Towards a practice of critical teaching about teachers' work
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Paper for the AAER Conference - November 1996 in Singapore

Being criticalist academics teaching about teachers' work in post-graduate degrees in education, in an era in which teachers' voices are increasing silenced in the development of educational policy and curriculum design, means grappling both theoretically and practically with the political and ideological nature of education. In this paper we argue for the increasing need for critical teaching about teachers' work at a time when the possibilities of engaging in a curriculum making practice capable of delivering on commitments to social justice seem less likely. We describe the struggle to develop a practice which opens up opportunities for our students (experienced teachers) to connect the life-worlds of their classrooms with the relentlessly changing surrounding socio-cultural milieu. On this nexus teachers have an opportunity to investigate the possibilities for developing agency as the makers of culture as opposed to the delivers of somebody else's curriculum.

Masters degrees as sites of professional regeneration

We want to focus on, and argue in this paper that course-work Masters degrees are becoming more and more significant as sites of professional regeneration for teachers. In particular we want to describe in a fairly brief way the nature of our struggle towards a practice of critical teaching about teachers' work in our course the master of Teaching. Such courses introduce teachers to scholarship as theoretical lenses for viewing the educational world, such as labour process theory (Smyth 1995), critical theory (McLaren and Giarelli 1995), feminism (Lather 1991; Davies 1994) and anti-racism (Ng, Staton et al. 1995). Teachers as apprentice scholars are also introduced to the "politics of knowing and being known" (Lather 1991; Denzin & Lincoln 1994), to the contested field of the production and "the legitimation of knowledge" (Lather 1993) through being introduced to the literature of educational research.

Our understanding of professional regeneration though is informed by our reading - and it's a somewhat despairing one - of the emerging trends affecting teachers and academics work. Professional regeneration is not happening in a context of vibrant innovation that we might characterise by harking back to the 1970s and early 1980s.

Instead, the somewhat demoralised teachers enrolling in our courses are looking for some resources that will enable them to make more sense of the "politics of educators work and lives" (Ginsburg 1995). Teachers

are looking for frames make more sense of their own diminishing capacity to determine the conditions of their work as a consequence of being "positioned" (Davies and Harre 1990) within a discourse which could be represented by the mantra - "leaner schools are better schools" (Boomer 1989a). Or to put it more bluntly, "leaner but meaner" (Challen 1996) schools in which

school self-management has come to mean no more than an opportunity for schools to manage dwindling fiscal resources, within tightening centralist policies over curriculum, evaluation and standards (Smyth 1993: 3.

Running parallel with this move to the self-managed school - or is that

the self-damaged school - is also an ongoing assault on public school teachers through the media, a demonisation of teacher unions at a time of industrial disputation and enterprise bargaining, and a continued absence of teachers voices in policy development (Knight, Lingard et al. 1994; Lingard 1995).

Before outlining in some detail how we are attempting to provide a space for teachers to develop as "socially critical educators" (Kemmis, Suggett et al. 1983; Smyth 1996) within the context of the Master of Teaching, we need to elaborate in more detail the nature of teachers' work "in a fractured world" (Connell 1996). Given that we want to explicate in some detail the nature of an "enunciative space" (Spivak 1988) that we are attempting to provide for the somewhat muted and silenced voices of teachers we would also like to foreground that our own working conditions are being reformed by the same marketising discourses. In providing a space for the "subjugated knowledge" (Foucault 1980) of teachers it is important to realise that we are also teaching against the grain of what is happening to academics work in these "new times" (Hall and Jacques 1990).

The marketising of academics' work
In broad terms a "discursive shift" (Marginson 1990) is infecting Australian society with a plethora of what is cleverly called "structural reforms", in which the market is not only wrenching itself free from the State, but insidiously "colonising civil society" (Pusey 1996: 69). Such structural reforms, based on what Harcourt (1982) rightly calls "economic imperialism", are having quite drastic effects on education in Australia. The terrain of education and training, we argue, sits somewhere between the market, the State, and civil society. As such, its social location is a significant site of colonisation and contestation. Education and training, not only offer potential for increased intrusion of the logic of the market into civil society, the public sphere and the family, but this terrain also offers spaces for resistance.

