INQUIRY-BASED PROFESSIONAL LEARNING
OF ENGLISH-LITERATURE TEACHERS:

NEGOTIATING DIALOGIC POTENTIAL

BY

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ABSTRACT

This research has taken place at a time when governments in Australia, like governments throughout the Western world, have given higher priority to funding teachers’ professional learning. This support for teachers’ learning tends to be informed by standards-based ‘reforms’ of schooling, underpinned by narrowly individualistic paradigms of teacher knowledge and enacted in managerial models of professional development. The effectiveness of this ‘PD’ for individual teachers tends to be measured in rigid accountability regimes.

My study is a conceptual, grounded and reflexive inquiry into teachers’ professional learning in Victoria, Australia. Central to the study is a multi-leveled account of a small group of English-literature teachers at Eastern Girls’ College, in Melbourne, Australia, learning about literary theory over a period of fourteen months. These teachers operate within an institutional setting in which they are certainly expected to be accountable in managerial terms, and yet they can be seen negotiating a very different paradigm of professional learning. In my account of their learning in this study, I develop a model of inquiry-based professional learning that offers a richly dialogic alternative to narrowly individualistic paradigms of professional knowledge and professional development.

My inquiry into a particular site of English-literature teacher learning is situated within a broader epistemological inquiry into the nature of teacher knowledge and teacher learning across the Western world. The study is characterized by ongoing movement, and critical comparisons, between international perspectives on teachers’ professional learning and local iterations of English-literature teachers’ dialogue. There is movement, too, in the interweaving of dialogic narrative inquiry and autobiographical narratives, and in the dynamic counterpoint between a close study of conversation transcripts (via critical discourse analysis) and parodies of literary texts. All this contributes to a multi-faceted investigation into the language, relationships, cultures and professional identities of teachers engaged in professional dialogue (spoken and written). In valuing a range of factors in teachers’ learning - such as language, creativity, human relationships and the unfinalizability of much teacher learning (Bakhtin 1984) - this is an investigation at variance with conventionally scientific
“evidence-based research,” which only values learning that is immediately visible and measurable.

“Dialogic potential,” in language, in learning and in research, emerged as a fundamental construct in the course of this study. In the end, the interpretive dialogic potential of four key words – noticing, developing, speculating, and activating – became crucial to the research. These words, and the notion of dialogic potential itself, have been as important in the writing of the thesis text as they were in constructing questionnaire questions, interviewing teachers and leading a group of teachers in professional learning. Just as the project has been rich in dialogic potential for most teachers who were involved, so too it has been significant in my own professional learning, as teacher and researcher.

By offering accounts of teachers’ dialogic inquiry-based professional learning, and presenting a critical framework for accounting for this learning, this study aims to open up the dialogic potential of teachers’ learning in policy-making and practice.
DECLARATION

This is to certify that

(i) the thesis comprises only my original work towards the PhD, except where indicated in the Preface;

(ii) due acknowledgement has been made in the text to all other material used;

and

(iii) the thesis is less than 100,000 words in length, exclusive of tables, maps, bibliographies and appendices.

Signed __________________________

Graham B. Parr

April 2007
ETHICS APPROVAL

This project, originally developed for the degree of Master of Education in The University of Melbourne, was given approval by The Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC), University of Melbourne, Victoria, Australia, in November 2000 - reference number A&Ed 3.233. The MEd study was converted to a PhD study in July 2002.

All names of schools referred to in this thesis are fictional. The names of teachers who responded to the questionnaire or participated in extended interviews in Phase 1 of the research are pseudonyms. Names of participants in The Literary Theory Inquiry Group (with the exception of my own) are also pseudonyms.
PREFACE

This study contains no material which has been submitted for examination or accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any educational institution.

Parts of the text draw on material previously published by me as a single author and as co-author, and this is clearly indicated within the body of the text.

Chapter Three (Part 3)

Chapter Four (Part 3)

Chapter Six (Parts 2 and 3)

Chapter Seven

Other published texts (authored by me alone or co-authored) that I draw on at various times throughout the text include


In cases of co-authorship, the ‘original’ texts were products of genuinely dialogic inquiry (in terms of research conversations leading to, and mediating, the writing). The writing itself was always dialogic, such that it was rare when only one author took ownership of one part of the article or chapter. In all cases, the texts on which I have drawn have been substantially re-written as my research thinking has evolved beyond the original text and/or to maximise dialogic potential with the rest of this thesis text.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I thank my English-literature teacher colleagues in The Literary Theory Inquiry Group at ‘Eastern Girls’ College’ for their willingness to participate in this research conversation and for the years of rich collaboration I enjoyed with them as colleagues at that school. Their friendship, their creative and rigorous approaches to teaching and professional learning, and their support and intellectual stimulation for me as a researcher, remain with me as significant models of teacher professionalism.

Thank you to my supervisors, Gaell Hildebrand and Ray Misson, who have continued since the very beginning of this project to support my research in meaningful ways. Their thoughtful engagement with my ideas and my writing has always prompted me to think critically and creatively about my research. I appreciate their willingness to be flexible as the project developed and changed over the years. I want to thank Gaell for being an insightful and enthusiastic mentor as I negotiated not just the twists and turns of this research, but also my own professional transition from English-literature teacher in a secondary school to teacher educator in a university. I well remember the postgraduate essay I submitted to Gaell, my lecturer at the time, using narrative (for the first time) in creative and critical ways to explore curriculum issues. It has proven to be a liberating moment in my journey as a researcher.

A newly-formed coalition of teachers and academics, known as the VATE Advocacy Group, has provided a much-needed focus for creative and critical dialogue about professional learning amongst English-literature teachers in Victoria. I have always enjoyed the collegiality of this group, their willingness to share and critique each others’ professional writing, and their commitment to advocacy within and outside the profession. I thank everyone from ADVOC for their interest in and support for this project. But I want to express particular thanks to two members of the group.

Natalie Bellis is an early-career teacher, with whom I have coauthored several journal articles and a book chapter. I have always valued Natalie’s fresh insights into English-literature teaching and her collegial dialogue since the days when she was a pre-service teacher in my workshops at university.
Brenton Doecke, my colleague and co-researcher in English Education at Monash University, has been a sympathetic, energetic and insightful mentor for me in these my early-career days as an academic. Whether it be team-lecturing pre-service teachers, co-writing a conference paper, co-editing a book, or exchanging critical musings via email, Brenton has been a magnanimous ‘team member’ and an unfailingly supportive critical friend over the last four years of this project.

I thank Sue Willis and the Faculty of Education at Monash University for generously granting me five months’ sabbatical in 2006 to complete my work on this PhD thesis. I also thank The School of Education at The University of Waikato in New Zealand for providing me with facilities to write and think in the early part of that leave. Thank you to Terry Locke for helping to organise my stay at The University of Waikato. I am very grateful to Terry for his generosity of spirit in talking with me about my research, and for providing critical feedback on some of the writing, at a critical stage in the project.

Thank you to my many colleagues at Monash University, and to colleagues at other universities and schools, with whom I have taught and/or engaged in research dialogue over the course of this PhD project. My working relationships with these colleagues continue to vivify me and to challenge me, intellectually and professionally.

Thank you to my parents, Don and Nola, whose trust and support were always important to me, whatever professional journeys I embarked upon.

Finally, I express my heartfelt thanks to my wife Tricia for her love, her strength of purpose and her encouragement throughout this whole project. For parents bringing up three young children and one PhD at the same time, there are challenges aplenty. Together, Tricia and I have negotiated these challenges, and we can still smile about them now. Along with Tricia, our three children, Daniel (8), Freya (5) and Rowan (2), have also been working on this project with me. I hope in future they can understand the depth of my gratitude for their patience throughout these PhD years. The contributions of my family to the dialogic potential of this study are rarely evident in the pages that follow, but they are as significant as the total combination of voices - academic and artistic, professional and political - represented therein.
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ABBREVIATIONS USED IN THIS TEXT

AARE – Australian Association for Research in Education
AATE – The Australian Association for Teaching of English
ACDE – Australian Council of Deans of Education
ACE – Australian College of Educators
ACEA – Australian Council for Educational Administration
ACER – Australian Council for Educational Research
AERA – American Educational Research Association
ALEC – American Legislative Exchange Council
AEU – Australian Education Union
ALEA – Australian Literacy Educators’ Association
BOS – Board of Studies
CAER – Centre for Applied Educational Research
CDA – critical discourse analysis
DEET – Department of Employment, Education and Training (Victoria)
DE&T – Department of Education and Training (Victoria)
DECS – Department of Education and Children’s Services (South Australia)
DEST – Department of Education, Science and Training
DETAIL – Developing English Teaching and Internship Learning (UK)
DfES – Department for Education and Skills (UK)
DHHS – Department of Health and Human Services (US)
ETANSW – English Teaching Association of New South Wales
GTCE – General Teaching Council of England
IARTV – Independent Association of Registered Teachers in Victoria
IFTE – The International Federation for the Teaching of English
MYRAD – Middle Years Research and Development Project
NBPTS – National Board of Professional Teaching Standards (US)
NCLB – No Child Left Behind (US)
NCTE – National Council of Teachers of English (US)
NICHT – National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (US)
NIQTSL – National Institute of Quality in Teaching and School Leadership
NITL – National Inquiry into the Teaching of Literacy in Australia
NSW – New South Wales
NZ – New Zealand
OISE – Ontario Institute for Studies in Education
PD – professional development
PEEL – Project for Enhancing Effective Learning
PETA – Primary English Teachers’ Association
PM – Prime Minister
SER – School Effectiveness Research
STELLA – Standards for the Teaching of English Language and Literacy in Australia
TAFE – Technical and Further Education
TESOL – Teaching of English to Speakers of Other Languages
TESL – Teaching English as a Second Language
UK – The United Kingdom
US – The United States of America
UT – University of Toronto
VATE – Victorian Association for the Teaching of English
VCE – Victorian Certificate of Education
VELS – Victorian Essential Learning Standards
VIC – Victoria
VIT – Victorian Institute of Teaching
As part of my work as a teacher educator, I teach a postgraduate unit called *School and community literacy practices*. It is an online unit undertaken by early-childhood, primary, and secondary teachers. Most of these teacher-students are studying part-time while they continue to teach, or else they are engaging in some study while taking leave from their teaching. In one assignment for this unit, the teacher-students are required to write an extended narrative that they themselves might use when teaching an authentic class of their own students. In addition, they must write a critical reflective commentary about this narrative, including details about reasons for writing the text as they had written it, and some indications as to the ways they intend to use this narrative when working with their students.

Some weeks into her work on this assignment, Yasmin,¹ who was teaching and studying in Israel, wrote an email to me from Israel. Hostilities had broken out between Israel and the Hezbollah, and her town was now the target of daily air-raids and mortar attacks. In response to these events, she had decided to scrap her first plan for the assignment and was beginning another story. The email said, in part:

> Dear Graham,

> ....

> I am living at the moment in real war conditions. I have already attended two funerals of ex pupils and a few times a day I run with my children to a bomb shelter or security room. Nobody knows if the new school year will open on the 3rd of September. Adults and children alike are afraid and extremely depressed. The sounds of sirens, explosions and airplanes are always in the background. If it is quiet for a while it appears strange. Our children waited so long for the summer holidays to arrive only to have all plans cancelled. As far as my assignment goes, I have started to write the diary of a girl in grade six. She describes her plans for the holidays and gradually finds herself in the reality we are facing today. I am using snippets I heard from my own daughters, the children I am in touch with and my own day to day experiences. One of my pupils is happy to illustrate the diary entries. I have begun to think of how we will approach these experiences

¹ All participants’ names, other than mine, are pseudonyms.
when school opens. How will we encourage the children to share their fears, disappointments and in many cases the losses they are dealing with? How do you go back to regular routine when such terrible things are going on around you? Very often we chose literature as a way to bring up difficult topics and to talk about problems in a semi detached fashion. I am convinced that a diary like the one I am intending to produce could provide a trigger for group discussions and personal writing. I could also use it in a teachers' seminar for preparing the teachers for meeting the pupils. What do you think?

I often feel that online forums, discussion boards and personal emails are helpful for communications between students and myself as lecturer in these sorts of online units. Inevitably, though, the dialogue between lecturer and students in an online unit is skeletal and sketchy. And yet when I received this email from Yasmin, I felt a powerful dialogic connection with her. Not because I could relate to the horror of daily bombings in my suburb. Try as I might, I just couldn’t imagine how awful it was. Not because I had any first-hand knowledge of the overwhelming effects of war on daily life. I had no such knowledge.

Rather it had something to do with the way Yasmin was ‘storying’ her personal and professional life (Clandinin and Connelly 2000). Her email was a story to a far off lecturer. She was writing a short story for her students whom she knew well. She was thinking ahead to the stories she would tell to help her colleagues understand the challenge of teaching children traumatised by life in a war zone. Narrative and narrative writing seemed to play a significant role in her making sense of the world around her, of her professional identity in this world, and of a range of professional learning possibilities.

It had something to do, also, with my sense of her professional practice and her professional identity being deeply embedded within, and mediated by, the social, cultural and political systems and minutiae of her daily life. One might say, how could it be otherwise in war time? As this study will show, for teachers throughout the world it is the case that their professional practice and identity are consciously embedded within, and mediated by, the social, cultural and political contexts of their diverse educational settings. And yet for some people (most notably Australian Federal Government
Education Ministers, neo-liberal economists and media commentators), teaching and learning, including professional learning, is still about working out what generic skills and subject-specific knowledge will be needed, regardless of the sociocultural context. It’s about articulating a set of learning outcomes in advance, and maintaining a steady focus on these outcomes to ensure that they are achieved as efficiently as possible. In Yasmin’s context, this perspective on learning seems disconnected with human experience at best, and grotesque at worst. And yet in ‘normal times’ it is a seductive notion for so many of our politicians, policy makers, teachers and for the general public.

I had the feeling that Yasmin’s work on this assignment was not revealing something new and different about her practices compared with ‘normal times.’ Quite the contrary. Throughout this nightmare, it seemed important to her to notice and build on the dialogic potential she sensed lay with current events as they unfolded, with the history that contributed to those events, with her own daughters (who connected her to the multiple and diverse stories of those days), with a pupil in her class (who would draw the illustrations for the story), with me as her lecturer (who was mediating her decision making and professional learning), and with her teacher colleagues in future (with whom she was already planning to work to help them learn how best to deal with their traumatised students). There were multiple voices and audiences in Yasmin’s community for her to connect with. Each of them in their own way, and all of them as a collective, held the promise of valuable dialogic possibilities. As I saw it, Yasmin’s stories and her dialogic voice were reaching out to notice, to develop, to speculate upon, and to activate the dialogic potential that lay in those connections.

And, finally, it had something to do with the way she saw her own professional learning. As with the learning of her students, Yasmin seemed to see this assignment as something that must be grounded enough and flexible enough to make meaningful dialogic connections with the world around her. When the world changed, in ways that changed her and changed those around her, so her professional learning had to respond to that change. Not to respond, not to be flexible, would be to construct her professional learning as disconnected from everyday human existence ....
I am still moved now, as I recall Yasmin’s email and the narrative that she eventually submitted for that assignment. These stories help me to keep in perspective the heteroglossia of voices (Bakhtin 1981) that speak to the teaching, the professional learning and the research I am engaged in on a daily basis. And I feel myself once again prompted to look anew at the ways these voices connect with and mediate my own relationships with colleagues, students, friends, and even my immediate family: my wife, Tricia, and our three children, Daniel, Freya and Rowan.

On a more prosaic level, as I entered the final stages of my work on this PhD thesis, my dialogic connection with Yasmin and her story reaffirmed for me the value of noticing, developing, speculating about and activating the dialogic potential in my personal life, in my teaching, my research, my continuing professional learning … and in this study.
PROFESSIONAL LEARNING, RESEARCH, AND
THE DIVERSITY OF HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Introduction: sketching in some frames

This study investigates recent theory, policy and practice of English/literature teacher professional learning in Victoria, Australia. It is situated within a detailed epistemological inquiry into the nature of teacher knowledge and teacher learning, and a critical review of the ways in which certain political developments in the Western world have framed practices and structures for teacher professional learning in Australia. In particular, I inquire into the professional practices and possibilities of what I call “dialogic, inquiry-based professional learning.” This is learning that appreciates the inherent dialogic struggles in language and knowledge between the tendency to stabilise meaning, and to shut down the potential for diversity, debate and change, and a tendency to destabilise meaning, and to promote the potential for diversity, fragmentation, debate and growth. It is learning that seeks to enhance the dialogic potential that inheres in this struggle and in the potential for further dialogue and learning, rather than learning that seeks to stabilize meaning, and to limit diversity and debate.

Central to the study is an extended, reflexive, dialogic inquiry into the professional learning of a school-based group of senior English-literature teachers, in Melbourne, Australia. The teachers in the group initially came together as part of a school-based project to form short-term collaborative professional learning teams (Du Four and Eaker 1998, Department of Education and Training [DE&T] 2004, 2005). After that project came to an end, the members of this group (with some changes in membership) elected to continue their professional learning, and they became known as The Literary Theory Inquiry Group. The focus of these teachers’ learning included exploring the possibilities of literary theory for their own professional reading and for their classroom practices.
Part of this exploration involved reflecting on the influence of literary theory on their professional identities and on their students’ learning.

Research in the social sciences has traditionally begun with a set of research questions, which are posed at the commencement of a study and which continue to frame and constrain the research throughout the whole research journey (Lankshear and Knobel 2004). In such a paradigm, research is framed as an autonomous intervention, a “discrete piece of action that achieves its objectives and comes to a close” (Crotty 1998, p. 167). Such a view of research has been critiqued as lacking authenticity, in that it artificially separates the endpoint of research from the means employed to achieve it (Hamilton 2005, p. 288) – that is, it fails to acknowledge or respond to the contextual and human changes that inevitably take place during the course of social science and especially education research (Crotty 1998, Lather 1991, Schratz and Walker 1995).

More fundamentally, as David Hamilton explains, it is often disingenuous for researchers to claim that they “know what they are doing” from the beginning, and that they are “fully aware of the moral and contextual frames that both steer and disrupt their practical activities” (Hamilton 2005, p. 157). Rather, as he says, researchers only really come to know what they have been doing or understand the scope of their research as they write their final artefact. He goes further: “It is only after the event – when they have finished their thesis, article or reports – that researchers can maintain they had a ‘good-quality and well-framed research question’ ” (p. 157).

The notion of a pre-determined set of research questions, questions that do not respond over the course of the research to changes in moral or contextual frames, questions that are not influenced by unexpected developments or shifts in beliefs by the participants and/or the researcher, is in many ways inimical to dialogic, inquiry-based research. Nevertheless, it is possible to identify, if only through a process of what Hamilton (2005) calls ‘reverse engineering’ (p. 288), three main research questions that underpin this whole study.
In what ways have recent policy and pedagogical landscapes and discourses - in particular, the emergence of neoliberal and managerial discourses - mediated Victorian English-literature teachers’ learning about literary theory?

How might an inquiry-based model of dialogic professional learning facilitate the professional learning and growth of English-literature teachers, as individuals and as communities?

How might dialogic inquiry-based research connect with and enable this learning and growth?

The generation of conversation data, and the collection of data in the form of policy documents, provided provisional and situated answers to these questions. It took place over two inter-related phases.

• **Phase one: Exploration of professional learning**
  This phase involved sending questionnaires to 131 Victorian literature teachers. These questionnaires inquired into teachers’ experiences with, and reflections upon, learning about literary theory in various professional spaces. As a follow-up to these questionnaires, I held extended interview conversations with six of the teachers, in which we discussed a range of these experiences and points of reflection. During the interviews, teachers were able to explore some of the narrative and autobiographical detail that it was not possible to include in their written responses to the questionnaires.

• **Phase two: Reflexive inquiry into inquiry-based professional learning (spaces)**
  In this phase I led, participated in and observed a series of six professional learning sessions with ‘The Literary Theory Inquiry Group.’ These sessions were based in a large single-sex independent school in the eastern suburbs of Melbourne, and were conducted over a period of 14 months. All sessions were audiotaped and subsequently transcribed. All readings (critical, research and literary) that we used in the sessions, along with any artefacts generated over the fourteen months, were archived. These artefacts included
emails and reflective texts written by members of the group during scheduled sessions. Also archived were various curriculum resources that teachers created and then used in their classrooms. In addition to this, I kept a detailed research journal over the six years of the study, which included reflexive narratives about my research journey, summaries and critical reflections upon diverse newspaper texts, and commentary on newly released government inquiries and policy documents.

The study explores these questions, and provides some answers that are intended to contribute to the development of knowledge and understanding about dialogic inquiry-based professional learning. But the answers are rarely straightforward. Many ‘answers’ are in the form of accounts of multi-levelled professional learning interactions between teachers, or narratives in which groups of teachers are negotiating a way forward in difficult policy and media landscapes. Through these accounts and narratives, I record some of the challenges and changes in the relationships between teachers, researchers, policy makers, politicians and media commentators over the course of the study. In doing so, I tease out these challenges and changes with respect to conceptualizations of professional knowledge and professional learning.

For instance, the pedagogy of The Literary Theory Inquiry Group shifted over time in response to changes in the membership of the group, the changing personal and social situations of these members, and developments in the institutional, political and curriculum context of The Inquiry Group. My own critical position with respect to the possibilities and potential of professional learning paradigms continued to develop as I sought to learn how best to maximize the dialogic potential of this group, in this particular setting, at this particular time. These challenges and changes occurred at a time when several government-supported studies about professional learning were being published in Australia (eg. Centre for Applied Educational Research, CAER 2002, Ingvarson 2002,), when national inquiries were being mooted and published (eg. National Inquiry into the Teaching of Literacy, NITL 2005a, Meiers and Ingvarson 2005a) and when new policy documents and issues papers related to teacher professional learning were being unveiled at state and federal level (The Allen
Consulting Group 2003, Committee for the Review of Teaching and Teacher Education 2003, Department of Education and Training, DE&T 2004, 2005, Victorian Institute of Teaching, VIT 2004, 2006). All of these had the potential to impact on my own research priorities and on the attitudes and practices of teachers participating in this research.

**Dialogic and reflexive dimensions**

The dialogic nature of the research means that the study also responded to these shifts and changes, both in the actions taken during the period of generating research data and in the reflexive critical inquiry methodologies that inform this written text. From early in the research process, I was engaged in collaborative professional writing that inquired into, and advocated for, dialogic inquiry-based professional learning. This collaborative dialogic writing was influenced by my leadership in inquiry-based professional learning practices, both in The Literary Theory Inquiry Group and in other professional settings. I also participated in policy development conversations with various English teaching professional associations (Australian Association for the Teaching of English, AATE, English Teaching Association of New South Wales, ETANSW, Victorian Association for the Teaching of English, VATE), which involved reporting on this study as a work-in-progress. In so doing I was advocating for engagement in, and further inquiry into, dialogic inquiry-based professional learning. At another level, in my role as a teacher educator, I was regularly opening up to critical scrutiny, with pre-service English teachers and with teachers in schools, the dialogic possibilities of inquiry-based collaborative professional learning. In that respect, my dialogic research activity in this study was mediated by my involvement in dialogic inquiry-based dynamics and structures in other aspects of my professional life.

At times throughout the thesis, in reflexive moments, I seek to make explicit and critically reflect upon the nature of this mediation, drawing out and inquiring into the value of inquiry-based professional work. In that respect, there are elements of advocacy that are inevitably embedded within this research, and this advocacy work indeed becomes an important part of the thesis. The emphasis on the interconnectedness of the advocacy elements is consistent with the spirit of dialogism, and it is consistent
too with the body of research literature that recognises all research as involving some advocacy (Kemmis 2005, Lather 1991, MacLure 2003, 2005, Schratz et al. 1995, Wink 2005), although some research is more explicit and reflexive about that advocacy than others.

