are to be 'docile bodies' (Foucault's 1977 term) - which is productive for many who take up 'powerful' subject positions within discourses. The more we fit into dominant discourses and the less we question the more likely we are to succeed in the identities/subjectivities of that discourse and become power-brokers in supporting it. But even at this level there are cracks and fissures and spaces of resistance.

Resistance, early childhood traumas, childhood injuries account for difficult learners.

Foucault talks about this (see Dreyfus and Rabinow 1983). Universities/organisations are full of this. Abstract, universalising knowledge is what supports the hegemony. To address everyday social practices would be to topple the power brokers.

See (1995) or any of his books.

See footnote 5 this chapter.

Adapted from Muspratt, Luke & Freebody 1997

See chapter 2.

See chapter 1.

Habermas is one of the most strident opponents to Foucault's work. For an excellent read on this see Falzon (1998).

Or is it control?

This is a deliberate use of the hyphen.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


Armstrong, H. Byrne 1996, 'A Quest without Closure', *Psychotherapy Australia*, vol. 2, no. 5.


---

H. Byrne-Armstrong PhD thesis 1999


---

H. Byrne-Armstrong PhD thesis 1999


Campbell, J. 1972, Myths to Live By, USA: Viking Press.


H. Byrne-Armstrong PhD thesis 1999


H. Byrne-Armstrong PhD thesis 1999


Foucault, M. 1977a, 'The Political Function of the Intellectual', Radical Philosophy, no. 17, pp. 12-14


H. Byrne-Armstrong PhD thesis 1999


Foucault, M. 1988a, 'The Political Technology of Individuals', Martin, L.H.,
Gutman, H. and Hutton P.H., (eds.) Technologies of the Self: A
Seminar with Michel Foucault, USA: The Massachusetts Institute
of Technology Press.

Fraser, N. and Nicholson, L. 1990, 'Social Criticism without Philosophy:
An Encounter between Feminism and Postmodernism', Nicholson, L.
(ed.) Feminism/Postmodernism, USA: Routledge.

Herder.

Freire, P. and Macedo, D. 1987, Literacy: Reading the Word and The


Freire, P. 1994, Pedagogy of Hope: reliving Pedagogy of the Oppressed,


Gatens, M. 1983, 'A Critique of the Sex/Gender Distinction', Allen, J.
and Patton, P. (eds.), Beyond Marxism? Interventions after Marx,
Sydney: Interventions.

Gebbie, T. 1994, On the Subject of Postmodernism Feminism, (unpub.),
University of Western Sydney.

Geertz, C. 1983, Local Knowledge: Further Essays in Interpretive
Anthropology UK: Fontana Press.

Gergen, K. 1991, The Saturated Self: Dilemmas in Contemporary Life,


Heron, J. 1977, Dimensions of Facilitator Style, Human Potential Research Project, UK: University Of Surrey.


Hillman, J. and Ventura, M. 1993, We've Had a Hundred Years of Psychotherapy and the World's Getting Worse, USA: Harper Collins.

Hillman, J. 1980, Egalitarian Typologies Versus the Perception of the Unique, USA: Spring.

H. Byrne-Armstrong PhD thesis 1999


H. Byrne-Armstrong PhD thesis 1999


---

H. Byrne-Armstrong PhD thesis 1999


---

H. Byrne-Armstrong PhD thesis 1999


---

H. Byrne-Armstrong PhD thesis 1999


---

H. Byrne-Armstrong PhD thesis 1999


*School of Humanities: Style Manual*, University of Western Sydney, Hawkesbury.

School of Social Ecology Undergraduate Handbook, 1992, University of Western Sydney, Sydney: UWS Printing Department.


Smith, K. 1982, 'Philosophical Problems in Thinking about Philosophical
Change', Change in Organisations, Goodman, P. (ed), USA: Jossey
Bass

Soja, E. 1989, Postmodern Geographies: The re-assertion of Space in:

Spanos, W. 1993, The End of Education: Towards Posthumanism, USA:
University of Minnesota Press.