Within higher education we have lived through the Dawkins reforms which many commentators argue has meant a

gradual whittling away of the notion that education (and higher education in particular) is a 'public good' .... towards being a 'private good' and therefore better left to the market (Smyth 1995: 56).

Smyth cited two aspects in particular to illustrate this point - the introduction of the Higher Education Contribution Scheme (HECS) as a user-pays system and the substantial fall in federal funding as a proportion of GDP. The "slide towards a privatisation mentality" (Smyth 1995, p57) continues unabated. In Smyth's (1995; 1996) study of the literature around the changes to the educational settlement brought about by the "slide from the 'public' to a 'private' good" he argues that the following is happening; deregulation and pedagogy for profit, instrumentalisation of knowledge and the proletarianisation of educated labour, gender and labour market segmentation in higher education, a colonisation by the discourses of managerialism, and the torquing of the research agenda towards those questions that have commercial value. How these rather complex and disturbing tendances are beginning to characterise academic work is summarised by Smyth (1995) as

● there is a growing separation in higher education between those who conceptualise the work and those who execute the work;
● the quest for increased managerial control is well advanced, and

occurs under the guise of restoring international competitiveness and enabling higher education institutions to respond better to national priorities;
● there is growing evidence of reduced worker autonomy, particularly among the growing peripheral workforce of untenured (and largely female) staff who operate in the teaching areas not regarded as being commercially viable;
● the skills of being an academic are increasingly becoming isolated and fragmented in contexts in which the paramount requirement is to make the work more explicit, so that it can be more easily codified and measured by performance indicators;
● institutional drift is tending increasingly to take the form of greater ideological control over the work of academics as they are vested with technical control in contexts that are framed by the norms and values of business and industry;
● despite the increased rhetoric about devolution, self-management, autonomy and single-line budgets, the reality is that the important decisions in higher education are made further and further away from the work, in elite policy-making units. (pp. 14-15)

The marketising of teachers' work

Similar, if not more deeply felt changes, are also occurring in the school sector. As a part of pursuing a deification of the 'free market', Australia (and a number of other countries including the USA, England and New Zealand) are witnessing a cranking up of the "fight against the public school as a central means of national integration and social development" (Wexler 1987). We also might add

[i]t is a way of the state arrogantly shirking its social responsibility for promoting an equitable quality education for all. (Smyth 1993: 8)

In summary then, the marketisation of the schooling sector involves the following:

● intensification of teachers work, in part due to reduction of real resources; including time, class-size increases, expectations for training and developing, and increased level of administrative workload, pushing all responsibility for balancing the declining education budget into school communities and calling it self-managing schools or devolution;

● associated with intensification is deskilling or redefining teachers work, not in terms of an educated professional or intellectual but as a competent practitioner or technician. (Knight, Lingard et al. 1994; Ball 1995). Rather than promoting an upskilling of teachers' work involving a continuation of the school-based curriculum movement of the 1980s, teachers are now expected to implement imposed curriculum frameworks, and increasingly teach to the test.

● deskilling is also promoted by increasing levels of imposed surveillance, often referred to as 'accountability measures. Examples include, standardised testing (or Basic Skills Testing) that have little relevance to best teaching/ learning practice and curriculum development, measuring student achievement according to numerical levels, and being evaluated by external Quality Assurance Teams.

● closing down of spaces for debates which include teachers voices about the nature of the school curriculum, or the conditions of teachers work, through a range of strategies including: dismembering

the advisory function of state education bureaucracies, shifting responsibility for professional development to schools without proper funding, shifting curriculum decision making back to the centre and calling it a national rationalisation of curriculum development.

● the trend towards a vocationalism of the school curriculum (Seddon 1994) This trajectory is characterised by the development and

implementation of the Mayer (1992) Key Competencies which emerged out of a perceived need for a convergence of general and vocational education which would ensure that schooling was more closely tied to preparing all young people for the merging forms of work and work organisation. Schooling is being asked to play a more important role in vocational skill formation and prepare job ready flexible and multi-skilled workers, but at a time when the labour market is characterised by increasing levels of part-time work, creeping credentialism, almost complete decimation of the youth full-time labour market, and a large pool of unemployed labour (Spierings 1995).

