

Writing Pedagogy in an Enabling Program

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This paper will explore the proposition that writing pedagogy can be used to investigate the relationship between literacy and social structure and between curriculum and critical pedagogy. The aim is to consider the importance of language in the construction and maintenance of social power and control, and to discuss the development of a critical literacy that is grounded pedagogically in a politics of difference, and which goes on to directly introduce those knowledges, discourses, texts and genres necessary for academic success and sociocultural power. The research on which this paper is based has been taking place in an enabling, or bridging, program, the objectives of which are to provide students with those skills that would enable them to participate successfully in tertiary study. Essential though these skills are, they do not necessarily address the construction and maintenance of the dominant discourses in society, which marginalise certain individuals, and perpetuate social inequality. Students are engaged in the construction and critique of varying texts, as well as critical journal writing in which they investigate and contest varying issues in society and education. Texts from journal writing are analysed using feminist poststructuralist analysis as an interpretive framework. This analysis allows an examination and interrogation of the conflicting, partial and contradictory discourses present in journal writing, together with a focus on relations of power and the multiple subjectivities that are available to individuals in society. The findings of this research will have application to the development of pedagogies for the exploration and implementation of critical literacy in general, and for adult continuing education in particular.

In recent times, there has been a multiplicity of view on the construction of language and literacy in which these terms can be seen as separate or as interchangeable, with neither having a common meaning. Increasingly, educators are writing of 'literacies' to point out that there is no one state that can be achieved and described as literacy; that, in fact, literacy is defined by culture, context, history, that it is a social construct (Freebody and Luke 1990). As a teacher educator involved with courses on language and literacy in teacher education, with a particular interest in gender in language, I have observed the emergence of discourses on literacy in educational debate, and I find that there are many issues which have accompanied this emergence that need to be addressed more directly. I am concerned moreover, that while there may be much public and

professional interest in literacy issues, it does not follow that an innovative, enlightened, socially critical literacy will result.

My concern is based on the relatively recent emergence of two contending discourses on literacy in educational debate, that of 'functional literacy', and that of 'critical literacy', which involve different understandings and emphases with regard to literacy and curriculum, as well as different political and social interests (Green and Bigum 1993). In the briefest terms, 'functional literacy', can be articulated with 'basic skills', the 'bottom-line' being to ensure that, in line with competency frameworks, all individuals have elements of survival literacy skills; whereas 'critical literacy' questions culture, power and social transformation. In general educational

debate, these discourses contend with each other because of their ultimately differing constructions of education and society.

Through my involvement in teaching language and literacy in an enabling course, I have made a preliminary move to gather together these disparate discourses, in an attempt to develop a socially critical agenda for exploring the relationship between literacy and education.

It is my belief that the development of critical literacy that is grounded pedagogically in a politics of difference, and which recognises the importance of language in the construction and maintenance of social power and control, should be a central concern for educators working with disadvantaged groups.

It is undeniable that students must learn the techniques and skills needed for achievement in the academy; equally, I believe they should feel free to write of their personal concerns and critique and question those discursive practices which have contributed to their marginalised positions. This means that the writing they are to do as part of their course should be both 'academic' and 'personal'. By rejecting the distinction between 'personal' writing and 'academic' writing and by showing that genre boundaries themselves are as questionable as gender boundaries, it can be demonstrated that all writing is a means of creating a self, not for expressing a self that already exists. This means that 'academic' and 'personal' writing can be seen as inseparable elements of the same thing, not as binary opposites (Davies 1994)

The tension between 'personal' and 'academic' writing can, I believe, be addressed by journal writing. Students can be encouraged to remember experiences, histories and activities which are traditionally dismissed and marginalised by academic discourse. They can use these experiences of cultural dissonance to make problematic, and to challenge, hegemonic culture both within and outside the classroom. Through journal writing, they can explore their differing subjectivities within a complex social and cultural environment,

gaining in the process a 'conception of what it means to be released into language; not simply learning the jargon of an elite, fitting unexceptionally into the status quo, but learning that language can be a means of changing reality' (Rich 1986:67)

In this paper I will focus particularly on writing as social practice and curriculum as social practice. I wish to explore and interrogate the nexus between the type of curriculum offered to marginalised students and the related teaching practices. My concern is to make students themselves theorists of their own lives by analysing and interrogating their own experiences (Weiler 1991). A way to address this concern is through a consideration of the centrality of language and the part it plays in the construction and maintenance of social power and control. Critical literacy and critical pedagogy can be powerful forces for exploring the relationship between literacy and education, and a recognition of the significance of the language and power nexus should be at the centre of a language and literacy pedagogy in an enabling course.

Poststructural Theory and Discourse

As the research on which this paper is based is framed within a feminist poststructural perspective, I will briefly discuss this theory

as it provides the interpretive framework for investigating the complex ways in which meaning, institutions, power, subjectivity and gender intersect, developing a new direction for theorising about change, power and subjectivity. I will first clarify my use of the term 'discourse'. I see discourse as all the ways of seeing, doing, believing, and valuing determined by historical, cultural and social factors, in which meaning is shaped (Gee 1990). It is through discourse that human subjects and meaning are produced, and relations of power are maintained and changed (Foucault 1977). The discourses and texts which make up social institutions and cultural practices are emphasised in poststructuralism (Kenway 1992, 1993). Poststructuralism becomes feminist when matters of femaleness and maleness and the differences between and within them are made a central feature of analysis and...when analysis implies a challenge to some sort of any inequitable relationships of power which involve gender or sexuality (Kenway 1992).

A significant feature of the poststructuralism paradigm is that it recognises both the constitutive force of discursive practices and at the same time recognises the subject as capable of having agency in relation to those practices. For individuals not accorded full human

status within society, 'agency stems from a critical awareness of the constitutive force of discourse' (Davies 1993:3). Thus, individuals are not passively shaped by others, but are active in taking up discourses through which they are shaped, with their 'identity' consisting of a 'nexus of contradictory subjectivities' (Walkerline 1990:3). What feminist poststructuralism claims to be able to do is to offer discursive space in which the individual woman is able to resist her subject position (Weiner 1993), as well as revealing how power is exercised through discourse, how oppression works and how resistances might be possible (Weedon 1987).

The strength of poststructuralism lies in its claim to create an analytic framework for defining and exploring social relations (Weiner 1993), viewing language as the common factor in any analysis of individual consciousness, social organisation and power. Poststructuralism also assumes that meaning is constituted within language and is not guaranteed by the subject who speaks it, but which allows one to examine the internal contradictions and illogicalities that reside within discourse and thus challenge the foundations on which they are based (Weedon 1987; Davies 1991; Kenway 1992).

Site of Research

The site of the research is that of an enabling, or bridging course. An enabling course is a part of adult continuing education and is a further development of adult basic education. (They) serve in principle to moderate the meritocratic, mainstream higher education access mechanisms by introducing compensatory action for disadvantaged persons (McNamee 1993:37). The participants in an enabling course are drawn from DEET (target) groups, as outlined in the social justice paper A Fair Chance for All. By taking part in an enabling course, individuals hope to acquire the skills that will facilitate their entry to a tertiary institution, and possibly the ultimate gaining of a degree.

