Abstract

This paper reports on a study that centred on the stories of a group of women teacher educators over a period of five years. Major themes that emerged from the stories ranged from questions of implementing a critical pedagogy in classrooms peopled by reluctant tertiary students, to coping with changing institutional structures. A constant subtheme that accompanied these themes was the women's efforts to confront the personal costs of maintaining a professional life in these circumstances while at the same time endeavouring to find ways of renegotiating an ethical, fulfilling and oppositional professional life. Using storying as a means of making sense of experience for oneself and for others calls on a range of discursive practices that are collaborative, narrative, and that are informed by various critical theories. These critical theories offered insights into the complexity of power relations within particular institutional sites. For these women, the past few years of teacher education have been those of turbulence and change. How these changes have impacted on these women as teacher educators involved in the continuing challenges of teaching, researching, and continuing with professional lives, is the subject of this paper.

Introduction

For a period of five years, a group of women teacher educators met frequently to discuss issues pertaining to their teaching. How these meetings came about was due to the happenstance of people who were interested in issues concerning teaching and learning, who had values and principles regarding their work, and who were stimulated by the challenges they faced in the classroom where they endeavoured to implement a critical pedagogy. These meetings were also able to take place because of the institutional structures at the time that provided space and time for these women to meet. From recounting the stories of their teaching work, each woman drew strength from and fed into the discussions. The discussions were intellectually challenging because of the range of research backgrounds of each of the participants, which, even though they were similar in many respects, were different enough to both inform and challenge existing ideas held by each individual. The stories touched on classroom experiences, the way these were translated into practice, issues of collegiality, and women's ways of working. The meetings,
however, stopped because of a range of factors which impacted on the women in differing ways. This paper explores the processes and possibilities and of these meetings, the stories of the women teacher educators, the impact of institutional changes on these women, and the challenges of teaching, researching and continuing with their professional lives.

**Theoretical Background**

While we emerge from different theoretical orientations (feminist poststructuralism and Habermasian critical theory), we find common ground in a concern for investigating the complex ways in which subjectivities are constructed and meaning is made by and within special practices of power mediated by language. We draw from the work on critical literacy, acknowledging that to define critical literacy is as problematic as trying to define literacy. We are informed by the notion of 'critical' as provided by Freebody and Muspratt (1992) who describe it as both 'important' and 'oppositional', the latter term also deriving from a Freirian construction of Critical Literacy. We also agree with Agger's (1991) point that challenges the notion of a literacy which unproblematically accepts the canon as an ideologically neutral construction of wisdom and knowledge, calling for a critical literacy that is 'not transmission as much as construction ... thoroughly textual and dialogical' (Agger, 1991, p. 11). Recognising the risks of conflating these two 'family trees', we nonetheless envisage a critical literacy pedagogy as a way of developing in students a range of particular knowledges and skills which will enable them to develop a critical view of society and culture.

Theorising narrative has been a particular focus for our work, and we are in agreement with Acker (1994) when she comments "... one advantage of narrative is that history makes itself evident in the world of its actors" (p. 65).

Teaching is both a public and a private activity in that one's lived experience is situated at the centre of the teaching/learning experience. The work that we do as teachers, and the particular views that we hold are the result of an interrelationship between the historical period in which we live, our cultural milieu, our position in the social structure, and our personal biographies (Weiner 1994).

Bakhtin (1981) has coined the term 'heteroglossia' by which he means the sound of many voices, many discourses, and the consciousness of a reader or a listener affecting what is said and what is thought. Gilligan (1982) has written of women's identity and moral development, arguing that women and girls articulate their moral dilemmas in a 'different voice'. Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule (1985) explored further this notion of 'voice' and women's ways of knowing, questioning the view that all knowledge originates outside of the self. The power of narrative, dialogue, and the dialogic nature of learning as contributors to reflective awareness in teachers and students are the concerns of Freire and Shor (1987), and Noddings (1991). They base their beliefs on the understanding of the personal and cultural histories and contexts of individuals being central to the construction of meaning.

It seems to us, therefore, that teaching by telling stories (Newman 1991), or through narrative structures, can assist in the understanding of changes in education in terms of historical perspective and social conditions, at the same time offering frameworks within which 'personal choices and apparently serendipitous events can be located and positioned' (Weiner 1994, p. 10). Goodson (cited in Weiner, 1994) also argues for this approach, recommending the reintegration of situational with biographical and historical analysis.

Narratives can be a means of making sense of one's own experiences, particularly as the 'narrator' has a story that is 'embedded in his or her culture, language, gender, beliefs, and life history' (Noddings, 1991, p. 3). Newman (1991) refers to her story telling as the relating
of 'critical incidents', or moments which have forced her to stand back and examine her beliefs and her teaching critically, and then to share this 'story' with others as a means of questioning taken-for-granted beliefs, and disrupting and questioning pedagogical practices and understandings. By encouraging individuals to observe and reflect on the stories that are told either by the teacher or by the students, the different ethnic, class and gender subjectivities in the classroom may be explored. Rather than identifying with an essentialist self, each individual's subjectivity is, as Bakhtin (1981) emphasises, constantly being redefined as meaning is asserted, contested, affirmed, or denied.

Teacher narratives serve an interpretive function. They introduce the students to difficult new concepts and theories, but they do this by relating them to personal interests and familiar notions. Students, and teachers, respond to stories because they make the abstract concrete and accessible. What may be only vaguely understood in the theoretical and abstract becomes explicit and graphic in the concrete. Further, using a story to demonstrate an abstract theory can have an immediate impact, leading students to more readily use the important skills of analysis and critique because they have been able to view the theory through the lens of action.

In our study, we have used two narratives - excerpts from students' written narratives as they seek to make sense of new ideas, and our narratives as we seek to make sense of student understandings, as well as to interrogate the problems and possibilities of a critical pedagogy.

Setting of the Study

The study took place at a regional University in Victoria. It is situated in a large, historically significant, rural town. There are approximately 5000 students, with not surprisingly, approximately 75% of students coming from rural areas. Over the years of the study, we, the women teacher educators, were involved in teaching in the BA/BTeach double degree, specifically two units in this degree - a compulsory Foundation unit in Language and Literacy, and compulsory Education major unit, Ideology and Education.