• abandoning a discourse about 'education and social justice' and affirmative action (Connell 1996: 5) based on a commitment to equal outcomes and retreating to a 'blaming the victim' position by marshalling such arguments as the need for freedom of speech and the need to rid our culture of the unnecessary constraints of 'political correctness'. (Newfield 1993; Wark 1995). The empirical evidence though, overwhelming supports the view (Connell and White 1989; Connell 1994; Teese, Davies et al. 1995)that the outcomes of schooling are still very much skewed in favour of those groups who are already advantaged in society. The already disadvantaged or disenfranchised - such as those living in poverty, and aborigines, - continue to not be served well by the schooling system and the present confluence of reforms is making things worse.

What we want to argue here is that the democratic nature of civil society is being undermined by the colonisation of the market into all aspects of our lives. What is happening in education and in teachers lives is indicative of what is happening elsewhere. This process of marketisation in education means that teachers, schools and their communities are being done to by the 'reform agenda' of an economic fundamentalism that is producing a "predatory culture" (McLaren 1994) in which the wealthy fulfil all of their desires and buy their health, education and protection whilst at the same time, undermining public services and the only alternative for the rest. In particular, contemporary reforms are undermining the democratic nature of teachers' work (Hattam 1995). In essence the public education system as a space for promoting the public good and civic responsibility is being undermined and teachers' voices are increasingly absent in decisions about the conditions of their work and especially about the nature of the curriculum. Teachers voices can be considered as "subjugated knowledge" (Foucault 1980) - knowledge that has "been buried and disguised"(p. 81) or has "been disqualified as inadequate to their task or insufficiently elaborated" (p. 82).

Sustaining sites of revolutionary learning

Within a context of a demoralising onslaught of structural reforms to teachers' work the Master of Teaching - in fact all course-work

Masters degrees for teachers - could be seen as significant sites for
professional regeneration. To not be seriously implicated, compromised
or accommodated by the ideology of marketisation requires that these
sites offer teachers the "representational resources" (New London Group
1995) to examine what is happening to their working conditions, solace

in knowing that others too have not abandoned commitments to a viable
public education system and the opportunity to re-design and
reconstruct their practices in the light of their "resistant reading"
(Janks and Ivanic 1992). We think it is appropriate to invoke Michael
Welton's (1993) description of New Social Movements - that is "sites of
revolutionary learning."- as a metaphor for the Master of Teaching. As
such the Master of Teaching offers a means to

resuscitate social relations, opposition, defiance, struggle and hope
whenever they have been crushed, distorted or stifled by order, which
is always the order of the state. (Touraine 1985, p.55)

As Michael Apple (Apple 1981) reminds us - hegemony is never complete.
"Resources of hope" (Williams 1989) and the possibility of "teaching to
transgress" (hooks 1994) in this present era of economic barbarism
haven't been totally closed off. Along with Agger (1991), Fraser
(1989), Calhoun (1995) and Kellner (1989) we believe that critical
theory still offers a "language of possibility" - a language that is
about "making hope practical, rather than despair convincing" (Kenway,
Willis et al. 1994).

Rejuvenating a critical theory of pedagogy

Given that critical theory is used in our course to, not only inform
our social analysis and in particular schooling's place in the order of
things, but also our pedagogy, its is necessary at this point to give a
brief introduction to what meaning(s) we give the term. Each of us
gives the term a different spin and we struggle to engage as critical
theorists in the spirit described by Horkheimer.

Yet there is no fixed method for doing this: the only universal
prescription is that one must have insight into one's own
responsibility. Thoughtless and dogmatic application of the critical
theory to practice in changed historical circumstances can only
accelerate the very process which the theory aimed at denouncing.
(Horkheimer 1972: v)

A practice of critical theory as struggle against the faults of
dogmatism is a practice of skepticism (Rajchman 1985) that involves "a
permanent questioning of those systems of thought and problematic forms
of experience in which we find ourselves" - "the endless questioning of

constituted experience." For us, such skeptism struggles not fall into either hopeless determinism nor romantic utopianism.