**Advocacy and investigation: dialogic tensions**

The nature of the advocacy in this research artefact draws on traditions of critical pedagogy (Aronowitz and Giroux 1993, Freire 1972, Giroux 1988, 2001, Gore 1993, Kincheloe and McLaren 1998, McLaren 2005, Peim 1993, Wink 2005), and it is especially influenced by the notion of “public sphere” as explored by Jurgens Habermas (1989, 1996) and Terry Eagleton (1984) in *The function of criticism*. Kemmis (2005) explains the nature of the public sphere as one where “communication is of a rather special kind,” where a community of interested individuals and groups are guided by aspirations of “communicative action.” This aspiration usually involves a community, and groups within the community, working in social and political ways to bring about change. And yet, crucially, any community aspiration must be accompanied by this community’s preparedness to “open … itself to examination and self-examination in different ways” (Kemmis 2005, p. 414). This serves to maintain an element of instability within that community which encourages the potential for opening up dialogue with ‘others’, and this in turn can be helpful in guarding against insularity and complacency within the community.

But the nature of advocacy that underpins this study is such that change should not be brought about through any means available. In exploring the nature of advocacy work in public spheres, Kemmis (2005) draws attention to the following:

Public discourse in public spheres … aims towards intersubjective agreement, mutual understanding and unforced consensus about what to do. Thus, communicative spaces organised for essentially instrumental or functional purposes – to command, to influence, to exercise control or functional purposes – would not ordinarily qualify as public spheres (Kemmis 2005, p. 416).
Characteristic of the advocacy work of this thesis is an aspiration to generate change, without resorting to tactics to ensure “unforced consensus.” Inevitably, and in ways in which Kemmis’s reference to “intersubjective agreement” does not make clear, any aiming toward “unforced consensus” does not mean that the moment of unforced consensus is necessarily reached, since it signals the destruction of the alternative belief or view. That is, a public sphere seeks to recognize and value “otherness” or “alterity” (Baumann 1995, Levinas 1969, Pennycook 2001) even as it presents a vigorous argument that may call into question some of its alternative beliefs and practices.

There are places in this thesis where my critique of managerial policy or paradigms is vigorous. And occasionally, some elements of narrative inquiry reveal the passion that underpins my professional interest in this area. Morson (2004) refers to this sort of vigorous critique as an “authoritative voice” in dialogic research, as opposed to the “authoritarian voice” of some pseudo-scientific objective research that does not brook opposition (p. 321). Nevertheless, the advocacy work in this study can best be described as working indirectly to prompt change. As Kemmis (2005) says:

Public spheres do not affect social systems (like government or administration) directly; their impact on systems is indirect. In public spheres, participants aim to change the climate of debate, the ways things are thought, and how situations are understood. They aim to generate a sense that alternative ways of doing things are possible and feasible, and that some of these alternative ways actually work, and do indeed resolve problems, overcome dissatisfactions or address issues (p. 416).

This study, then, involves tensions between conceptualizing and investigating the nature of dialogic inquiry-based professional learning. There are tensions, too, between critiquing some traditional understandings of professional development and evaluating one site of professional learning. In working with and through such tensions, the study offers “a sense that alternative ways of doing things are possible and feasible, and that some of these alternative ways actually work, and do indeed resolve problems,” although resolving problems need not mean eradicating tensions. In this way, the study constitutes and contains both investigation and advocacy.
A literary perspective on research

In Bertolt Brecht’s play, *The life of Galileo*, the eponymous hero articulates his philosophy about scientific research. He is endeavouring to prove that the Earth revolves around the sun, and thus he hopes to disprove the prevailing dominant view that the sun revolves around the Earth. He articulates what is now a traditional empirical framing of scientific inquiry, when he says:

> My object is not to establish that I was right but to find out if I am. Abandon all hope, I say, all ye who enter on observation. (Brecht 1980, scene 9)

Such a view can be seen as somewhat incongruous in a play that shows the lengths to which a researcher will go to persuade a dominant group in society, in this case the Catholic Church, about an alternative way of thinking about the world. Galileo’s point is surely that the rhetorical position that scientific researchers must occupy in carrying out, and reporting on, their research is to *seem* to have abandoned all hope. They must *seem* to have approached the research without any views on the subject. They must *seem* to approach the research divorced from all other work and investigations in which he is involved. Such a rhetorical position is intended to ensure that the ideological and methodological position of the researcher is neutralized. But all that it succeeds in doing is mystifying the researcher’s position. This approach to research is contrary to the dialogic spirit and reflexive rigour of this study.

Later in the same speech, Galileo admits there will be time for advocacy – seeking to persuade the Church of the wisdom of his findings – but that time will only be “once every other hypothesis has crumbled in our hands.” That is, there will come a time when he can move from uncertainty, and what he describes as a state of “the profoundest depression” because of this uncertainty, to arrive at a position of complete certainty. And *this* will be the time when he can allow himself to engage in advocacy.
In the 1970s, Kuhn (1970), working from within traditional scientific communities, was showing the methodological and epistemological flaws in scientistic claims to certainty. Other researchers, including those from feminist traditions (Cochran-Smith and Lytle 2001, Gore 1993, Harding 1991, Lather 1991, 2004, MacLure 2003, Smith 2002) have critiqued the inappropriateness of such certainty with respect to knowledge claims, including supposedly ‘evidence-based’ claims to certainty. Nevertheless, Galileo’s position here is also contradictory on its own terms. Earlier in the same speech he affirms the researcher’s imperative to “question everything all over again,” and yet by the end he envisages a moment where the researcher can finally rest assured that he is unquestionably right, where objective certainty has been achieved. He has reached the sanctuary of certainty, and he no longer needs to question his own claims. In contrast, and consistent with rich dialogic traditions that acknowledge the contingent and unstable epistemology of knowledge, this study is premised on the understanding that there is no position of absolute certainty that can be reached about inquiry-based professional learning.

However, there is an alternative to the researcher remaining in “the profoundest depression” because of this lack of certainty. There is an alternative to the position that says one must not enter into public, policy, institutional and professional conversations if one cannot be absolutely certain. That alternative is to embed a form of advocacy within the critical dialogic inquiry of the study. It is to acknowledge and make explicit this ongoing tension (rather than trying to disguise it), and to maintain an ongoing reflexive position that holds up to critical scrutiny the very claims that are being made and advocated.

**Connecting with dialogic research traditions**

It is a feature of this thesis that, in some respects, insights from the study, both those that I (as researcher) offer and those expressed by participants in the study, are situated within the particular sociocultural and curriculum contexts of these teachers, in their respective institutions. Such insights are most meaningful in those contexts. However, at a conceptual and strategic level, the research has implications for the professional
learning practices and policies of teachers across a wide range of settings, disciplines and policy areas.

There are various ways in which my study connects with recent studies employing dialogic inquiry – eg. Florio-Ruane 2001, Kooy 2006, Nystrand 2003, Wells 2001. Like these studies, I draw on a diverse combination of methodological traditions, including critical narrative inquiry, critical discourse analysis and reflexive autobiographical inquiry. However, more than adopting a particular set of research practices or methods, this research draws on what I call the spirit of dialogism (cf. Bakhtin 1986a, 1981c, Morson 2004, Morson and Emerson 1990). At the level of epistemology, this dialogic spirit works from the assumption that knowledge and understanding are inevitably emergent, contingent and unstable (Bakhtin 1986a, Lave and Wenger 1991, Vygotsky 1962a, Wertsch 1980), and that research writing is a fundamental part of the process of inquiry rather than something which is done after the research is completed (Doyle and Carter 2003, Kamler 2001, MacLure 2003, Richardson 2000). Long gone are the supposed distinctions between creative and analytic or critical writing (Pope 2005, Richardson and Adams St. Pierre 2005, Woods 2001), if they ever actually existed\(^2\) (MacLure 2003), to be displaced by a lively dialogic dynamic that plays with, and speaks through, hybrid textual possibilities. A dialogic epistemology informs all methodological decisions and judgements, from the wording and structuring of items in the questionnaires sent to literature teachers, to the flexible conversation protocols in interviews, to the dialogic dynamics that underpin the planning for and enacting of meetings of The Literary Theory Inquiry Group.

Importantly, the spirit of dialogism also drove my decision to articulate the research within a non-canonical thesis. Bakhtin (1981c) talks of the danger of over-utilised genres, wooden generic forms that have been reproduced to the point where they have become more derivative and less meaningful. This danger is pertinent when merely reproducing pre-existent thesis forms, or emulating canonical forms of education theses. The dialogic potential in the richest genres, Bakhtin (1986a) observes, derives from a

\(^2\) Maggie MacLure (2003) argues that “qualitative research has never been a ‘pure’ genre. It has always enjoyed improper relations with its [literary] neighbours (p. 112).” See also Culler (1983).
“dialogic imagination” that can connect with existing genres and forms, and yet generate newer and richer genres and forms for representing the current world and making meaning for a future world. In this thesis, I draw on some existing genres and forms. For example, there are chapters that introduce research questions (Chapter 1), that explain and tease out epistemological and methodological issues (Chapters 2-4), and I draw on and analyse a wide range of literature that relates to professional learning, professional identity and literary theory (Chapters 4-7). And yet, contrary to canonical forms of theses, these elements are often grounded within (and not demarcated from) a critical consideration of transcripts of conversations that took place in the process of research (what some call the data), and artefacts and stories generated throughout the course of the study. In addition, I make frequent allusion to fictional and poetic literary texts in areas of the thesis that would have traditionally been reserved for consideration of the research literature only, the methodology only, or the analysis of data. In all these ways, I aim to maximize the “generic potential” (Bakhtin 1981a, p. 390) of the research artefact. Another way I intend to promote more “generic energy” (cf. Morson et al. 1990, p. 307) is through constructing hybrids of existing genres, constructing “experimental” dialogic texts that “travel the margins and borders” of research writing traditions (Lincoln and Denzin 2005, p. 1122). In the very act of constructing this research artefact, I am searching for ways of representing that have the potential to break new ground, or at least ways of representing that gesture toward the future development of teacher professional learning and of research in education.

A rare consensus but …

The study has taken place over a period of six years, during which a rare consensus has emerged among politicians, policy-makers, researchers, teacher educators and teachers across the Western world about the need to give higher priority to teachers’ professional learning in order to improve students’ learning: eg. DE&T 2004, The Allen Consulting Group 2003, NITL 2005a, in Australia; The US Department of Education 2001, in the

3 This thesis also owes much to Britton’s (1990) notion of “dialogic imagination.” Late in his life he refers to this as “the creative possibilities of cooperative talk,” possibilities which are not limited by a narrow focus upon “terminal outcomes” (p. 182). When talk is conceptualised as extending beyond the spoken word, as Britton often assumed that it did, then this concept can be seen as epistemologically central to this thesis.
US; General Teaching Council for England [GTCE] 2004, Bolam, McMahon, Stoll, Thomas, and Wallace 2005, in the UK; Ministry of Education 2006, in New Zealand. (See also Cochran-Smith 2006, Ingvarson 2002, Lovat 2003, Reid 2004.) The consensus has quickly evaporated, however, when different stakeholders advocate their preferred models or paradigms of professional learning and their preferred ways to account for teachers’ engagement in this learning.

While there is widespread acceptance of the view that teachers’ professional learning happens in schools, and outside schools, in a variety of formal and informal ways, the approaches to research into this professional learning have tended to be polarized. At one pole, there are more tightly controlled empirical studies, with a strong component of measuring the benefits of teacher learning through quantitative analysis of measurable student learning outcomes and/or analyzing the particular teacher learning in terms of a teacher’s competence vis-à-vis some pre-determined set of standards.4 At the opposite pole, there are more open-ended studies (often with reflexive narrative components, but also perhaps containing quantitative elements). Such studies inquire into the manifold ways in which professional learning influences, and is influenced by, teachers’ sociocultural contexts, their professional identity and/or life history. They also explore the multiplicity of ways in which teachers’ professional learning might benefit their students’ learning. There is considerable critical skepticism, in these studies, of simple linear correlations between teachers’ professional learning and improvements in students’ learning outcomes, especially those measured by standardized tests.

The former paradigm tends to interrogate and evaluate individual teachers who are engaging in tightly focused professional development events or series of events. At these events, individual teachers are construed as acquiring particular knowledge or developing particular skills with a view to teaching their students to acquire a discrete set of knowledge and skills. The professional learning tends to take place in tightly structured programs. The programs have often been developed outside of schools, and they are implemented in similar ways notwithstanding diverse settings and different

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4 These tend to be generic rather than discipline-based standards (cf. Doecke 2006).
teachers. The intention is to identify what professional development programs and models add most ‘value’ to teachers’ teaching.

Some government-funded research studies have attempted to establish a direct causal relationship between these sorts of focused, ‘value-adding’ professional development programs and apparent improvements in student learning outcomes (eg. in Australia, Meiers et al. 2005a; in the UK, Department for Education and Skills [DfES] 2001; and in the US, Langer 2000). In cases where much narrower programs of professional development are investigated (ie. with specific content knowledge), and where student learning outcomes with respect to that knowledge can be readily seen and measured, a direct causal relationship has been claimed (eg. Carpenter, Fennema and Franke 1996). However, in several other studies (including those funded by governments) the connection between professional learning and student learning outcomes has been judged to be unclear or difficult to establish (Meiers et al. 2005a, p. 3; Miech, Nave and Mosteller 2001; Supovitz 2001, p. 86). This is the case even when the programs of professional development are tightly controlled and even when the only student learning outcomes that are scrutinized are those that can be readily seen and measured.

In contrast to the research into more tightly controlled professional development programs, there has been an increasing number of studies that acknowledge as problematic any attempt to measure the value of teachers’ professional learning against, on the one hand, centrally mandated teaching standards, and on the other, student learning outcomes that are visible and measurable (cf. Doecke, Locke and Petrosky 2004, Petrosky 2006). Such studies are often inquiry-based in their methodologies and grounded in socio-cultural epistemologies that recognize knowledge as socially constructed, contingent with respect to individual and cultural backgrounds, and fundamentally mediated by language.

There are few accounts of the ways in which teacher professional learning is enacted over longer periods in collaborative projects (Kooy 2006, Petrosky 2006) and fewer still in school-based settings (Wilson and Berne 1999). Those studies that have begun to
investigate such learning have offered rich accounts of professional learning impacting on students’ learning, in often unexpected ways. And yet governments and policy makers are yet to be convinced. They increasingly establish and fund those professional learning and professional development programs premised on claims of a direct and causal link between ‘PD’ and improved student learning outcomes that can be readily seen and measured (Doecke, Howie and Sawyer 2006, Petrosky 2006, Sachs 2005, Yinger 2006).

My study seeks to add to, and critically scrutinize, the body of inquiry-based research into professional learning by providing a multi-levelled and nuanced account of inquiry-based professional learning in a school over an extended time. I do not attempt to illustrate the efficacy or value-addedness of the learning. However, I do show how teachers engaged in dialogic inquiry-based learning over extended periods of time use writing in their learning. And in doing this, I show how the writing that is generated by these teachers during their learning can provide meaningful artefacts that do indeed ‘account for’ their engagement in productive professional learning.

My approach to this study is grounded in the long tradition of scholarship that critically interrogates and inquires into the possible benefits of dialogue, negotiation and conversation in teachers’ learning. This tradition has placed crucial importance on establishing sophisticated frameworks for inquiring into, rather than simply measuring, the value of dialogue in professional learning. The early work of Lev Vygotsky (1962), Mikhail Bakhtin (1981c, 1984, 1986a) and John Dewey (1916/61) informs and ‘lives on’ throughout this study. Other more recent figures whose research has influenced my research include Douglas Barnes (1992), James Britton (1986), Arthur Applebee (1996), Etienne Wenger (1998) and Gordon Wells (1998). The study complements and affirms the burgeoning number of socio-cultural studies in education from the last ten years which critically investigate, and in so doing advocate for, teacher professional learning that is:
school-based, and yet open to input from outsiders and/or partnerships with universities;

- extended over longer periods of time, rather than focused in single events or sessions;

- collaborative in ways that do not merely reaffirm a dominant practice or position;

- inquiry-based, rather than constrained by the need to achieve and demonstrate pre-determined learning outcomes; and

- reflexive, with an awareness of the mediating role of language in the professional learning process (especially in writing that is part of the learning), rather than seeking to make ‘provable’ claims about the value or efficacy of any instance of professional learning.


“It is our conception of learning that needs urgent attention”

The studies above come from a range of international perspectives and are focused on a diverse range of professional learning settings and dynamics (ranging from large-scale literature reviews, to comparisons of teachers’ book clubs). And yet they may be seen to speak to and with each other in a lively dialogue that both prompts and informs this study. In that respect, as a body of research, they support Wenger’s (1998) call for research into conceptions of learning (be it professional learning or the learning of young people) to look beyond the techniques of learning and decontextualised judgements of what techniques ‘work,’ and instead to look toward something more fundamental. At a time when the rhetoric of governments is to give higher priority to teachers’ professional learning, and when the imperative is to make teachers’ more accountable in this professional learning, Wenger’s words sound a note of caution:
Perhaps more than learning itself, it is our conception of learning that needs urgent attention when we choose to meddle with it on the scale we do today. (Wenger 1998, p. 9)

Indeed, this research may be seen as a response to Wenger’s words. And yet the research does not remain at the conceptual level. It also provides a nuanced and grounded account of the professional learning dynamics and discourses of one group of teachers at one school site. It describes in detail the processes and practices, the beliefs and critical dispositions, of this group of English-literature teachers. Beyond this, it proposes some structures, some discourses, and an interpretive framework for critically reflecting on any site of professional learning. It uses the grounded accounts both as a basis for investigation and inquiry and as illustrations of the ways in which professional learning that is conceptualized in dialogic paradigms might be meaningful and feasible for teachers in a range of professional spaces.

This thesis, and the project it reports on, predictably involves much critical dialogic analysis about this professional learning. It also involves a mix of intellectual curiosity and proactive advocacy as to the possibilities of dialogic inquiry-based professional learning. Leonardo (2004) advocates intellectual and imaginative “dreaming” in research and he recommends a research disposition that is open to possibilities - “less a wandering consciousness and more a refusal to surrender to despair” (p. 15). There are significant aspects of this study that are indeed mediated by such ‘dreaming.’ In maintaining my commitment to dialogic inquiry, and to critical reflexivity, I do not see any value in adopting a Galilean conceit in which I ‘abandon all hope’ as I enter into ‘observation.’

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Curiosity and the research imagination

To conclude this opening chapter, I want to sum up some of the research positions I occupy with respect to epistemology, methodology and the dialogic potential of this research to connect with human experience. Here, as I do frequently in this thesis, I

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draw on some images in a literary text that has been important to me as a teacher of literature.

Early in Tracey Chevalier’s novel, *Girl with a pearl earring*, Jan Vermeer’s young servant girl, Griet, stumbles upon the famous Renaissance painter’s studio. At one end of the studio, there is an arrangement of furniture and ‘props’ that appear to be the setting for Vermeer’s current work. In the middle of the room, Griet discovers an intriguing box, some sort of observational tool, pointed toward this setting.

And I was curious.\(^5\) … I took a deep breath and gazed down into the box. I could see on the glass a faint trace of the scene in the corner. As I brought the robe over my head the image, as he [Vermeer] called it, became clearer and clearer—the table, the chairs, the yellow curtain in the corner, the back wall with the map hanging on it, the ceramic pot gleaming on the table, the pewter basin, the powder brush, the letter. They were all there, assembled before my eyes on a flat surface, a painting that was not a painting. I cautiously touched the glass—it was smooth and cold, with no traces of paint on it. I removed the robe and the image went faint again, though it was still there. I put the robe over me once more, closing out the light, and watched the jewelled colours appear again. They seemed to be brighter and more colourful on the glass than they were in the corner.

(Chevalier 2000, p. 63)

Vermeer will later inform Griet that it is a “tool,” a mechanism to help him “capture” the scene that he is painting, before he “adds in” the human “subjects.” He will identify this tool enigmatically as a “camera obscura.” In this passage Griet moves her gaze from the scene before her to its image in the *camera obscura* and back again, as she proceeds to construct her version of the scene.

To do this, she enters into the box, under the robe and into the *camera obscura*. At this moment, she is apparently several times removed from the table, the chairs, the yellow

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\(^5\) My use, here, of a passage from Chevalier’s novel, *Girl with a pearl earring*, and my playing with painterly discourses to explore reflexively some of the problematic issues associated with my position as writer of a research artefact, owes something to Foucault’s (1970) introduction to *The order of things*. In that book, he uses ‘*Las meninas,*’ painted by VELÁZQUEZ, in ways that I found provocative and generative for my own understanding of a wide range of issues.
curtain hanging in the corner, let alone the people (the “subjects”) who will eventually populate the constructed scene. Griet’s reconstruction is mediated by her personal and cultural history, by her own imagination, by the language with which and through which she describes it, and by the framing of the scene that the *camera obscura* offers up to her. It would seem she is distanced from the scene in so many ways – and yet she remains curious and strangely connected.

Embedded within the sense of wonder and connectedness in Griet’s account here, there are tensions and contradictions aplenty. Perhaps she senses her distance from the scene – perhaps that is why she briefly emerges from underneath the robe – and yet she is seduced by the possibilities of the representation. The scene represented on the *camera obscura*’s glass is “flat …. smooth and cold,” and yet the image excites her with its bright “jewelled colours.” The scene has been apparently secured, framed and contained by the *camera obscura*. Yet it remains vulnerable and unstable in the presence of the “light of day” when Griet lifts the robe.

On reading this passage, I have a sense that I am keying directly into Griet’s account of the scene, but I am also conscious of the involvement of others in the construction of this account. For instance, Vermeer has, some time previously, carefully arranged the objects in the corner of the room. The maker or makers of the *camera obscura* have collaborated with Vermeer in ‘pinning down’ the scene on a mysterious pane of glass. And, I do not forget that I am reading Chevalier’s text.

In one respect I see myself in this PhD study entering into a constructed world of English-literature teacher professional learning in Victoria. In some ways the scene is being (has been?) constructed by dominant others, and here I am engaged in another act of construction as I seek to give a faithful account of it. Is it possible to overcome the sense of being impossibly distanced from that which I seek to represent, I wonder? Am I merely creating jeweled colours as I seek to avoid the generic woodenness of canonical thesis forms, by using narrative forms and hybrid genres? In so many ways, I am negotiating similar tensions and contradictions to those in Griet’s account here.
There are fundamental epistemological and methodological problems with trying to separate out the scene or context in which the professional learning and the research are taking place. It is for this reason that I use the discourse of ‘ecologies’ of professional learning (see Chapter 4). However, to the extent that there is something that exists and can be described as the “settings” of teacher professional learning, and that these settings are able to be represented, then the process has involved some element of seeking out research literature and policy documents, written by others, to inform the representation. In one sense, in preparing to construct my version of the scene or settings of professional learning I am, like Griet, gazing through frames which others have constructed. This is not to say that I am totally reliant on others’ frames. My reconstruction of the scene is informed by many of my own experiences of engaging in inquiry-based professional learning, with my students, with teachers and colleagues, and in my own professional writing. In many respects, my construction of various ‘scenes’ of professional learning is powerfully mediated by my own experiences in these professional learning spaces. As an outside observer, I have my own personal and cultural histories, and these are mediated and shaped by a multiplicity of collegial voices, cultures and professional spaces.

I might also mention my ‘curiosity,’ something that is fundamental to my dialogic research imagination (Bakhtin 1986a, Britton 1990)\(^6\), and fundamental to the multiple professional lives I live out in the ecologies I seek to represent. This is where I hope that my reflexive narratives may help to make explicit the constructedness of the frames through which I am gazing, and my own implicated role in the process.

There are several ways that I hope to distinguish my mode of representation from that of the master craftsman, Vermeer. Firstly, wherever possible I will make explicit the multiple voices that come together in this thesis. Wherever possible, I want to lay bare the dialogic nature of the creative and intellectual process, as also I want to show the dialogic status of the artefacts, tools and media with/in which I am representing teachers’ professional learning. I will endeavour to shed light from several directions

\(^6\) This is distinct from the rather romanticised notion of “research imagination” that is presented in Hart’s (1998) otherwise conventional approach to empirical research, *Doing a literature review: Releasing the social science research imagination* (London: Sage).
onto elements of the scenes that I reconstruct, with the words I write, regardless of how
this might affect any consideration of the neatness, completeness or certainty in the
research. I find no sanctuary in certainty. And finally, and most importantly, although I
am dealing in this thesis with ‘ideas’ and structures (which are socially constructed
anyway), I want any scene that I reconstruct to be peopled with social beings: students,
teachers, researchers, teacher-researchers, journalists, politicians…. For me, the
professional learning scene I construct will only be meaningful and worthwhile to the
extent that these people, whose ideas and actions I focus on, are authentic and
believable. A research scene, like a professional learning policy, that is replete with
‘jeweled’ ideas but separated from authentic, grounded, tension-ridden and
contradiction-riddled participants is like … a painting without paint: flat, smooth, cold,
lifeless, and ultimately disconnected from human experience and its dialogic potential.