Spolin, V. 1986, Theatre Games for the Classroom, USA: Northwestern
University Press.

Stanley, L. (ed.) 1990, Feminist Praxis: Research and Epistemology,
London: Routledge.

Starhawk, 1987, Truth or Dare, New York: Harper Row.

Stenner, P. 1993, 'Discoursing Jealousy', Discourse Analytic Research,

Style Manual for authors, Editors and Printers, Fifth Edition, 1994,
Canberra: AusInfo, Department of Finance and Administration.

Press.


Tomm, W. 1992, Ethics and Self Knowledge in Exploration in Feminist
Ethics, Theory & Practice, Browning Cole, E. and Coultrap-McQuin,
S. USA: Indiana University Press.

and reconstructing the Postmodern World, New York: Tarcher
Putman.

H. Byrne-Armstrong PhD thesis 1999


DEAD CERTAINTIES AND

LOCAL KNOWLEDGE:

poststructuralism, conflict &
narrative practices
in radical/experiential education

Hilary Byrne-Armstrong

A thesis submitted to the University of Western Sydney in total
fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of
Philosophy, Faculty of Social Inquiry, March, 1999
PLEASE NOTE

The greatest amount of care has been taken while scanning this thesis,

and the best possible result has been obtained.
I hereby certify that this thesis, titled *Dead Certainties and Local Knowledge*, submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy is the result of my own research, and except where otherwise acknowledged and to my best knowledge, that it is my work, and has not been submitted for an award at any other institution.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgments</td>
<td>VIII</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>IX</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abstract</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## Chapter One

Preamble: Learning along the way  
1. Introducing this Project  
2. Locating Myself in the Research  
7. Writing the History  
10. Locating the Style  
16. Walking Through the Thesis  
19.  

## Chapter Two

The Passion and the Problem of/using Foucault  
1. Introduction  
26. The Death of the Subject & the Turn to Language  
26. Foucault's Passion - giving theory feet  
28. Manufactured Identities  
33.  
   truth stories  
39. self-self practices  
42. The problem of using Foucault  
44. The problem of Foucault - gender blindness  
46. Another problem - relativism  
50. And another problem - foundationalism  
51.  

## Chapter Three

Exploring tradition: 'Singing-Up' the Local Radical Pedagogy  
1. Introduction  
56.  
2. The Lineage  
58.  
   1. experiential movement inspired by humanistic  
   psychology  
59.  

H. Byrne-Armstrong PhD thesis
2. radical/liberatory education movement 62
3. the critical thinking/reflection-in-action movement 68
4. feminism and interlocking oppressions 74

Chapter Four
Knowers, Knowing, Knowledge(s): singing up a method 80
Introduction 81
behind the methodology 81
writing the methodological history 82
The Pathway to a Narrative Epistemology 85
changing directions 85
why a narrative pathway? 87
exploring the contours of narrative knowing 89
narrative as cognitive schema 90
narrative as culture 91
narrative as political praxis 93
positioning the thesis in a narrative epistemology 95
Methods to Fit a Narrative Epistemology 97
Foucault's influence 98
discourse analysis 100
acknowledging the paradox in this method 103
possible outcomes 103
Research Design 104
walking the talk 104
the arrangement of the research 104
Concluding 112

Chapter Five
Feminism & Power-Truth Encounters 114
Introducing the Narrative 115
'Dead-Certainties' - The Famous Fishbowl Incident 116
introduction 116
setting the scene 117
the incident 119
More 'Dead-Certainties' - the first interpretation 121
a feminist interpretation 122
Reflecting on new knowledges 127
'Local-Knowledge' - a second interpretation 130