Students who come into an enabling program are marginalised in society, and they are also marginalised in the discourse of the academy wherein discursive practices can negate the differences and alternate subjectivities which are significant to them. They are not adult illiterates, nor would their particular needs be catered for in a

basic literacy course for adults. It is possible that they have developed a high level of literacy in a given discourse, while perhaps remaining semiliterate or illiterate in a whole range of other discourses that constitute the ideological world we inhabit (Macedo 1993). They bring with them quite different institutional commitments and pedagogies, and (they) locate the student in a very different place in the socio-political makeup of the academy (Rose 1985:354-5). They

may be quite illiterate, but may not read much for pleasure; they may lack general knowledge that could be central to academic inquiry; they may need to write more than they do, or pay more attention to it than they are inclined to. These are all different problems for which a particular curriculum is needed, which could be defined as transitional or as initiatory, orienting, or socializing to what Bartholomae (1985) and Bizzell (1982) call the academic discourse community (Rose 1985).

Background to Enabling Courses

In the past only a relatively small proportion of Australians had the opportunity to study at a University. In recent times, this situation has changed due to factors ranging from the educational initiatives of the Whitlam Government in the 1970s to the present record number of young people who are going on to higher education.

While this increased opportunity to study at a University has alleviated much concern for equity in access in education which developed most strongly in the 1960s and continues to the present (Dawkins 1992), studies of particular sorts of disadvantage which impede access have thrown light upon the problems facing particular groups and their special needs. The Higher Education Equity Program identifies the following groups as disadvantaged in terms of their participation in higher education:

- * women (particularly those wishing to participate in non-traditional areas like engineering and physical sciences),
- * indigenous peoples,
- * people from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds
- * people disadvantaged through rural isolation,
- * people with disabilities,
- * people from non-English backgrounds (DEET 1990)

A further obstacle confronting those desiring access to tertiary education has been, as mentioned, the record number of young people going on to higher education which, coupled with a reduction in funding, has resulted in severe shortage of places at tertiary institutions. This factor particularly disadvantages those requesting entry other than through Year 12 results.

The Direct Entry mode of application is one solution to the competition for places based on Year 12 results, as it is aimed at people who have not come directly from school and who may not have recent education experience, but who may possess the aptitude for higher studies. There are still other individuals, however, who desire access to tertiary education but feel they do not possess the necessary study techniques to achieve success, and consequently lack the confidence to pursue their educational aims.

Several tertiary institutions have begun courses which allow interested people, drawn from DEET 'target' groups, to experience university study in a non-threatening environment. These courses aim to teach students how to study efficiently and successfully as well as introducing them to the major disciplines of university study. Called

variously Foundation, Enabling, or Bridging Courses, all have a similar aim: to introduce interested people to university study, and to provide them with the skills of literacy which will facilitate such access.

The FAST Course

In responding to the need to provide educational opportunities for those 'targeted' by DEET, and because of its rural location which places it in a position to attract all of the groups mentioned as 'targets', the University of Ballarat began an enabling course as an initiative of its Equity Program. Called the Foundation Access Studies (FAST) Program, it is an enabling program specifically designed as a preparatory course for people from the DEET 'target' groups who wished to enter a tertiary institution but considered that they lacked the general academic abilities required for study in this context. In one semester of full time study, students undertake courses in Language and Literacy, Mathematics, Research and Computing Skills and Orientation to Tertiary Studies. The FAST Program is seen as a vital step in facilitating their subsequent participation in higher education, and while students are not guaranteed a place in a degree course when they complete the FAST program, it is anticipated that successful completion would provide them with the necessary skills and abilities for undertaking tertiary study. So far, all students who have completed the program have begun degree courses at their chosen tertiary institution.

Previously, individuals drawn from target groups were catered for in adult literacy courses outside the university. However, the enabling course offered to students through the FAST Program was not perceived as an adult literacy course per se, but was planned on the assumption that the participants would already possess an ability in mathematics equivalent to Year 10 level, and an ability to write and read in English. The selection process includes an interview with the FAST co-ordinator, and the Equal Opportunity Officer. Selection criteria are based on a demonstrated disadvantage on equity grounds, demonstrated ability to complete the course, and evidence from prior learning.

Becoming literate in the academy involves learning to 'read the culture' (Ballard and Clanchy 1988:8), learning to come to terms with its values, rituals, behaviour and styles of language. All of the students hope to become a part of the academic community, which is

'literally a community of readers who write and writers who read' (Brodkey 1987:3). They need to acquire the abilities to use written language to perform those tasks required at a level judged as acceptable by the academy. While the selection process for students attempts to choose only those applicants capable of study at a higher level, it cannot be assumed that their overall literacy standard would be adequate for the demands of tertiary education.

Academic Writing

Of immediate relevance to my research are the literate practices which are considered appropriate for reading and writing in the academy. To introduce individuals to the academic community means inducting them into the genres and requirements of academic writing. This implies a discrete set of skills and abilities which, once mastered, will allow one to 'know' how to write for the varying academic discourses (Swales 1991: Oliver 1990). Learning to read and write academic prose is also a matter of learning conventions, such as whom to cite and when to

do so, for these conventions are part of the cultural repertoire of the academy (Brodkey 1987). These conventions include the use of argument as the preferred mode for discussion, the importance of the objective and impersonal, and the necessity of being thorough, and to reach a definitive, or objective, conclusion. 'A common denominator of each convention seems to be "to get it right", that is, establish cognitive authority' (Frey 1990:509).

There are serious problems, however, with conceiving of writing as a basic skill and with the pedagogies that flow from such a conception (Collins 1993; Gilbert 1991). From this perspective, student writing is a set of techniques, not a product of culture, and writing is taught as as a set of rules about grammar, rhetoric and style (Burhans 1983; Colvino et al 1980). Because skills are viewed as basic procedures, there is the strong expectation that they may be mastered at various junctures in one's educational career, and in the places where such tools are 'properly crafted' (Rose 1985:347). It has been demonstrated by Aronowitz and Giroux (1985) that teaching basic skills 'underestimates and undermines both teachers and students' (Fox 1990:66), because writing is not just a skill with which one can present or analyse knowledge. Writing is essential to the 'very existence of certain kinds of knowledge' (Rose 1985:348), and to acts of knowing which are to be stimulated and grounded in an individual's own being, needs, circumstances and experiences (Freire and Macedo 1987), and which cannot be considered independently of the social forces which have set up the conventions of appropriacy for that context (Fairclough 1992). Writing can therefore, serve in two ways; it offers the chance to manipulate words and ideas and also to deal with systems of social meanings that underlie the words that are

written

Bartholomae (1985:273) suggests that when student writers come into the academy they have to 'invent' the university, that is they have to learn to speak the language, and to take on the varying ways of knowing, evaluating, reporting and arguing that define the discourses of the academic community. If the differences between academic discourse and students' discourse is overstated, 'we send a message to those who are most uncomfortable, more anxious, about the status of their language in the university' (Fox 1990:71). An emphasis on the distinctiveness of academic discourse can also perpetuate the cultural division and conflicts that cause the discomfort of many students. Therefore, to teach writing only in terms of academic discourse could invalidate any history and experiences which might cause dissonance with academic discourse. This can have the effect of silencing the voices of students, and giving unquestioned pedagogical authority to discursive practices which concentrate on form at the expense of content, or on the academic at the expense of the personal.

Critical Journal Writing

My reasons for placing an emphasis on journal writing and the individual expression of meaning are, in essence, twofold. One reason is concerned with my standpoint as a feminist educator, and my aim to expand the 'limits of discourse' (Luke and Gore 1992) by directly addressing the forces that shape students' lives. The other reason for journal writing is to provide a non-judgmental forum for an exchange of ideas between the students and myself, and to subvert the 'structured hierarchical relationship' which can exist between a teacher and the students (Perry 1987), and in which we can reveal the work of words in the lives of our students and in our own lives' (McQuade 1992:11). Journal writing would appear to provide such a

forum.