* * * *

A note about the structure

As indicated above, the structure of this thesis draws on some elements of a traditional
thesis structure, but there are significant variations on this as well. The text is framed by
two shorter chapters, Chapter 1 (Professional learning, research, and the diversity of
human experience) and Chapter 8 (Conclusions and recommendations). Chapters 2, 3,
4, 6 and 7 are all significantly longer than conventional thesis chapters. At the start of
each of these chapters, a Preface outlines the conceptual territory of the chapter. The
body of the chapter that follows is divided into three separate but dialogically
interrelated parts. (In more conventional theses, each of these parts would probably be
given the status of a separate chapter.) Chapter 5 (Dialogue and counterpoint: Inquiry-
based teacher professional learning) is a shorter chapter, on which the thesis pivots. It
is in this chapter that I investigate my own professional learning biography (including
more of my background as a professional musician, a secondary English-literature
teacher, and a teacher educator, and its relationship to this study), and I sketch out a
conceptual framework for the reflexive elements of the thesis.
I should point out that the chapters immediately following this one – ie. Chapter 2 (Methodology matters), Chapter 3 (Dialogic epistemologies of professional learning) and Chapter 4 (Ecologies of professional learning) – are hybrids in many respects. For instance, as well as discussing methodological, epistemological and ecological issues, they include some critical consideration of literature relevant to dialogism, professional knowledge and professional learning, as well as other key concepts. I occasionally ground my discussion of these issues within critical accounts of some of the data. This is partly to avoid conventional tendencies to separate so-called theory (methodology, epistemology, etc.) from practice (the data). It is also to provide newer ways of seeing some fundamental issues in education research and professional learning.
Happy the man [sic] who could search out the causes of things.

Virgil, *Georgics*

‘There is something of Minny in Isabel,’ Henry admitted. ‘She always used to say that the remote possibility of the best thing was always better than a clear certainty of the second best thing….’


**Preface: “A fumbling act of discovery”?**

David Hamilton (2005) writes, in an editorial to *Pedagogy, culture and society*, that research is “always a fumbling act of discovery” (p. 289). In making such a statement he is reacting against those who seek to represent research as a straightforward linear process, beginning with a clear statement of a research question, followed by a program of methods for collecting data, which are then “faithfully followed.” The whole process finishes with the analysis of data (again, faithful to a set of pre-scripted methods), and the writing up of the whole process, findings and recommendations. While this sort of representation gives an impression of a totally contained and controlled process, Hamilton claims that “researchers only know what they are doing when they have done it; and only know what they are looking for after they have found it” (p. 288-9).  

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7 Pope (2006) makes a distinction between “full bodied re-search” and what he calls “merely gestural research.” His descriptions of “full-bodied re-search” resonate with much of the framing of research I am setting up in this chapter: “Re-searchers with genuinely open, inquiring minds know that they are searching before they know what they are searching for. Reflections on the how and why must flow from there if they are to really flow at all” (p. 63). See also Crotty’s (1998) characterisation of critical inquiry that also emphasises the necessarily emergent nature of social science research: “Critical inquiry,” he says, “cannot be viewed as a discrete piece of action that achieves its objectives and comes to a close. With every action taken, the context changes and we must critique our assumptions again. Viewed in this way, critical inquiry emerges as an ongoing project. It is a cyclical process (better seen, perhaps, as a spiralling process for there is movement forward and upward) of reflection and action” (p. 157).
Perhaps Hamilton is overstating the point, but there is much about his description of the research process which is congruent with the emergent nature of my research. In this chapter, I explain how methodology does matter to this study. It matters for the purposes of making explicit the decisions I made and the research designs I arrived at, but not for the purposes of representing the research process as utterly contained, controlled and operating according to a pre-determined program. I have divided this chapter into three parts. Each part makes explicit and provisionally demarcates some of the decisions I made about method and design, but I also want to communicate a sense of the dialogic inter-connectivity I constantly felt as I made decisions and as circumstances encouraged decisions to be made. Any one decision I made was informed by, and was a response to, multifarious voices, conditions and events, and the multiple research traditions that had preceded it. At the same time, each decision was influenced by my sense of where it all might be heading and which methodological matters would be impacted upon by such a decision.

The three parts are demarcated as follows:

- **Part 1: Generating and (re)presenting dialogue**
  This part is focused partly on pragmatic decisions made in creating opportunities for generating dialogue, and the presentation of that dialogue in artefacts that lend themselves to close analysis. In this part, I also discuss in conceptual terms these decisions and their implications for the research.

- **Part 2: How and why narrative matters**

- **Part 3: How and why critical discourse analysis matters**
  These two parts are focused on issues pertaining to the analysis of data, especially the dialogue with and among participants in the research.

Having proposed the distinction between the *generation* and *representation* of dialogue, on the one hand (in Part 1), and the analysis of that dialogue, on the other hand (in Parts 2 and 3), I recognise (and will be explaining in all three parts) how such a distinction is problematic. As Mishler (1991) points out, some analysis is involved in most acts of generating and organising dialogue.
Consistent with the emergent nature of the study, I use some narrative approaches in Part 1 to outline the methodological decisions taken (and amended or re-thought) and the design features that emerged over time. In the remainder of the chapter, I describe and situate within methodological debates a range of analytical/interpretive approaches taken with regard to both narrative inquiry (Part 2) and critical discourse analysis (Part 3). Throughout this chapter, I foreground the creative and somewhat unpredictable nature of any of the “methodological matters” I am explaining as much as any faithfully followed schedule or formula. Together, the three parts sketch out guidelines for my dialogic inquiry, and for reflexive scrutinising of this inquiry. They do not provide a fixed template for research action.
PART ONE: GENERATING AND (RE)PRESENTING DIALOGUE

Introduction

Characteristic of the dialogic, inquiry-based nature of this study (cf. Florio-Ruane 2001), the focus of my research shifted around somewhat in the early years of the project, until I honed in on particular issues and practices for my investigation. Figure 2.1 (below) simplifies the shifting into two phases of the research design: Phase 1, *Exploration of teachers’ professional learning (spaces)* and Phase 2, *Reflexive inquiry into teachers’ inquiry-based professional learning*. In the movement from Phase 1 to Phase 2, the range of people participating in the project changed. These changes, and my own inquiry-based learning, influenced my decision to explore a dialogic inquiry-based approach to professional learning, and to open up this approach to critical scrutiny. In practical terms, this meant using what I had learned in Phase 1 to inform and shape the design of Phase 2.

Phase 1 was an exploratory mapping activity, focused upon a medium sized cohort of teachers (VCE literature teachers) and a narrowly framed aspect of their professional knowledge, literary theory. Phase 2 involved the development of, and critical inquiry into, a dialogic inquiry-based approach to professional learning. The focus for the professional learning was no longer restricted to literary theory, and yet it was contained within a single site of professional learning. The range of participating teachers at that site, while smaller in number, now included teachers who were teaching in a wider range of curriculums including VCE literature, VCE English and the International Baccalaureate.

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8 The Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE) for senior secondary students has offered a separate syllabus for VCE English and VCE literature, since its inception in 1990. In 2000, two additional study designs at VCE level were introduced: VCE English Language (a linguistics-based course) and VCE Foundation English (a course designed for students experiencing greater difficulties with English communication). Some schools in Victoria offer two further alternatives: English in the Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL) and English in the Diploma course of the International Baccalaureate (IB).
In Phase 1, my inquiry had honed in on a narrower version of curriculum (VCE Literature), a narrower area of teacher knowledge (literary theory), and a narrower aspect of teachers’ professional learning (their learning about literary theory). Nevertheless, the inquiry-based interviews with individual teachers that were part of Phase 1 were already extending well beyond these boundaries. In Phase 2, with a much smaller number of teachers, in a single professional learning site, and with a more diverse variety of curriculum areas, my inquiry was freer to investigate richer multi-faceted notions of professional knowledge and professional learning that included but were not restricted to literary theory. There were two major reasons for this.

The first reason relates to my concerns about the researcher-teacher relationship and my desire to maximise the dialogic potential in any communication with teacher participants. The questionnaires and the follow-up extended interviews revealed that many English-literature teachers saw (and still do see) literary theory, or critical theory or even critical literacy, as an area of their professional knowledge that was seriously under-developed. Or they saw it as a gap or deficit in their professional knowledge (cf. Bourdieu’s 1977 discussion of deficit framing of teacher professional knowledge). The 1999 Study Design for VCE literature in the early days of this study did not mandate the teaching of literary theory⁹, although there were increasingly explicit signals in the Study Design encouraging teachers to explore the possibilities of teaching and learning...

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⁹ This is in direct contrast to the Higher School Certificate (Stage 6) syllabus for English in New South Wales, introduced in 2001 (BOS NSW 2001), and the central syllabus documents in Western Australia and Queensland.
with literary theory. The 1999 *Study Design* for VCE English seemed even more reluctant to make explicit its literary theoretical underpinnings or to mandate any teaching and learning with literary theory. At the time, I suspected that many English teachers might be even more defensive or anxious with respect to any research into their knowledge of, or attitude to, literary theory. It has to be said that this situation was noticeably changing, even during the course of this project, as evidenced by larger numbers of teachers at Victorian Association for the Teaching of English (VATE) state conference workshops devoted to literary theory or critical literacy, and more workshops offered through VATE professional development. There also seemed to be more space devoted to discussions of literary theory and classroom practices mediated by literary theory in state-based and national English teaching journals.

The second reason for the change in focus of my inquiry is related to the first but applies to the particular school setting in which Phase 2 of the project would be run. Eastern Girls’ College was not just a large school; it was a large school with a particularly strong tradition of literature teaching and learning. There were nine teachers with experience at teaching VCE literature (although, as will become clear, they were not all confident or widely read in literary theory by any means). When inviting teachers to participate in what came to be known as The Literary Theory Inquiry Group, I did not want to give the impression to colleagues in the senior English department that membership of this group was in any way restricted or exclusive. I decided to invite all teachers in the senior English department, including teachers of VCE literature, VCE English and International Baccalaureate English. I was also keen to encourage dialogic potential within the department, so that learning in The Literary Theory Inquiry Group might more readily contribute to ongoing dialogic professional learning across the department.

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10 The changes in language for VCE literature Study Design Rationales (in BOS 1994, 1999 and VCAA 2006) makes for an interesting close study of language. There is increasing attention given to “context” in explanations of the ways in which meaning is made through reading and writing. In the 2003 *Study Design* there is a lengthy list of references for teachers wanting to broaden their professional reading, but there is still no explicit mandating of teaching or learning literary theory. (See VCAA 2006.)
Table 2.1: Methodological shifts between Phase 1 and Phase 2 of this study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Phase 1</th>
<th>Phase 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Data</strong></td>
<td>Responses to Questionnaires, Transcripts of extended interviews, Research journal, Archived policy &amp; media artefacts</td>
<td>Transcripts of Literary Theory Inquiry Group sessions (as well as archives emails, artefacts generated throughout these sessions), Research journal, Archived policy and media artefacts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Participants</strong></td>
<td>Teachers of VCE literature (from across Victoria), Myself (researcher and participant), Policy makers and journalists</td>
<td>Teachers of VCE English, VCE literature and IB English (from single school), Myself (researcher and participant), Policy makers and journalists</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Focus</strong></td>
<td>Curriculum: VCE Literature, Teacher knowledge, understanding and attitudes: re.literary theory, Professional development: attitudes to, and experiences in, learning about literary theory</td>
<td>Curricula: any English-literature-related curriculum (ie. not restricted to senior English), Teacher knowledge and professional identity mediated by literary theory, literary theory itself, socio-cultural systems, school-based textual practices and professional practices (in and beyond the English-literature classroom), Inquiry-based professional learning: practices, structures, outcomes and dialogic potential</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Phase 1: Exploration of professional learning (spaces)**

*Questionnaire: design features*

Table 2.1 summarises the ways in which I generated dialogue data in Phase 1. The data consisted of responses to questionnaires\(^{11}\) I had sent to VCE literature teachers in Victoria and a series of follow-up extended interviews with six of these teachers. De Vaus (2001) has said that social researchers are basically trying to answer two

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\(^{11}\) In some cases I have chosen to use the term “dialogue” rather than “data” to describe not just the transcripts of interviews and professional learning conversations but also occasionally the interaction between myself as writer of the questionnaires and the teachers who responded to my questions in that questionnaire. This is to emphasise the social dynamic that I see as animating all aspects of the research dialogue I was engaged in. The term “data”, as an alternative, can sometimes seem to reduce this dialogue to impersonal, decontextualised statistics whose meaning ignores the socially situated nature of any comment, response or exchange.
questions: what is going on? and why is it going on? In many respects my questionnaire was intended to provide some provisional answers to these very questions. I wanted to know what was going on in regard to VCE literature teachers’ knowledge of and attitude to literary theory and how their experiences of professional learning had influenced their knowledge and attitudes toward literary theory and their professional sense of themselves. The purpose of the exercise was to open up critical dialogue, not to elicit a full coverage of views about literary theory.

My approach here is consistent with Scollon’s (2001) categories of “mediational means surveys,” and “events/actions surveys” which help the researcher to identify the discourses by which and in which potential participants respond to issues. My plan was that as teachers responded to the range of closed and open-ended items about their experiences in, and attitudes to, learning literary theory, they would identify various discourses and discursive practices for describing literary theory or professional learning or professional identity. I was also interested to see if/how they would allude to social and institutional practices influencing their experiences and attitudes. I never intended that the questionnaire responses would be appropriate for close study of the discourses or discursive practices that mediated their professional learning (see Scollon 2001, p. 157), but rather that their responses would help to identify and open up for dialogic inquiry (Wells 1999) certain aspects and issues suggested in teachers’ responses. In this study I concentrate more on the professional learning conversations in Phase 2 than on the data generated in Part 1.

This is also consistent with a research design which acknowledges that a rigorous analysis of discursive practices or discursive events is only meaningful in the context of some situated, contextual knowledge about the socio-cultural fields in which these practices and events are embedded (Wodak 2001, p. 65). I had hoped that teachers’ responses to these questionnaires might provide helpful gestures or fragments of stories that suggested areas worthy of closer investigation. This was often the case.

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For example: (1) the literature teacher who referred to his eight years experience “teaching English Lit “A” level and potential Oxbridge students” as “more intense than the VCE and literary theory played an integral part in them.”
I speak at some length in Chapter 3 about the dialogic approach, in inquiry-based research, of asking a focused question in order to “provok[e] a specific answer that actualises the [dialogic] potential, albeit in a particular and incomplete way” (Morson and Emerson 1990, p. 55). The questionnaires, whether they were posing some narrowly focused (closed) multiple-choice items, or whether they were inviting diverse responses to more open-ended items, were intended both to open up possible lines of inquiry and to narrow the scope of specific sites or communicative interactions for future critical discourse analysis and narrative inquiry (see Scollon 2001, p. 158). Some of the particular concerns and issues opened up by the teachers’ responses quoted above helped to inform, in pragmatic and conceptual ways, my approaches in leading the dialogic inquiry of The Literary Theory Inquiry Group. Other ideas needed to be investigated in more detail in order to develop my knowledge and understanding of socio-cultural, political and social contexts in which to situate the analysis of, and reflection on, the professional learning I would report on in this study. (See Chapter 4, *Ecologies of professional learning*, where I use Foucault’s genealogical methodology to inquire into these contexts and “backgrounds.”)

Still others helped to frame the particular approaches taken to critical discourse analysis of, and narrative inquiry into, the dialogue.

**Questionnaire: respondents**

I posted out 221 questionnaires (see Appendix I) to VCE literature teachers who were attending a day-long VATE professional development event in December 2000. In an accompanying letter I invited them to complete the questionnaires and post them back to me (see Appendix II) within 2 weeks. The cohort of teachers chosen for the questionnaires would best be described as an “opportunity

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6 (cont.) (2) the teacher who taught literature in evening classes at a College of Technical and Further Education (TAFE), where she had a disparate range of students but she could never “assume much background knowledge of literary theory.” She commented on the ways her own teaching practice with respect to literary theory had been “temper[ed]” by this diversity and yet she had “found the texts on literary theory based around children’s books useful.”

(3) The teacher from regional Victoria who had observed “an increasing gap between those who have access to latest ideas/theories and those who don’t.” She added, “Despite our great teachers association VATE trying to fill gaps, there are access, cost and time issues that prevent students in schools having teachers who are up with the implications of the theory.”
sample” (Burns 2000) and a “purposive sample” (Lincoln and Guba 1985, Neuman 1994, Patton 1990). The focus for the study would eventually include not just VCE literature teachers but teachers of multiple senior English curriculums (including VCE English, VCE Literature and English in the International Baccalaureate Diploma course). At this point in the research, I was concentrating on teachers of VCE literature because I felt that these teachers would be less likely to be confronted by questions about literary theory and their professional learning in that area, and I felt that any feelings of intimidation in the research conversation would not be conducive to rich dialogue. The VCE literature Study Design (BOS 1999) at the time was the only curriculum document in use in Victoria that made explicit reference to the relevance of literary theory in the teaching and learning for that course.

I received replies from 131 of these teachers, representing a wide range of geographic settings and school types (as shown in Figures 2.2 and 2.3 below).

![Geographical spread of respondents](image)

**Figure 2.2**: Different regions of schools in which questionnaire respondents were teaching
The ratio of females to males who responded to the questionnaire seemed to me to be consistent with the ratio of females to males I had encountered in my experience in professional learning at previous VATE PD sessions.

**Figure 2.3: Types of school in which questionnaire respondents were teaching**

**Figure 2.4: Ratio of females to males in responses to the questionnaire (N = 131)**
Figure 2.5 shows the largest numbers of responses came from the oldest cohort of teachers, but Figure 2.6 shows that this did not necessarily correlate with the number of years teaching VCE literature. By far the largest number of respondents to the questionnaire had been teaching VCE literature for two years or less.

Figure 2.5: Age categories represented in responses to questionnaire (N = 131)

Figure 2.6: Years of experience teaching VCE literature (N = 131)
I include, here, this amount of demographic detail about the respondents in order to demonstrate the degree to which this group of teachers was likely to raise issues that were pertinent to a wide range of teachers of literature in the state. It was important for the purposes of broad mapping that these teachers were not just representative of a particular ‘voice’ or a narrow range of views on literary theory and/or professional learning. I was seeking a diverse range of voices, voices that were likely to challenge any views or perspectives I held prior to engaging in the research rather than those that would merely have affirmed my existing thinking.

The questionnaires that were returned to me were anonymous, except for those who freely offered their contact details in the final item. I attached a simple numerical coding – ie. a single number for each completed questionnaire, from 1 to 131 – to each questionnaire in the order in which I received them, so that details of certain responses, and cross-referencing with respect to answers by the same respondent to different questions, could be done when I was inquiring into issues of interest. While responses to the questionnaire reveal a rich variety of attitudes and information, particularly valuable for the exploratory nature of the mapping in Phase 1 of the study, this mapping should not be extracted from the research and generalised to the wider population of VCE Literature teachers or to other groupings of English-literature teachers in Victoria.

*Extended interviews: design features*

The interviews were extended and flexible in structure, in order to allow scope for a more dialogic “joint construction” of events (Mishler 1991; cf also Mercer 1995). For Labov and Fanshel (1967, quoted in Mishler 1991) this is a matter of allowing the interviewee to “hold the floor” (p. 74) and not be continually guided to respond in ways that would fit in with the researcher’s emerging (or pre-determined) analytical coding. For Reinharz (1997), this constitutes a modification of traditional roles of interviewer and interviewee toward a more participatory dynamic (p. 181), with the participant having scope for directing some parts of the conversation, including asking questions of the researcher. My concern in constructing the extended conversations in this way was to open up a range of social interaction opportunities, as I guided and prompted teachers to construct stories of their professional and personal biography and to
critically reflect on them (Clandinin and Connelly 1996, Connelly and Clandinin 1995, Ritchie and Wilson 2000). In analysing these conversations through critical discourse analysis my emphasis would be more on foregrounding the ways that knowledge and experiences emerged in authentic professional interaction than on additive “information gathering” (Anderson and Jack 1991, p. 23). I wanted to enact an inquiry-based dialogic professional conversation between colleagues, a form of the very inquiry-based model of professional learning I would be investigating (and critically reflecting on) in this study. Consistent with this model, I was planning for possibilities, engaging in dialogic inquiry in order to prompt further dialogic inquiry. To use the discourse I will outline in Chapter 3, interviewer and interviewee were together noticing, developing, speculating about and activating the dialogic potential of their conversation and their professional experiences.

Although I used a small number of open-ended questions to focus the four interviews (see Appendix III), I expected that the conversations would range over other related issues if, and when, the participant raised them. The responses to these questionnaires, as with the interview transcripts, showed teachers understanding literary theory and its place in their practices in different ways. This understanding often communicated interesting variations in the ways these teachers saw their work and their professional identity as teachers of English and/or literature.

Extended interviews: participants
I invited a diverse range of teachers from among those who had completed the questionnaires and those who had volunteered their contact details – thereby constituting a “staged sample” (Burns 2000, p. 79) – to participate in separate extended conversations with me, the researcher, some months after the questionnaires had been completed, transcribed and analysed. Six of these VCE literature teachers agreed to the interviews: three of them took place as one-on-one conversations and I had a further conversation with a husband and wife together who taught VCE literature in the same school in regional Victoria. These six teachers represented a range of demographic variables although, consistent with the respondents to the questionnaire, there is a clear over-representation of teachers in the oldest age bracket (see Table 2.2 below).
Many of these teachers had last undertaken literary studies at university in the 1960s (where the teachings of F.R. Leavis and I.A. Richards were dominant, and where notions of literary theory were yet to emerge explicitly – see Matheison 1975\textsuperscript{13}), and yet they had all engaged in various forms of professional learning about literary theory and/or critical literacy since then. This learning ranged from formal professional development events or seminars offered by VATE, to their own professional reading, to working with students in classrooms to develop critically theorised readings of texts. Table 2.2 (below) indicates the diversity of participants in these interviews. Most categories in this table are taken from the opening items in the questionnaire. The exception is “Confidence in knowledge of literary theory.” The simple evaluations of “less confident” or “more confident” were made by me on the basis of my interactions with the teacher concerned, although in some cases a teacher offered a self-evaluation (mostly self-deprecatory) about his/her competence or confidence with respect to literary theory.

\textsuperscript{13} It needs to be said that Terry Eagleton’s (2004) book, \textit{After theory}, includes a respectful consideration and critique of FR Leavis’s ‘theory’ of interpretation which so dominated English departments in the 1960s, although the term ‘theory’ as such is anachronistic to Leavis’s time.
Table 2.2: Demographic details of participants in the extended interviews

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant (pseudonyms)</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Years of experience teaching VCE Lit.</th>
<th>School type</th>
<th>Region within Victoria</th>
<th>Recent study of literature at univ.</th>
<th>Confidence in knowledge of literary theory</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Coco</td>
<td>46-65</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>0-2</td>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td>Melbourne (eastern suburbs)</td>
<td>1960-1969</td>
<td>Less confident</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>* Julia</td>
<td>46-65</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>6-10</td>
<td>State</td>
<td>Rural / regional</td>
<td>1960-1969</td>
<td>Less confident</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kris</td>
<td>46-65</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>21+</td>
<td>Independent</td>
<td>Melbourne (south eastern suburbs)</td>
<td>1960-1969</td>
<td>More confident</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>* Larry</td>
<td>46-65</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>6-10</td>
<td>State</td>
<td>Rural / regional</td>
<td>1960-1969</td>
<td>Less confident</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sam</td>
<td>46-65</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>3-5</td>
<td>Independent</td>
<td>Melbourne (eastern suburbs)</td>
<td>1997-1998</td>
<td>More confident</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teri</td>
<td>36-45</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>0-2</td>
<td>Independent</td>
<td>Melbourne (eastern suburbs)</td>
<td>Current</td>
<td>More confident</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(* Julia and Larry taught VCE literature at the same school.)