Because each of these units is compulsory a number of consequences follow. The students are not self-selected, as would be the case if they had 'chosen' the units; thus our students have no prior commitment, nor even interest in a critical framework, unlike some of the recorded instances of critical pedagogy described by Gore (1993), and Middleton (1993) whose accounts of feminist pedagogical critical practice are associated with a subject chosen by students - women's studies or a feminist sociology of education. A further consequence of the compulsory nature of these units is that our cohort reflects the institutional profile; most students are from rural backgrounds, where they are frequently the first in their family to enter tertiary education. They tend not to be diverse in ethnicity or class associations (or at least not in ways that they will own). Another consequence of compulsion is that there is a wide diversity of capacity in our classes - indeed the very diversity that we referred to earlier as being names within the deficit discourse. For us, rather than seeking to teach students we wish we had, we see it as our professional responsibility to find a way to teach 'inclusively' such that, in principle, the work is do-able, non-alienating, and developmental for all students. That is, we endeavour to enable all students, whatever their capacities and cultural backgrounds, to succeed in what we do, given that the students seriously apply themselves, and meet the criteria of the learning tasks set for the unit.

It was the above factors that, in many instances, were the focus of our discussions, as we explored a range of pedagogical strategies that would allow the students and us to problematise and interrogate the issues that were part of the content of our units. Many of the students were resistant to the notion of interrogation, having spent the past 13 years of
their education generally being told what to do, when to do it, and how. They were reluctant
to engage in critical inquiry, not the least because it disrupted their assumptions about their
society and culture. The dilemmas we faced in the classroom we shared in our discussion
groups, describing the classroom practices we employed, theorising our pedagogies, and
reflecting critically on our perceptions of our teaching and learning strategies.

Theorising the construction of the classroom

At the risk of seriously oversimplifying the notion of the construction of the classroom, we will
focus on the two major participants in that enterprise, the teacher and the student, and their
particular constructions of that environment. In different ways, both are aware of the
institutional constraints and constructions of the classroom, of the conflicts and
contradictions inherent in the teaching/learning situation, of the notion of surveillance that
accompanies classroom tasks and evaluation processes, and of the particular subject
positions each participant takes up, and of the actual architecture of the classroom space
and time.

The teacher's construction of the classroom is largely articulated by their particular
pedagogy/ies. We had a Freirian perspective, and so wished to engage in a dialogic
encounter with the students, resulting in teacher and students learning from each other, and
thus being 'transformed'. Each classroom episode, therefore, would be a situation in which
teacher and students engage in a search for knowledge, so that they can adopt a 'dialogical
posture as a response to their epistemological inequititude that forces the revision of what is
already known so they can know it better' (Freire and Macedo, 1995, p. 378). To the extent
that the teacher recognises themselves as a co-learner in this situation, they willingly give up
some of their own institutional authority as they gain more 'authen
tic' authority. In turn,
students become empowered as active, conscious subjects in the learning process (Schilb,
1992). Freire's work is also echoed in feminist pedagogy, where hierarchical and institutional
authority is replaced with participatory modes
of learning (Weiler, 1991).

What construction, however, do students make of the classroom? Within a Freirian model
of empowering pedagogy, the students would be active learners holding a critical view of the
world, which abounds with emancipatory possibilities and imperatives. Giroux (1988), Shor
(1987), and Macedo (1987) have written or Freire's work and have sought to involve
students by fostering in addition, an 'intelligent engagement and effective dialogue that
considers the interrelated dynamics and effects of social class, gender, race, power and
history on their lives' (Giroux, 1988, p. 50). The classroom, therefore, should be a place that
supports expression of marginalised subjectivities, where learning processes need to recruit
the different subjectivities students bring to learning (The New London Group, 1995).
Students, however, can be very wary of any 'radical' pedagogies which ask them to take
risks and which confront and disrupt their long-held beliefs. When they have already spent
the previous 13 years as subjects of a 'traditional' pedagogy, which has proved quite
successful in helping them on the educational journey, the demands and 'experimentation' of
a critical pedagogy can be threatening and unwelcome.

Increasingly important is the notion that pedagogy occurs not only in educational sites, but in
all cultural sites (McLaren, 1995), with the terms 'hybridity' and 'intertextuality' (Fairclough,
1992; the New London Group, 1995) highlighting the mechanisms of creativity in
contemporary society as well as the potentially complex ways in which meanings are
constituted through relationships to other texts. Thus, individuals experience contradictions
and conflicts as they 'cross the boundaries' between different perspectives and histories,
'forged in the narratives of their own lives', and the institutional roles associated with them
(Kemmis, 1995, p. 147). A further complication occurs when individuals from different
discursive backgrounds and traditions come into sites of social practice, where it cannot be
assumed that the meanings associated with given words/concepts are the same for all (Gee & Lankshear, 1995).

In short, individuals belong to multiple discourses, and their subjectivities are a mass of contradictions. Their conflicting and multiple interests and knowledges raises possibilities, however, for generating a dialectic of conflicting positions, from which may arise a dynamic for critique and change.

Data Construction

Amongst other things, we teach two units that occur in the first semester of the students' contact with tertiary education in general and with the BA/BT at this institution in particular. The two units concerned are Language and Literacy (L&L) - one of the Foundation Units, and Ideology and Education (I&E) - the first of the units in the Education Major. The data have been taken from various writing tasks and recorded oral comments, through which student voices are heard. Data have also been taken from the meetings of the Critical Pedagogy Group, which were taped, transcribed, and reflected on by participants before the next meeting, with issues arising from the transcriptions being discussed again, when relevant and appropriate.

For L&L, following a discussion on the central aspects of the unit, students reflected orally and in writing on their perceptions of some of the issues of the unit, such as the idea of critical literacy, language and power, the social construction of meaning. From the teachers' point of view, the concerns were: how do students learn the literacies required for learning in the Academy? And how successfully can students learn a critical social literacy, one that will develop in them a recognition of the complex roles of literacy in the wider uses of language in education and society? These questions frequently guided the discussion of the Critical Pedagogy Group meetings.