H. Byrne-Armstrong PhD thesis
unpacking 'truth stories'
Masculinist Discourse
 totalising ... homogenising practices
 ... colonising practices
 classification ... control by rule practices
 surveillance practices ... distancing practices
 normalising practices
The Rights Discourse
 totalising ... universalising practices
 surveillance practices
Duty of Care Discourse
 totalising practices
 surveillance practices
 regulatory practices ... ground rules for groups
Control Discourse
 surveillance practices
 regulatory practices
 reflecting on new knowledges
A Post-script: a student wrote to me
'Thick-Descriptions' - 'singing-up' new practices
'Thick-Descriptions' ... burying certainty
Concluding the Narrative

Chapter Six
Humanism & Insight-Outsight Encounters
 Introducing the Narrative
 'Dead-Certainties' - discovering a 'self that one truly is'
 Reflexivity Exercise: who am I?
 'Local-Knowledge' - the first interpretation
 'singing-up' the narratives
 Reflecting on new knowledges
 More 'Dead-Certainties' a genealogy of reflective practices
 More 'Local-Knowledge' - the second interpretation
 the narrative re-visited
 reflection on new knowledges
 'Thick Descriptions' ... singing up new practices
 externalising conversations
 interrogating the context
interrogating self/subjectivities 187
More interpretations...challenging dominant discourses 190
Reflecting on new knowledges 193
Concluding the Narrative 193

**Chapter Seven**

Radical Education: Conflict, Power, Desire & 'Other Encounters' 196
Introducing the Narrative 197
'Dead-Certainties' - a geography of power 199
the conflict 199
mapping the conflict and a first interpretation 202
'Local-Knowledge' - a second interpretation...
how is power exercised 209
Banker Education Discourse 209
Discourse of Autonomy 213
Reflection on new learnings 222
More 'Dead-Certainties' - conflict, desire & other 222
'Thick-Descriptions' - singing up new practices
other as other 227
dramatic interrogations 229
Reflecting on new knowledges 234
Concluding the Narrative 235

**Chapter Eight**

Embodiment: 'Singing-Up' a Body of Knowledge 238
Introducing the Narrative 239
'Dead-Certainties' - the body speaks its mind 240
More 'Dead-Certainties' 242
'Local-Knowledge' - the body-mind narratives 246
reflecting on new knowledges 248
'Thick-Descriptions' - the art of self-making 254
1. interactive geography 254
   From my journal 255
2. playing with selves 257
3. writing the self 259
reflecting on new knowledges 270
Concluding the Narrative 271

H. Byrne-Armstrong PhD thesis
Chapter Nine
Towards a Narrative Epistemology: Thickening the Descriptions

Introduction 274

'Singing-Up' the ironic tension 275

'Singing-Up' desire, resistance & agency ...desire...
  resistance... 278
  ... & agency... 279

Making connections with the thesis
  encounters with feminism 279
  encounters with humanism 281
  encounters with radical education 282
  encounters with embodiment 283
  reflections and connections 284

'Singing-Up' A narrative epistemology 286

Gesturing Change 288

Concluding the Thesis 290

Bibliography 295
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I have pursued throughout my life, a quest for understanding the spaces and differences between people. Since childhood I have been aware that there was much more going on between people and the social spaces they inhabited than was obvious or acknowledged. As I gained a voice, my curiosity increased. I hope it never leaves me, because the more curious I become, the more I come to know and the more complex and exciting life becomes. This thesis is my latest quest for understanding. It emerges from a growing excitement that acknowledging and mediating difference creates the quality of relationship that many people search for. Perhaps mediating our conflicts whilst honouring and maintaining our difference, is the beginning of love.

There have been many conversations, interactions and relationships over the years that have assisted me on this quest, but my primary acknowledgment must go to my partner, Dr Peter Melser, for being willing to join my excitement at discovering new things and making connections, for dialoguing with me day and night as I pursued my quest. His encouragement, love and narrative creeps through the nooks and crannies of the text.