**Phase 2: Reflexive inquiry into inquiry-based professional learning**

*The Literary Theory Inquiry Group professional learning sessions: d*\(\text{esign features}^{14}\)

The Literary Theory Inquiry Group met, officially, six times between October 2002 and December 2003 in a large, well-resourced, independent girls’ school in the eastern suburbs of Melbourne. Throughout my text I refer to this school as “Eastern Girls’ College.” The establishment of The Inquiry Group followed some months after my collection of questionnaire responses and my recording of interviews. During this time extensive analysis was carried out on the questionnaires and interviews. And this analysis had prompted me to read research literature in areas such as professional identity and inquiry-based professional learning in order to prepare for the commencement of the professional learning sessions.

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\(^{14}\) For a detail conceptual analysis of the design features of The Inquiry Group, see Chapter 5.
Final preparations for the setting up of an Inquiry Group to learn more about literary theory in Eastern Girls’ College serendipitously coincided with a short term curriculum development project in the senior English department at the school. In this initiative, begun in Term 3 of 2002, members of the senior English department (21 teachers) were required to form small teams to develop different resources for the senior English curriculum and to report back in Term 4. I suggested that the work of a group of teachers learning about and inquiring into literary theory would be a viable and valuable alternative to developing specific resources. The Head of Department agreed, and so the group had its first official meeting in October 2003 with 7 teachers participating.

Initially, these sessions were scheduled in after-school time-slots that were already designated as senior English department meeting times. They lasted for approximately 90 minutes. (Following the end of the departmental curriculum development projects, The Inquiry Group continued to meet after school, about once per term, over the course of the next year.) In the curriculum development projects, all teachers were required to contribute to one of the professional learning teams, but there was no such obligation for teachers to commit to The Literary Theory Inquiry Group. I invited all those who were part of the original meeting in October 2002 (and others) to participate in the research (see Appendix IV), and a total of eight teachers subsequently signed their consent. While this showed their agreement to be participants in the research, it did not signify any differences in the structure or dynamic of the meetings when they had been mandated as a department project. Having been presented with the opportunity to embed the research within authentic and ‘usual’ professional learning within the department in the first instance, I wanted to maintain, as much as possible, the sense in which this professional learning was fully integrated into teachers’ ‘usual’ professional lives.

The most obvious variation on the ‘usual’ professional learning was the teachers’ agreement for the meetings to be recorded on audiotape. To that end, and wishing to productively use the artefacts generated through this element of the meetings, I offered to make available for all participants, if desired, the full transcripts (and/or edited
highlights of these meetings). At first, I provided hard-copies of edited transcripts at earlier meetings (see Appendix V for a document titled *Highlights of 1st session*) and I emailed full transcripts to all participants. However, teachers in the group seemed not particularly interested in these transcript artefacts and on the occasions when I scheduled time to discuss them during Group meetings, there was very little inclination to discuss them. So I did not continue this practice in later meetings, although other artefacts that were produced specifically for Inquiry Group meetings – eg. Jo’s resources from her presentation to the group (in meeting 3), Sam’s PowerPoint slides of a presentation she had made to other Year 12 teachers (discussed in meeting 6), and the document titled *Towards post-colonial literary theory* (created for meeting 4; see Appendix VI) – were distributed in digital form as well as in hard-copy at the request of members of the group. Additionally, as I was publishing articles in various journals during the course of the project, I emailed drafts of these to members of the group who had expressed an interest in reading and commenting on them. (See Appendix VII - excerpts of an email from Jan to me after reading a journal article written by me.) My representation of the workings of the group as a whole and my critical discourse analysis of excerpts of our discussions are intended to be broadly congruent with the participants’ experiences of their professional learning, although I recognise these teachers would construct their involvement slightly differently.

My own position within the group changed over time. When I began the project, I was still teaching part time within Eastern Girls’ College, while I was a lecturer in the Faculty of Education at the University of Melbourne. At the end of 2002, I resigned from the College to take up a full-time lectureship in the Faculty of Education at Monash University. This meant that for the final twelve months of the project, I was a researcher entering into the school setting from outside, and yet to all intents and purposes the members of The Literary Theory Inquiry Group were still my colleagues. As I was managing and leading The Inquiry Group sessions and the research, I was learning with and from them. On a pragmatic level, I largely continued as I had before. I organised each group meeting, and this organisation involved sourcing and distributing various readings. I ostensibly chaired the meetings; however, leadership of the meetings was fairly fluid with different members of the group leading the discussion.
when they made interactive ‘presentations,’ seminar style, and at various times different teachers ‘took the lead’ in the discussion.

I negotiated with Inquiry Group colleagues about topics they were interested in learning more about, and a week prior to each meeting I emailed an agenda to all members with a ‘topic’ as a focus for our inquiry, and a provisional outline for the session. The details of the session were always open to further negotiation. Over the course of the six meetings, participants in the group engaged in a wide variety of professional learning activities. These activities included:

- discussing participants’ biographies with respect to literary theory – eg. stories of first contact with literary theory and stories of classroom experiences with literary theory;
- writing reflective autobiographical fragments and discussing some of these;
- investigating and recording experiences of teaching with literary theory (from various readings distributed before each meeting and from participants’ own classrooms);
- critically discussing essays and articles using or reflecting on literary theory;
- dialogic (ie. via a whole group discussion) deconstruction and reconstruction of canonic texts (such as Blake’s *The Sick Rose* and Donne’s *The Good-Morrow*) with the emphasis on playfulness and creativity as much as conventional analytical insights;
- anonymous ‘posting’ of differently theorised readings of texts, followed by playful and and subversive development of these readings as alternative or resistant readings of texts;
- listening to ‘live’ readings of diverse texts and recorded performances of musical settings of texts. The range of texts was purposely eclectic: an English nursery rhyme and a canonic French children’s story; Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century prose texts written by American, Australian and English writers; Eighteenth-, Nineteenth-, and Twentieth-Century poetry from Australia, Britain and America in print texts and musical settings;
• discussing and analysing, in whole-group discussions, texts that were familiar to the group;
• exploring readings, in whole-group discussion, of texts that were unfamiliar to some or all in the group; and
• creating and sharing of resources and classroom practices for teaching with literary theory.

The Literary Theory Inquiry Group: participants

Participant numbers in the Literary Theory Inquiry Group varied over the length of the project. After the first two sessions, there was a drop off in numbers, but there were never fewer than four teachers at meetings throughout the fourteen months.  

All but one of the teachers had taught or were still teaching VCE literature for the duration of the project, but as explained earlier this had become less important to the focus of my research by Phase 2 of the project. The combined curriculum experience in the group now covered VCE English, VCE Literature and IB English. One member of the group had experience teaching English in a College of TAFE in Melbourne; Jo, who would join the group in 2003, had taught English literature in Perth, Western Australia, and I had taught English in Boston, USA. That is to say, teachers brought to the conversations about literary theory a range of experiences in different curriculum settings and institutional contexts, but they were all nonetheless interested in reviewing and reconceptualising their practice and professional knowledge as a result of insights made available through literary theory. Sometimes, discussions proceeded by a process of sharing a reading of a text or an account of a classroom practice and from this drawing out ways in which it would be possible to understand this reading or that classroom practice in terms of a particular literary theory. All teachers in the group

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15 Some possible explanations for the drop off are: (i) the end of the team project mandated by the department head was considered by some teachers to signal the end of any obligation to continue their participation; (ii) the break between the second and third sessions (summer vacation) could have interrupted the momentum of the meetings; (iii) some teachers might have found the commitment of after-school meetings too burdensome; (iv) one teacher took long-service leave and did not return to the group when she returned to school; and (v) there were some alterations in teaching allocations at the school that might have further intensified an already heavy workload for some teachers making it difficult for them to commit to an additional professional activity.
possessed a reasonable understanding of the complexities of their professional practice, and they seemed aware of the value of engaging in dialogue about their work.

Table 2.3: Demographic details of participants in The Literary Theory Inquiry Group

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name (pseudo-nyms except for mine)</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Number of Inquiry Group sessions attended</th>
<th>Most recent study of literature at university</th>
<th>Senior English curriculum areas taught before or during the period of the project</th>
<th>Confidence in knowledge of literary theory</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Graham</td>
<td>36-45</td>
<td>m</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1980s</td>
<td>VCE English, VCE Literature, Teacher Education</td>
<td>More confident</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jan</td>
<td>46-65</td>
<td>f</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1980s</td>
<td>VCE English, VCE Literature, IB Theory of Knowledge</td>
<td>More confident</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jo</td>
<td>25-36</td>
<td>f</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1990s</td>
<td>VCE English, English-literature (WA)</td>
<td>More confident</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lydia</td>
<td>36-45</td>
<td>f</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1980s</td>
<td>VCE English, VCE Literature, IB English</td>
<td>More confident</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lyn</td>
<td>25-36</td>
<td>f</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1990s</td>
<td>VCE English</td>
<td>Less confident</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marianne</td>
<td>25-36</td>
<td>f</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1990s</td>
<td>VCE English, VCE Literature</td>
<td>Less confident</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fil</td>
<td>36-45</td>
<td>f</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1980s</td>
<td>VCE English, VCE Literature, IB English</td>
<td>Less confident</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robin</td>
<td>46-65</td>
<td>m</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1970s</td>
<td>VCE English</td>
<td>Less confident</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sam</td>
<td>46-65</td>
<td>f</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1980s</td>
<td>VCE English, VCE Literature,</td>
<td>More confident</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Transcripts: presentation protocols

The extended conversations and inquiry group meetings were audio-taped and subsequently transcribed. The judgements I have made about construction protocols do not fit within a pre-existing program or formula for transcribing conversations. Rather,
they derive from the dialogic theories of language and the dialogic epistemologies of knowledge and meaning-making (Mishler 1991; see also Gee 2005) as articulated in Chapter 3. In saying this, I am emphasising that the constructing of transcripts is not merely a mechanical or atheoretical activity. The activity neither precedes analysis, nor does it stand outside of analysis. As Gee (2005) says, constructing transcripts is already an act of analysis (p. 88).

The transcriptions of the interviews and Inquiry Group sessions included some moments of phatic speech (“well,” “umm,” “ah,” and “uh”…), but not to such an extent that the phatic speech would distract from (my judgement of) the communicative intent. Also recorded are most instances of “anacolutha” or grammatical constructions abandoned in favour of other grammatical structures (Fairclough 1995, p. 198). All hesitations were indicated by elipses – “…” – with the number of dots broadly representing the length of a hesitation or pause (Gee 2005, p. 125). Repetition was reported faithfully, irrespective of whether the repetition communicated emphasis or just hesitation (such as “that was really valuable for my class”). In more extreme cases of what Gee calls “speech dysfluency” – eg. when the fluency of speech was significantly impeded by what seemed like the speaker’s concentration on what he/she was about to say next (Gee 2005, p. 107) – I made some edits. I only made these edits where I judged that a literal transcription would serve to confuse rather than to clarify the intended communication. All modifications are included in square brackets.

All of the phatic speech, hesitations and repetition are incorporated into what I deem to be a creative but nonetheless conventionally punctuated discourse “to support the meaning of the utterances,” as suggested by Mills (2001, p. 288). By using this more conventional prose punctuation, I wanted to avoid a pseudo-scientific atomising of language. Instead, I sought to represent as faithfully as I could the socially mediated nature of a specific moment of dialogue in analysis. Such a moment of dialogue has been variously described as a “speech event” (Mishler 1991) or “communicative interaction” (Chouliaraki and Fairclough 1999), or “communicative event” (Fairclough 1995) or “interactive event” (Halliday and Hassan 1985), and for all these descriptions there is some sense of the dialogue being processual and dialogically linked with (ie.
constitutive of and constituting) the social environment in which it occurs (Locke 2004, p. 14).

In Part 3, I will explain and provide a justification for the version of Critical Discourse Analysis I use in investigating transcripts of conversations (as well as some other artefacts from policy makers and the print media). Before this, in Part 2, I will outline my approach to, and use of, narrative in telling the research story of this study.
PART TWO: HOW AND WHY NARRATIVE MATTERS

Introduction

I had the story, bit by bit, from various people, and, as generally happens in such cases, each time it was a different story.
Wharton (1911/1993), Ethan Frome, p. 3.

The knowledge imposes a pattern, and falsifies,
For the pattern is new in every moment.
Eliot, Four Quartets

This chapter tells something of the story - “bit by bit” and in outline - of narrative in this study. I begin by teasing out some definitions of narrative, and proceed to explain how narrative, in its multifarious modes, mediates my dialogic inquiry into teacher professional learning. I provide a rationale for my use of various narrative ‘moments’ and for my use of narrative as a framing structural principle overall. Along the way I identify connections with some traditions and conventions of narrative - familiar narrative patterns, as it were. I also draw attention to the ways in which I will be subverting and challenging pre-existent patterns and structures. I want to show how the patterns and structures of professional learning can themselves be generative if knowledge and learning are understood in terms of their dialogic potential rather than as rigid entities to be imposed on teachers’ professional lives.

Those narrative moments written by me are intended to represent and variously investigate professional learning. They include some ‘set pieces’: eg. a fictionalised representation of an Inquiry Group meeting (as seen at the start of Chapter 3), a genealogical outline and analysis of two historical periods that have impacted on teachers’ professional learning in Victoria (Chapter 4), a re-reading of a nineteenth century short story as an allegory for professional learning policy and practice in Australia (Chapter 6), and a parody of a contemporary Australian short story, as a metaphor for managerialist cultures in education in Australia (Chapter 7). And there are several transitional narratives where I connect together the ‘bits’ of the research story. But mine are not the only narratives in the thesis. Many of
the excerpted texts written or spoken by teacher participants are narrative-based. All these narrative moments, mine and others’, draw on earlier traditions of narrative as seen in literary and/or research texts. I have sometimes interpolated fragments of transcripts or questionnaire responses and/or excerpts from policy literature into longer narratives, resulting in hybrid genres. These help to represent the complexity of the narrative moment.

The form of the narrative overall is hybrid, too. It is determined as much by the diverse range of research conversations, or data, that inform the narrative moments as by my underlying concern to create a text that maximizes the dialogic potential between its constituent elements. I look to enhance the sense of a text that speaks with multiple voices in polyphony or counterpoint (see Chapter 3 and Chapter 5), one where the voices speak to each other within a narrative moment as much as they communicate with other voices in other narrative moments.

Of course, I am also concerned to maximise the dialogic potential of the narrative moments and the narrative overall with respect to my reader(s). So amidst the diversity and hybridity, I have tried to ensure that the overall narrative I construct “possesses its own organic logic” (Bakhtin 1984, p. 157). This logic has been more important than any concern to fit the dialogue and the stories into an “external template” (cf. Bakhtin 1981a, p. 390) or some imperative of what a narratively-based thesis should look like.

**Narrative and genre**

In discussing definitions of narrative here, I am conscious, first of all, of Barthes’s sense of a broader view of narrative co-existing with more specific local iterations of narrative genres.

The narratives of the world are without number. In the first place, the word ‘narrative’ covers an enormous variety of genres which are themselves

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16 Silverman (1993) suggests that it is possible to treat an account of an interview as “narrative” (p. 116). This suggests a dialogic interweaving of the unfolding conversation (the words spoken by interviewer and interviewee) itself with the researcher’s representation of that conversation.
divided up between different subjects…. Under the almost infinite number of forms the narrative is present at all times, in all places, in all societies; the history of the narrative begins with the history of mankind; there does not exist, and never has existed, a people without narratives. (Barthes 1977, p. 79)

Bakhtin understood any particular narrative genre, in both the broader sense and the more local iteration, as “a way of seeing the world” (Morson and Emerson 1990, pp. 282), and he coined the term “form-shaping ideology” to encompass everything that makes a genre what it is:

its way of seeing the world, the forms that carry the traces of earlier creative thinking, its record of interactions with other genres, its potential for future development, and … its distinctive kind of generic energy. (Morson and Emerson 1990, p. 307)

Another way that Bakhtin expresses this distinctive generic energy is through the term “generic potential” (Bakhtin 1981a, p. 390). According to Bakhtin, the narrative genres with the highest “generic potential” are informed by, and grounded in, chronotopes – ie. “specific form-shaping ideologies” involving a particular interaction between spatial and temporal dimensions – that have been used less often and have become less clichéd. The richest narrative genres, grounded in “productive” chronotopes, hold a capacity for generating newer and richer meanings from any particular story or narrative. In addition, they hold a capacity for generating newer and different forms for representing the world and making meaning in the world into the future (Bakhtin 1981b).

The inherent instability, the diversity, the complexity and the generic potential in narrative make neat definitions deeply problematic. Predictably, Bakhtin was reluctant to offer what he calls simple “transcriptions” (definitions) of narrative or genre; he was concerned about the truthfulness of transcribing a genre’s complex chronotope into a crude set of propositions or even a contained network of forms. However, as Bakhtin scholars Morson and Emerson (1990) say, there is some value in such a transcription, when it can be a “stepping stone” to understanding the nature of the genre (p. 307) and its potentialities.
Richardson (1995) says that narrative in educational research is both a mode of reasoning and a mode of representation (including structures and devices) (p. 200), and she is one of those who argue that all sociological writing is mediated by narrative structures and narrative devices of one sort or another (see also Lather 1991). But the issue is broader than that. Put simply, virtually all research tells a story. E.L. Doctorow (1988) has said that “There is no longer any such thing as fiction or nonfiction; there is only narrative.” Poststructuralist theory provides a discourse to challenge claims that positivist research captures facts and objective truth. Traditional scientific research can be shown as no less an artifice than a well crafted story. It’s just that in some of that positivist storytelling, the narrative structure and narrative devices are masked by monologic scientific research rhetoric. In these monologic texts, the storytelling and the explanation are characteristically abstracted from spatial and temporal contexts (Richardson 1995, p. 199), the positioning of the monologic speaker is disguised, and the monologic “voice of the narrative” seeks to finalise meaning and thus shut down dialogue. (See also Atkinson 2000, Ball 1990, Cherryholmes 1988, Lather 1991, MacLure 2005, Stronach and MacLure 1997). In the dialogic narratives I construct, I endeavour to be more explicit in contextually situating my storytelling (with respect to time-space). And while the storytelling may include somewhat authoritative discourse, designed to persuade as much as to inform (Morson 2004), this is intended to stimulate further dialogue rather than to finalise or shut down the research conversation. But let me turn to some more fundamental methodological matters.

In conventional answers to the question, ‘What is narrative?’ theorists have traditionally offered a definition that emphasizes form or mode of representation, although in all cases it becomes clear how form powerfully mediates content. Polkinghorn (1988), for instance, proposes that a research narrative is premised on the need for the story teller to provide a sense of purpose and direction, and that narrative form can enable a writer to construct a representation of life that is orderly and coherent (p. 11). This need for orderly and coherent narratives clearly concerns more than just structures. In educational research, this might be seen as remaining faithful to the ways in which schools attempt to structure teaching and learning into temporal sequences and patterns (Elbaz 1991, p. 3). It might also be seen as presenting a philosophical view on the
nature of experience – ie. that in spite of appearances to the contrary, life is ordered and coherent – and an epistemological view of language – ie. that language must be fundamentally stable, otherwise all attempts to construct order and coherence would be futile. And this latter view is at odds with those education researchers who understand experience to be fundamentally ‘messy’ and disordered (eg. Ball 1995, p. 259; see also Gale and Densmore 2003, Geelan 2003, Stronach and MacLure1997) and those who see it as neither inherently ordered nor disordered (eg. Wenger 1998, p. 97; see Chapter 7 in this thesis).

At a more fundamental level, Ricoeur (1985) frames narrative as a social form of storytelling, involving a teller or narrator, an audience and a subject (see also Rankin 2002). Pope (2002), too, affirms the dynamic element in narrative: it is “any activity which results in a story being told and an event being represented or reported” (p. 218). This sounds similar to Chambers’s (1984) proposition that story involves “someone telling someone else that something happened” (p. 4). In the extensive literature that discusses narrative in research, these conceptualisations are important for signalling a poststructuralist turn away from more wooden structuralist approaches (where narrative can sometimes seems like a box in which experience can be stored). They suggest that the meaning of a narrative can only be grasped in the context of the social relationships within which it is told. As a result, poststructuralists would say, the meaning of a narrative is not something fixed. The ‘point’ of a narrative can change significantly depending on who is telling the story and who is listening. Doecke and Gill (2000) put it this way:

A story is only completed by the reader’s response to it. As every English Literacy teacher knows, meaning does not reside ‘within’ texts, but is constructed in the process of responding to them, when readers read and then talk with others about their readings. (Doecke and Gill 2000, p. 10)
**Toward a dialogic conception of narrative**

It is possible to see Bakhtin’s theorising of narrative and genre as teasing out further social implications of these views of narrative. For instance, he sees any narrative, utterance or story, standing in unstable relations, both temporal and spatial, to all other narratives, utterances, or stories. I see any particular narrative in my research text, as well as my research narrative overall, as a provisional response to existing narratives, and I see it drawing on existing narrative genres in research. There is a similar unstable dialogic relationship between my narrative/s and newer research narratives and ‘newer’ (ie. emerging) genres. Also, my narratives invite responses from ‘newer’ narratives and ‘newer’ genres that will follow them. In this way, my dialogic narratives are part of ongoing dialogic activity and ongoing development of generic potential. (See Figure 2.7 below.)

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Figure 2.7: Dialogic conception of narrative in this thesis as it relates to other research narratives and existing narrative genres (cf. Bakhtin 1981b).

One way of teasing out the poststructuralist complexities of this dialogic conception of narrative is to view it as a coherent but incomplete answer to the question, ‘What is narrative?’ Another is to take each of the three social elements of narrative activity implied by Ricoeur, Pope and Chambers – ie. a single story teller or narrator, a single audience and a subject – and tease them out, one at a time, before moving on to consider some arguments that problematise the notion of three clearly demarcated elements.¹⁸

A single story teller or narrator

It is important to note that any singular notion of storyteller or narrator would be masking the sense in which multiple social ‘voices’ speak to and through any appearance of a singular or monologic voice.¹⁹ While I would hold to the basic

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¹⁸ I am not saying here that Ricoeur, Pope and Chambers see these as ‘clearly demarcated elements.’

¹⁹ I do not wish to imply that Rankin (2002) is suggesting a monologic notion of narrative. As she goes on to say: “Narrative communication can now be seen as a network of past, present and future dialogues: within the author, between the author and her work; between the author, her work and her audience,
idea of a narrative voice, my conception of narrative voice is premised on a polyphony (or counterpoint) of voices, and I see it as crucial to my role as storyteller to highlight the multi-voiced nature of the narrative voice.

A single audience
While I believe there is value in the sense of an audience who hears or reads the story, I would want to emphasise the significant potential for both temporal and spatial variation in thinking of such an audience. Put simply, the fact that there are various times and places in which the story may be heard or read multiplies any sense of a generic singular audience (Carter 1993, p. 9; see also Bauman 1977, Turner 1981). Bakhtin’s theorising of the chronotope, or space-time, expands in detail on this simple idea, more than I have space here to do. What I should explain, however, is the sense not just that space and/or time are important factors that influence the notion of an audience, but that they are “intrinsically interconnected” or “fused” and fundamental in their mediating of any sense of audience (and storyteller and subject, for that matter) (Bakhtin 1981b, p. 84).

Further complicating notions of audience is the Bakhtinian (1986) conception of utterance: ie. any utterance is engaged in a chain of meaning which speaks backward to past audiences, in the present to audiences close to the space-time of writing, and forward to future audiences of this and related stories (p. 69). (See also Bakhtin’s (1986) notion of “addressivity,” p. 99.) I recognise that my research narrative must speak to multiple audiences, who will be reading the text in multiple and often overlapping chronotopes, and this recognition drives my concern to develop the dialogic potential of any narrative – ie. to promote the sense of my narrative(s) as a response to, and a contribution to, an ongoing research conversation about professional learning.

between individual members of that audience, between the work and other such works, between history and possible futures, between individual consciousnesses and their culture” (p. 6).