For I&E, students were asked to make the last entry in their journal a reflection of their journey of learning about education during the preceding semester. In framing the task in this way, the intention was to have students distance themselves to a degree from the content and reflect on their own sense making about the content. A second source of student voice came through an open-ended evaluation written anonymously. From the teachers' point of view, the concerns were: have the students been able to problematise and re-construct their own understandings about education? And how successfully can a critical pedagogy develop critical understandings about education in society.

We have selected written student texts and our transcribed oral texts upon which to shape this paper. We are mindful of Reid's (1997, p 59) insight, drawing on Bourdieu, that data is itself "authored" and "authorised" by its context. The data certainly exists in our records, but it cannot be taken naturalistically. In contrast, it is multiply "authored".

In regard to our own texts, there are three levels of authorship. First, each story was "authored" as it happened in the classroom, and our immediate telling of the story to ourselves enabled us to respond to each incident within the classroom. Second, as participants in the conversations of the Critical Pedagogy Group, we "re-authored" our particular stories in the context of collegial teacher dialogue and the multiple relationships to each other which we lived at that time. Third, in selecting aspects of those conversations to use in this paper, there is an additional layer of "authoring". This time, our stories are "re-authored" in the context of us writing this paper, an activity in which we are positioned as researchers, at both a spatial and temporal remove from our own stories. In a sense, the "then we" who were participants in the conversations described herein are historical characters, separate from but shaping the "we" who are writing this paper. The "current we"
are looking at strangers who are not strangers. At two stages, we have chosen what stories to tell and how to inscribe/be inscribed by our stories. To paraphrase Bourdieu, lots of things remain secret (Bourdieu, 1992, in Reid, 1997, p. 59).

With regard to the student texts, the "authorship" is even more complex. Each student certainly wrote her own words, but they were "authored" in the context of the pedagogical relationship which existed at the time, wherein the student knew (and agreed) that their words would be read by us. Our selection of them for this paper is authored by our construction of student voices as "suitable" for our present purposes, yet at the time at which the students wrote them, we read them as their teachers.

So whose voice is being heard in the students' comments? Clearly it is our version of students' voices.

We recognise that the naturalistic ascription of 'voice' to either the participating lecturers or the students is problematic. On the other hand, this paper is also a story in which we yet again try to make sense of our experience. We are "responding" to our own stories, in Connelly and Clandinin's (1994) sense of seeking to understand through reflection rather than through analysis or interpretation per se. As Carter (1993, p. 9) says "we are, in the very act of story making, deciding what to tell and what to leave out and imposing structure and meaning on events".

Written comments from journals and other writings and discussions will be placed in italics. While we cannot deny that we have selective in the written and oral texts we have chosen to display, there was a distinct grouping of comments and responses that were generated from class activities, readings, class discussions, students' engagement with the varying assessment tasks, specifically critical journal writing, as well as from our Critical Pedagogy Group meetings which focused on all of these issues, and more, at various times. What appears below are the comments grouped according to the issues that appeared to be dominant in students' thoughts and writing, and in our discussions. These issues are (1) competing discourses regarding the academy that permeate and surround the classroom, indeed shape the classroom; (2) competing discourses about knowledge and learning; (3) competing discourses about literacy that construct and constrain the doing of academic work; (4) the increasing marginalisation we felt as changes in the institution impacted on our work and our lives. For each of these themes, we seek to interweave students' 'voices' as heard through their writing, teachers' 'voices' as we try to reflect upon our understanding of our pedagogy, and theoretical 'voices' from the academic canon. We seek to identify and explore some of the tensions between competing discourses which are played out within our classroom at 9 o'clock each Monday morning.

Institutional Changes

The late 1990s have been a time of turbulence and change for tertiary educators.

Significant numbers of tertiary teachers have been made redundant, and many schools/faculties have merged or have been closed down by their institution. The remaining academics working in higher education, moreover, are constantly under pressure to increase their research output, publish in internationally refereed journals, find time for community involvement and service, as well as having to cope with increased teaching demands, larger classes, increased administrative duties. (Miller 1995, p.53) These changes are linked to a conservative restoration in education, set within a managerial discourse which emphasises rationality and accountability.
Marginson (1995) argues that the changes include a shift towards "academic labour for and as commodity production" in which the overriding importance of exchange values places limits on diversity and innovation, and separates teaching from research (Marginson, 1995). The separation of teaching from research is embodied structurally within faculties, according to a Canadian study by Buchbinder and Rajagopal (1995). Teaching becomes the primary responsibility of part-time and contract staff, and research and administration the responsibility of full-time staff. The diversification of academic work is paralleled by the diversification of status of the two activities - teaching being relegated to secondary status. Similar circumstances seem to be occurring in Australia.

Studies in the United Kingdom by Maguire and Weiner (1996) have examined the impact of the changes in education on women tertiary educators, noting that

Women as feminists began to reposition themselves as part of the

Counter hegemonic educational discourse. At the same time, the

Managerial discourse within education emphasised a new formation;

A specific hierarchical and patriarchal formation, that further

Demoted women (Maguire & Weiner, 1996, p. 716)

Further, Bessant (1998) has pointed out that despite a decade of legislative pronouncements about equal employment opportunity, universities remain "hegemonically masculinist" workplaces where traditional ways of knowing and rules of validation continue to exert "opaque violence" on women academics.

As well as these pressures on the tertiary sector of the education industry (Knight, 1993), those academics within education faculties have faced additional pressures from state and federal governments who seek to shape future teachers in line with their ideological and economic projects. These pressures include a desire to shift the emphasis from "theory" to workplace practices of teachers, focusing on skills and techniques rather than intellectual habits of reflection.

It is important to understand these pressures, according to Smyth (1995), by concentrating on what academics actually do, rather than on the common myths about academic work. Smyth suggests that these matters go to the very heart of how knowledge is produced, construed and conveyed (p.2).