I wish, however, to place journal writing within the framework of academic writing as there are conflicting views regarding its efficacy and potential. Journals are a ubiquitous item in many educational institutions, though their use ranges from the intense to the abysmal.

The 'personal' aspect of journal writing is considered by some writers as a disempowering vehicle for exploring an individual's lived experience, as it is resonant of the humanist/personalist discourse which does not take account of gendered subjectivity. It is also said to gloss the socially constructed nature of language practices and the discursive nature of subjectivity (Gilbert 1991b). The prose in journals is often characterised as incompetent, ill-considered, immature, descriptive and personal or subjective (Griffiths 1994), and of limited value in the development and construction of meaning in a

discipline. Academic prose, conversely, is ideally, organised, clear, assertive, analytical and objective. Whether or not student writers actually achieve this 'ideal' is a moot point.

These interpretations of journal writing and academic writing perpetuate the binaries between 'personal' and 'academic' writing, and inevitably continue to give power and authority to the discourse that is analytic and objective, leading to the 'invisibility and silencing of all those in the marginal, non-ascendant groups' (Davies 1994:20).

What is needed, I believe, is a more complex understanding of writing in the academy. Writing should offer a way to cross the old divide between objectivity and subjectivity, to rework the notion of objectivity, and the discursive practices which valorise such concepts as, say, 'science' and 'objectivity' (Davies 1994:19), and to make visible the constitutive power of ways of talking and writing.

Journal writing can be 'political and critical' (Griffiths 1994:73), and it is a means by which individuals can critique hegemonic regimes and discourses which perpetuate marginalisation. When this critique is placed within a dialogic framework where the journal is used as a forum for critical discussion, reflection and analysis between teacher and student, it provides a powerful force for exploring the relationship between literacy and education, and for considering the centrality of language in the construction and maintenance of social power and control. Journal writing can facilitate and allow the complexities of the teacher/student classroom interaction to be realised in a way that neither silences nor grants authority to any specific participant. It can allow recognition of the 'value of students' own voices, subjective experiences of power and oppression, and the worth of their class and ethnic cultures' (Weiler 1988:149), and it offers teacher and students the opportunity to explore a 'discourse of possibility' (Aronowitz and Giroux 1985).

Through most of my examination of the students' journal writing, I have been influenced by the theories of Davies (1990, 1991, 1993, 1994), Davies and Harre, (1990), Clandinin (1991), Haug (1987), Lather (1988, 1991), Brodkey (1989), and Weedon (1987). The feminist poststructural theory of Weedon (1987) provides the most fertile ground for the consideration of students' writing as:

'...it is language in the form of conflicting discourses which constitute us as conscious thinking subject and enables us to give meaning to the world and act to transform it.' (1987:32)

The Participants

The FAST Program on which this research is based commenced with 18

students; 13 students completed the course. Of these 7 women and 6

men, all were from rural or isolated backgrounds, 8 were from a position of socio-economic disadvantage, two were severely hearing impaired, one was termed 'legally' blind, one claimed difficulty with English as a second language, and there were two Koories. Most students felt that they would not have been able to cope with a first year degree course, so they saw the FAST Program as an enabling mechanism should they choose to attempt further tertiary study. They all felt they needed to gain a lot of confidence before going on to higher study. Most said that difficult family circumstances, combined with difficult financial circumstances had prevented them from tertiary study in the past. There were two students who, because of physical disability, were made redundant from their jobs; so they were looking at other career options, as both had families to consider. Three of the students had been unemployed for some time, and expressed dissatisfaction with government initiatives which were in place to ostensibly address the problem of long-term unemployment. In terms of what they expected from the Program at its completion, most wanted access to a degree level course, or increased confidence so that further study could be attempted. Of interest, in terms of the Finn Review (1991) was that only a few of the students considered the promise of better employability as their main reason for study, though this was probably a long term goal.

Journal Writing by the Students

I wish now to turn to the journal writing produced by four of the students from the bridging course, specifically from the Language and Literacy component of the course for which I was responsible. Most of the students in the course have not 'written' for years; that is, their writing has been confined to filling out forms, writing shopping lists, writing letters (personal more often than business correspondence), with the very occasional student who may have kept a diary, or written poetry or stories. They feel very uneasy at their ability to succeed in the tertiary environment, although all are strongly motivated to achieve. The four students whose journal extracts we will be looking at were chosen because they present a diverse range of experiences and personalities. The following is a brief introduction, and the names used are pseudonyms. Initial information was gleaned from application forms, and from an early introductory writing exercise in which they were asked to briefly explain what they hoped to gain from tertiary study.

Ruth: Early 30s. Hopes to be accepted into applied science or engineering. Interested in dressage and working with horses, an interest which is commensurate with her rural background. She is a single parent, separated from her husband, and has a 10 year old child.

She writes: Stupid is a word that springs to mind when reading the

program sheets for the different units, how can I begin to think in a university way? The only thinking I have done over the past decade was concerned with childcare, men, cattle, potatoes etc.

Tom: Late 20s., Koori. Employed in a successful Koori tourist venture, which involves him in speaking to individuals and groups about his culture, and in visiting schools and talking to students. He has three children who live with his wife from whom he is separated. He commented: It took three months to decide if this course will be good for me in the future. I had to think of transport also accommodation also finding and meeting new friends. This is very new to me.

Marion: Since her marriage, has been at home with her three children and husband. She is in her late 30s. Has been very involved in her daughters' education, and in school matters. She writes: Children always come first, so if they are sick I look after them, unless it would be an exam day and a 'supp' was not allowed. Getting behind in work and juggling family life could be interesting. If they can't be right, I could not go on with a course.

Anthony: In his early 20s. Has been unemployed for some time, and is estranged from his family. Is severely hearing impaired, and is gay. Keenly interested in spirituality, Tarot cards, witchcraft, crystals and so on. He writes: I decide to try this course so I would have a better chance of getting into Humanities next year. I want to do the course next year because I have something to prove since I am hearing impaired (Prove to myself). I've been wanting to return to study for years but it took many years to fulfil and be unashamed of my hearing aids which I got at a late age.

This brief introduction is in order to give some indication of the students' attitudes and approaches towards beginning study in a tertiary environment. They express concerns ranging from the pragmatics of transport and accommodation to wondering how they will learn to think in a 'university way'. They were also anxious about potential disruptions to their 'private' lives, countered by a desire to prove to themselves that they were capable of studying at a higher level, despite any physical, economic, or personal constraints.

Learning a New Literacy in a New Place

Becoming literate in the academy involves learning to 'read the culture' (Ballard and Clanchy 1988:8), learning to come to terms with its values, rituals, behaviour and styles. All of the students hoped to become a part of the academic community, which is 'literally a community of readers who write and writers who read' (Brodkey 1987:3). In achieving this, however, the students are being apprenticed to dominant ways of using language in speech and print, and of making sense of experience. This apprenticeship (Gee 1990) involves students

in discourse practices which may conflict with their initial enculturation, or with any other experiences they may have had over time. Their differing experiences of literacy, therefore, may have a major impact on their construction as students initially, on their realisation of the relationship between the self and language, and on their understanding of the varying discourses of the academy and the discursive practices inherent in each.

Towards the end of the Language and Literacy course, in Week 9, students were asked to discuss what it was like learning a new literacy in a new place. While I will include some extracts of their writing on this question, I also want to bring in their first journal entries as a point of comparison, and as a demonstration of their abilities to use language that is powerful, individual, and contestatory. The writing in these journal entries also show the development of 'voice', and their differing subjectivities, as they negotiate meanings and experiences for themselves and discover how these are realised in language.