A useful description of 'critical theory' that reflects how we use the term in our own work is given by Agger (1991) when he refers to three generations of critical theory. The first generation being the early Frankfurt School and especially relying on the scholarship of Horkheimer, Adorno and Marcuse. Their scholarship layed the foundations for an ongoing development of a critical social theory that was able to relate political economy to an analysis of culture and ideology. The second generation of critical theory involved the linguistic turn of Jurgen Habermas in which "he offers critical theory as an important imaginary of communicative public life characterised by dialogue, discourse and democracy" (Agger 1991: 4). The third generation of critical theory we argue is still being developed and involves an ongoing rejuvenation with a range of theoretical sources outside of it, including poststructuralism (Poster 1989; Davies 1994), postmodernism (Flax 1990; Best and Kellner 1991; Giroux 1991), feminist theory (Fraser 1989; Benhabib 1992; Benhabib, Butler et al. 1995) and

postcolonial theory (Spivak 1988; Sprinker 1992). Of particular interest for us, are the conversations between these theoretical sources over the nature of pedagogy (McLaren and Leonard 1993; Giroux and McLaren 1994; McLaren and Lankshear 1994) - and the work of Paulo Friere being very influential (Freire 1972; Freire 1985; McLaren and Lankshear 1994).

A critical theory of pedagogy, or 'critical pedagogy' becomes an important resource for our work and given we are travelling across a lot of territory in this paper we don't have time to unpack the critiques of critical pedagogy here but wish to mention the sustained critique of critical pedagogy from many feminist scholars (Ellsworth 1989; Luke and Gore 1992; Gore 1993). In particular, feminist critique has made problematic the difficulty of translating theory into practice and has drawn attention to the absence of practical detail in much of the theorising about critical pedagogy. We want to agree in part with this work but also to draw attention to the plethora of writing about critical teaching, as opposed to critical pedagogy, and in particular the translation of Freire's approach into 'western' contexts (Shor 1897; Shor 1987; Shor and Freire 1987; Shor 1992). We hope that this paper might contribute to this translation. Rather than concentrate here on the "blind spots" of critical pedagogy that have been the focus of much of this feminist work (Weiler 1996) we prefer in this paper to offer a conceptualisation of critical theory that expresses a language of possibility. Rather than see critical pedagogy/critical theory as a "regime of truth" in the way that Gore (1993) has, a conceptualisation that has the tendency to concentrate on the constraining nature of discourse rather than the possibilities, we offer an alternative that is also Foucauldian - except sees critical theory as a "technology of

Paper Presented at the Joint ERA/
AARE Conference, Singapore, 1996
Australian Association
for Research in Education

self". As a technology of self - as a practice of effecting a counter-hegemonic self - critical theory could be thought of as a practice of "conscientisation" (Freire 1972) which refers to

a process of learning to perceive social, political, and economic contradictions, and to take action against the oppressive elements of reality. (Freire 1972: 15)

Critical theory as a technology of self also invokes Roland Barthes notion of a 'writerly' text that "gives the writer a role, a function, a contribution to make" as opposed to theory "which renders the reader idle or redundant, 'left with no more that the poor freedom either to accept or reject the text and thereby reduces him (sic) to that apt but impotent symbol of the bourgeois world, an inert consumer to the author's role as producer" (Hawkes 1977: 113-114). As a position to critically "read the word and the world" (Freire and Macedo 1987) critical theory involves a constellation of practices including, self-reflection, refusal, indignation, imagination, unlearning and transgression. We have no space here other than to flag these practices, but in a larger version of this paper we have began to explicate what these practices might mean.

What we what to do now is to broadly outline what the Master of Teaching entails, to explicate in more detail one of the core units - Reflective Analysis of Teachers Work - and to outline the nature of the struggles we engage in to sustain a 'site of revolutionary learning' for our students.

The Master of Teaching

The Master of Teaching course gives teachers an opportunity to investigate their own knowing-in-practice - to engage in a rigorous

interchange between their practice and enabling theoretical perspectives - within the context of post-graduate study. The Master of Teaching is a 48 unit program comprising the following course work topics: Reflective Analysis of Teachers' Work; Case Study Methods in Education; Curriculum and Teaching; Teaching for Learning; Social Dimensions of Teaching; and, Power and Knowledge in Teaching. There are also options for either a course-work project, dissertation or thesis depending on the extent to which the student wishes to engage in their own research inquiry.