Our study seeks to take up Smyth's challenge and look at what one group of academics has actually done and how the broader changes in academic life have impacted on our professional working lives and our existences.

The Study

Our study involved five women tertiary educators in the discipline area of education who had experienced the conservative restoration in education in multiple ways - a tertiary teachers, as education professionals, as critical educators, as researchers and administrators. Beginning as a collegial support and course planning group some four years ago, we captured, through taped discussion sessions, some of the personal and political dis/continuities of our educational lives. Naming ourselves the "Critical Pedagogy Group' we explored in diverse ways, the notion of teachers as 'transformative intellectuals', activated by
the possibility of counter-hegemonic sensitivities, framed within a language of possibility which empowers teachers, as well as students.

These sessions, however, came to an abrupt halt when institutional constraints made it difficult/impossible for us to continue to meet, much less to discuss issues of concern in our teaching/learning lives. This disruption to our exploration of the delights and dilemmas of critical pedagogy foregrounded the continuing power inequalities in education, together with the state's role in mediating, supporting, engendering and reproducing them. In retrospect, therefore, it seems somewhat wishful thinking that the institution in which we were placed would support, or enable, educational processes which may well undermine its own legitimacy and functioning.

Our study draws attention to some of the 'chalkface' realities shaped by government and institutional policies, realities which impacted on our classroom teaching, on our places in the institution, on our intellectual growth, on our personal lives, and on our collective hope and desire to deconstruct authoritative voices through the critical pedagogy of our classrooms. While rejecting the notion that we are simply the helpless agents of the system, we are nonetheless troubled by the ambiguities, and ironies, of our attempts to engage with and foster the politics of possibility of critical pedagogy, attempts which were silenced and subsumed by the concrete complexity of power educational, social and political concerns.

One reason Freire's work on literacy is so appealing to us is that he looks critically at institutions and encourages those he teaches to do the same. As Freire argues, when one looks in a critical way at institutions one becomes the doer, rather than the 'done to' (Freire 1990). To question institutions is to challenge a larger culture.

Challenging a larger culture from the margins is what Brodkey (1989) calls a rhetoric of resistance. She defines this rhetoric by stating that those who are ambivalent or threatened by their subject position in a given discourse interrupt 'the very notion of the unified self ... in their spoken and written texts', by representing '... a stereotype as an agent in a discourse the least committed to the preservation of the stereotype' (p, 127). According to Brodkey, these rhetorics of resistance not only shift subject positions but lend support to postmodernist speculation that language and discourse materially construct reality, not simply reflect it.

Knowledge of multiple subject positions makes possible both the practical and the theoretical critiques that interrupt the assumption of unchanging irreversible, and asymmetrical social and political relations between the privileged and unprivileged subjects represented in a particular discourse (Brodkey, 1989, p. 128).

Apart from having our own awareness of the ways constitutive construction of language and discourse, one of the things we tried to do was take this institutional, social, and cultural awareness into our classrooms, to encourage our students to be 'actors' in their own learning. Through close interrogation and exploration of their strategies in group discussions and in writing, we hoped students would come to understand the political dimensions of the forms they choose to write in, or the words they used, as well as the sources they cited.

Critical pedagogy group.

"Collegiality" or working together?
We resist describing the Critical Pedagogy Group as an instance of "collegiality", although it was a real case of teachers working with each other. The term "collegiality", while elastic enough to embrace multiple meanings, seems to us to be associated with managerial theories and practices as a way of fostering a "professional culture of teaching that is more responsive and receptive to change" (Hargreaves and Dawe 1989 in Smyth 1991, p 138) of particular types. Smyth (1991), writing of school level changes, warns that "collegiality is much more than a teacher-to-teacher...it is a policy option being wielded very effectively at the moment to dramatically re-define what is meant by the notion of skill and competency in teaching in the light of national economic imperatives" (Smyth, 1991, p. 139) On the other hand, various writers have suggested that teachers value working together. In our case, one of the conditions of success of the collaborative way of working that was the Critical Pedagogy Group was that it occurred "naturally" - it was not "force-fed". We were not agents "charged with policing one another's oppression (Smyth, 1991, p 141) but rather engaged in a process of critiquing an ensemble of lived ideologies (Harris 1979). And we came to trust each other politically, professionally and personally.

For the Group, there was nothing to be gained in institutional terms by spending precious time and emotional energy exposing our "dirty linen" from the classroom. Indeed, such exposure outside of the Group would have been suicidal in terms of confession of perceived weaknesses. It was not the "done thing", especially in a faculty of education to acknowledge that one might be less than perfect in one's classroom practice, and indeed that tertiary teaching practice was itself problematic. Further, as a Lecturer in a tertiary discipline, the assumption of "mastery" (hooks, 1994, p. 174) in all aspects of one's professional life usually results in image management on the part of a tertiary teacher to ensure that one's status within academe is unsullied.

Participants (pseudonyms are used)

Mary - Associate Professor, senior lecturer, critical friend. Mary had been at the University for 12 years, and had been a supervisor to the others when they were involved in higher degree study.

Margaret - course co-ordinator, lecturer in Ideology and Education. Margaret had been at the University for 15 years, and had witnessed a number of restructurings and changes in the Institution

Anne - lecturer in Language and Literacy; then sessional staff member. Anne had been at the University for 5 years when her contract expired, and was not renewed. She found employment elsewhere in the University, and ultimately outside of that particular institution.

Pam - sessional lecturer in Language and Literacy. Pam had been involved with the University for 4 years, first as a higher degree student, then as a sessional lecturer.

Kim - sessional lecturer in Ideology and Education. Kim had been involved with the University for 5 years, first as a higher degree student, then as a sessional lecturer.

 THEMES AND EXPLORATIONS

 Beginnings

The Critical Pedagogy Group meetings began as a result of several, ongoing, corridor conversations, as we hurried either to or from our classes. We had certainly been aware of
each other's general research interests, but had not really connected our interests in any concrete way. It was in sharing our perspectives on teaching, both positive and negative, that we began to see common pedagogical interests emerging. These interests formed the basis of our initial discussions which took place in a number of sites - in the corridors, in each other's offices, over cups of coffee - until we gradually began to realise that there were certain dilemmas and challenges that we shared and that we wished to explore further. Hence, we organised to meet and explore, in a more 'formal' context, the issues that we had been tentatively focussing on, and that we wished to problematise in a more directed, and critical, way.