Tom: As a teacher in my culture I find it easy to deliver cultural programs to non-aboriginal students by knowledge orally and visual because that's my heritage and I live it and feel it and have experienced it. Christie (1985) has commented

that "The disadvantage of the Aboriginal World-view (and this is where Western education, if done properly, should be able to help) is that it renders them mostly powerless to resist the relentless onslaught of Western Civilization" (1985:13). I disagree because we are now in mainstream societies and only we can determine our futures as we may wish.

(First Entry) I hoping that can survive this course. I think I doing all of this for myself maybe I am wrong we will have to wait and see. This is my third time I writing this paper and I feel pretty bad about my writing and spelling misstake also feeling pretty tied so I will finish off here until my next essay I suppose.

Tom's First Entry is tentative, ungrammatical, hesitant, and it has spelling errors. He was not inarticulate to speak to, but obviously felt very constrained when he had to write for another person. He shows his anxiety regarding his ability to complete the course, as well as being critical of his abilities and skills. The inconclusive way he

completes this entry is in contrast to the assertive manner in which, in Week 10, he proclaims agency for an Aboriginal perspective on the future. In Week 10, his writing is assured and confident, and he discusses his role as an educator to non-aboriginal students. Of some significance is his position in regard to education and the Aboriginal world-view as promulgated by Christie. In disagreeing with this statement, he is writing his way to a new subject position, one which rejects culture as fixed and powerless, to a new way of ordering the cultural.

Ruth: Two major factors that have acted as inhibitors to the learning of new literacy in my life have been the subjective issue of gender, and the indoctrination of Catholicism. The power, in both these discourses, lies with the white, male majority. This dominant social group gives a passive cultural, and social relationship to the followers of religion, and the disenfranchised female section of society.....(R)eal literacy opportunity cannot succeed when set up by a dominant social group, that, as Lorde argues, views women as an "educational audience to the colonising discourse...set up for us as exemplary". Therefore, the adoption of the traditional area of women's literacy, within the cultural framework is held up as a model to strive for. Any attempt at creating manoeverability in feminine discourse outside this sphere is severely inhibited by culture, social and power boundaries.....The empowerment available to an individual in learning new literacy is dependent on the cultural relationship she has, and position she occupies, within her community.

(First Entry In writing this journal...I will be embarking on a journey through

the past and into the present. I hope you won't get too bored Pat, or that this gets too heavy. (Observation from Week 2). (You'll get a laugh at this Pat). At first I thought the class would be feminist oriented class and felt hostile towards this. You have to understand that this was coming from a subordinate female background,

imposed by men and upbringing. New experiences and ways of thinking
and a
little questioning after classes, and thinking, when reading for the
first assignment
turn my mind to the feminist issue. I am enjoying starting to explore
that 'dirty'
word 'feminism' and how it relates to me. It's challenging to my
pre-conceptions
of a self that is womanhood. It could be a very powerful tool in
writing to be
able to position an audience in a certain way. It would make
interesting research -
to position and thus gain reaction and action. The power of language.

Ruth's First Entry shows the lack of importance she gives to her life,
as she 'hopes' the reader will not get 'too bored', reading of her
experiences and thoughts. In Week 2, she indicates the changing
position she is taking to her studies, to herself, to reading, and to
her writing. She feels assured enough to write of her hostility
towards the class, but still retains some degree of doubt regarding
positioning an audience in writing, which 'could' be a powerful tool.
Her use of modality here means that she is still tentative regarding
the power of language to position an audience, but she is 'exploring
and 'challenging'. In Week 10, her writing is forceful and definite,
as she ties gender with Catholicism because she sees the power of these
discourses belonging with the white, male majority. In locating the
power of these discourses, she is also recognising the discursive
practices which sustain and maintain that ascendancy, and the way that
power is made problematic for those assigned to the female gender. Her
subjectivity made possible through these discourses both creates an
interpretive lens through which to see the social world (Davies 1994),
and allows her to disrupt these dominant discourses and to make
possible a life which can be lived differently.

Anthony: The cultural background of the English Educational system, I
found, inhibited
me to the extent that all subjects were taught in a heterosexual point
of view. As
an active homosexual at the time, I found that I could not feel
involved in the
work for all the characters in the books we read were 'straight', and
the discussion
of relationships and sex education was taught on the presumption that
we would
be heterosexual.

(Entry in Week 6) What pisses me off! I picked up a book "Dictionary
of
Sociology" by Abercrombie, 2nd Ed 1988, and came across a definition of
witchcraft; "In anthropology, this is defined as the belief that

members of a
community employ supernatural means to harm others in ways which are
socially disapproved". I am hoping to get into wiccan (witches)

religion and
rituals over the summer holidays and I already know that the use of
witchcraft
is to be in harmony with nature to bring about healing. I find it
disturbing
that a book that outlines academic terms should define it in such a
narrow
minded way. I thought sociology was to help people understand
different
religions and cultures and dispense with outworn and outdated lies.

I have chosen these samples from Anthony's journal as they are
significant for particular reasons. In the first response, which
relates to gaining a new literacy in a new place, he was writing of his
experiences at secondary school, and the way in which he felt
colonised by the dominant heterosexual discourse of the curriculum. In
this extract, Anthony is writing both from the unmarked position of
(male) individual, and from the marked position of homosexual, which
renders him powerless and other to hegemonic masculinity (Davies 1994).

At the same time he has made visible to himself the ways in which
gender is constructed and sustained, within particular power relations,
in certain contexts, considering what effects this may have had on him.

Journal Entry Week 6 is significant because in it Anthony is
contesting a definition in an 'academic' text book Based on his
personal experiences, and on his reading, he is rejecting the
'legitimized' definition, and interrogating a discourse which appears
to him to be narrow and exclusionary.

Marion: The biggest challenge to learning a new literacy has been
returning to study as
a mature age student..... One conflict I am faced with is language
and sexism. Personally, I have never been challenged and now I am. I
can comprehend how
women have been viewed in the past and how it certainly is a
male-dominated
world.

(First Entry) I feel happy using 'man' as a generic term for human
beings. I like being feminine but would not call myself a feminist.
Maybe this word is used wrongly but to my mind conjures up the idea of
pushing
controversial and current issues pertaining to women. I like 'Mrs', I
do not like
'Ms'. I guess I like tradition.. Unless a radical change takes place
in my life I am very happy to use the title 'Mrs' and carry the

traditional roles of wife and mother - going back to 3 years study full time hardly falls into this category though.

In her First Entry, Marion constitutes herself in the current phallogentric gender order which perpetuates the male/female dichotomy.

But, while she is asserting her desire to be considered 'feminine', but certainly not 'feminist', she is beginning to recognise the contradictions that such categorisation entails. In speaking of her 'traditional role' as a wife and mother, she is, as Davies (1994) puts it, 'inevitably tied up in patterns of talk and ways of being that constitute us as male or female' (1994:2). At the same time, she is beginning to develop an awareness of the limitations and entrapments entailed in categorisation, when she acknowledges that going back to full time study hardly fits in with the 'traditional' wife and mother role. Her other journal entry continues the struggle she is still facing with the discourses of gender and education, and the tensions and possibilities of each.

The nature of what it is to be a man or a woman is one of the key sites of discursive struggle for the individual. At the centre of the struggle is the 'common sense assumption' (Weedon 1987:98) that there is a natural way for women and men to be. Both Anthony and Marion, in different ways and for different reasons, were questioning gender definitions, boundaries and and cultural expectations. They were contesting that meaning is fixed for all time and were in the process of producing 'new versions of meaning from the conflicts and contradictions between existing discourses' (Weedon 1987:106).