20 Notwithstanding Kamler’s (2003) concern about the way the discourse of voice suggests a naturalising of the labour of writing which she suggests is both disingenuous and unhelpful to any reflexive narrative writing enterprise (p. 37).
A subject

The term, ‘subject,’ can be understood here as meaning both that which is told, *the what*, and the means of its telling, *the how* (Rankin 2002, p. 2). ‘The what’ could include combinations of elements such as actions, events, characters, experiences and situations. ‘Subject’ also implies the ways in which language and discursive practices mediate unfolding temporal and spatial structures, and the ways in which discursive practices make sense of or give meaning to the possible combinations of these elements. Expressed in this way, the term ‘subject’ means more than an experience that can be made to fit into an unfolding structure that has a beginning, a middle and an end (Doecke et al. 2000, p. 336), although there are some who still wish to give priority to a particular form of story when considering narrative and so tend to emphasise the need for sequence or direct causality (eg. Scholes 1981). My sense of ‘subject’ in dialogic narrative inquiry is one which helps me provide a specific focus for inquiry, but I recognise that even this focus is provisional. (Such a focus may be interpreted variously by different readers.) And I also recognise the sense in which this focus is most meaningful and generative when it prompts future focused inquiry and dialogue in a range of responses rather than when it seeks to conclusively shut down the debate.

As Bakhtin observed, there is a distinction to be drawn between speakers or writers who see a particular narrative genre as “an external template” (Bakhtin 1986, p. 5) – such a notion of genre is static and resistant to change – and those who see genre as unstable and open to change, and thus tend to transform existing genres as much as just use them, creatively activating a narrative’s “generic potentials” (Bakhtin 1981a, p. 390). The former notion implies that narrative is most meaningful to an audience when it reproduces existing (recognisable) forms and practices; the latter allows for reshaping and reconfiguring of narrative forms and devices as part of the creative process of story-telling and interpretation. Putting the case more strongly, the former sees the emergence of new narrative genres as an aberration; the latter sees it as part of an almost inevitable evolution of narrative, and tends to welcome newer forms and fresh

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21 I am thinking, here, of perspectives such as that of Olson (1990), who suggests a static view of genre: “Narrative structures provide a format into which experienced events can be cast in the attempt to make them comprehensible, memorable, and shareable” (p. 100-101).
interpretations. The degree of generic potential in narrative genres would seem correlatable with the degree of inter-connectedness between ‘the what’ - that which is represented - and ‘the how’ - the ways in which it is represented. The one mediates the other; they are ‘intricately interconnected.’ Clearly, this has implications for our understanding of the narrator, the audience and the subject as interconnected notions. Finally, it is worth stating that this definition applies at the level of the different narrative moments in the text that are mediated by story-telling of one sort or another – each of them a narrative - and it applies to the telling (and interpretation) of my research story, overall. It, too, is a narrative, connecting with existing narratives in educational research, but also keying into the ongoing development of narrative potential in future educational research. (Again, see Figure 2.7.)

This potential for ongoing development of narrative potential is important to me. It helps to explain my decision to experiment with narrative genres, to juxtapose more obviously narrative moments with less obviously narrative text, to juxtapose more conventional narrative genres with less conventional narrative genres, and to construct hybrid narrative representations of knowledge and experience. Bakhtin observes that genre (and the chronotopes that inform it) is a significant feature of a social group’s understanding of actions, experiences and events. When chronotopes and narratives are renewed and re-shaped, through literary experimentation or creative ‘transgressions,’ such an understanding can be continually enlivened and critically scrutinized. ‘Newer’ genres can be seen to contribute to newer understandings (Morson and Emerson 1990, p. 371). However, as Bakhtin (1981) also says, some genres continue “to exist stubbornly ….up to and beyond the point where they had lost any meaning that was productive in actuality or adequate to later historical situations” (p. 85). In 2007, it can no longer be claimed that more obvious and explicit use of narrative genres is new or unusual. So there is no guarantee now (if there ever were) that narrative as a mode of reasoning or as a structural device or as a way of seeing the world will, in itself, help to generate new insights. I cannot assume that any ‘newer’ genre will, in itself, activate new dialogic potential with respect to teachers’ professional learning. However, it is my hope that my hybrid and multifarious approaches to narrative will encourage stronger ‘generic potential’ in regard to this and future studies into teacher professional learning.
The heritage of narrative in research

Notwithstanding the fact that virtually all narrative in education research involves telling a story, many writers have commented upon the proliferation over the last two decades of narrative and narrative forms in education literature (Doyle and Carter 2003, Goodson 2003, Kamler 2003, Ritchie and Wilson 2000). In 1991, Maxine Green declared that storytelling was “everywhere” in educational research. And recently Barbara Kamler (2003) considered that interest in the writing of narratives has “burgeoned” since that time (p. 38; also Kamler 2001) as a “framework for understanding the construction of knowledge in relation to lived experience” (Kamler 2001, p. 45).

Some of this narrative writing has been produced by education researchers (who are often, but not always, teacher educators) inquiring into aspects of policy, assessment or curriculum development and its effects on teaching and learning. Researchers and university educators from all disciplines have increasingly written about their own teaching programs and practices. Education researchers, in particular, have used narrative modes when inquiring into the programs, practices and professional identity of teachers they have been working with, and when critically evaluating their own programs, practices and professional identity. Narrative has been a feature of the vast range of writing generated by teachers in schools and/or teachers in collaboration with teacher educators. Finally, narrative has been used by all manner of professional individuals and groups to inquire into their professional learning (including teachers in schools, and people working in various professional or community settings).

Interestingly, with the rise of reflexivity in narrative writing in all these instances has come a broader awareness of the ways in which narrative writing almost invariably prompts some element of reflection upon the value of narrative writing as professional learning for the writer him/herself (Parr and Bellis 2005).

It is possible to group the different heritages of narrative writing, relating to teacher professional learning, in the following categories.\(^{22}\)

\(^{22}\) The categories are not meant to be mutually exclusive. There is potential for blurring and crossing of category boundaries, as I express them here.
• **teachers as researchers** (eg. Stenhouse 1975; see also Nixon 1981)
  Since the 1970s, university researchers have sought to position teachers as significant contributors to research into education by providing opportunities and spaces for them to write and publish stories about their work as teachers. This heritage continues to be very strong to the present day (eg. Mitchell 2005);

• **the “teacher lore project”** (eg. Ayers and Schubert 1994)
  Related to the above group, this ongoing “project” involves partnerships between school teachers and university researchers working together to construct and publish teacher narratives. They often claim that these narratives capture more of the authentic lived experience (and therefore the knowledge) of teachers in schools than writing generated by university researchers;

• **teacher bloggers** (see Bellis, Bulfin and McLeay 2005)
  The online medium tends to encourage a sense of immediacy in the narratives. The communal and democratic character of this grouping is distinctive, but the diversity of bloggers’ texts makes it impossible to generalize any further about the nature of the narratives;

• **the “self-study movement”** (eg. Loughran and Russell 2002)
  This is a loose community of university-researcher and teacher-researcher partnerships, claiming to follow in the footsteps of Donald Schön (1983/1991). They frequently refer to themselves as “reflective practitioners,” and tend to base their writing around teaching and learning “cases” in schools;

• **critically reflective narrative writers** (eg. Richardson 2000; see also, Goodson 1992)
  These writers tend to conceptualise their narratives within more rigorously theorized accounts of teaching practice, stressing the need to situate or locate any narrative within the socio-political contexts and environments of schooling. This grouping might also include those who call themselves “narrative inquirers” (eg. Clandinin and Connelly 2000, Jalongo and
Isenberg 1995), although the degree of critical grounding of these narratives varies significantly from one narrative inquirer to another; and


These university-researchers and practitioner-researchers construct narratives that explicitly draw attention to the context of writing and the mediating nature of language in any writing project. They tend to frame their (autobiographical) narratives in opposition to humanistic or romantic narrative traditions of discovering ‘truth’ or ‘the self’ through narrative.

Sounding a cautionary note in the midst of the “burgeoning” of narrative, Goodson (2003) wryly apostrophizes about the “Nirvana of the narrative, the Valhalla of the voice [in teacher research].” He calls for careful critical scrutiny of narratives in educational research and in teacher professional learning:

> Stories and narratives are not an unquestioned good…. Individual and practical stories [can] reduce, seduce and reproduce particular teaching mentalities, and lead us away from broader patterns of understanding…. [They can] be as easily employed for closure as exposure.” (Goodson 2003, pp. 26, 30, 48)

In particular, Goodson points out the dangers of narratives that naively romanticize or sentimentalise teaching and teachers’ work. They are the stuff of myths, he argues. In serving to mythologise and therefore mystify the work of teachers, such narratives discourage, if they don’t actually shut down, any meaningful discussion of critical issues affecting teachers and teaching.

Goodson’s is not a lone voice. Several critics caution against the uncritical embracing of naïve or romantic notions of teacher narrative (eg. Doecke et al. 2000, Ritchie and Wilson 2000). Deborah Britzman (2003) takes this note of caution further. She is deeply critical of the “glorification of firsthand experience” in teacher narratives. She identifies the danger of a narrative that “nonproblematically scripts teacher identity as synonymous with the teacher’s role and function” (p. 54). This is a concern for many writers, especially when these roles and functions are increasingly constructed by policy
makers and employers in ways that impoverish teachers’ professional autonomy and intellectual potential (see Cochran-Smith 2004b, Cochran-Smyth and Lytle 2001, Cochran-Smith and Fries 2001, Doecke et al. 2004, Goodson 2003; see also Chapter 7 of this thesis).

In the early stages of the burgeoning of narrative writing, Fenstermacher (1994) was another who had voiced his suspicion of narratives that claim to be “prima facie examples of teachers’ knowledge” (p. 13). In order to address this concern, he (like Goodson) had urged all researchers and teacher researchers using narrative in research methodologies to be “sensitive to or concerned with epistemological issues” (Fenstermacher 1994, p. 19).

He went on to state his belief that there was a useful distinction to be drawn between types of knowledge and ways of knowing. The former covers the nature of the knowledge we hold, while the latter pertains to how we come to achieve this knowledge. (Fenstermacher 1994, p. 20)

In referring to “ways of knowing” Fenstermacher explains that he has in mind the narrative inquiry of Clandinin and Connelly23, as much as the narrative elements of Cochran-Smith and Lytle’s “inquiry as stance” (1993). Fenstermacher seems to understand narrative as a form and/or style of writing that helps researchers (and teachers) to tell the story about their “ways of knowing”; these ways of knowing in his view amount to stories about “how [teachers and researchers] come to achieve [different types of knowledge]”. In both cases, he is still locked into a less dialogic, less participatory conception of knowledge. His position suggests a simple epistemological binary: there is writing that represents or describes the knowledge product, and there is writing that describes the means of achieving this knowledge. According to Fenstermacher, there is a process of explaining “how we come to achieve knowledge” that is apparently separate from the knowledge product. And Fenstermacher’s ‘product’

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23 Actually, Fenstermacher cited what we now know as Clandinin and Connelly’s earlier work, such as articles published in 1988 and 1990. Their more fully theorized work, *Narrative Inquiry*, would be published later (2000).
is an entity that exists irrespective of changing socio-cultural contexts and irrespective of the dialogic instability of language.

In contrast, researchers from as far back as Dewey (1916/1961d) have theorized knowledge as fundamentally processual, social and participatory (p. 338). Dewey and others argue that the notion of processual and social knowledge does not just refer to the acquiring of pre-existing knowledge (cf. Delandshere and Petrosky 2004, p. 8). More recently, Freebody (2003) takes this further, looking to conceptualise the very “products of research” as “particular … ways of knowing about cultural practice” (p. 69). This is consistent with more poststructuralist conceptions of knowledge, as articulated for instance in Foucault’s *The order of things* (1970) where knowledge is conceptualized as a process that can itself be examined as a mode of knowledge (cf. Payne 1997, p. 57), and dialogic conceptions of knowledge such as in Bakhtin’s (1984) where knowledge is “born between people collectively searching for truth, in the process of their dialogic interaction” (p. 110). And here it is worth pre-figuring an important aspect of the epistemological framework of this project that I will explore in more detail in Chapter 3: ie. Wenger’s (1998) reificatory and participatory discourses. For Wenger, the notion of knowledge as a reified product is premised on the possibility of capturing or pinning down that knowledge or experience, in a less dialogic product, whereas the notion of knowledge as participation implies a sociocultural, processual or dialogic process.

For Fenstermacher, at least as he writes in his 1994 review, only when knowledge can be reified can it achieve respectability and reliability as ‘knowledge.’ Other processual perspectives are interesting but of secondary interest.24 This renders narrative as an interesting side-show to the creation and representation of the ‘real’ research knowledge we might ‘hold’ about professional learning. Such a rendering is inconsistent with the dialogic epistemology of knowledge in this project and I believe it under-estimates the crucial role of narrative in studies like this. Narrative mediates the various representations of newly generated research knowledge about inquiry-based professional learning and it allows more scope for the multi-levelled professional

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24 Fenstermarcher, in his follow-up article on narrative methodologies in 1997, claims to be more sensitive to and concerned with epistemological issues, as he himself uses narrative to inquire into the particular ways in which narrative mediates the generation of research knowledge.
learning that I as the researcher experience, as I write these narratives and integrate them into the research artefact.

**Mediating and becoming**

Wenger’s (1998) notions of reificatory and participatory discourses do not exist in pure or absolute forms, and there is a sense in which all research artefacts operate on the basis of some underlying tensions between the two. Many who write about narrative in educational research move between, and blur, participatory and reificatory discourses especially when talking about professional learning. For instance, Doyle and Carter (2003) refer to teacher researchers using narrative to “*capture* their underlying conceptions of teaching” (p. 131) (see also Geelan 2003). This notion of narrative as tool and as container that can ‘capture’ relies on thinking of narrative as a fixed genre, where conventions largely dictate structure and character. All stories that are ‘captured’ by/within similar containers are likely to have many features and details in common. In this way, genre can not only shape an experience or story; it can also limit its dialogic potential in terms of possible interpretations and in terms of something that provokes and stimulates further dialogue.

Doyle and Carter (2003) elsewhere speak differently about narrative writing as it is done in teacher education programs. Pre-service teachers, they say, use a very different notion of narrative to “‘story’ their progress toward becoming a teacher” (Doyle and Carter 2003, p. 131). The notion of narrative playing a role in ‘storying their progress’ suggests a more participatory and dialogic rendering of narrative. It is less confined to pre-existing conventions of genre and more open to emergent and hybrid stories of professional learning. It also suggests that narrative writing is *mediating* professional learning in the sense of representing learning experiences and promoting the potential for further learning experiences. It considers narrative as encouraging interrelationships between writing as process, product (or artefact) and medium (Doecke and Parr 2005a, pp. 13-14), rather than being just a product, a static container, or even just a tool, something that might either aid in the representation of professional learning or provide a focus for the dialogic activity of professional learning. Britzman (2003), too, gives primacy to participatory and dialogic discourses in her argument for narratives as part of
the “becoming” of professional learning. She makes it clear that this becoming is best thought of as ongoing through pre-service and early-career learning, and indeed throughout a teacher’s career. It is this dynamic combination – the sense of (i) narrative writing as mediating professional learning and (ii) professional learning as becoming – that underpins and provides coherence to the various uses and modes of narrative in my study.

Consistent with this combination, I am concerned that my construction of any narrative moment or the narrative of the thesis overall should not be read as a “victory” narrative (Lather 1994), a “valorizing” narrative (Doecke et al. 2000), a narrative that “smooths out” the self (MacLure 1996), or a “coercive” narrative (McKewan 1997).25 Yes, the writing involves creative elements. And, yes, there is a persuasive, advocacy element to many narrative moments, and there is a persuasive advocacy element to the narrative of the thesis overall. But I wish to avoid positioning myself as the hero of my own tale (Swidler 2001). Rather I see the persuasive elements as part of the “testable authoritative voice” behind the writing (Morson 2004, p. 321; cf also Bakhtin 1981a), whether I am using narrative structures and devices more explicitly or less explicitly, and I try to construct that authoritative voice as always open to critique and challenge.

There is a sense in which all narratives in this thesis are constituted by, and constitutive of, the dialogic character of language and knowledge and the dialogic epistemology underpinning this thesis. Important in the dialogic nature of the writing is what Bakhtin called the multiple voices – what he calls polyphony and I call counterpoint26 – that animate the narrative moments and the narrative overall. Occasionally in the thesis, I foreground the dialogic nature of a narrative by making explicit references to the mediating influence of particular voices and sources. I do this by:

25 McKewan’s (1997) summary of what he calls “coercive narratives” draws on the research of Edward Said (1993) into the colonising effects of language, in The word, the text and the critic, and Richard Bernstein’s (1986) article, “The sage against reason.” McKewan explains a coercive narrative as “stories of anticipations, set-backs, and trials, but they culminate in the progressive realization of truth and reason, which is normally identified with what the philosopher/storyteller now sees clearly—a truth which his or her predecessors saw only though a glass darkly” (McKewan 1997, p. 186).
26 See Chapter 3 for an introduction to the epistemology of counterpoint as it relates to my research writing. See Chapter 5 for a fuller conceptualisation of counterpoint and the relationship between the stimmen (or voices) of the counterpoint and the texture of the counterpoint as a whole.
• citing conventional academic texts within the text, and in footnotes
  (Sometimes these citations refer to literary sources, sometimes to policy or
curriculum documents, and sometimes they connect to musical sources)
• direct quotation of researcher voices from within that literature and those
  sources
• quotation of teacher voices from the transcripts or questionnaire responses
• more extended intertextual references to the voices of colleagues with whom
  I have collaborated in the past.

In a sense, the voices of colleagues with whom I have co-written in the past are always
dialogically mediating my writing in this artefact and have done so throughout my work
in this study. I try to remain faithful to Bakhtin’s notion of polyphonic narrative, making
these influences explicit as often as I can, without the prose becoming impossibly
fragmented. I see this as being consistent with the contrapuntal texture of the writing.
There are also some narrative moments in the text where I give more space to the voice
of a past collaborator. This is especially the case in the sections when I quote from a
dialogue with a past student of mine, Natalie Bellis, who is now an early-career teacher.
In doing so, I am mindful of the scepticism of Phillips and Jorgenson (2002) about the
disingenuous nature of some dialogic writing involving co-authors, where one voice is
clearly more responsible for the generation of text. I am equally aware of criticism by
Andy Hargreaves (1996) that much dialogic writing in teacher education research,
particularly that involving teacher educators co-authoring with early-career teachers,
tends to de-emphasise any potential difference in the voices between the two, which
usually means silencing the early-career teacher perspectives (cf. Schultz, Schroeder and
Brody 1997). It is fair to say that these concerns have been an ongoing and generative
tension in the dialogic writing I have engaged in outside of this thesis. In this writing, as
with references to my co-authoring in this thesis, I wish to preserve something of that
tension rather than burying it beneath the demands of some pre-existing genre
expectation.
Conclusions

Narrative, in the form of ‘moments’ and as a framing structural principle, is fundamental to the writing and to the interpretive dimensions of this research. It is as important in the analytical and creative processes of noticing, developing, speculating upon and activating dialogic potential in the accounts I write of professional learning, as it is to the analytical and creative interpretations readers will construct from the writing. Although I draw on various narrative traditions and genres, each narrative I construct and draw on is intended to do more than emulate and repeat tired versions of old narrative ‘patterns,’ and old modes of reasoning.

It may be hasty to dismiss as “false” any knowledge claim that fits neatly into an existing pattern, as the voice in Eliot’s *Four Quartets* (from the epigraph to Chapter 2) is predisposed to do. However, it is my intention that the knowledge of professional learning and related issues that I generate in this thesis is enhanced by a sense of narrative that is:

- grounded in patterns and structures that effervesce with “generic potential” (Bakhtin 1981a) – that is, narrative that does more than merely reproduce an existing genre;
- dynamically situated within an unfinalizable and uncertain present and generating possibilities for an unpredictable future; and
- helping to notice, develop, speculate about and/or activate dialogic potential.

In so doing, I trust that my writing narrative moments and my narrative as a whole are meaningfully connecting to/with a multiplicity of other voices, including those making alternative knowledge claims.
PART THREE: HOW AND WHY CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS MATTERS

Introduction

Has anyone ever asked his [sic] pupil what he thought of rhetoric or grammar, or of this or that sentence of Cicero? Our masters stuff these things into our memory, fully feathered, like oracles in which the letters and the syllables are the substance of the matter. (Montaigne 1985, *On the education of children*, p. 57)

Having outlined the methodology and methods for generating and representing the questionnaire data and participant conversations in Part 1, and discussed some methodological matters with respect to narrative in this project in Part 2, I will now explain and discuss my use of critical discourse analysis (CDA). To begin the explanatory sections, I will sketch out some preliminary conceptualisation of CDA. From there, I will analyse an excerpt of Patrick White’s (1976) novel, *A fringe of leaves*, and use this analysis as a form of rehearsal of some of the key ideas and discourses I will use in my version of CDA. Following this rehearsal, I will build a more detailed theorisation of my approach to CDA, in which I will consider a range of alternative approaches to CDA from past research. In this theorisation, I will be grappling with several matters that I myself needed to address before deciding to use a version of CDA in this study, founded as it is upon Bakhtinian dialogic principles. Most important in these matters was my concern to negotiate a way forward between an accessible, complex and principled ‘program’ for discourse analysis – handed down, “fully feathered” as it were, to me as a researcher – and the dialogic spirit and logic of this project that must reject a rigidly programmatic framing of discourse, if such framing fails to appreciate the poststructural instability of language and meaning.

Despite Luke’s (2002) confidence that CDA stands in a “sustainable counter-tradition in linguistics, as against the technical, [programmatic], scientific projects” of the likes of Saussure, Chomsky and Humboldt (Luke 2002, p. 97), the history of critical discourse analysis is one in which researchers continue to be cognisant of, and variously influenced by, such traditions in the struggle to gain academic and political legitimacy (Pennycook 2001, p. 38). This struggle has never been more pressing than in the recent
upsurge in neoliberal policy-making, which tends to be more impressed with claims of scientific certainty than with provisional but rigorously theorised research (MacLure 2003). (See also Chapter 5 in this text.) Ruth Wodak (1996) might be seen as strategic in claiming that “CDA is not less scientific than other linguistic approaches” (p. 20); and Gunther Kress (1990) seems to need to mediate his claim that CDA is “politically committed” with the assurance that “it is nonetheless properly scientific” (p. 85). Importantly, Kress goes on to explain that the scientific legitimacy resides “all the more so for being aware of its own political, ideological and ethical stance” (p. 85).

Nevertheless, traditional scientific paradigms of knowledge and methodology continue to weigh heavily in the claims of CDA researchers. This is despite Kuhn’s (1970) important work from within scientific research communities in debunking myths about traditional scientific inquiry providing epistemological certainty and methodological surety (see also Apple 1986/1995, Lather 1991), and despite Foucault’s (1970) work, in texts such as The order of things, where he shows how human beings have been erroneously constructed as unproblematic objects of traditional scientific inquiry.

In the following consideration of CDA within dialogic inquiry, I remain conscious of this tradition and these tensions. I argue for a flexible and situated approach to critical discourse analysis. My version of CDA responds to, and interprets, the particular details of each communicative event in the transcripts (and questionnaires). In this, I am not so much constrained as I am guided by pre-existing patterns or programs.