The first meeting drew together some of our teaching concerns, specifically how to effectively cope with the diversity of students who were now involved in tertiary education.

Margaret -- This group conversation really only came about because, after I had been chatting to some of you incidentally, it became obvious to me that similar sorts of things seemed to be of concern to people teaching in each of the different units. So I thought that the problems seemed not to be isolated to anyone of us as a teacher, nor any one unit content, nor any one variation of critical pedagogy. I've sometimes thought if I'm not getting students to be more open minded, more questioning, seeing things as more problematic, getting them to connect with questions of power....if that's not happening through the way I'm approaching it through a version of critical pedagogy, maybe I'd be better turning it right round, start from the students' existing pragmatic frame of reference, and doing it as an issues discussion-based sort of unit.

Anne - But at least we've started them thinking, unsettling them. We've disrupted them. Even if they walk out thinking 'she doesn't know what she's talking about', we are confronting them, and I think that's important.

Margaret - Given that we do seem to have some sort of different grouping of students coming in, one of my assumptions was that a version of critical pedagogy was more likely to be helpful to them, to allow them to enter at whatever place they were already at, and to move along. I'm also wondering why is it that not all students are succeeding in my unit saying about what is right and not right in my version of critical pedagogy? What is it about my pedagogy that is now allowing the sorts of developments for all students that I think ought to be there?

These comments from Margaret and Anne were representative of the nature of the discussion that took place at the first meeting; indeed, it was just these concerns that underpinned the imperative, as the women saw it, to meet and discuss the issues of student involvement (or not) in their learning, their resistance to many of the discursive practices of our classrooms, their reluctance to engage with a pedagogy that was critical, questioning, and that sought to disrupt their taken-for-granted assumptions.

What we were finding in our classes was that, while greater democratisation may have brought more students into the university, the greater diversity had created greater complexity for doing tertiary education, with the result that the teaching/learning context was becoming increasingly challenging and problematic. We were anxious not to frame the students’ abilities with the discourse of deficit which tends to view students as the problem, and which finds fault with individuals or their prior schooling or home background. Those of us aware of the history of school level educational change will recognise these constructions which attempt to explain and rationalise educational failure. Just as these explanations at the school level were theoretically, educationally and socially flawed, so too are they at the tertiary level.
We did not wish to be understood, however, as saying that there was no cause for tertiary educators to cease being concerned with enabling students to engage successfully with the discursive practices of the academy. To the contrary. All teachers, and specifically in this instance those who teach both undergraduate and postgraduate students were (and indeed still are) aware that students’ capacities to engage with the varying demands of academic discourse were/are as diverse and varied as are the students themselves. This did not mean reifying difference and celebrating theoretical individualism. We believe both ‘difference’ and 'individual' are themselves constructed and provide moments for interrogation. We also saw that our responses to the classroom situation also provided moments for interrogation - hence our continued meetings of the Critical Pedagogy Group.

Competing discourses about the academy - shaping the classroom

We sought to have students see things differently, and to be disrupted by content as well as the pedagogy. We were, therefore, encroaching on the students' sense of who they were, and we intended it be so in our view of knowledge, learning, and pedagogy. But disruption is not just intellectual, it also has an embodied consequence. Students could block out our voices and refuse to hear what we were saying, particularly when what we say threatens their past known certainties. As one student made clear, there were times when you don't listen because you want to be right. This student, it would seem, was not alone in being reluctant to entertain other versions of the world. Thus, while we did not resile from the critical pedagogy which informed our practice, the student's response raised central professional and ethical questions for us as teachers. At the same time, we were struggling ourselves with how to apply a critical pedagogy in classrooms where the audience was not 'captive', and the theories, in many instances, did not seem to be addressing our particular needs.

Anne - If we keep critical pedagogy as central. I remember when I borrowed Giroux's book from you just recently 'Living Dangerously' I think it was, and I said 'this looks good'. And you said it's all right in theory, but doesn't face why I have to do on Monday morning' - a throwaway line and you weren't laughing - that haunted me all the way through reading that book because I thought you're absolutely right. Giroux, McLaren writes incredibly persuasive stuff, powerful stuff, Gore, all of them, I've been revisiting Elsworth et al, and I thought I really cannot equate anything I do with what you're doing because our audiences are not captive to what we're trying to teach them. They are wonderful theories and get you fired up, and you think I've got to keep going on this, and then you face all the other things, plus the survival - as you said, you're already tired in first semester. It gets back to the self-preservation, and the bottom line 'What's in it for us?' Now we can't any more say 'The empowerment we get from empowering the students and being challenged and being excited by that' When that's not there the way that we want it, no external reward certainly. Why do it? You can't say that if you work very well you'll get a job next year, and it would be despite doing a critical pedagogy.

Margaret - It seems to me that if you make enough administrative and organisational changes you can impact on what happens in the classroom, because you constrain and shape the work activities that teachers do, and occupy their minds with, so that they make decisions for survival at various levels which end up altering what they do in the classroom, which affects how well learning occurs for those students, and even what knowledge is available. I mean, if you are rushed administratively, you go into class with less clarity about what you will do and what points you will bring up, and as happened to me a couple times, I've had to leave the class to do other stuff. Sure you leave work for the kids to do - self directed learning - but it tends to be more superficial, less nuanced, less critical, than if you were there to shape the direction of discussion and probe.
While we were grappling with the notion of challenging our students, and in generating enthusiasm, openness, alternative meanings and questioning, some students interpreted 'challenge' in a number of ways that may have been different from what we had envisaged. One use of the word seems to see a challenge as equivalent to the successful completion of a test, of 'proving' that one can overcome set hurdles, where the reward for success is emerging as a more 'worthwhile' person. This usage can be seen in the following comment: It was challenging to reflect on our own experience and come up with conclusions. Here the process of reflection was seen to provide the hurdles, and the success was seen to be the ability to 'leap them at a single bound' and arrive at the end of the course with certainties, or 'conclusions. Or, there was this comment, where the student viewed 'challenge' as an antidote to boredom: There are so many ways in which to approach learning, making it a lot more challenging. But I like a challenge. Without it life is boring.' It needs to be said, in addition, that we are conscious of the masculinist sub-text of the very word 'challenge'. It is combative, competitive, individualist and has an overall sense of meeting and overcoming a foe.