The program aims to give experienced teachers an opportunity to grapple with the following questions:

(i)how do teachers make sense of the contradictory and conflicting demands made on them by their schools, parents, policy makers,

industry, and the wider community?

(ii)how do teachers formulate and articulate middle-range classroom-based theories about teaching, about what works, with what effects, and why?

(iii)what kinds of conditions are realistically possible in sustaining and maintaining circumstances in which teachers can communicate with other teachers in trialing and experimenting with alternative teaching strategies and forms of classroom organisation and practice?

(iv)what support is needed and how do teachers acquire the necessary resources to permit teacher-to-teacher collaboration to occur in the normal context of teaching?

(v)how do schools, within the degrees of freedom open to them (and with out the injection of massive amounts of additional resources), re-organise the way they operate to permit professional dialogue among teachers about the substantive work of teaching?

(vi)what role is feasible and desirable for outside agencies, such as university faculties of education, in assisting teachers to systematically reflect on their teaching, and what kind of circumstances are necessary to promote such partnerships?

We want to concentrate now on just one of the units - Reflective Analysis of Teachers Work. In part this is because of the need for some brevity, but also because this unit encapsulates many of the important ideas that motivates the Master of Teaching. This unit is a core unit and we recommend that those enrolling in the Master of Teaching complete this unit first. Reflective Analysis of Teachers' Work encourages teachers to set up arrangements in which they can be more thoughtful about their teaching and connect their teaching to a burgeoning field of literature (Carr and Kemmis 1986; Kemmis 1989; McTaggart 1994; Smyth 1995) on being reflective about teaching. Participants meet for three whole-day workshops spread throughout the year, approximately two months apart. A set of readings are provided which aim to ensure teachers are prepared to engage in doing rigorous reflection on their own practice. The initial set of reading focus on selecting an approach to reflective practice(Smyth 1989; Smyth 1992; Education for Social Justice Research Group 1994; Brown 1995), deciding on techniques for collecting evidence (Allen and Fauth 1987; Macrorie 1987; Kemmis and McTaggart 1988; Smyth 1992), selecting a focus for inquiry, understanding the ethical issues (Lather 1986), and monitoring of the micro-politics of the school context (Blase 1991). The aims of each workshop are as follows:

Workshop 1
This workshop aims to prepare participants for doing some form of

reflective practice on their teaching and covers the topics above. A group process for constructing a bibliography of readings is also negotiated.

Workshop 2
Participants have an opportunity to use the group setting to share the outcomes of their reflective analysis and their readings on reflective practice. Issues that begin to emerge from the "reading" and the "doing" will be topics for further discussion.

Workshop 3
Opportunities are given for sharing and debating of issues emerging from the readings. There is a special focus on expecting the students to bring their reading of the literature and their experience of reflective practice to interrogating the claims made about reflective practice in the literature.

In attempting to provide a space for conscientisation for us and our students, within the constraints of a course-work Masters degree, we are faced with a number of significant issues which must be faced when designing the course, during the 'teaching' and when we assess the quality of the student's learning (ie. marking their writing). These very same issues are central also to the work of our students. In that sense we have the same struggles. Of most importance though is the cultural differences between us and them. Most significantly are these inter-related differences:

● our students inhabit places in which an oral culture predominates and we work in places which privilege the practice of writing; and,

● no matter how much we try to avoid it, a defining feature of the relationship between us and our students, is the differential of power which is very much in our favour.

These two are inter-related, because the maintenance of power, in large part, operates though our marking of their writing and hence judging their capability of inhabiting our world.

In struggling to moderate the disempowering possibilities of this power differential, or of working at developing a practice that understands the difference between having authority and being authoritarian, (Shor and Freire 1987) we are attempting to develop what Shor (Shor 1992) calls the "third idiom" or a "third discourse" - that "is a learning area between students' speech and understandings and those of the teacher." (p.203) Gutierrez et al (1995) refer to this as the "third space" -

 as the social space within which counter-hegemonic activity, or contestation of dominant discourses, can occur for both students and teachers. (Gutierrez, Kreuter et al. 1995: 451)

One way of thinking about this third or dialogic space is to see the impossibility of us being co-inhabitants of our student's space without our voices appearing as incomprehensible theory and the equal impossibility of our students, at least in the first few years of the enrolment, inhabiting our space without having their voice significantly muted. Academic discourse - our discourse - operates as an "authoritative discourse" (Bakhtin 1981, p342) and the knowledge and voice of teachers - our students- even though being an "internally pervasive discourse" is often rendered mute in the company of

authority.