**CDA with unfinalizable conclusions?**

Phillips and Jorgenson (2002) describe their version of CDA as follows:

>CDA analyses] the dynamic discursive practices through which language acts as both discursive products and producers in the reproduction and transformation of discourses and thereby in social and cultural change. (p. 17)

The assumption behind this is that language is fundamentally implicated in social reproduction or transformation. This is not to suggest that language neutrally reflects society or culture; nor is it saying that particular language has the power to singularly
determine society or culture or any change in these areas. Phillips and Jorgenson (2002) also emphasise their belief that CDA analysis should be motivated by a principled moral position on the part of the researcher (p. 208). Luke (2002) agrees, stating that CDA researchers needs to appreciate the “explicitly normative” nature of this form of analysis (2002, p. 96; see also Janks 2002, p. 18; Chouliaraki and Fairclough 1999, p. 96). CDA in social science research, Luke argues, should take seriously, and make explicit, its motivation to “disrupt and interrupt ideological common sense, everyday language use, and the codification of discourse power by dominant groups and interests” (Luke 2002, p. 97). In my dialogic research into teachers’ professional learning, I will be constructing and using a hybrid version of CDA to help in this disrupting and interrupting.

While Pennycook (2001) is supportive of critical researchers being motivated by “principled positions” with respect to power in social practice and systems – he uses language similar to Luke in advocating “a restive problematisation of the given” (p. 25) – he is also suspicious of claims of critical research to be normative or emancipatory (eg. Freire 1972, Kincheloe 2003, Kincheloe and McLaren 1998, Meyer 2001, p. 22, van Dijk 2001, Wink 2005), even when he supports their principles. As he says, “too much mainstream critical work is not critical enough. It is too normative, too unquestioning of assumptions” (Pennycook 2001, p. 44). (See also Fairclough 1995, p. 230; Fairclough 2001, p. 127; Phillips and Jorgenson 2002, p. 208.)

Partly, these concerns are alleviated by embedding a strong reflexive stance into the discourse analysis. On the one hand, this means making explicit the normative or emancipatory agenda, but it also puts the onus on me as CDA researcher “to acquire a certain theoretical modesty” (Blacker 1998, p. 357). In practice, this means grappling with the intellectual conundrum that animates and problematises reflexivity: one should attempt to distance oneself sufficiently to identify the discourse position from which one is pursuing a particular agenda, and yet I must be open and say that it is not possible to define a discourse from outside of discourse (Gee 1996).
Locke is one who supports the importance of reflexivity in CDA. This is very clear in the way he approaches a definition of discourse and discourse positions. The notion of discourse, he suggests, can be viewed from the perspective of stories:

> It appears that there are sense-making stories that can be viewed as circulating in society, that are not easily attributable to a particular originary source. The technical term for such a sense making story is *discourse*. ... One definition regards discourse as a coherent way of making sense of the world (or some aspect of it) as reflected in human sign systems (including verbal language). ... Fairclough [1992] draws on Michel Foucault in defining a discourse as “a practice not just of representing the world, but of signifying the world, constituting and constructing the world in meaning.” (Locke 2004, p. 5)

Gee too discusses discourse with an emphasis on a situated and social perspective. When clarifying his sense of capital ‘D’ Discourse, as distinct from small ‘d’ discourse, he warns against too loose a definition: “Discourse does not just involve talk or just language” (Gee 1996). Rather,

> Discourses [which can be pluralised] are ways of being in the world, or forms of life which integrate words, acts, values, beliefs, attitudes and social identities, as well as gestures, glances, body positions, and clothes. A Discourse is a sort of identity kit which comes complete with the appropriate costume and instructions on how to act, talk, and often write, so as to take on a particular social role that others will recognise. (Gee 1996, p. viii)

Jager (2001) is also concerned with the social perspective of language, but his version of CDA focuses on the “institution” as a reification of the social. For him, discourse – he does not subscribe to Gee’s capitalisation – is an “institutionally consolidated concept of language” (written or spoken and/or digitally generated) that identifies and consolidates action, and that thus tends to reproduce existing power relations (p. 34). Jager offers two caveats. Firstly, he warns that one should not be seduced into assuming that critique or analysis of a discourse can take place from a space outside of discourse (Jager 2001, p. 34; cf. also Gee 1996, Luke 2002). Secondly, he urges that CDA researchers should be wary of efforts to neatly compartmentalise discourses for analytical convenience. As he says:
Discourses are intertwined or entangled with one another like vines or strands; moreover they are not static but in constant motion forming a “discursive milling mass” which at the same time results in the “constant rampant growth of discourses.” (Jager 2001, p. 35)

This reference to a “discursive milling mass” is strongly reminiscent of Bakhtin’s notion of heteroglossia in a dialogic world – as portrayed by Kostogriz (2005) – the “teeming” mix of literacy practices in schools (p. 104); Holquist (1990) – the “roiling mass of languages” in the world (p. 69); and Luke (2002) – “the Dionysian character of discourse in local sites” (p. 104). Not surprisingly, it is just this milling, roiling, teeming, Dyonisian character of discourses that makes it problematic to suggest a rigid, theoretical framework or overly systematic method for critical discourse analysis.

I have suggested in Chapter 1, that there is a great deal of contestation about the key concepts of literary theory and professional learning in this project. So too there are similar levels of contestation and disagreement as to theoretical underpinnings of CDA (Gee 2005, Locke 2004, Luke 2002, Pennycook 2001, Phillips and Jorgenson 2002). Meyer (2001) finds some agreement amongst CDA users in what he calls “a general understanding” that CDA is not a single method but “an approach, which constitutes itself at different levels” (p. 14). Locke (2004) resists categorising CDA as a method or methods, and proposes that it is “better described as a scholarly orientation with the potential to transform the modus operandi of a range of research methodologies” (p. 2). Chouliaraki and Fairclough (1999) are concerned by the disagreement over CDA theories and methods, arguing that the “theories [CDA] rests upon and the methods it uses have not been explicitly and systematically spelt out as they might have been” (p. 1). Pennycook (2001) is just as concerned that this might lead to a level of programmatic prescription (as seen, for example in the calls for more scientific rigour by advocates of systemic functional linguistics [SFL][27]) in CDA methods. He voices his disquiet that prescriptive programs of CDA risk shutting down potential dialogue (about methods, analysis, or interpretation) and tend merely to reproduce an established orthodoxy (Pennycook 2001, p. 79; see also Janks 2002, Luke 2002). Locke (2004) deals with these concerns by emphasising the value of the dialogic epistemology of

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[27] See Chouliaraki and Fairclough (1999), Chapter 8, for a balanced critique of Halliday’s (1978) systemic functional linguistics and its value in CDA.
language and of the interdiscursive underpinnings of social theories when explaining his version of CDA. Central to this dialogism is a commitment to critical reflexivity and transparency in research design. Chouliaraki and Fairclough (1999) propose to deal with their concerns about random eclecticism of theories and methods, by “bringing a variety of theories into dialogue [my emphasis], especially social theories, on the one hand and linguistic theories on the other, so that [CDA’s] theory is a shifting synthesis of … theories” (p. 16) and by committing to ongoing reflexivity (p. 9).

Of course, dialogism does not claim to offer a neat resolution to the tensions and conflicts I have begun to sketch out here. But before I examine these in more depth, I want to ‘rehearse’ some critical discourse analysis, not of a transcript from a meeting of The Literary Theory Inquiry Group, but of an excerpt from Patrick White’s novel, A fringe of leaves. In a dialogic commentary situated on the right hand side of the page of this analysis, I will begin to draw attention to some key aspects of my version of CDA and the particular methods and discursive practices I will be employing.

‘Rehearsing’ critical discourse analysis (CDA)

The agenda for each meeting of The Literary Theory Inquiry Group always included some time for focused, and occasionally open-ended, discussion of at least one literary text. Patrick White’s (1976) novel, A fringe of leaves, was scheduled for some of this discussion in the fourth session, in July 2003. I titled the session Post-colonialism and Colonialism – unpacking the discourses. White’s novel was being taught by some of The Inquiry Group teachers in classrooms during the school day and thus it served as a grounding text for our learning about literary theory at the end of the school day. This was valuable in that it provided a focus for inquiry into literary theory, particularly the discursive practices associated with postcolonialism. Teachers in the group recognised

28 My focus on White’s literary text, for this rehearsal, might be seen by some as a diversion from the task at hand – a ‘mere’ analysis of a literary text. However, I choose this approach to a rehearsal in order to illustrate the very strong connections in textual and discursive practice between the intellectual work of English-literature teachers in analysing literary texts and the intellectual work of the researcher in this project in analysing primary data/artefacts. Although, as I will show, CDA as a research methodology often positions itself as being more strongly interested in social practice and social systems rather than just linguistic/textual analysis, these social interests have always constituted a powerful concern in the literary analysis I (and my students) have engaged in during literature and English classes in secondary schools.
the relevance of this to their developing knowledge in teaching this text. Such knowledge included classroom activities and approaches for teaching White’s novel (and a number of other novels that invited postcolonial readings). Just as important was the sense in which the conversation about postcolonial discourse in or about *A fringe of leaves* generated dialogic potential for related inquiry into a number of social practices and systems around the teaching of English and literature at Eastern Girls’ College.\(^{29}\)

Often in the course of a session, a member of The Inquiry Group (not necessarily me) would propose that we all look at a particular passage from a text set down for discussion that day, a passage such as the following from *A fringe of leaves*. Rather than giving an account of one of The Inquiry Group’s discussions – there will be several instances of this in Chapters 5, 6 and 7 – I will use this passage to rehearse a version of critical discourse analysis close to the one I will be using to analyse transcripts of meetings of The Literary Theory Inquiry Group.

Austin Roxburgh, seated with his wife in a boat off the cast of colonial Hobart, is an incongruous figure holding aloft his prized copy of Virgil’s *Georgics*. He has just finished reading a passage aloud - in Latin - to his feisty, but for the present, dutiful wife Ellen. He looks to Ellen to affirm his love of Virgil.

‘Splendid stuff! Did you hear, Ellen?’

‘Yes. I heard. But shall not understand unless you have the goodness to translate. I thought you would have known that.’ Now she merely sounded like a peevish woman.

‘As you are in almost every respect admirable, one tends to forget that you don’t always understand.’

While he gave the lines his renewed consideration, humming to himself from behind his moustache, she was forced up from her chair to fidget restlessly in the narrow space in which they were confined.

‘Perhaps this will satisfy you,’ he ventured at last, ‘without doing justice to the original verses. ‘Happy is he,’ he no more than muttered, ‘who has unveiled the cause of things, and who can ignore inexorable Fate and the

\(^{29}\) In Chapter 7, I quote an excerpt from the 4\(^{th}\) meeting of The Literary Theory Inquiry Group, where notions of structure and chaos in *A fringe of leaves* are discussed by several members of the group. Intermingled among the teachers’ discussion of the text is some analysis of the social and physical spaces in which English-literature teachers at Eastern Girls College are able to engage in professional conversation (or not).
If I were to analyse this passage in terms of CDA, I might begin by suggesting that the first part of Patrick White’s *A fringe of leaves* reads like a series of interconnected stories about British middle-class colonists in Nineteenth Century Australia. These colonists are negotiating their awkward ways through various social practices and conventions of colonial life in Hobart Australia. Characters such as Austin Roxburgh, newly arrived in Australia, are attempting (with little success) to control the wildness and unpredictability of their new home.

Austin enthuses over the “splendid” verses from the *Georgics* and expects his “admirable” wife, Ellen, to do the same. Frustrated at being excluded from his train of thought – she does not understand the Latin – Ellen prods Austin to translate them. And Austin has “the goodness” to do just as she wishes. In reciting and translating the verses, Austin is appropriating and “performing” the epigrammatic discourses of another culture that he sees as superior to the culture of Hobart. To put it another way, he is hoping to “tell the story” of his intellectual connectedness to another land (Britain and Europe) and to another time and culture (classical “civilizations”) from which he feels physically and culturally disconnected. As I read this text, I get the sense that this recitation or this text cannot really help to salve Austin’s feelings of disconnectedness. He is not a happy man, it would seem.

My analysis here begins with a broad framing of the sociocultural territory that is under scrutiny, although the exact nature of any ‘problem’ is not tightly framed or identified (whereas other forms of CDA would expect a clear explanation of the problem at this stage). My reason for deferring any precise framing of the problem is to avoid shutting down dialogic potential early in the analysis.

Nevertheless, by framing the excerpt in this way I am signalling my intention from the outset to pay attention to the interrelationships between

- discursive details in the text and between this text and related texts (*textual and textural practices*);
- the social practices and orders of discourse (in colonial Australia and in White’s novel) constituted by, and constitutive of, the discursive details (*contextual or socio-political practices*); and
- the broader social systems (and the theories underpinning them) in which there are ongoing struggles and tensions over power, knowledge, privilege and authority.
By reciting these verses, Austin hopes to reassert a sense of knowledge, authority and empowerment in his life. He can show his knowledge of Virgil’s text: he can read and translate the verses. He can demonstrate his authority over a “classical” culture that spawned Virgil’s text and yet one that contrasts with his experience of Australia and Australians. He can summon it and use it at his convenience. And he can both exercise his power over his wife and empower her. He can control her and yet he also has the power to empower her from her lowly Cornish origins. All this when circumstances around him seem to subvert his attempts at control. Austin’s reciting and translating of Virgil’s text constitute a form of textual practice; they are also appropriating the social practices of certain cultures, where public displays of intellect (outside of formal teaching institutions) are *de rigeur* – ie. engaging in recitations and interpretations of classical literature among intimates. These practices are intended as much to raise Ellen above what he perceives to be the barbaric wildness of colonial Australia as they are to mark out or reassert his own position of dominance.

The satirical caricature of Austin Roxburgh, by Patrick White, is unforgiving. Austin is portrayed as self-satisfied (White draws on the discursive practice of caricature, in this case the genteel urbane man “humming to himself behind his moustache”), patronising (“as you are in almost every respect admirable”) and a calculating coloniser (whose distance from his wife is emphasised by his use of the
impersonal pronoun “one tends to forget”). Austin is self-conscious in his efforts to maintain his social dominance (evidenced in the would-be urbane practice of “coughing for his own efforts” and in White’s use of “Mr” as the subject of the sentence acting as a kind of ironic honorific). He comes across as patronising and complacent and, to some readers – at least to those critically conscious of his class pretensions – his efforts to show his dominance would appear to be ineffectual. (If Austin achieves some semblance of short-term dominance, he is soon to be ‘all at sea,’ literally – the ship is about to sink – and in the demands of a complex and challenging social milieux.) In this short vignette, White reiterates, through various textual means, a sense of Austin’s social and textual practices which confine, constrain and even shut down social, personal and textual possibilities.

For instance, he offers his translation of the Virgil text as a gift to “satisfy” Ellen, rather than as something with the potential to encourage dialogue or to build on their relationship. Ellen’s response has already been discursively scripted: she is expected to agree that the Virgil verses are indeed “splendid.” Austin’s pseudo-apology with respect to the faithfulness of his translation / interpretation of the “original verses” appears to be performing an established social practice more than anything else, as seen in the self-satisfied cough he utters at “concluding” the translation. Both his choice of “splendid” verses, those that would seem to be making a virtue of ignoring Fate or Hell or other such socio-cultural “distractions” when searching for
causes, and his translation / interpretation of unveiling the cause (singular) of things, suggest a proclivity for shutting down dialogue and possibilities. Significantly, Ellen feels herself “peevish” for prodding him to “open up” to more communicative interaction.

Austin’s translation can be seen as reductive and perhaps doing an injustice to the open-endedness of Virgil’s Latin verses. Where he translates the maxim “Happy is he who has unveiled the cause of things,” other classics scholars (such as that cited in the epigraph to Chapter 2) have translated it as “Happy the man who could search out the causes of things.” This alternative interpretation offers, at the very least, multiple ‘causes’ in the searching out. This is significant in itself. Beyond this, we can interpret significant ambiguity in the transitivity of the verbal phrase ‘search out’ in alternative interpretations. It is unclear whether it is the searching in itself - what one might otherwise call ‘curiosity’, something that Austin demonstrably lacks - that brings happiness to ‘man’ or whether it is the pinning down of a single cause (or causes) that brings happiness. Austin’s translation / interpretation fails to connect with the philosophical possibilities that this ambiguity raises.

In characteristically closing down (or failing to open up) the dialogic potential of such an interpretation, Austin (like the other English ‘settlers’ whom White satirises in the opening chapters of the novel), cuts himself off from the chance to develop important knowledge about dealing with cultural difference and
cultural change. This approach to dialogue can only continue to inhibit the capacity for individuals like Austin (and for groups) to negotiate their way through to a future where they can connect more fully with their new home. In working with teachers and or students in the study of this text, there would seem to be rich dialogic potential in taking this territory or this particular ‘problem’ as a focus for critical inquiry. There is potential, also, for making meaningful extra-textual connections with current socio-political practices in contemporary Australia.

**Conceptualising CDA in this study**

My choice of colonisation as a focus for this ‘rehearsal’ or broad framing of the critical discourse analysis used in this project is not accidental or random. The ways in which various historical colonial powers asserted and maintained their power in social practices, or the ways in which more contemporary institutions or social groups mimic these colonialist practices in order to assert and maintain power, are a common focus of the work of CDA researchers (cf. Chouliaraki and Fairclough 1999, Fairclough 1995, 2001, Locke 2004, Pennycook 2001).

However, I am wary of simple deterministic celebrations of the resistant work of CDA. Locke (2004) sums up his version of CDA with a caution against a deterministic view of discourse or of seeing CDA as a linguistic and social marshall keeping order in an unjust world:

> The aim [of CDA] is not to reveal some sinister and manipulative hand aiming to impose power over others, but to provide opportunities for critical detachment and review of the ways in which discourses act to pervade and construct our textual and social practices in a range of contexts. (Locke 2004, p. 89. See also Pennycook 2001.)

If Meyer can find broad agreement about CDA being not just one method, then one can find a high level of subscription by CDA researchers to Foucault’s (1980)
poststructuralist theorising of the interrelationship between power and knowledge. This relationship, mediated by language (or more broadly semiosis\(^{30}\)), has the potential to be productive as well as oppressive (Phillips and Jorgenson 2002, p. 91), and my version of CDA is conscious of this.

Poststructuralist versions of CDA emphasise the necessary interconnectedness and resulting tensions of assuming that language can be *reflective of* socio-cultural practices and the institutions associated with those practices. Language can also *contribute to* and *create* and *modify* these socio-cultural practices. Fairclough (2001) would seem to speak for many CDA researchers when he recommends that strong emphasis be given in CDA to social practice:

> The motivation for focusing on social practices is that it allows one to combine the perspective of structure and the perspective of action – a practice is on the one hand a relatively permanent way of acting socially which is defined by its position within a structured network of practices, and a domain of social action and interaction which both reproduces structures and has the potential to transform them. (p. 122)

However, this would seem to be positing an unproblematic separation between the perspectives of “structure” and “action.” Such a separation may ostensibly bring clarity to the analysis of language and power, and in that respect it is in keeping with Fairclough’s (1995) conceptual separation elsewhere between “context” and “text.” These sorts of assumptions contribute to more systematised approaches to CDA as presented in Fairclough’s 2003 “toolkit.” But this approach is at variance with Foucauldian poststructuralist conceptions of CDA. It is worth noting, in passing, that a significant body of literature has pointed out the ways in which oversimplification in social science practices has been sanctioned in the name of “clarity” (eg. Giroux 1992b, MacLure 2005, Stronach and MacLure 1997). Many CDA researchers recognise some form of dialectic between, on the one hand, social systems mediating language use and, on the other hand, textual and/or discursive practices (see Table 2.4 below). And yet, as Phillips and Jorgenson (2002) have pointed out, some have followed the lead of

\(^{30}\) It is assumed, from here on, that any reference to language considers not just verbal language but also iconic and visual signs that are part of a complex dialogic dynamic of communicative interaction (Fairclough 2001, Gee 1996, 2005).
Michael Halliday (1978), in critiquing the “elegant self-contained systems” (p. 3) of many linguists, only to proceed to construct highly systematised taxonomic methods for social science analysis, which would seem to contradict the initial critique (eg. Fairclough 2003).

Table 2.4: Discourses representing various dialectics at play in versions of CDA

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dialectics underpinning CDA</th>
<th>Social science researchers theorising the dialectic in this way</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>macro context</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>structure</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>social/non-discursive practice</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>discursive practice</td>
<td>Chouliaraki &amp; Fairclough 1999, Fairclough 2001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(social) system</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>activity</td>
<td>Jager 2001, Wodak 2001a,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>field (order or discourse)</td>
<td>Gee 2005</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>communicative interaction (discursive event)</td>
<td>Bourdieu &amp; Wacquant 1992, Fairclough 1995</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Conclusions

I am indebted to Terry Locke (2004) for the following perspectives on critical discourse analysis (printed in italics), which help to summarise my own version in this study. Under each one of Locke’s perspectives, I relate some grounded detail that helps to situate the perspective in relation to particular aspects of my study of teachers’ professional learning. Where there are any tensions between Locke’s perspectives and my own, I make this clear and, again, illustrate the tension with respect to particular aspects of this study.

In this study, my hybrid version of CDA:
• views a prevailing social order as historically situated and therefore relative, socially constructed and changeable.

This is not to suggest that social order in schools or policy-making is monolithic. Even the neoliberal ideologies that are particularly dominant in policy-making with respect to teacher professional learning at the present historic moment amount to a range of interconnected systems that together contribute to a sense of prevailing social order.

• views a prevailing social order and social practices as constituted and sustained less by the will of individuals than by the pervasiveness of particular constructions or versions of reality — often referred to as discourses.

This is not to underestimate the potential of individual teachers or groups of teachers, such as The Literary Theory Inquiry Group, to destabilise pervasive constructions of professional learning ‘norms.’ But it does recognise that notions of individual agency are always mediated by social order, social practices and dominant discourses.

• views discourse as coloured by and productive of ideology.

Locke adds, parenthetically, “however ideology is conceptualized” (p. 1). This seems to me to be too liberal in its approach. I believe there are potential dangers in some conceptualisations of ideology. For instance, as Pennycook (2001) argues, there is a tendency in Marxist analysis of ideology to see ideological power as originating in/with dominant groups – as if some problem were all the fault of a particular neoliberal government, for instance – in contrast to Foucault’s more complex notion which sees power as existing independent of particular individuals or groups in society (p. 108; see also Mills 1997). I do enjoy Locke’s definition of ideology as “an elaborate story told about the ideal conduct of some aspect of human affairs … [whose] power lies in its truth value.” Locke later adds that “the truth of an ideology is determined by the number [of people] subscribing to it …. and the social status of its subscribers” (pp. 33, 37). One part of me is tempted to take a cue from Foucault and eschew the use of the term, ideology, in favour of the less value-laden term of “discourse” in my version.
of critical discourse analysis. The reasons for this would be twofold. Firstly, in my CDA interpretive work, I want to maintain an optimism about the potential for change in educators’ social practices, whereas I believe the word ideology (not including Locke’s productive redefinition of it) has tended to inhibit this potential. This is most clearly seen in the work of Althusser (1971) and even van Dijke (1986, 2001). Secondly, the word ideology has a tendency to be associated with a simplifying of the complexity of the ways in which discourse operates. Van Dijke (2001), for instance, talks in relatively simple ways about ‘the ideology of the text’ as if this were singular and something that one can identify objectively outside of one’s own ideological influences and frames. Nevertheless, in this study I do acknowledge the value of Locke’s definition. However, I also acknowledge a danger in talking about the “emancipatory” or “normative” status of CDA work.

- **views power in society not so much as imposed on individual subjects as an inevitable effect of a way particular discursive configurations or arrangements privilege the status and positions of some people over others.** As Locke (2001, 2004), himself, says elsewhere, the gradual erosion of the power and autonomy of teachers and professional teaching associations appears to some to be “inevitable,” normal, and not at all destructive. Where CDA can help to challenge such a view, it can make a powerful contribution to research debates, to debates within the profession and to debates with policy-makers. The outcomes of these debates are potentially significant for the future dialogic potential of teachers’ professional learning practices and arrangements.

- **views human subjectivity as at least in part constructed or inscribed by discourse, and discourse as manifested in the various ways people are and enact the sorts of people they are.**

For teachers, this means that notions of individual agency and individual professional identity are powerfully mediated by the discourse communities of which they are a part. It also means that there is a significant connection
between the professional learning practices a teacher engages in (with his/her discourse communities) and the sense of professional identity he/she feels.

- views reality as textually and intertextually mediated via verbal and non-verbal language systems, and views texts as sites for both the inculcation and the contestation of discourses.