At the same time, considering Marion's initial statement that her children and family must come first, and her early realisation that there may be conflict with the discourses of motherhood and of education, her positioning within these varying discourses may be contradictory, dissonant and unsettling. Walkerdine (1985) has written "as new identifications are created, so too is the potential for loss, annihilation and disavowal' (1985:225). We need, therefore, to be well aware of the potential upheaval which our discursive practices may cause to the students' lives. Pedagogy, even feminist pedagogy, does not easily translate into an education that includes women if we do not address the threat to women's survival and livelihood that a critique of patriarchy, in its varied manifestations, confronts. (Lewis 1990).

ëCriticalí Dialogue in Journal Writing

Most of these writers in their journal entries referred to other texts to support what they were writing; that is, they used the authority of other writers to illustrate and substantiate points they were trying

to make, as well as to disagree with certain points the writers were making. They have successfully combined, I believe, the 'personal' and the 'academic' in a way that blurs the boundaries between these two discourses, enabling them to write themselves into a subject position that is neither student only, nor woman/aboriginal/homosexual only, but is appropriately a mixture of differing, and at times, conflicting subjectivities. In this way, they are constructing for themselves a way of writing that produces a new subject position in language, one that continues to create a self, rather than one which expresses a self that already exists.

The students obviously wanted to learn, and I felt it was important that they saw the journal as a valuable learning activity, as an integral part of the course, and not simply the place where they wrote of personal struggles and issues, important though these are. I also shared the concern of Caywood and Overing (1987) for equity in the classroom. Their statement that 'a writing course has the potential to be the single, most important learning experience for students if it provides them with the confidence in their own ideas and belief in their authority' (1987:xv), I found relevant and significant.

I also hoped that would see their journals, not as a means of describing 'naturalistic realism; for life is not lived realistically, in a linear manner' (Denzin 1992:27), but as a means in which they could write of their experiences and critique the discursive practices which create and maintain their subordinate status. I considered that my task was to explore educational possibilities and discursive practices which could impact on what students actually do in the classroom, as well as educating them to take risks, to critically appropriate forms of knowledge that exist outside of their immediate experience, and to envisage versions of a world which is 'not yet' in

order to be able to alter the grounds upon which life is lived (Simon 1987).

As an introduction to journal writing, the students were told that the journal should be a place in which one asks questions and moves towards answers; it was to provide a safe place in which to grapple with some of the issues to be dealt with during the Language and Literacy course.

Literacy means reading as well as writing, and in order to give the students a further 'authentic' reason to write, I considered I should respond to what they had written, to engage in a 'literacy dialogue' (Brodkey 1989:52).

Response to Writing

I wish here to clarify what I mean by response, as it is a crucial aspect of the journal writing undertaken by the students. By

'response', I do not mean a statement which 'functions as the material expression of the student-reader inner-self and (that) provides the means by which the student is nurtured/scrutinised, cherished/corrected and guided/reconstructed through a constant process of revelation and examination. (Patterson 1993:79). In this sense, 'response' can be both a reflection of a 'depth of inner feelings' (Patterson 1993:79), as well as a pedagogy which can be employed 'in the interests of a comprehensive system for surveillance and correction' (Patterson 1993:80)

My use of response was influenced by Jana Staton (1987) who suggests that responding to persons in dialogue journals can bring about 'new understanding, new ideas, new possibilities' (1987:54). In a dialogue, the student and teacher are equal participants, with the right to comment on each other's entry, and with the added freedom of attention not having necessarily being paid to the conventions of written language. While I acknowledge the premise that dialogue journals are not inherently meaningful or important, but become so through the social interaction in which they are embedded (Staton 1987), I also wished to encourage students to explore their lived experiences and gradually come to a realisation of how their lives had been shaped by ideological and material forces. This would also enable them to see the constitutive force of the images and language through which 'real worlds' are constituted, as well as the 'power of all that is left unsaid' (Davies 1994:122).

It may be appropriate at this point to include one of the student's comments on journal writing, as it has relevance to the issue of response that is being discussed. This entry in the latter part of the course came from a woman student in her early 50s, and she had been discussing Fairclough's book *Language and Power*, which she had enjoyed reading and thinking about, believing that "social" conditions do determine properties of discourse. She writes, "...I have slowly grown to enjoy and feel more comfortable about (journal writing), being able to picture you reading my thoughts, without having to be critical of my grammar and spelling - perhaps the same as if I was sitting across a table talking to you face to face. This has been an important part of my feeling comfortable with my journal writing - being an example of 'social' conditions as Fairclough mentions in his book. In this writing, she is opening up the possibilities and diversity of experience of being a person as she finds herself positioned now one way and now another, in one context or another, constituted through one discourse or another (Davies 1994), and discovering the multi-faceted connections and subjectivity made possible through the discourse to which she has access. She is also

engaging in a dialogue in which meaning is being shared with the teacher, based on shared reading, interactive writing, and the gradual realisation of the discursive practices that are mutually constitutive

elements of the life process (Davies 1994).

The way I used response was more as a process of 'active involvement' (Nielsen 1989:21) or 'intervention' in which I commented on what students had written, encouraged them to question the discursive practices which had positioned them as marginalised individuals, explore their differing subjectivities, and examine the relationship between language and power. Within those parameters, I responded to what they had written, and we exchanged a good deal of information about our lives and concerns. The journal writing provided an ongoing dialogue in a format that was personal, meaningful, and critical.

While it was encouraging for me to feel that the students were open in their responses, and were beginning to question, I also realised that I must be aware of any preconceived notion of a 'resister', someone so saturated with false consciousness that she could not see the 'light' being offered here in our classrooms (Lather 1992:22). Even though I shared with them my thoughts, ideas and reflections of their journal entries, together with what was written in my own journal, where appropriate, I was aware that their journal writing may have been constrained by the thought of their words being scrutinised, and this may raise issues of self-protection and self-censorship which could inhibit the reflective enterprise (Convery 1993:137). Equally, I have in mind the warning of Giroux and Simon (1989), who query the ethics of inviting students to bring the private areas of their lives into the official discourse of education, suggesting that 'encouraging student voice (in journals) can become a form of voyeurism or a way to satisfy a form of ego expansionism constituted on the pleasures of understanding those who appear as 'other' to us' (1989:247)

I acknowledge this warning, and constantly reassessed my own positioning in the teacher/student nexus throughout the course. Nevertheless, the gradual and growing ability of the students to 'find in each moment of contradiction a clearer comprehension of their own fractured and fragmented female subjectivity' (Haug 1987) was becoming more explicit in their writing. They were also clearly demonstrating their recognition of the centrality of language in the construction and maintenance of social power and control, and their ability to contest the reproduction of gender identity in language.

Language, Power and 'Voice'

The following extracts are from the journals of two other students whose writing has not been included to this point. Both Margaret and Dianne have spent the past few years at home with their children, and neither have been 'near' education for many years. Margaret is in her late 40s, and Dianne in her late 30s.

Margaret: Looking back through my journal, I remember the way in which I used language and I notice its changes. There were points in my journal when I wrote about myself as 'just a mother'. Now this shows a certain type of thought that had been generated by society through the use of language. Language has been used to downgrade the roles that women have as mothers and home-makers and that is another way in which we see the use of language and the power it has.

Dianne: Control of one's life is important, without it women are silent. Low self esteem, self-worth and lack of goal achieving is commonplace for most women in our culture due to the control used linguistically against them. Women need to create new language to suit their own needs. Consider a major catastrophe that has occurred in society in recent times, that has empowered the people involved with a recognised and respected voice, e.g. homosexual males found a voice - the HIV virus would not be kept silent. Does it take another catastrophe for women to find a voice?