Thank you to my colleagues for walking along the path with me, especially Dr. Martin Mulligan, Dr Debbie Horsfall and Dr Mike Newman. Thank you also to Professor Bob Hodge for alluding to my Pollyanna process, a chance remark that sent me on this journey.

I also want to acknowledge my family, especially my mother, Frances, whose love of learning has shaped my life. That she still reads my work and struggles to understand new theories and ways of thinking in her mid-eighties is a testimony to her and an example of this model in my life. Also, Lucy and Bridget and their father, for the many years of support that brought me to this place, and, finally, to Roxy, my grand-dog who insisted on taking me for walks whenever I came to stuck places in my writing.

Hilary Byrne-Armstrong 1999
SUMMARY

This thesis documents the development of a narrative epistemology and an associated pedagogic practice around the conflicts that occur in experiential learning settings. The thesis traces a progressive shift away from individualistic accounts of conflicts and dilemmas in learning being primarily embedded in psychological spaces, to a recognition of the importance of the social space - the cultural discourses that shape our everyday activity and interactions. This recognises that conflict is not simply a consequence of difference arising from personality, or other psychological factors, but a consequence of prevailing cultural narratives that instruct/construct us into the identities we are.

This pedagogic practice involves a change from internalising conversations to externalising conversations, thus keeping the discursive space open to the different stories, which are usually silenced by prevailing taken-for-granted explanations. For me, it is this refusal of what we are (i.e. our culturally bestowed identities), and a critique of the forces that shape us, that opens spaces within the social fabric to enable different stories to be heard and appreciated and creates opportunities for new, radical learning to occur.
ABSTRACT

This thesis traces and unpacks an ironic tension that I experience as a radical educator between:

- the objective knowledge of the teacher (banker education) and the subjective knowledge of the student (personal experience);
- judgments of false and true consciousness and the socio-political agendas of people (usually in authority) defining these states;
- the uses of reflective teaching as unfolding the naked individual or perpetrating individualism through surveillance of the self.

My initial questions/conflicts emerged as a student and teacher within a particular tradition of radical education. I term this the 'local radical pedagogy'. I became concerned with the social forms within this tradition that constructed 'right' and 'wrong' models of learning, 'true' and 'false' consciousness, reduced the complexity of human beings and their worlds to quadrant models of learning styles and personality profile categories, and preached prescriptions for reflective self-styling practices.

My search has been to deconstruct (through my own practice) some of these so-called radical teaching practices to find out for myself how much they perpetuate the very forms of exploitation and subjugation that they purport to challenge. I am not doing this within a politics of the pointing finger, in fact, if anywhere the finger would gesture in my direction, as someone who at times was too uncritical about the truth stories informing my practice. This exploration has not only addressed this uncriticalness, but has led to new understandings and knowledges, which fertilise my agency.

The thesis traces the exploration of the conflicts/dilemmas and tensions and proposes a pedagogy based on what I am calling a 'narrative epistemology'; that is, a way of knowing that holds the social space open for multi-storied narratives, but recognises the politics of difference between

H. Byrne-Armstrong PhD thesis
narratives. The thesis is written as a demonstration of this epistemology and a pedagogy informed by it. It is not being touted as the 'answer'; it is an exploration of practice. However, in the reading, (like any reading), it will generate different ideas and new knowledge in others who will take this to inform their practice in their ways within their local contexts.

Foucault (1983a) said there were three types of struggles:

- the struggle against forms of exploitation (ethnic, social and religious);
- the struggle against forms of exploitation which separate individuals from what they produce (economic);
- the struggle that ties the individual to her/himself and submits her/him to others in this way (forms of subjection, subjectivity and submission).

Education is implicated in all of these forms of exploitation. It is obvious in mainstream education. In radical/experiential forms of education it is less obvious and more subtle, but nevertheless present. But, as well as being implicated in exploitation, education (in most forms) also promotes agency and autonomy. This is the tension I identify at the beginning of this abstract.