I would prefer to substitute the words “power and knowledge” for Locke’s phrase “reality as textually and intertextually mediated” in this dot point. Elsewhere in his book on CDA, Locke speaks persuasively of Foucault’s conception of the all-pervasiveness of power-knowledge regimes and the continuous struggles that mediate any and all social existence. To me, this Foucauldian conception renders any use of the term ‘reality’ less useful than the notion of ‘power and knowledge.’ In my version of CDA, I am less concerned to identify the ‘reality’ of teachers’ professional learning practices or ecologies, than I am to tease out the ways in which different actors in these ecologies seek to construct professional learning outcomes, needs, and practices as ‘realities’ such as in a professional learning ‘kit’ or ‘package.’ (See my discussion of the ecologies of teachers’ professional learning in Chapter 4.)

- views the systematic analysis and interpretation of texts as potentially revelatory of ways in which discourses consolidate power and colonise human subjects through often covert position calls (Locke 2004, pp. 1-2)

The term, ‘systematic,’ is of course open to a wide range of interpretations. My approach to CDA is not totally resistant to any sense of a system as an organising principle, especially where the alternative seems to be a random under-theorised approach to language and social practices. This study is, however, resistant to highly systematised discourse analytical programs, which by definition lose their groundedness within particular social, historic and political contexts.

Researching in ethnographical methodologies, Marcus (1998) cites Bakhtinian theory in arguing for an approach that juxtaposes multiple levels and styles and a polyphony of
voices in representations of social science research (p. 37). He encourages research
writing to break out of generally acknowledged genre constraints (p. 36) that tend to
flatten out and resolve tensions (and dialectics) in collected or generated data. Like
other poststructuralist researchers – e.g. Lather (1994), Lincoln and Denzin (2005),
suggests that researchers should resist overarching methodologies that neatly unify
approaches. Rather, he recommends that they experiment with hybrid approaches, styles
and genres, allowing unresolved or problematic tensions and contradictions in the
dialogue with/among participants to speak as just that. Luke (2002), anticipating “the
next generation of CDA research,” draws attention to the need to “contend with blended
and hybrid forms of representation and identity.” He advocates for “new, hybrid blends
of analytical techniques and social theories” (p. 98), although he stops short of calling
for hybrid blends of representation in the research artefact that is a product of CDA.

This latter hybrid, polyphonic approach is the one I have taken in the analysis of
questionnaire data and transcript dialogue for this study, in line with the dialogic
epistemology underpinning the whole research project. I am encouraged by the prospect
that this approach is likely to “say more” (Marcus 1998) about the texts, the discursive
practices and the social systems under scrutiny in this research than more rigid
approaches. In the end, I am motivated more by Virgil’s notion of searching out causes
and explanations, with respect to inquiry-based professional learning, and by seeing any
apparent causes and explanations as provisional, than I am by Mr Roxburgh’s
complacent notion of “unveiling the cause of things.” If this leads to fewer “clear
certain[ies]” in my findings but more possibilities, immediate and “remote,” then I will
feel the research is generating valuable dialogic potential.
Truth is not born, nor is it to be found, inside the head of an individual person; it is born between people collectively searching for truth, in the process of dialogic interaction.

Bakhtin 1984, p. 110 (emphasis in original)

If the formula for all our desires and whims [and our knowing] is some day discovered – I mean what they depend on, what laws they result from, how they are disseminated, what sort of good they aspire to in a particular instance, and so on – a real mathematical formula, that is, then it is possible that man [sic] will at once cease to want anything, indeed, I suppose it is possible that he will cease to exist…. [H]e will at once turn from a man into a barrel-organ sprig, without will, without volition, but a sprig on the cylinder of a barrel-organ. What do you think? Let us consider the probabilities….

Dostoevsky, *Notes from underground*, 1972, p. 34

**Preface: considering the possibilities**

In Dostoevsky’s (1972) novella, *Notes from underground*, the narrator is grappling with what he feels to be competing imperatives: on the one hand, to be faithful and true to himself as a social participant and as an individual but, on the other hand, to maintain the integrity of the social communication he is engaged in. He takes this to extremes, perhaps, in assiduously taking on the language and positions of those he considers his interlocutors. As I considered the ways I would express the theories of knowledge and language that underpin and (I hope) enliven this thesis, I was drawn back to texts like Dostoevsky’s novella. I thought about how *Notes from underground* can be read as an extended reflexive dialogue31 about the dialogic nature of knowledge and the mediating role of language in the generation and interpretation of knowledge.

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31 Bakhtin (1984) refers to it as polyphony, in *The problems of Dostoevsky’s poetics*. 
As I wrote this epistemologies chapter, I found myself still grappling with these competing imperatives. I wanted to communicate the complexities and nuances of the experiences and ideas I had been living with for the duration of the project. And that meant using pre-existing discourses, genres, modes and voices – even some notion of the ‘laws’ – of research writing. This was necessary in order to connect with my readers, my interlocutors. And yet for the integrity of the dialogic notion of knowledge that I would advocate, as well as for my passionate desire for the research to exist beyond the ‘life’ of the project, and hopefully to generate some shift in some professional cultures so that at least there might be an openness to consider the possibilities that the research is raising (Hamilton 2005, Kemmis 2005), I was determined to eschew tried-and-proven formulas. I did not wish to become a mere sprig on the cylinder of a barrel-organ, grinding out knowledge, discourses or structures of the past. It is perhaps because I am mindful of conventional expectations that I devote separate sections of this thesis to methodology and epistemology. And yet, in other ways, my text contests and occasionally deviates from canonical ‘laws’ of thesis structure in different ways.

In this chapter I identify and inquire into a range of epistemological issues associated with a dialogic conception of language and research. To do this, I present and reflect on written narrative texts from three of the classroom teachers in The Literary Theory Inquiry Group as an initial focus for inquiry. Later, I sketch out the implications of these issues for a study of teachers’ inquiry-based professional learning.

This chapter is structured in three parts:

- **Part 1: Toward dialogic professional learning**
  This part is a multi-voiced, multi-levelled inquiry into aspects of professional learning of literary theory, via a range of interwoven narrative texts. The first of these texts is a fictionalised account, written by me, of the lead-up to a professional learning session of The Literary Theory Inquiry Group. Amongst other things, this account provides some contextual detail for reading the following three narrative texts, written by classroom teacher
participants in The Literary Theory Inquiry Group. The teachers’ texts, presented here in dialogue with each other, include explanations of how the teachers feel their learning about literary theory has influenced their classroom practices.

- **Part 2: Accounting for teachers’ knowing**
  In this part, I use dialogic frameworks to evaluate the classroom teachers’ narrative accounts of their practice. The evaluations are linked by a common concern to identify and appreciate a dialogic ‘sense’ of the teachers’ knowledge building. In this sense, they provide a strong contrast to more reductive and formulaic regimes of accountability vis-à-vis teachers’ professional learning.

- **Part 3: Toward a dialogic research enterprise**
  I begin this part by focusing on my role as writer-researcher in this research. This involves my illustrating some of the ways in which multiple voices inform and participate in my writing. Toward the end of this part, I ‘step back’ from the narrative excerpts, the evaluations and my role in the evaluation and writing, to articulate a theoretical rationale for the dialogic epistemological framing of the whole study.

From the outset of this chapter on epistemology, I wish to signal the importance I place on grounding the study within authentic professional learning spaces (ie. the physical spaces and the artefacts generated in these physical spaces). Consistent with the dialogic principles underpinning the study, it is my intention in this chapter to encourage lively dialogic interaction between three dimensions:

(i) a descriptive account (and analysis) of the “intellectual, emotional and relational work” of teachers (Sachs 2005), especially their professional learning;

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32 Having made my position clear in terms of this study, I do not totally reject what Wacquant (1990) calls “‘conspicuous theorising,’ freed from connection to the practical constraints and realities of empirical work” (p. 30). Ball (1995), for instance, talks about theory as offering the potential for “thinking otherwise” and that it can be a platform for “outrageous hypotheses” (p. 266). This suggests that sometimes there is a strong case for freeing oneself, albeit briefly, from “the practical constraints and realities of empirical work.”
a critical review of various epistemological issues; and

the writing of this research artefact (with an awareness of the backgrounds and biography of myself as writer).

These dimensions are interrelated, but to the extent that it is possible to demarcate each dimension, I see them as having similar significance to each other.

By raising the writing of the research artefact to a level of significance similar to that of the descriptive and critical dimensions, I am conscious of the extent to which I am foregrounding the role of the writer-researcher in the study. This is not to romanticise the involvement of the writer as individual, engaged in a process of discovering the truth of his/herself and his/her topic (eg. Richardson 2000, p. 923). Nor do I endorse Bruner’s (1993) notion of a clear delineation between author and object. Bruner argues for research writing that “return[s] the author to the text openly,” in a way that does not “squeeze out the object of the study” (Bruner 1993, p. 6). I would endorse the project of returning the author to the text, but whether the identity of the author can remain ‘open’ or clear is more problematic than Bruner suggests here. I would want, also, to emphasise, as Kamler (2003) does, the value of “personal engagement” in writing and reading as dialogic communicative acts (p. 39; see also Flecha 2000). However, this notion of personal engagement needs to be seen in tension with the notion of writing as a technology, as intellectual work, as an act of labour in the research enterprise (Kamler 2003, p. 37; see also Kamler 2001). Additionally, it’s important to see the imperative for personal engagement as in tension with the need to somehow distance the research writing from the phenomenon under inquiry (see also Giddens 1990 below). So while I foreground the writing as a significant dimension of the research enterprise, I also recognise that the mediating role it plays with respect to the other dimensions is complex and multifaceted.

Just as it is important to stress the importance of the writing dimension in the research as a whole, it is crucial to highlight my desire to notice, develop, speculate about and in various ways activate the dialogic potential inherent in these three dimensions of the study (cf. Wells 2001, Florio-Ruane 2001). Certainly, I wish to avoid what Bourdieu
calls “methodologism”: the inclination to separate reflection or methods from their use in the research process (Wacquant 1992, p. 28). I would consider it incongruous to ditch my dialogic principles, in order to provide a contextually disinterred review of epistemological arguments in this chapter – as if I could provide some objective account of what these critical arguments “depend on, what laws they result from, how they are disseminated, what sort of good they aspire to in a particular instance, and so on” (Dostoevsky 1972, p. 34). Like Dostoevsky’s Underground Man, I want to rigorously question the value of such formulaic approaches, and to “consider [some alternative] probabilities”…or possibilities, as I would prefer to call them (cf. also Cole and Knowles 2000, Denzin and Lincoln 1998, Etherington 2004, Florio-Ruane 2002, Stronach and MacLure 1997, Morson 2004).

Having said that, I want to add quickly that I am not interested in glib celebration of all possibilities. I intend to subject any of the alternative possibilities that I propose to rigorous questioning. In that respect, there is a critical commitment to reflexivity in my writing. Giddens (1990) talks of reflexivity in sociological research in three respects:

i. the agency of the research
   Giddens discusses how reflexivity can enhance self-awareness in the research process and how it can serve to promote a conscious distancing from the phenomenon under inquiry.

ii. the status of the research as science
   He recognises, too, that reflexivity renders the process of this distancing problematic. For instance, one must also question one’s claims to distance or critical disinterest.

iii. the role of the research in society
   Reflexivity in writing, Giddens argues, need not undermine the epistemological foundations of the research; rather it can support them, and this increases its scope for contributing to knowledge generation.

Needless to say, my (and Giddens’s) use of the term ‘science’ here does not mean traditional positivist paradigms of science or scientific research. (See my discussion of this in Chapter 1 and then later in Part 2 of this chapter.)
policy formulation and changes in practice at the local level (Giddens 1990).

While I am comfortable with these three perspectives on reflexivity as they relate to this project, I want to take a moment to draw particular attention to the dialogic tensions between them, and to acknowledge that my announcing my intention to be reflexive does not automatically bestow integrity and truth. The tensions within and between these perspectives serve to enliven the dialogicality of the research, and they also bespeak the need to be recursive and reflexive in various ways, rather than just adopting a formulaic approach to reflexivity in the writing (Bourdieu and Waquant 1992; cf. also Schratz and Walker 1995).

And so, I begin by dialogically embedding my critical review of epistemological issues within and through a consideration of the issues raised by authentic teachers engaged in authentic professional learning.
PART ONE: TOWARD DIALOGIC PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

‘I didn’t need to fire a gun to get things started’

As outlined in Chapter 2, The Literary Theory Inquiry Group met formally six times over a period of 14 months (in 2002 and 2003). By the time of the third session, the first meeting for 2003, the membership of the Inquiry Group had already changed. I, for one, was no longer teaching in the school, having moved to a full-time position as a lecturer at Monash University. One teacher, Robin, had resigned and moved to a different school, although he did return to participate in this third session. Some teachers had chosen to take no further part in The Inquiry Group. And there was one new member of staff in the Senior English Department, Jo, who would be joining The Inquiry Group for the first time.

The third session was titled Literary theory and diversity in the classroom. (Appendix VIII provides a summary of the activities and resources for all sessions of The Literary Theory Inquiry Group.) In this session, my intention was to inquire into some specific ways in which these teachers were teaching with literary theory. I wondered how (or whether) they were using their developing knowledge of literary theory to connect with their students and various curriculum requirements. I also wanted to prompt some reflection about how they were employing different classroom practices with respect to literary theory. To help stimulate this inquiry, I asked Jo to share some of her experiences as a beginning teacher prior to coming to Melbourne. Jo had begun her teaching career in Western Australia, with an English and literature curriculum quite different from Victoria’s. I hoped that this, in itself, would be a source of interest for The Inquiry Group teachers and a provocation for lively dialogue. In her first weeks teaching in Eastern Girls’ College, Jo had developed a reputation as a teacher with a solid knowledge of literary theory and she was emerging as an advocate for teaching with literary theory. As Jo had explained to me in a conversation when I was planning the session, she had begun her teaching as an early-career teacher with a strong passion

34 Readers from the northern hemisphere should note that the school year in Australia runs from January to December. The beginning of 2003, therefore, was the beginning of the new school year.
for critical literacy, but this passion was not often shared by her students or her colleagues.

Before Jo’s presentation, we began this Inquiry Group session with a period of time devoted to reflective writing. In an email sent to the teachers before the session, I had signalled that we would begin with some individual writing about the influences of literary theory on their teaching up to now. I explained that they would be invited to write about whether their interest in, and developing knowledge of, literary theory had impacted upon their classroom practices, and/or their students’ learning, and/or their sense of themselves as teachers.

I present the following fictionalised reconstruction of the lead-up to this third session. This reconstruction provides a sense of my own role as researcher and participant in The Literary Theory Inquiry Group. It also adumbrates some contextual detail that will become significant when I go on to consider excerpts of some reflective texts written by three teachers from the group.

* * * *

3.30pm. It’s the end of classes for teachers in Eastern Girls’ College. While they have been gathering together loose ends at the end of period 4 – periods are 75 minutes at this school – I have been setting up an empty classroom for the third session of The Literary Theory Inquiry Group. As usual, I have brought with me to the session a couple of plates of snacks, a bottle of wine, a carafe of water - nothing fancy – to help support the atmosphere of conviviality that characterises most of our sessions. The food and drink are waiting, as I am, at the side of an otherwise eerily quiet classroom. Room C6. In the centre of Room C6, on a nest of tables, a tape recorder sits amongst a selection of critical readings and some books.

3.35pm. Teachers begin to trickle into the classroom in dribs and drabs…. To some extent, school life seeps into the room with them. One teacher is wrapping up a conversation, literally at the door of the room, with a student from last period of the day. Another teacher is on her feet, rummaging though papers in her office down the corridor from Room C6. When her phone rings she wheels around, glances at the phone, then at her watch. She pauses, the way a classroom teacher does when a student
has posed an intriguing question. Then she turns on her heels, and heads toward Room C6, leaving the answering machine to deal with the call.

I notice that teacher after teacher enters the room exhaling deep ambiguous sighs – breathing out the challenges and excitements of the day. It was the same for me 30 minutes ago. In entering this classroom, now designated for professional learning, each of us is engaged in our own negotiation of the multiple boundaries between classroom, office, staffroom and this space …. 35

In one respect there is something special about a scheduled professional learning event, at a particular time and place. 36 We sometimes need help to carve out this space – a place and a time separate from the teeming activity of school and university life. And yet, I am conscious that we have all been, individually and in transitory groups, learning as we work all day. This learning is rarely about facts and formulae; it’s rarely about knowledge that can be packaged in clearly demarcated epistemological categories. Most of our professional learning is about generating ‘knowing’ rather than absorbing knowledge. And this knowing can often be elusive, problematic and hard to pin down. Much of it happens in ambiguous spaces, as we negotiate professional and cultural boundaries. Leonardo (2004) calls such spaces the “interstices of possibility in institutions” (p. 16). I like that, and I like Wenger’s idea of “boundary encounters” (p. 112). I’m reflecting on these things, as I wait to welcome my colleagues, my research participants. Yes, we have been learning for the whole of the day, but there is something alluring about carving out a designated space to learn with colleagues and friends …

I’m thinking too about where the conversation will lead this time. It will be a smaller group than previously. I know that much. Will a small group develop the same energy and richness of dialogue we experienced in the first two sessions?…

Gradually, the room warms to the sound of relaxed conversation between teachers who know each other well. ‘Have you seen [title of film]? Oh, it’s just brilliant….’ ‘This weekend, John and I are looking forward to ….’ Casual chat makes way for quieter reflection, as one teacher after the other sits down to write…. Everyone knows they will

35 Bakhtin (1975) says that “Every cultural act lives essentially ‘on boundaries’ ” (from Bakhtin’s The problem of content, material and form in verbal creative art, cited in Morson and Emerson, 1990, p. 51).
36 This is what Wenger (1998) calls a planned “learning episode.”
be writing at the start of this session. At first, fingers pause beside keyboards (or paper). Faces stare ahead pensively.

Robin pads in only a few minutes later, having driven from his new school. Anticipating he would be late, he has already emailed his reflective piece. Seeing colleagues’ fingers bouncing over keys or pushing pens, he finds a space to sit down and begins to read some of the critical literature on the tables.

This session of professional learning has begun like some of the senior English classes I used to teach in this very classroom a mere six months earlier. In those classes, students too would sometimes arrive in dribs and drabs (some for good reasons, some not so); and as my colleague Prue Gill (2005) describes it, they would “bring their recess talk with them” (p. 153). Soon, however, those students, like my colleagues in The Literary Theory Inquiry Group, could be relied upon to settle into work on the project at hand. I didn’t need to ‘fire a gun’ to get the learning started.

* * * *

**Teacher narratives ‘capturing’ professional learning?**

As mentioned above, I had signalled to everyone in The Literary Theory Inquiry Group that our third session would begin with reflective writing about the ways in which their teaching with literary theory may have influenced their classroom practice. I had offered several ‘stems’ to help prompt or focus the teachers’ reflective writing (cf. Kamler 2001) for those who wanted this. I made it clear that these stems were not required or even recommended – just options, if desired. My intention was to open up potential for dialogue in the group – as Morson and Emerson (1990) put it, “provoking a specific answer that actualises the potential, albeit in a particular and incomplete way” (p. 55, my emphasis). I consciously resisted any tightly framed questions: I was not eliciting responses that would extract data to fit some pre-existent analytical categories. Perhaps some transferable generalisations about the influence of teaching with literary theory on

37 In the year before this session, I had still been teaching English in Eastern Girls’ College for two days a week. The other three days of the week, I lectured and led workshops The Faculty of Education, in The University of Melbourne. In December 2002, I resigned my part-time school teaching position to take up a full time lecturing position at Monash University.
students’ learning could be derived from these teachers’ written responses, but I wasn’t banking on it.

Jo (the teacher from Western Australia, joining the group for the first time) had begun her reflection (listed below) during the session, and she emailed the completed version to me later that night. As I said, Robin emailed his text prior to arriving at the session. And Jan emailed her completed reflection some days after the session. At this stage, I will not dwell any further on the background details of each teacher, or their biographies, partly because some of the teachers are careful themselves to situate their responses in particular places and times anyway, and partly because (again) I do not wish to frame too actively the dialogic potential that a reader may interpret within and between these teachers’ reflections. Initially, I list the excerpts below in a conventional linear format, with limited preamble. However, all three excerpts are also presented in a single figure (Figure 3.1) in the hope that some readers’ interpretations will more readily “actualise [or activate] the potential” of these texts when seeing them in close physical proximity on the page than they would if these same texts were only presented over several pages in a conventionally linear way.

Jo begins her reflection by constructing a self-deprecating narrative of herself as enthusiastic, but somewhat ‘green’ – an early-career teacher equipped with the gospel of critical literacy38 and keen to change the world, or at least to ‘convert’ her students:

!I recall being a teacher fresh from the Grad. Dip. Ed., starry-eyed and full of enthusiasm about providing my students with my new-found knowledge of critical literacy theory. ‘Evangelical’ may be an appropriate word to use here. I had a file full of resources that I was going to use in my approach with my Year 10 class, in a co-educational school in one of the lower socio-economic areas in Perth. The two units I was going to teach focussed on ‘race’ and ‘gender’.... I was confident, passionate and certain that I could enrich and empower these students.

38 I discuss, in Chapter 6, how definitions of literary theory are highly contested. The same is the case for critical literacy. Not surprisingly, many teachers such as Jo treat the two terms as virtually synonymous.
Well, it didn’t quite work out like that…. I was firstly (in the gender unit) accused of being sexist, and then in the race unit of being racist! .... With gender, the girls in the class tended to respond positively, the boys negatively. It was a mirror of what was happening in the larger culture, just on a smaller scale. I coped with my own version of the ‘backlash’ by making sure I prefaced most of my discussions with ‘of course, this does not represent my opinion’, and instead of placing myself at the forefront of classroom discussion, I provided instead more opportunity for students to work through the concepts with their peers. Gradually, changes began to occur. ...

There were, however, some students who never ‘came around’, if you like.... Perhaps we will have to accept that we are not necessarily on a quasi-religious mission to supply more ‘converts’ to critical literacy, and instead apply our critical gaze to our own agenda, and what we hope to achieve.... For what hope can we have of teaching our students to be self-reflexive, if we lack that capacity in ourselves?

Jo (email sent after Session 3- May 2003)

Robin begins his reflection in pseudo-confessional mode. He describes what he feels to be a lack of connection between his teaching in his new school (having moved from Eastern Girls’ College at the end of the previous year) and the previous conversations in The Inquiry Group sessions about teaching with literary theory.

I have to admit that I have not yet brought much of our discussion [in The Literary Theory Inquiry Group] to my teaching of texts this year at either year 11 or year 12. I was a little surprised when I thought about it that I hadn’t really contemplated integrating the ideas we discussed about text into my teaching. It is easy to nominate a number of possible reasons, but I think there are two major reasons. One is that I have been under pressure to prepare about 6 different texts to teach this year, all of which are new to
me, and I see now that I reverted to very traditional ways in which I have approached the preparation of a new text for teaching purposes. I was busy matching outcomes, assessment etc and targeting those to meet the timeline of the school agenda. But I think the more significant factor is my lack of confidence in the material and the feeling that I have not fully assimilated the ideas for myself and how it would then lead to alternative teaching strategies for the exploration of a text. 

One thing that excites me about literary theory\(^{39}\) is the way that it opens up new ways of reading texts, even those which we feel we ‘know’. I think too that it legitimises a plurality of responses rather than just an orthodox canonical response thereby giving students confidence in their own understanding and reading of a text. I think, too, that it ‘demystifies’ the view that texts can only be read in one way and that there is only one valid way of reading/understanding.

Robin (email sent prior to Session 3 – May 2003]

Jan, like Jo, sets her reflection in narrative form, but hers is written in the present tense. She describes particular classroom approaches she uses and reflects on what students value in these approaches. There is a sense that her experiences of teaching with literary theory and her learning of literary theory are emergent and ongoing.