In these two extracts from Week 11, the writers speak of two factors crucial to a consideration of language and literacy in the discourse of education, and in society: that of language and power; and that of 'voice'. These factors are central to a consideration of the relationship between literacy and social structure and between curriculum and critical pedagogy because they address the complex roles of language and literacy in society, and in the discourse of education.

What is at issue is the need to challenge the inevitable unequal distribution of power and knowing in the classroom (Lather 1991), in which some students are comfortable and confident, and some are silent.

Students who do not have access to ways of knowing, to an understanding of the relationship between language and power, or who are denied the validity of their own lived experiences from which to make meaning, are silenced and can thus become objects of regulation (Walkerline 1990:31).

In language we make meaning, but these meanings are always multiple in that they differ not only across groups, individuals and situations, but within them as well. Meaning therefore is not internally consistent, but inherently unstable. The journal entries indicate a multiplicity of meanings, constructed by the writers and reconstructed by the readers. In this, they are valuable indicators of the perspectives the writers have taken as they describe and name a world, and thus shape the reality in which they live and limit the possibilities that they can see and hear. It is in order to stretch the boundaries of these possibilities that journal writing can be seen to have value and significance.

Language and Literacy in the FAST Program

My planning of the Language and Literacy Component of the FAST Program was underpinned by my concerns regarding current understandings of language and literacy, and the multiple meanings given to these terms; and the need to teach writing which would conform to academic expectations, and yet would not be constrained by deficit theories inherent in a basic skills pedagogy. I shall elaborate briefly on these concerns.

Language and literacy can be constructed as separate and interchangeable with neither term having a common meaning. Increasingly, educators are writing of 'literacies' pointing out that there is no one state that can be achieved, and described as literacy; that, in fact, literacy is defined by culture, context, history, that it is a social construct (Freebody and Luke 1990). There is also a large literature analysing the flow of literacy as technology, practice and embedded social relations. The high-tech information society imposes increasingly high minimum levels of literacy and numeracy on

all members of modern populations (Lankshear 1993), resulting in educational requirements increasing, independently of changes in job requirements (Collins 1993), or independently of the degree to which changing job demands genuinely call for more or different forms of literacy competence (Freebody and Welch 1993:13).

I wrote earlier of my concern regarding the emergence of two contending discourses of literacy in educational debate that of 'functional literacy', and that of critical literacy, suggesting that there were issues accompanying this emergence that need to be addressed more directly. Functional literacy could be viewed as a carefully thought out compromise where individuals are able to function as productive units in the economic machine, yet, significantly, are not enabled to question or critique the dynamics of society and their 'place' within it. Critical literacy, on the other hand, provides students with more than functional skills; it provides them with 'conceptual tools necessary to critique and engage society along with its inequities and injustices' (Kretovics 1985:51). In general educational debate, the discourses of 'functional' and 'critical' literacy contend with each other because of their ultimately differing constructions of education and society.

The practical result of the differing constructions of literacy in education and society, and of the shift in multinational, economic, and market forces can clearly be seen in the students who come into an

enabling course. They have already been disenfranchised from powerful cultural texts and knowledges, and they have undoubtedly realised that being 'literate' has not led to increased social or economic power. How they had previously used language, while satisfactory for the varying 'roles' they have taken in life, does not equip them for membership in discourses which promise status, prestige, power or increased economic and social advancement. Their 'skills' in reading and writing, which served them quite well so long as they stayed in their subordinate positions, were insufficient if they wished to step out of the margins.

There is a certain paternalism behind the rhetoric of 'helping' the disadvantaged to enter the mainstream of education, particularly if students are defined by their deficiencies. Deficit theories attempt to address this 'deficiency' by the application of a set of discrete reading and writing skills which are to supplement the literacy skills already possessed by marginalised individuals. 'More' literacy, however, does not necessarily lead to 'more' social power. Particular forms of critical literacy, on the other hand, may contribute to the construction of individuals who can contest and change the discourses which maintain their subordinate status. Marginalised adults coming into the academy would be better addressed, I would argue, not by a basic or functional literacy curriculum, but by a radical or critical literacy curriculum (Giroux 1983).

Critical Literacy

At present, being 'critical' is somewhat of a ubiquitous term, appearing in a range of documents and contexts. In these documents, it is suggested that students are to have fostered in them the skills of critical analysis and critical thinking. But, while there are many views on what 'critical' means, there is a general lack of interpretation or theorisation of a critical orientation towards society and culture, and the discursive practices which shape and form individuals. The Deet (1991) document *Australia's Language* suggests that effective literacy involves integrating listening, speaking and

critical thinking with reading and writing (1991:5). In *A Statement on English for Australian Schools* (1994), it is noted that students are expected to indicate growing achievement in being critically aware of the way authors use language to construct meaning (1994:42). However, in neither case is it made clear what would characterise a critical orientation towards literacy and language. While educators may be in agreement on the importance of promoting critical literacy, even a cursory survey of current educational theories reveals a range of different approaches to critical literacy.

As proposed by Freire (1990), critical literacy should achieve the

right to authentic speech and conscientisation that occurs in the dialectical relationship between individuals and the world (Andreola 1993). According to Gilbert (1993:325), critical literacy explores how language practices are used in powerful institutions like the state, the law, the family, the church, education, demonstrating how these practices contribute to the maintenance of inequalities and injustices. Relating this to education, critical literacy attempts to address the issue of the systematic reproduction of inequality in educational institutions along the lines of class, ethnicity, age and gender (Baker and Luke 1991). Critical literacy avoids valoring 'voice' or 'literature' and positions texts as 'public artefacts subject to critique, contestation and dispute' (Luke, Freebody and Gilbert 1991). It is sceptical of both child-centred models of literacy which assume literacy is a natural phenomena rather than a social phenomena, as well as functional literacy which is an inadequate objective for a participatory democracy.

Critical educators and theorists have recognised that educational institutions and their curricula both enable and constrain students, and they have attempted to shift the balance towards enabling and inclusive curriculums. They are aware of the 'selective, interest-bound versions of culture' proposed by the common culture agenda (Agger 1991), and they have suggested an alternative construction of culture, literary texts, what counts as literature, what counts as reading, in order to work against the grain of reproducing structural inequality, and the ideas of student 'individual achievement' which serves to mask its function of stratification (Luke 1992:22). At the same time, they argue that it is not sufficient to replace one 'authentic' text or voice with another (Baker and Luke 1991), by simply learning new discourses and thus becoming a member of the group and being apprenticed into new ways with words through interaction with other texts, students and teachers. What is needed, suggests Shor (1989), is a 'situated' curriculum that engages the lives and language of students and which is both participatory and dialogic.

It is important to note the nexus between the type of curriculum offered to marginalised individuals and the related teaching practices.

On the one hand, students need to gain knowledge and competence with literate practices that will facilitate access to and engagement with the texts, practices and genres that are considered powerful. On the other hand, a central classroom aim should be the empowerment of students as active subjects in the learning process, bearing in mind that this may bring one face-to-face with the issues of resistance, domination and conflict (Weiler 1988). In coming into the academic community, the students are being introduced to discursive practices that are 'embedded in the particular world view of particular social groups' (Gee 1990:67). In acquiring a new identity, the students becomes complicit with a set of values and norms of particular social groups. This world view may conflict with the students' initial enculturation, with some feeling that they are being asked to 'abandon

their less prestigious, less socially powerful world views in favor of

the academic' (Bizzell 1982:171). Therefore, there is a need to develop a pedagogy that leads to a consideration of how they and others are influenced and constructed by complex social structures (Weiser 1988), which can have the effect of silencing their voices (Clandinin 1991; Gilligan 1990; Grumet 1988; Belenky et al 1986).