The knowledge that teachers have about their work is often devalued by teachers in comparison to academic knowledge - especially in academic contexts. For a course that aims to practice within a critical paradigm this offers a possible hindrance.

The critical paradigm .... respects the knowledge, experience , and language of students. It does not mythologise them as deficits. (Shor 1992, p202)

Dialogic space needs to be developed and sustained in which we can both speak to each other. We want to agree with Gutierrez et al (1995) when they argue that the notion of the third space redefines what counts as effective classroom practice.

Effective practice, in this sense, exists in contexts in which various cultures, discourses, and knowledges are made available to all classroom participants, and thus become resources for mediating learning. It is within this third space that students and teachers can bridge the various social spaces within classrooms. This bridge creates the potential to rewrite and contest extend texts and discursive practices. It becomes possible for both teacher and student to redefine what counts as knowledge. (p. 467)

A major resource for our practice has been Ira Shor's (1988) description of a 'dialogic method' in which he proposes the following features:

● participatory - students should be active in the classroom from the outset.

We rarely lecture our students and run our groups more like a reading
 group - the texts are our recommended literature and our experiences as
 students and teachers.

● critical nature of learning - problem-posing is central to how the content is presented and dealt with in class.

Most importantly we hope to problematise the practice of teaching.
Often this means being able to distinguish between, problem-solving -
a practice that characterises the teacher as technician - and
problem-posing - a practice of making extra-ordinary the experience of
our work through a rigorous examination of how come things came to be
this way.

• situated - the class text is the language, statements, issues and
knowledge of the students. From this text the problems to be
investigated are developed.

The Reflective Analysis of Teachers' Work unit really hinges on our
students doing some reflective analysis of their work. This is the
first activity. The content then is the issues that they name as being
significant.

• dialogic - a return to a desire to talk about and act on the world
together.

Our course operates using a group discussion format. In grounding what
seems to be a rather ethereal notion, we aim to assist our students to
become more articulate about the content of our course - ie. their work
- and hence we work to assist them to become better writers (and

probably speakers). Many of our students have not written an essay for
twenty years and certainly have not written an essay following the
conventions of academic prose at a standard we hope for. The writing
process has a central place in the teaching and learning process of
this course. Using Peter Elbow's (1975) notion that pre-writing
exercises are an important way to assist writers improve their writing
we structure the workshops as pre-writing activities. In other words
the workshops are designed to assist the students in the difficult
conceptualising that is required in working out the situated nature of
their work using essay writing as a method.

• desocialising - "to transform passivity into involvement" (Shor 1988:
106).

All of the students are expected to make a contribution to the
dialogue, and learning tasks are designed which often entail humour,
autobiography, and designing representations of their learning that
involve collaboration. As a pre-writing activity the workshops can also
be considered to be opportunities to engage in drafting. Activities
such as brainstorming, concept mapping and giving each other feedback
are included in the workshop format.

Each of these aspects deserves to receive a fuller treatment, but again we need to focus our text on the most important aspect of our practice - that is providing a space for our students to examine their classroom practice. In the next section we want to focus therefore on what we mean by critically reflective practice.

How do we understand critically reflective practice?

Teachers are constantly, perhaps unconsciously, making decisions about their teaching practice. Refining what they do about individual students, assessment, worthwhile learning activities and a whole range of other issues. This process of reflection usually occurs on the run so to speak, usually while engaged with the teaching/learning process. Usually reflection occurs as a solitary event. Critically reflective practice is much more that this. Critically reflective practice is a collaborative approach to working in schools by teachers committed to improving their teaching for the benefit of all students. For our purpose critically reflective practice has these three key elements: a research spiral, a critical community and critical reflection.

1. A research spiral with these elements (Smyth 1996):

1. Describe ... what is it that you do as a teacher?
2. Inform ... what does this mean?
3. Confront ... how did I come to be like this?
4. Reconstruct ... how might I do things differently?