In contrast to this meaning of 'challenge', our perspective was to see it as a process of disrupting metanarratives, and as re-constructing narratives which are different and more emancipatory. We were attempting to create a sense of unease and discomfort through critical questioning as part of the process of transformation embedded in our critical pedagogy. In our meaning, 'challenge' did not have a negative connotation; it was embedded in a sense of possibility and becoming, as the student engaged with the transformative potential of experience and of learning.

Competing discourses about knowledge and learning

We made many attempts to critique and counteract knowledge and learning as a process of transmission. These attempts, which took place in our classrooms, provided many opportunities for discussion and problematising.

Margaret - I've been trying to teach about equity issues for umpteen years. In fact it was resistance to that form of content which I thought was trying to instil some sort of critical understanding of gender relations - class relations - unequal social power relations generally - that started me on rethinking the how and the what of what I was teaching. There, I'd say, I've experienced resistance to the ideas - and that it has increased over the last two or three years, so much so that I found that students would reject research findings.

Resistance, of course, might be related to their existing construction of self and thereby their idea of knowledge and how one goes about learning, which is reinforced in the schools, but also by the culture - the cult of the individual. At the same time, there were some students who began to recognise that there are different educational views. One student commented: We have been given heaps of information, but no answers as to what's best. Another student noted: I am curious as to who is right with the different educational views.

While some students began to grapple with competing and multiple views, there were others who hostile at the notion that there are multiple views of the world.

Pam - In some ways, it was building up a resistance to what they were expecting to hear from me. The minute I mentioned something about feminism, or whatever, they'd say 'Oh no not that again. We're up to our ears in this.'
Kim - the students that I have found have done the best were ones that had already experienced some of the things we were talking about...they'd already worked through an idea of class, or something like that, whereas the other hadn't even thought about them.

In regard to the language students were being introduced to, e.g. feminism, class, ideology, ethnicity etc., resistance took a number of forms. Students certainly defined the language pejoratively as 'jargon', and many jokes were made about the new languages as students struggled to understand both the meanings of the words, contextually situated, and also the implications that new perspectives brought to their views of themselves and their relation to others. They spent much time trying to find the 'real' meaning of a word. In our view, this response by students denied the complexity of disciplinary knowledge, devalued that knowledge, and indeed, themselves as knowers. This desire for simplicity and certainty and denial of complexity can be interpreted as symptomatic of students' existing lack of critical literacy abilities, where they persisted in seeing language as a given label of definite meaning. Based on their previous understandings, experiences, and beliefs, students tended to cling to everyday, 'commonsense' definitions of words and concepts that are part of the discourse of everyday life.

**Competing discourses about literacy**

Bartholomae (1988) suggests that the problem for all students entering the academy is the need to 'try on a variety of voices and interpretive schemes, to write...as a literacy critic one day and as an experimental psychologist the next' (Bartholomae 1985, p. 135). As he puts it, students have to 'invent' the university (p. 273). 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. We would argue that students have a certain expectation of what constitutes study in a tertiary institution, and that they may have a tendency to 'invent' the university in ways that are not dissimilar from the way they expect it to be. Given our belief that writing is essential to the existence of varying kinds of knowledge, an early point of disruption to the student's understandings occurs when we examine what counts as knowledge and how it is constructed in language.

One student wrote of being aware of the differing demands now being made on an individual's literacy abilities; although it should be noted that the writer comments on an understanding of 'language changing dramatically'. In general, students saw 'literacy' as being able to read and write - 'basic' skills which they learned at a very early age, and which they did not expect to have to 'learn' again at University.

*Margaret* - Another thing I thought of is that coming to that understanding, that the way we use language has social (and political) implications, is the point of both our units. I mean our whole unit is supposed to be about exploring the different discourses about education, or the different ways of talking about education, right? So at the end, we're asking them to be conscious that the way language is used constructs differences, or conceals commonalities sometimes, or imposes commonalities that may not really be there. So that's the end point insight that we're after.

*Pam* - The only way I saw it was in ways that I imagine they wanted me to see it. There was no sort of 'self' speaking through it. They were using words and groups of words that spoke to me, but it was virtually lifted out of class. I really wasn't presented in a meaningful way. I found it very difficult to see whether it was any more than what they thought I was expecting to see.

This comment is closely allied with the above view on 'basic' skills, as they saw language in 'common sense' terms as transparent, as having no force of its own, as simply a 'natural'
tool with which to describe the 'real' world. One student commented that he wished he had a
closer vocabulary, perceiving his lack of experiences as detrimental to his development of
language, or, as he put it, *I don't have an exciting life, I don't have a strong grip on exciting
language*. In this instance, he was conflating a class discussion on 'powerful' language with
his own view of 'power in language'.

Perhaps one of the crucial factors relating to the perceived power of literacy education, at
any level, is that there are not guarantees of futures that come with literacy achievement:

The consequences of literacy have always been related to how it is
used and what it is used for, what value is placed on it, and who is
permitted to become literate. Although one of the powerful meanings
surrounding literacy in the Western world today is a belief in its
liberating power, in fact, literacy is a necessary but hardly sufficient
passport to the mainstream. (Edelsky, 1991, p. 93)

**Marginalisation in the institution**

The institution at which the women work is a comparatively small regional university, still
influenced to a certain degree by its history as a CAE. It is a more recently established
university with a less formal university tradition, but with certain hierarchical power structures
in place.