Language is not a tool for describing the real world, any more than literacy can be achieved and thus commodified. That they are social constructs (Freebody and Luke 1990), in dialectical relationship with other social phenomena (Fairclough 1989), learned in and through the bodily, sexed, living of social processes (Threadgold 1991:66-67) has undermined the humanist or technicist notions of language and literacy. This has opened up a space for a critical social literacy which can enhance an individual's powerful participation in language, as it recognises that experiences, knowledge, values and information are constructed in various textual or discursive practices (Christie et al 1991). How this is translated in the curriculum provides a further space in which the common culture position (Giroux 1987) can be contested by voices of students from subordinate groups (Giroux 1987:176) who can develop new perceptions of textuality, writing and literacy (Green 1993)

Construction of Discourse

I have argued throughout that a powerful cultural critique can be provided through journal writing, that boundaries may be broken and existing genres and discourses disrupted, thereby opening up the possibilities for change and transformation. I have also suggested that there is a nexus between the type of curriculum offered to the marginalised and the related teaching practices. Equally, when considering the implications for a theory of discourse in language and literacy education, it is important to note that an individual's discursive history is not a unitary, coherent phenomenon, but is replete with contradictions, in which we may be constructed as both belonging and as 'other'. Students, therefore, need to realise that their identities are socially constructed in and through discursive practices, and that they are not necessarily independent agents of action and meaning. This realisation should generate the knowledge that the individual self is not unified, but is made up of multiple subject positions (Davies 1991; Davies and Harre 1990; Lather 1991), and is a creation of language and ideology. This should allow a critique of the discourses which have shaped their identity and constrained and enabled their individual thought and action (Davies 1991), and which can present subjects as either privileged or underprivileged. It can also allow their subjectivity to be

reconstructed through 'the process of reflective practice' (Alcoff 1988:425).

As with any other social context, the classroom is the site of discursive difference, where students actively seek access to new discourses through the control of specific textual practices. One of the frequent comments made by students when they first encounter the language and literacy demands of specific disciplines in the academy is "Why do we have to write that way?". Some students will be mollified by the response which discusses how each discipline has its own ways of shaping meaning, and in order to become part of that particular discourse community, it is necessary to employ the skills and discursive practices and goals of that community (Swales 1990). Other students interpret this rather cynically as 'writing the way the lecturer wants'. While some are challenged by the demands of the

discipline and are willing and eager to engage with the discursive practices in which meaning is shaped, this does not imply that such knowledge 'automatically ensures equality and social success or erases racism or minority disenfranchisement' (Gee 1990:67). Nor does it address the alienation felt by students, who, in the process of encountering these new discourses and repositioning themselves as new subjects within new communities, find that conflict arises with the diverse ways of being and knowing that form their existing discursive history.

Rather than seeing this as problematic, Gee (1990:48) suggests that students who are 'marginal' to a discourse valorised within education are often more able to reflect upon the 'workings' of these discourses because they consciously perceive them as different from their own. Discursive difference in the classroom, therefore, can be viewed as a rich resource that can assist students to succeed within the educational environment. In the process of any acquisition, the specificities of the discourse become apparent to the student. These distinguish the new discourse from other discourses within the academic community, and the discursive history of the individual. The individual student acquiring the new discourse is always conscious of difference between new and existing discourses. In this regard, students need to learn that the language they use will vary in different disciplines and in different contexts, and that they can 'learn to transform materials, structures and situations that seem fixed or inevitable, and that in doing so they can move from the margins of the university to establish a place for themselves on the inside' (Bartholomae and Petkovsky 1986:41)

The Construction of 'Voice'

I now look at the construction of 'voice' because in poststructural

terms, the category of voice can only be constituted in differences, and it is in, and through, these multiple layers of meanings that students are positioned and position themselves in order to the subject rather than merely the object of history (Giroux 1990). Voice, therefore, is not simply the expression of private experience, but is an amalgam of personal meanings and public meanings which dialogue, interpret, contradict and conflict with each other, and which is positioned in terms of underlying discursive frameworks (Giroux 1992). Students do not have a singular voice (Giroux 1990); rather their voices are constituted in multiple, complex and often contradictory discourses.

The discourse on student voice sees the student as 'empowered' when the teacher 'helps' students to express their subjugated knowledges (Shor and Freire 1987). The literature on critical pedagogy also recognises the possibility that students will be capable of identifying a multiplicity of authentic voices in themselves. By speaking in their 'authentic' voices, students are seen to make themselves visible, with such self-definition presumably giving students an identity and political position from which to act as agents of social change (Simon 1987).

The concept of 'authentic' voice does not, however, confront the ways in which any individual student's voice is always a 'teeth gritting and often contradictory intersection of voices constituted by gender, race, class, ability, ethnicity, sexual orientation or ideology' (Ellsworth 1989:312). It is impossible, Ellsworth suggests, to speak from all voices at once, or even from any one, with the 'traces of others being present and interruptive' (1989:312). While pluralizing

the concept of 'student voice' to 'student voices' implies correction through addition, it 'loses sight of the contradictory and partial nature of all voices' (Ellsworth 1989:313). More consideration needs to be given to how the voices of, for example, students of colour, disabled students, white women, 'white men against masculinist culture, and fat students will necessarily be constructed in opposition to the teacher/institution when they try to change the power imbalances they inhabit in their daily lives, including their lives in school' (Ellsworth 1989:310)

The variety and complexity of 'voice' is a significant characteristic of students who are part of a bridging program. Chiefly this comes about through the mechanism by which they gain entry to such programs.

In institutional terms, they are derived from certain 'target' groups in government writing on social justice. The 'target' groups cover those of lower socio-economic status, people from isolated or rural areas, individuals who are physically disadvantaged, people from a non-english speaking background, Koories, and women who wish to begin study in non-traditional disciplines. From an equity standpoint,

students enter the bridging course as marginalised individuals. However, this can have the effect of being a totalising discourse, as 'no-one is oppressed in all situations' (Janks and Ivanic 1992:307). Indeed, we all can claim to stand as oppressed and oppressor in relation to someone else and in relation to differing contexts. To term a group disadvantaged, or to refer to them as marginalised individuals, does not cover with the ways they are marginalised, or that they may be disadvantaged only in certain contexts and in particular situations. Similarly, their 'voices' are not always, and at all times, marginalised or oppressed. They may also define themselves outside of the categories of disadvantage which attempt to subsume their 'voices' within the paternalistic rhetoric that marginalises them so neatly.

A consideration of students in an enabling course brings out the recognition that a multiplicity of knowledges are present in the classroom, and that these knowledges are contradictory, partial and irreducible. Within the dynamics of the classroom, in their journals, and through discussions, there was a constant shifting and dispersal as contradictory contexts of knowing were explored and revealed. This became both empowering and threatening as students struggled to find their voices in the contexts of learning and knowing.

But, to state that the classroom is a site of multiple perspectives or ways of knowing is not to diminish the oppression experienced by the group in a multiplicity of contexts. Rather, the oppression, ways of knowing, and voice, must be understood, struggled against, and defined (Ellsworth 1989).