There is an assumption that all teachers have some "critical instances" (Tripp 1992) that bother them that could form the basis for further investigation and improvement. This spiral allows teachers an opportunity to work through the assumptions, expectations and motivations underlying their teaching practice.

In 'teaching' a unit that has as its focus the reflective analysis of teachers work, we are keen not to fall into the trap of over-emphasising the technical aspects of this practice. In commenting on the popularity of action research in the early days of its

resurgence in Australia - as promoted by those at Deakin University during the early 1980s - McTaggart (1991) argues that:

Action research became something for advocates to support, and administrators to impose. It became a tool, a technical device for solving certain kinds of educational problems. It was often reduced in meaning to the simplistic icons used to characterise it. (p. 44)

That is not to say that we don't spend time assisting our students come to terms with the technical aspects of the practice. We are especially

keen to encourage our students to engage in serious journal writing
(Francis 1995).

2. The research process is conducted in a network of critical friends,
in a critical community. For us this means having the opportunity to
reflect and plan with other teachers. The critical community in the
first instance is other interested teachers. This group will give
teachers the opportunity to be one step removed from the action for the
purpose of planning and reflecting. A community of critical learners
aims to provide an environment where people can share frustration's,
ideas, strategies, as well as critical, supportive feedback about their
work in schools.

Some of this will be based on practical concerns, and some will become
 the means for discussing schools in a social context and extend into
 some clearer understandings about: the discourse or language of school
 - how people talk about and categorise teaching and students;
 activities - what counts as learning and participation and; the
 structures and organisation - how people relate to each other (power
 and authority relations) (Kemmis and McTaggart 1988).

We are also keen to encourage a practice of critical collaboration.
Another important strategy for overcoming a fetish for the technical is
to provide an opportunity for a critical community to develop. In the
context of our course this means encouraging the teachers to establish
a relationship with a critical friend in their school, who at a
minimum, could provide some feedback from observation of their
practice. Often this became a two way exchange - in which participants
were involved in an interchange about each others practice. As well as
the school-based critical friend the regular workshop meetings were
also organised to model how a critical group might operate. We have
taken up an " active educative role" (Kemmis 1989: 22) in these groups.
As such we were acting

...as "facilitators" .... of the action research process, again
offering techniques, but also beginning to offer theoretical
perspectives which could link the work the researchers were doing to
relevant literatures about their substantive problems and about
ideology. (Kemmis 1989: 22)

3. We argue that schooling is bigger than what is happening in one
classroom or one school, and hence being a reflective teacher involves
being able to locate our theory and practice in wider social milieu.
This means critically reflecting on the social conditions of teachers'
work, to think about, challenge and work to change what we do as
teachers. It enables us to look at the social purposes of schooling,
rather than just to tinker with the technical skills of teaching (Smyth
1985). Becoming critical about teaching and the social theories that

support it amounts to moving away from asking how to apply strategies
to solve particular "problems", to asking 'what and why' about the role

of schools in society.

To this end we are also keen to push teachers to locate their work and
their concerns within a broader frame than the classroom or the school
fence. In terms of the overall design of the workshops we have
deliberately staged this process. In the first instance we provide
reading about reflective practice with a view to assisting our students
do some reflective practice in their work context. This outcome of this
is reported and an examination of the literature is also commenced. A
part of the literature of our course are examples of readings that
attempt an analysis of teachers' work that make the linkages between
schooling and the social milieu. These readings and the conceptual
resources they use, become further text for our interrogation.

In conclusion, it should be noted that a few weeks prior to the writing
of this paper we were not clear about the status of the subject of our
deliberations. It was looking likely that the Master of Teaching was
going to be an historical oddity rather than a living breathing course.
In recent weeks, in our University, there has arguments put that all
course-work Masters degrees be full fee paying in the future.
Fortunately for us at this stage, the Vice Chancellor of our University
is resisting this move as he predicts, as do we, that such a move would
lead to an almost complete decimation of such programs. The target
group for our course - school teachers and others working in the
schooling sector - just won't be able to afford to pay the up front
fees. Such a decimation is being viewed as a retrograde step and hence
resisted at this stage. Our course lives on. We hope that this change
of heart is a positive omen for the future of teacher development and
that more spaces open up in which teachers have the opportunity to
reclaim their voices and nourish their commitments to democratic
schooling.

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