The following meeting took place just after three of the women had received word that their
various contracts would not be renewed. We have included several extracts from the
meeting, as the words uttered at the time have more impact, we believe, than any present
interpretation of those words. Their words demonstrate the living out of educational change.

*Margaret* - *It seemed to me that we need to talk about the implications of people's changed
circumstances, in terms of connectedness with out teaching and also this group. Does this
group continue, given that we started off a group of people teaching in the first year units
and comparing notes. Since we started this group, people's circumstances have changed,
Anne particularly, maybe others of us after the budget. With the changed circumstances
have you found differences in the ways that you relate with the institution, and with the work
of this group which was based on some notion of co-workers and collegiality. I mean, if I put
myself in Anne's place, these meetings would be much more tangential to my concerns now.*

*Anne* - *I actually see it as two different issues. I see the institution arrangements as a
reflection of the place in which you were once working, as fulltime or sessional staff. I see
this group as totally different. The importance of this group are many and multiple, but I also
feel that unless one were working at least within the parameters, to come to the group - even
though it is intellectually challenging and collegial and it's friends, you're inclined to think
'why?' Is this some sort of indulgence? It's not that when you lose your sessional position or
your job you lose interest, of that you're not interested in the intellectual interchange that has
gone one, or the pushing by everyone that really you shape (up?)... but it almost gets back to
'Yes, but in my case, so what?' I think it's terrible that we've had this sort of collegiality going
with people whom you admire and you trust and it's totally professional yet personal as well,*
and yet we have to think seriously about whether or not it's valuable to keep going. To keep coming into a place, where actually you have no place.

Pam - I really identify with what you say. They're my words too. For me the group helped me to identify my, my self definition. To move out into the bigger group was an exciting further definition for me in my work in academia. I really valued it. I wondered what part of that self definition of me in critical pedagogy and the whole tying together of theorising and being a teacher. I don't stop being that person. I no longer have my place here; somehow the only thing I have is the group. The sharing was vital, because that was the practice we were engaged in, but somehow now there are other elements. Now, as a critical theorist or person wanting to be involved in pedagogy, but not allowed the space.

Kim - I was the same as Pam. There was this big, big hole where we had no status, no work. I went through a really terrible couple of weeks in deciding whether I should even continue to be part of the academic scene because there just didn't seem to be a place for me. I guess in terms of this group, I found it really useful while I was teaching, but then I have to ask those questions - do I give the time to it?

Margaret - I partly saw these discussions as partly my political work, attempting to do some sort of critical pedagogy and talking about it to me was part of being a political activist - authentic. It might have some implications beyond the immediate. And there seemed to be a little space where that could happen. None of us really fought for that space, there just seemed to be a space through force of circumstances and it just seemed to be appropriate to work with it. And the current circumstances are like that space is closing off a little bit. There's other stuff going on - who knows how long these existing units, let alone the existing contents and approaches are going to be able to be continued - that's all part of the gathering conservative clouds that are part of closing up the free space that we've found. The possibilities for action are getting narrower and our free space is no longer where political action is possible. The circumstances are going to shape what you can do. When do you keep going and when do you stop and look for the new free spaces?

Mary - We knew we were going against the grain right from the beginning in all sorts of ways. So this the actual politic at work in the lives of five tertiary teachers and the way it closes up the knowledge agenda and the practice agenda and people's heads. You're right..there really is a strong sense of being unable to understand a transformative understanding and practice unless we recognise and feel the opposition and pain and consequences that doing so implied. Just like what we're putting our students through, our own subjectivities have been constructed in that very same sort of way and we don't like the material and psychic consequences of living a confrontation with dominant power structures any more than they do. We're examples of our own theory at the moment. So if we can answer why everybody has gone along with the conservative restoration, maybe we should look to ourselves - will we fight?

Pam - my whole definition in terms of academia comes from this group. There was enormous affirmation of who I was, on a personal as well as intellectual and professional level, and exploring intellectual ideas on teaching the students I encountered each week.

Kim - in terms of the institution here, we don't belong to any other committees. This group, you feel at least part of the institution, recognised by colleagues, connectedness with intellectual life.

Pam - Yes, that's where the impact was for me. I really felt I was an academic, there was so much I couldn't contribute, but you understood what was being said, and also you have a
shared language - you can speak with other people and they knew what you were talking about.

The above comments focus on the major changes that had happened in the lives of some of the women. The change of climate in the institution saw a major push towards privatisation in funding, together with a change to a corporate management discourse in the way institutions operate. But it was also lived at our level as the instability of contracts and sessional work. It was very much the policy of having core staff and peripheral staff, whereas when we had been talking last, sessional work was a first step in a career path within academe, gaining experience and then moving into on-going positions. Now, the climate and practice had changed in the meantime so that it was almost a case of once a sessional, always a sessional because that category is necessary to the staffing structure.

Women teacher educators in the academy

For the women in our group who were working as sessional staff, the continuing need for their teaching services in universities meant that there would be ongoing opportunities for work But it was also clear that the university was not offering any commitment regarding ongoing and permanent academic employment. This highlights an ironic paradox. On the one hand there was a perceived bureaucratic imperative for universities to change the composition of their staff, in accordance with market forces for dominant areas of study and research. On the other hand, the universities also required staff who were committed to their work. While changes in work practices may have been expressed as the need for the workforce to be multi-skilled and flexible, it also has resulted in employees seeing themselves as 'disposable' (Castillo, 1997).

As far as most of the women in our group saw it, they were 'hired to teach a course or two, provided no benefits, often given no office space, and expected simply to show up to teach a class' (Altbach, 1997, p. 322). Any notions of tenure were no longer a consideration in their plans for the academic careers. While it needs to be acknowledged, as Aronowitz (1997) points out, that tenure as a formal condition of employment is 'barely a half-century old' (p. 202), it must also be acknowledged that the goal of tenure is likely to remain the "gold standard" to which all aspire' (Altbach, 1997, p. 321). The differences between sessional staff and tenured staff draw attention to the 'competitive and hierarchical bureaucracy of the university (Wisker, 1996, p. 150), and highlights differences in prestige. Sessional staff, we would argue, are only too aware of the differences in prestige between those who are 'sessional', and those who have ongoing employment. A further aspect, noted by Trowler (1998), as certainly relevant to our observations, is the gendered nature of sessional staff, a disproportionate number or whom are women.