ëVoiceí, therefore, can also mean questioning what is not understood, even undermining the idea that ëthose of us with power and wisdomí are models for students to imitate (Buley-Neissner 1990). Developing a ëself-consciousí voice enables students to participate in the kinds of dialogue essential to progressive education - dialogue that places students in active, critical relationships to teacher, texts, institutions, history culture. Essentially, having a voice enables an individual to ëresist being silenced, to resist being made anonymousí (Buley-Neissner 1990:54).

Conclusion

In this paper, I have argued that the development of critical literacy should be a central concern for educators working with the marginalised

as it can provide a powerful cultural critique. It is also my belief that the journal can be used as a site of contestation, opening up the possibilities for change and transformation, empowering students to use their voices to explore the connection between consciousness, social meanings, power and language, and to see their voices respected

and legitimized (Weiler, 1988).

The journal writing component of the Language and Literacy Unit which formed part of the FAST Program was to develop in students the confidence to see that their own lived experiences, identities and voices were part of an ongoing praxis (Lather 1991). Far from being a debilitating process, the conflict of oppositional knowledge indicated one of growth, change and empowerment. In relation to FAST students, I saw empowerment as providing an understanding of the discursive practices which would enable them to draw upon their own cultural resources as a basis for initially engaging in the development of new skills, as well as gaining the ability to interrogate existing knowledge claims, and to engage in a '...dialogic dynamism beyond mere heterogeneity where voices are juxtaposed and counterposed so as to generate something beyond themselves. (Lather 1991:134). Working within a feminist framework, I wished the students to define themselves as active authors of their own worlds; to use their journals to communicate their understandings of the conflicts and contradictions of life; and to use their voices to investigate and speak of their own subjectivities. Students may use the journal to reflect, write and critique, to question discursive practices, to reshape subjectivity, and to explore the possibility of bridging the gap between 'personal' and 'academic' writing.

The notion of bridging the gap between 'academic' and 'personal' writing through critical journal writing is central to the exploration of literacy and writing pedagogy, in which feminist poststructuralist initiatives are used to frame a socially critical agenda for engaging the relationship between literacy and education. In the classroom, teaching bodies of knowledges, or the discursive practices employed, can result in potentially totalising discourses. This can also be the situation in classrooms where teachers are positioned differently in terms of their gender, race, ethnicity and class, or where students themselves are colonised by the 'facts' being taught. Discourses which can be rewritten in ways that are non-totalising, or which have to be disrupted or contested can, I believe, be accomplished through critical journal writing. Using the journal this way is a means of empowering students who are not satisfied with what 'is', and allows them to consider what 'may be'.

All our individual ways of describing and naming the world shape the realities in which we live and limit the possibilities that we can see and hear. Indeed, in writing of the 'personal', we can become 'plurivocal', thereby rejecting the old notion of the autonomous individual. Because we are constituted in socio-cultural conditions, and are both constituted by and constitutive of language (Luke 1992), using the 'personal' allows us to occupy a culturally and politically contestable space, in which we can contest and change discursive practices, form new categories, and allow different discourses to emerge.

As a profession, teaching demands of its practitioners an ability to live with a great deal of ambiguity and uncertainty. In this regard, we are not different from our students who, when questioning discourses once perceived as 'natural', may find that they are confused and alienated. I questioned myself constantly throughout the course in terms of the discursive practices I was using and the subsequent

ramifications for the students. I was also aware of the writings of Gore (1993) who injects a note of caution:

In our attempt to empower others we need to acknowledge that our agency has limits, that we might 'get it wrong', in assuming we know what would be empowering for others, and that no matter what our aims or how we go about 'empowering', our efforts will be partial and inconsistent. (1993:63)

Political change can be exhilarating; it can also be traumatic. I was aware during the course of the somewhat contradictory notion of a person in an authoritative position, e.g. a teacher, seeking to help others exercise power, to empower themselves. The responsibility one faces in providing pedagogical practices which seek to empower students may be equalled only by the arrogance which assumes we know what empowerment means for individuals, and that their lives will be 'enriched' because of their empowerment. The students were, however, becoming aware of themselves as knowing people, rather than as receivers of knowledge. They were starting to question the view that all knowing 'originates outside of the self' (Belenky et al 1986:48), and realising that their voices could be used with authority to speak and contest the dominant discourses which had shaped them.

The equity groups targeted by DEET as disadvantaged, and therefore eligible for bridging or enabling courses, consist of individuals assumed to be in need of literacy skills in order to achieve success and gain a degree at a University. What is gradually emerging is that their literacy skills - gained in a variety of contexts - can be equal to, if not better than, many students at tertiary institutions who have gained entrance to University through 'normal' means. Their literacy has been gained in a variety of situations, work, home, courses, leisure activities, and it can have a multiplicity of dimensions that are inevitably lacking in a young school leaver. They have already used literacy for a variety of purposes, for differing audiences, and in a variety of contexts. But literacy is not always liberating, as literacy per se will not enslave or empower. Rather, the kinds of outcomes are seen to be dependent to some extent upon the pedagogical practices with which they are associated (Freire 1990; Lankshear and Lawler 1989; Luke 1992). Moreover, education and literacy cannot be used interchangeably. Some individuals are highly literate, but not educated in the traditional sense of the word.

"The myths and stereotypes that create images of specific groups... have no relevance when we stop counting and start observing and working with people" (Taylor and Dorsey-Gaines 1988:202)

Poststructural theory addresses the possibility of critique and change in discursive practices because it sees language and discourse as complicit in the representation of self and others. Rather than being an arbitrary or neutral means of expression or thought, language is a social construction, with the result being that writers of texts cannot avoid the social and political factors which have formed their subjectivities and which will appear in their writing. To seek, therefore, to instruct students only in the techniques and skills of academic discourse is to artificially and arbitrarily impose a curriculum which takes no account of their lives and histories and which can further devalue their experiences and knowledge. Students who are enabled to articulate their experiences, their lives, their knowledges can also be enabled to question and critique the discourses which maintain their marginalisation. This realisation of the relationship between the self and language will also allow them to better understand the varying discourses of the academy and the varying discursive practices inherent in each.

Writing pedagogy in a tertiary context need not perpetuate and reproduce dominant discourses, but may, if framed within a feminist poststructuralist theoretical base, introduce individuals to language as a meaning potential in which individuals and the social are constructed and reproduced. It can allow individuals to position themselves within the discourse of education so that they learn to resist discursive practices that diminish human subjectivity, opening up to them the possibility of imagining (themselves) as agents of their own lives (Brodkey 1992:312).

In an area of literacy education, emerging from adult basic education, enabling or bridging courses are becoming an institutionalised part of mainstream education. This means that a pedagogy employed in an enabling course must take account of the competing agendas, that is social, economic and cultural imperatives, within the discourse of education. With the present emphasis on productivity in the educational system and on economic rationalism, literacy could be seen as needed for utilitarian purposes, as for example for better living skills, getting a job, or for a vocation. If an enabling course addresses only these factors, it could be considered as quite satisfactory because it is, ostensibly, providing the participants with the language and literacy skills needed for those particular contexts.

Literacy, however, is not a static body of skills; is a dynamic, evolving, social and historical construction in which and through which we construct meaning of various kinds, all of them having social

significance in some way. There is a need, therefore, to go beyond mere skills acquisition in an enabling course. Even an emphasis on cultural meanings, which can validate the humanizing values of education, may not necessarily provide a basis for a critique of society and the centrality of language in constructing and perpetuating social, political and economic discourses. Thus, the language and literacy component of an enabling course should provide a pedagogy which can politicize the students, both in their construction as subjects in the classroom and their construction as individuals in society, with the overall emphasis being on the development of critical literacy, and on the role language plays in this construction of their subjectivities, and in the construction and maintenance of social power and control.

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