My aim is to unpack this tension and demonstrate that this tension is the heart - the stuff to be worked on by the reconstructionist teacher (one who Gore:1993 identifies as being interested in some fluid notion of ethics and social justice). I propose that the activity of deconstructing this ironic tension opens the space for people to resist and therefore acquire some agency and autonomy in the face of subjugating discourses.

Furthermore, I want to demonstrate that rather than being nihilistic, deconstruction makes the material base of knowledge visible. This is an ethical practice and more fitting to reconstructionist teaching than pedagogies based on universal and abstract ideals. Showing that the social forms that we dream up as human beings are historical, contingent, multiple.
and partial, makes visible the spaces/rents/fissures through which resistance can occur. In order to do this, what I am calling a narrative epistemology is required. Furthermore, as the different stories that shape our lives are 'sung-up', we hear a chorus of voices rather than just one or two voices. This dialogue is, I propose, the ethical basis of practice.

The thesis is written to demonstrate my proposition. It uses several motifs to evoke the narrative epistemology; 'singing-up,' to evoke the notion that language is not a reflection of reality, but an action that produces it; 'dead-certainities,' to evoke the paradox of social forms being both true/necessary and not true/unnecessary at the same time; 'local-knowledge,' to evoke the material, temporal basis of knowledge; 'thick-description's to evoke the fullness and richness of the everyday meanings we inhabit, rather than deeper, absolute meaning.

The methods used in the thesis are embedded in the epistemology it proposes for the pedagogy. In other words, the research methods that I am using in the thesis are the same as I use in teaching. Research, knowledge production and teaching are not separate. This gestures towards the feminist stance on knowledge (that there is no separation of knower and known). The style of the thesis echoes this. Furthermore, the feminist stance is expressed in the writing style which is personal, narrative and at times poetic.

The theoretical underpinnings of the thesis are a feminist appropriation of the work of Michel Foucault whose project was to demonstrate the material foundation of knowledge and its historical specificity visible in taken-for-granted, everyday language and social practices. In other words he showed how the individual and contemporary social and political agendas are intricately connected. Like many feminists, I have appropriated his work for my own project. The thesis is not 'Foucauldian' in that while it follows
the notion of an interpretive analytics it is neither strictly archaeological or
genealogical.

I have used my own practice as the material of the exploration. The
thesis weaves between theory and practice attempting to keep the material
and contingent manner of knowledge production before the reader, thereby
demonstrating what it proposes: a narrative epistemology. To do this I hold
the ironic tension rather than reaching conclusions, the effect of this being
a demonstration that, if kept in play, this tension opens the space for
resistance and agency. The effect on you, the reader, is part of the
demonstration that I am trying to achieve. As a reader, you are a
participant in the knowledge production of this thesis. So, it does not aim to
come to definitive conclusions or universal prescriptions. It is local
knowledge, local practice and local research.
THE AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL APPROACH TO RESEARCH IN EDUCATION IS SUCH A MIDDLE WAY, ANCHORED IN THE WORLD. NARRATIVES, SITUATED IN SPACE AND TIME, TAKE PLACE, SAY MORE AND OTHER THAN THEY INTEND. OUR STORIES ARE POORLY INSULATED STRUCTURES. ALL KINDS OF CREATURES CREEP IN AND FIND REFUGE UNDER THE EAVES, BUILDING NESTS IN THE ATTIC AND BASEMENT CUPBOARDS. THEIR INEVITABLE HOSPITALITY IS NOTED IN POSTMODERNISM ... OUR STORIES, NO MATTER HOW FANCIFUL, IMPLICATE OUR BODIES. THERE WE ARE, SKIPPING DOWN THE PAVEMENT, CLEANING OFF THE TABLE, AND ALWAYS SITUATED, THE EYES AND EARS FOR WHAT OTHERS SEE AND HEAR AND SAY AND DO (GRUMET 1990:338)