We do not wish to give the impression that the presentation of these extracts from the women's 'stories', or indeed the meetings at which these 'stories' were voiced, imply in any way that the women saw themselves as 'victims' of the system. To the contrary. While 'empowerment' can be a contested term that has a range of meanings, and constructions, we see empowerment as a central concept in the discourse of critical pedagogy. Given that members of our group witnessed, with sometimes a sense of disbelief, the changing nature of their employment, and their ultimate employment prospects, we were nonetheless 'empowered' both by the positive power relations that we experienced in our group meetings, and the freedom and space to speak our words within a supportive, albeit 'critical' environment. In our meetings, we were engaged in the investigation of specific pedagogical techniques that enabled us to identify the weaknesses in our own practices, 'through which to begin to chip away its regime of pedagogy' (Gore, 1993, p. 146). We explored, and critiqued, each other's educational philosophies and pedagogies, and we were 'forced' to defend our views, or sometimes, to modify them in view of further discussion and reading of
the literature. Then, as our 'fortunes' began to change quite dramatically, we were able to
discuss the systemic nature of the changes, and were thus deflected from a tendency to feel
powerless and victimised. We found empowerment in the recognition of Gore's notion that,
from a Foucauldian perspective, while there will always be regimes of truth and technologies
of self, the

...point of identifying spaces of freedom is not to escape all regimes and
technologies, only current ones; to increase awareness of current regimes
and technologies; to recognise that current regimes need not be as they are;
to continually identify and squeeze into those spaces of freedom' (1993, p.
156)

In the themes briefly explored in this paper, themes which emerged from our Critical
Pedagogy Group meetings, we have been informed and influenced by Habermasian critical
poststructuralism has provided a powerful framework for our research as it attempts to
understand the position of academic women within specific historical, political and cultural
contexts. In addition, feminist poststructuralism is interested in multiplicity and diversity,
facilitating new ways of understanding the diverse and contradictory way women experience
power. We recognise that women's experience of the discourses of the academy is not a
'unitary' experience, and is intersected by factors such as class, race, ethnicity, age and
nationality. While we have focused our concerns in this paper on a small group of women,
we would suggest that in the process of understanding the diversity of power relations that
tertiary women educators' experience, a broader understanding of both contestation and
resistance can be accommodated. Comments made by the members of our group pertained
to a particular context, yet we believe that these comments are generalisable to a broader
range of situations and institutional sites in which women tertiary educators are engaged in
the continuing challenges of teaching, researching, administrative tasks, and maintaining
their personal lives.

Conclusion: some thoughts on narrative

Stories are located within a number of different discourses, and they vary widely in terms of
the language used, the concepts, issues and moral judgements made relevant the subject
positions made available within them (Davies & Harre, 1992). 'There's no more subversive
act', states LeGuin (1989, p. 177), than the act of writing from a women's experience of life
using a woman's judgement. To keep women's words, women's works alive and powerful,
that's what I see as our job as writers and readers'. That has certainly been one of our aims
in writing this paper, to keep alive the words of our group of women educators, so that the
challenges they confronted, and the possibilities encountered may continue to inform our
theories and our practices in the classroom. A cautionary note, however, is supplied by
Zawacki (1992) when she notes that women'' lived experience is read into texts as if to say
that women can write only from the perspective of their own personal experience, whereas
men can transcend narrow self-interest and "write' the world. Walkerdine (1990) claims that
what can be spoken, how and in what circumstances is important as 'It directs attention to
how particular forms of language, supporting particular notions of truth come to be produced.
This provides a framework for examining how speaking and silence, and the production of
language itself, become objects of regulation' (p. 31).

From the earliest days of our group meetings, we had been interested in the research by
Belenky and her co-workers (1986) on women participating in an educational institution.
Their research focused on young women involved in tertiary study, who were struggling to
hear their voices, to be aware of themselves as knowing people, rather than as receivers of
knowing. They were beginning to question the view that all knowledge 'originates outside of
the self' (Belenky et al, 1986, p. 48). We found their notions of 'women's ways of knowing' to be a powerful way of contesting and resisting the masculinist and patriarchal discourses of the academy. We were also influenced by Clandinin (1991) who advises, 'We must learn to tell new stories of possibility in which ... we neither deny our difference in the name of equality by living out the male cultural story, nor do we deny self in the name of caring' (Clandinin, p. 37).

Narrative may be a useful way to understand human experiences and events, but it also introduces some further complexities. When the teacher tells stories about events in her classroom, she is both a character in the story and the narrator of the story (Conle 1999: 15). As Conle (1999) puts it, "when I tell myself a story about myself as a character in that story, the story may have important effects in my life." The story itself helps constitute what it is that is being told. This is more strongly the case where the storytelling is a communal activity (as in the case described above). The story telling of one person helps to shape the story of each of the others, as well as her own. Indeed one person's story may trigger an as yet un-authored story from another person, a story which is not untrue, but one that only comes into existence when a potential storyline is made public. Herein lies the power of communal storytelling as a learning experience, but also suggests that the notion of "authentic voice" must be treated with caution.

Conle (1999) also points to the complex temporal features of narrative. Each story is told at least twice: the "then-perspective" of the contents of the story, and the "now-perspective" at the time of telling. In the case we describe above, we need to acknowledge a third temporal perspective - a "current perspective", in which the stories are reconstructed in a research narrative. In truth, this is another story connected with this paper - the story of the researchers/writers as we re-construct the "then" narratives. In this we are conscious that we as researchers easily acquire the tone of definitiveness and superiority (Carter 1993) in the "current" telling.

Notwithstanding these difficulties, we believe with Clandinin (1992) that narrative research is a fruitful and exciting approach which validates the art of teaching and celebrates a major aspect of tertiary work which all too often is subsumed within institutions focused on the research dollar and masculinist ways of knowing.
References