\(^{39}\) The opening words in this paragraph were taken from one of the stems suggested by me. (See Appendix IX for a list of the writing tasks teachers could choose from, and the stems that I suggested as one option for their written reflection.)
**Jo’s reflection**

I recall being a teacher fresh from the Grad. Dip. Ed., starry-eyed and full of enthusiasm about providing my students with my newfound knowledge of critical literacy theory. ‘Evangelical’ may be an appropriate word to use here. I had a file full of resources that I was going to use in my approach with my Year 10 class, in a co-educational school in one of the lower socio-economic areas in Perth. The two programmes I was going to teach focussed on ‘race’ and ‘gender’. I was confident, passionate and certain that I could enrich and empower these students.

Well, it didn’t quite work out like that. … I was firstly (in the gender unit) accused of being sexist, and then in the race unit of being racist! … With gender, the girls in the class tended to respond positively, the boys negatively. It was a mirror of what was happening in the larger culture, just on a smaller scale. I coped with my own version of the ‘backlash’ by making sure I prefaced most of my discussions with ‘of course, this does not represent my opinion’, and instead of placing myself at the forefront of classroom discussion, provided instead more opportunity for students to work through the concepts with their peers. Gradually, changes began to occur…

There were, however, some students who never ‘came around’, if you like. … Perhaps we will have to accept that we are not necessarily on a quasi-religious mission to supply more ‘converts’ to critical literacy, and instead apply our critical gaze to our own agenda, and what we hope to achieve. … For what hope can we have of teaching our students to be self-reflexive, if we lack that capacity in ourselves?

**Robin’s reflection**

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*One thing that excites me about literary theory … is the way that it opens up new ways of reading texts, even those which we feel we ‘know’. I think too that it legitimises a plurality of responses rather than just an orthodox canonical response thereby giving students confidence in their own understanding and reading of a text. I think, too, that it ‘demystifies’ the view that texts can only be read in one way and that there is only one valid way of reading/understanding.*

Gradually, through constant questioning – what is your theory here about what’s happening, how do you justify it, does it need qualification, how do you deal with this alternative theory, what are the values underlying these theories – they begin to realise that they can propose ideas themselves about the text (rather than receiving them from others) and that those ideas actually represent values of their own. Making this conscious is a really liberating thing for them.

**Jan’s reflection**

[The students] begin to feel validated and empowered because of the way their view of the world is acknowledged. This does not happen quickly (on the whole), but over time. … In the beginning they are swamped by a feeling that this is hard, it is a bit mysterious, they’re not sure what they’re meant to be doing …. They feel they’re on unstable territory, as if I have some secret which I’m not quite revealing about what I want when I ask for a theory about what the author of the text might be ‘doing’ (consciously and unconsciously) in this moment in the text. I run through with them the terrain that has been covered since I studied English myself (and learned to recount in my own way the favoured view about the truth of the text). We talk about the world views we might bring to our readings, about the way the authors might ‘reveal’ their world views through the language of the text, about the fact that the text will be responded to in different ways – it is living, not static, readings might change over time and place, and it doesn’t matter if we come up with ideas that the author herself may not have entertained. As others have pointed out, all this is destabilising too, because they have to think about their own world view as just that! And they become frustrated by my response that there is no right answer to their questions (though there are plausible and implausible answers).

Gradually, through constant questioning – what is your theory here about what’s happening, how do you justify it, does it need qualification, how do you deal with this alternative theory, what are the values underlying these theories – they begin to realise that they can propose ideas themselves about the text (rather than receiving them from others) and that those ideas actually represent values of their own. Making this conscious is a really liberating thing for them.
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Gradually, through constant questioning – what is your theory here about what’s happening, how do you justify it, does it need qualification, how do you deal with this alternative theory, what are the values underlying these theories – they begin to realise that they can propose ideas themselves about the text (rather than receiving them from others) and that those ideas actually represent values of their own. Making this conscious is a really liberating thing for them.

Jan (email sent following Session 3: May 2003)
These three texts, written specifically for The Literary Theory Inquiry Group, describe some ways in which notions of literary theory influence these teachers’ professional learning lives and their classroom practices. Embedded in these descriptions are various levels of reflection. In one respect, the texts may be seen as stand-alone artefacts, written by individuals for individual reflection, along the line of Donald Schön’s (1983/1991) model of reflection-on-action. The writing of such an artefact may well be valuable in a teacher’s life, in that it prompts focused attention on so many practices that might otherwise be endlessly repeated as part of a teacher’s habitual pedagogy. And yet, as many writers have pointed out (eg. Collins 2004, Ellis 2006, Kemmis 2005), this sort of reflection-on-action has the potential to frame teaching (and professional learning) as merely an individualistic activity. Individual reflection, of that nature, may not necessarily prompt critical awareness about one’s practices and one’s professional knowledge. And it may not necessarily contribute to, or help generate, a professional dialogue with colleagues. The teachers’ texts I present here, however, reveal a number of ways in which individual reflection is crucially mediated by dialogic connections with/in different elements of their work. That is, the texts are dialogic texts; they effervesce with dialogic potential. Indeed, as I will go on to suggest, these texts gain (or are imbued with richer meaning) through a consideration of them as elements within an ongoing professional conversation, with themselves and with their colleagues. On multiple levels, the teachers are participating in and enacting a professional learning dialogue, at least part of which is focused in The Literary Theory Inquiry Group. And the texts both contribute to and reflect the collective learning of The Inquiry Group.

In invoking the discourses of dialogic professional learning, here, I am suggesting a framework for learning that is related to the traditional views of learning communities (eg. Du Four and Eaker 1998, Senge 2006; see also DE&T 2005, Hord 1997, National Staff Development Council 2006). As will become evident in my unpacking of the professional dialogue below, dialogic professional learning certainly values collaborative, creative and reflective dispositions in its participants. However, the dialogic discourse I will be using extends beyond “the sharing of teachers’ own experiences in [a group that operates] as a learning community” (Hoban 2002, p. 41; see also Clandinin and Connelly 1996, Cochran-Smith and Lytle 1993). I am suggesting a
richer sense of a learning community, one that emerges from critically examining the ways in which the learning is represented in and mediated by language. In such an examination, language can be seen as both unifying and destabilising the interrelationships between participants. Language both connects participants with other teachers and other discourses and problematises these relationships. In other words, I am suggesting a conception of community that is mediated by the dialogic potential of the language they use. As I will show, it is possible to see in these texts how the teachers are (to varying extents) enacting all four categories of dialogic potentiality that I will explain later in Part 2 of this chapter:

- **they notice** the dialogic potential of their own prior learning and the collective learning of The Literary Theory Inquiry Group;
- **they develop** the dialogic potential in their own learning with/in the group;
- **they speculate about** the dialogic potential in that learning for future practice and future learning; and
- **in the very act of writing, they activate** the dialogic potential of their learning with and from other members of The Literary Theory Inquiry Group.

Put simply, each text articulates and promotes present and future dialogic learning. Notwithstanding the appearance that these teachers are ‘merely’ reflecting as individuals on their own practice, it can be seen that there are points of connection and dialogic tensions within and between these texts. I will come back, later in Part 2, to identify and critically reflect on some of these connections and tensions, which I will frame as dialogic potentialities. From there, I will propose that identification and reflection like this can be a meaningful and feasible tool for evaluating these teachers’ professional learning. I will propose that this evaluation can be especially meaningful, if and when teachers, schools and/or regulatory bodies value a dialogic conception of language, and a dialogic epistemology of teachers’ knowledge and professional learning. I will do this by considering these texts with respect to the accountability
requirements for teachers’ professional learning in these teachers’ home state of Victoria.\textsuperscript{40}

However, before this, I will sketch out some of the landscape of evaluation and accountability regimes for teachers’ professional learning throughout the world. As part of this sketch, I will point to the growing influence of neo-liberalism and managerialist cultures in Western countries, and how this growing influence has been driven by sections of the popular media, policy-makers and politicians calling for simple formulas in the evaluation of learning in students and their teachers. And, as I will show, such simple formulas are premised on epistemological assumptions about language and knowledge that are in sharp contrast to the dialogic epistemologies I have been outlining so far.

\* \* \* \*

\textsuperscript{40} In Australia, education has traditionally been under the governance of separate states, although the Federal Government has retained some influence on professional practice through federally funded research and grants, usually attached to professional development projects. Since the turn of the century, each state has introduced a professional regulatory body – eg. The Victorian Institute of Teaching (VIT), The New South Wales Institute of Teaching (NSWIT), The Western Australian College of Teaching (WACOT) – with the dual purpose of regulating accreditation, registration and professional standards and being an advocate for the professional in various public forums.
PART TWO: ACCOUNTING FOR TEACHERS’ KNOWING

Teaching as ‘performance’?

There is little doubt that institutional teaching and learning cultures in Western countries are becoming increasingly preoccupied with evaluation and accountability of teachers’ “performance” (Boreham 2004). This performance tends to be expressed in managerial discourses such as the “quality” or “effectiveness” of classroom teachers (see Slee and Weiner 1998a; see also Mahony and Hextal 2000), and the “effectiveness” or “value-addedness” of their professional learning (see Doecke et al. 2004, Harvey 2005, Kupermintz 2003). While newly articulated teaching standards have the potential to be used as a focus for teachers’ learning and self-evaluation (Doecke 2006, Doecke and Gill 2000, Petrosky 1998), they are being widely used as punitive checklists to compel teachers to teach and learn more ‘effectively’ (Delandshere and Petrosky 2004, Doecke 2006).

This managerial framing of teaching and learning extends to schools and teachers being required to prove efficient use of their time in and out of the classroom (cf. Kress et al. 2005) and to demonstrate measurable improvements in students’ “performance” (eg. DE&T 2004). It is fair to say that such requirements are now commonplace and unavoidable in most school settings. Thus, in addition to preparing for, and engaging in, teaching and learning with students in classrooms, and engaging in professional learning outside of classrooms, the fundamental work of teachers now involves constructing professional artefacts intended to show what they “know and can do” (Kleinhenz and Ingvarson 2004). These artefacts are required to capture and demonstrate aspects of teachers’ multifaceted work and learning life, in order to satisfy increasingly detailed accountability demands (Gale and Densmore 2003).

The accountability imperative is expressed in similar ways across much of the Western world. In Victoria, for instance, in order to achieve full accreditation as a professional teacher, a graduate teacher is required to submit a detailed portfolio in the first two years of his/her career, which should demonstrate his/her competence, skill and knowledge (VIT 2004). And all experienced teachers in Victoria are soon to be required
to renew their registration every five years. In order to renew their registration, they will be required to generate artefacts that demonstrate, amongst other things, the “quantity, scope and quality of professional development activities” they have been engaged in over those five years (VIT 2006, p. 6).

What I have observed locally in Victoria, Australia, is repeated in many northern hemisphere contexts. In North America, regulatory practices differ across different states, from the somewhat benign model of registration requirements of the National Board of Professional Teachers’ (NBPTS 2006) where the emphasis is on the voluntary aspect of the certification process, to the highly prescriptive mandates outlined in texts such as *Better teachers, better schools* (Thomas Fordham Foundation 1999). However, in all cases teachers have little option than to submit a detailed professional portfolio in order to obtain and maintain their professional certification (Delandshere and Petrosky 2004). Writing in England, Ellis (2006) describes the “professionalisation agenda” in his country (see also Goodson 2003, Zeichner 2003) where, for instance, beginning teachers’ subject knowledge is closely “audited.” Reflective professional portfolios are part of this “auditing culture” (cf. Avis 2003). Common to the portfolio artefacts generated in all these contexts is a requirement for the teacher (almost always the individual teacher) to ‘capture’ or represent his/her (individual) performance – i.e. to prove (individual) competence against generic standards imposed from some distanced administrative body (see Doecke 2006, Elmore 2000). I will leave aside, for the moment, any direct comment on the politics of these portfolios satisfying externally mandated requirements, and the sense in which the ‘capturing’ of individual experience and knowledge (as opposed to representing socially situated knowing) must take place within the terms dictated by others (Morely and Rassool 2000). For the moment, I want to investigate the epistemological status of some of The Literary Theory Inquiry Group teachers’ written reflective texts.

**Teachers’ writing: ‘congealing’ professional knowledge?**

Wenger (1998) refers to any attempt to capture or represent performance or experience or knowing as an act of “reification” – he calls it “congealing” in fixed form what might

41 Alfie Kohn claims that these portfolios also serve as valuable evidence when individual teachers want to prove their worthiness to be paid more than their colleagues (Kohn 2003).
otherwise be considered an elusive admixture of social, multidimensional experiences, practices and knowledge (p. 59)\textsuperscript{42} – and he considers it a pervasive part of Western cultural practices. It is certainly not the preserve of educational institutions, alone.

Reification occupies much of our collective energy: from entries in a journal to historical records, from poems to encyclopedias, from names to classification systems, from dolmens to space probes, … from single concepts to entire theories, from the evening news to national archives, from lesson plans to the compilation of textbooks, … from tortuous political speeches to the yellow pages. In all these cases, aspects of human experience and practice are congealed into fixed forms and given the status of object. (Wenger 1998, p. 59.)

In some respects, the written reflections by Jo, Robin and Jan (shown above) can be considered as reifications. They may be interpreted as the teachers attempting to capture their experiences, practices and knowledge of teaching with literary theory. I will talk later about the ways in which this ‘capturing’ is mediated, and so problematised. However, for now it is helpful just to identify the different ways in which they are attempting to ‘congeal’ into a fixed ‘reified’ form some aspects of their experiences, their practices and their knowledge.

In each case here, Jo, Robin and Jan communicate in ways that remind me of Britton’s (1986) notion of \textit{expressive language}. Britton had researched the language used by teachers in a wide range of professional learning settings in the 1960s. He was particularly interested, in his research, in any professional conversation (written or spoken) that he saw as “exploratory” and “expressive throughout”:

in the sense that it [was] relaxed, self-presenting, self-revealing, addressed to a few intimate companions; in the sense that it move[d] easily from general comment to narration of particular experiences and back again (Britton 1986, p. 105)

\textsuperscript{42}Morson and Emerson (1990, pp. 290-1) point out, and this is significant for this study, that Bakhtin also uses the term ‘congealed’ when talking about the sense of genre as the residue of past behaviours. Bakhtin (1986) refers to received genres as “congealed events.” The form of such congealed events, he explains, is “stereotyped, congealed old content … [that] serves as a necessary bridge to new, still unknown content [because it is] … a familiar and generally understood congealed old world view” (p. 165). (See M. Bakhtin (1986) \textit{Toward a methodology for the human sciences}, pp. 159-172.)
I have found Britton’s notion of expressive language to be a helpful perspective in this study for inquiring into the details and nuances of professional conversations as recorded in transcripts of those conversations. Especially helpful is the way he focuses attention upon the importance of language in professional learning, rather than just looking at the processes, structures or outcomes of that learning. In this respect, his work stands at the centre of a tradition of research that can be deemed dialogic, although the word is not always used in association with particular authors. This is a tradition that values open-ended, exploratory talk in professional learning, a tradition that continues to impact upon powerful professional learning practices to this day. It can be said to begin with Dewey (1916/1961a) almost one hundred years ago, and to extend to Barnes (1992),43 McEwan (1997), Applebee (1996), and more recently Doecke et al. (2000), Clark (2001), Florio-Ruane (2001), and the Australian Association for the Teaching of English (AATE) and the Australian Literacy Educators’ Association (ALEA) (2002a).

The language of the brief reflective pieces written by Jo, Robin and Jan, is in many ways exploratory and expressive. There seems to be an honesty and openness in all three writers’ language that bespeaks a comfort and confidence in their interactions with professional colleagues and with me as researcher. Each writer moves easily from offering general comments or observations about her/his experience, practice and knowing to making reference to specific aspects of her/his particular experience, practice and knowing. (Actually, the movement in these teachers’ writing tends to be from the specific and situated to the general, but the principle remains consistent with Britton’s model of “expressive language.”) Of course, trying to judge honesty and openness in language is a fraught activity; it is problematic, too, for Britton to use discourse of “self-presenting” and “self-revealing.” There is a danger in Britton’s earlier conceptions of expressive language of suggesting that the truth of one’s self is something that can be revealed unproblematically through language. I want to argue that this is some distance from a richly dialogic conception of language. A dialogic conception argues that any purported truth of a self is elusive and unfinalizable. To the extent that I see some truth or some valuable knowledge about teaching emerging in

43 In this list I see Barnes’s contribution as signalling a significant move beyond the work of Britton. For instance, he distinguishes between exploratory talk and the finished talk of presentations and speeches with respect to classroom activities. In a broader sense, for Barnes (1992), “Language is not simply the means of communicating the content of the curriculum but the major means by which children in our schools formulate knowledge and relate it to their own purposes and view of the world” (p. 19).
these teachers’ reflective texts, I will argue for this truth and this knowledge in provisional or dialogic terms. I see such truth or knowledge as generated through and mediated by complex sociocultural processes and the dialogic nature of language itself. As Bakhtin (1984) says in Problems of Dostoevsky’s poetics, such a truth (or knowledge), “born [as it is] between people collectively searching for truth, in the process of dialogic interaction” (Bakhtin 1984, p. 110), is inevitably provisional and open to further dialogic contestation.

**Dialogic potential in teachers’ writing**

In order to explore and explain the provisional nature of teachers’ dialogic language, and therefore the provisional nature of their congealing of experience, I want first to examine how each teacher-writer appears to ‘pin down’ or finalize his/her experiences, practices and knowledge, by analysing explicit and specific details of these written reflections. I begin with a perhaps commonplace observation that, in these written reflective texts as in all written artefacts, there is a sense in which any explicit and specific details can only go so far. As Wenger (1998) says, “When it comes to meaningful knowing in the context of any enterprise, the explicit must always stop somewhere” (p. 69). That is, no matter how comprehensive or detailed the attempt to represent or fix one’s experience, practices and knowledge, it will always be incomplete, partial, problematic – more of a contribution to an ongoing dialogue than some sort of objective or authoritative individualistic statement that captures reality.

Wenger’s notion of communication “stopping somewhere” – cf. also Wells’s (1999) view that “no utterance is final” (p. 105) – suggests a temporal dimension. That is, there is always more that could be said later, when the text (on the page or spoken) stops, literally. Bakhtin would argue slightly differently, I think. He might say that the very incompleteness of the specific or ‘explicit’ in any artefact is explained more by the fundamental nature of language as “unfinalizable” (cf. Morson and Emerson, pp. 36-40). He would perhaps concede that attempts to provisionally fix or finalize an aspect of experience, practice or knowledge can help to focus dialogic energies and potential, and hence can promote creative and “surprising” (or innovative) developments. Morson and Emerson (1990) explain this as constructing a “nonmonologic unity,” in which real change (or “surprisingness”) is an “essential component of the creative process” (p. 2).
Elsewhere, Morson (1986) argues that “one needs a certain level of dialogic activity” in order to provide the optimum creative conditions for “something new and original to emerge” (p. 84).

However, any attempt to represent experience, practice or knowing in a single utterance is necessarily incomplete. It is ‘unfinalizable’ in that the words of an utterance (within and beyond the physical words on the page) continue to speak to the past (to a previous addressee/s, to words previously spoken or written by the previous addressee/s), and to the future (to the addressee/s for whom the words were intended or oriented, and equally to unexpected addressees who may read or hear these words); and past, present and future words continue to speak back to them influencing their sense and meaning. I will provide a theoretical rationale, by way of summary at the end of this chapter, for the dialogic epistemology of all language, in terms outlined by the likes of Voloshinov (1986), Bakhtin (1981, 1984) and Vygotsky (1978), and more recently Wells (1999), Florio-Ruane (2001) and Kooy (2006). In the meantime, I outline below a range of categories to distinguish the diverse dialogic activity at work, between and within these teachers’ reflective texts.

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**Categories of dialogic potential**

- *Words and ideas intentionally oriented forward* ...
  - to one’s own words and/or ideas to be uttered in future (ie. as in a rehearsal)
  - to a particular anticipated addressee
  - to an unknown or unexpected addressee

- *Words and ideas intentionally oriented backward* ...
  - to one’s own words and ideas uttered in the past
  - to words heard or read by others in the past

- *Words and ideas connecting* ...
  - directly to specific, focused ideas and words
  - indirectly to dispersed, decentralised ideas and words

- *Words and ideas unintentionally (but still dialogically) connecting with* ...
  - known addressee/s
  - unknown addressee/s

- *Words and ideas left unstated between interlocutors* (since they are already shared in dialogic relations coexisting between the interlocutors and/or members of a community)

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Figure 3.2: A summary of the categories of dialogic potential – from Bakhtin (1981) – as seen in the reflective texts written by Jo, Robin and Jan.
Dialogic potential: from categories to critical frameworks

Having provisionally delineated these categories of dialogic potential, my inquiry into the teachers’ texts will proceed in two ways:

(1) focusing on utterances (units of speech) across different texts
I will investigate the multiple ways in which any one teacher’s utterances contribute to and derive meaning from their dialogical relationship with the words/utterances in other teachers’ texts or conversations; and
(2) focusing on smaller units of language – such as a particular word/phrase – and focusing on one text at a time
My approach here will be to consider how particular words/phrases contribute to, or derive meaning from, their dialogic relationship with similar words/phrases within the same text.

These two approaches still fail to address the multiplicity of other voices or actors that are involved in contributing to and deriving meaning (Engeström, Miettinen, and Punamäki 1999b). However, they do provide a starting point from which to build a more complex analytical and conceptual framework. This framework is constructed from four interpretive actions: noticing, developing, speculating about and activating dialogic potential:
• **Noticing dialogic potential**
  This refers to the action of identifying or acknowledging a connection between ideas or similar language that is more obvious or explicit (cf. Mason 2002; see also Moss, Dixon, English et al. 2004).

• **Developing dialogic potential**
  This refers to the action of making explicit or more obvious a connection between ideas or language that is implicit or less obvious.

• **Speculating about dialogic potential**
  This refers to the action of predicting or imagining a connection existing between ideas or language in a text or speech event that is likely to take place (or is likely to have taken place) but this connection is not explicitly identified.

• **Activating dialogic potential**
  This refers to the action of applying a dialogic connection or potentiality (ie. usually one that has been noticed or generated) in a different or new context or exploring the implications that such potential has within a familiar context (cf.. Morson and Emerson 1990).

**Figure 3.3: Summary of four interpretive actions used with respect to dialogic potential**

Before I begin operationalising these categories and frameworks with respect to The Inquiry Group teachers’ reflective texts, I want to sketch out one other epistemological dimension that I will use. This involves Wenger’s (1998) discourses of reification and participation. As well as shuttling between general comment and specific/explicit detail, Jo, Robin and Jan shift back and forwards in their reflective texts between a discourse of reification and a discourse of participation. As outlined earlier, a discourse of reification is characterised by a sense of language being contained, fixed, and ‘congealed.’ A discourse of participation, in contrast, is characterised by a process of ongoing “negotiation of meaning” (Wenger 1998, p. 62). By necessity, it involves interacting with and sharing the space and the materials/words of negotiation, and this is characteristic of communication in communities of practice (Lave and Wenger 1991, 1999, Wenger 1998).
I should point out that the discourse embedded in my invitation for these teachers to write was encouraging the teachers to consider literary theory in terms of a decentred, participatory discourse. I had asked teachers about how their “interest in literary theory” was influencing their students’ learning and their teaching. I did not discuss this with them at the time, but the implication was that theirs was an interest in literary theory shared with the rest of us in The Literary Theory Inquiry Group, at least. To that extent their learning and knowing was already richly participatory. There was already a sense in which I was framing their learning of literary theory in a discourse of participation.

**Dialogic connections between teachers’ texts (and professional lives)**

Jo begins her reflection with specific contextual details of her school setting in Perth, Western Australia. She goes on to report on her students’ responses (the “backlash”) to her first efforts to teach with critical literacy discourses, and she outlines a change in her pedagogy over time (“instead of placing myself at the forefront of class discussion….”). It is possible to *speculate about* certain dialogic connections between the ideas and language in Jo’s text here, and the presentation she gave in The Inquiry Group session. I cannot tell what parts of Jo’s reflection were written before or after the presentation she gave in this Inquiry Group session because she sent her text to me several hours after the session.

If most of her reflective text was written at the start of the session, then there is a sense in which the ideas and language in her text here were oriented toward a particular sense of her audience (addressees), and in that respect the written words and ideas were oriented to the ideas and language she was planning to communicate to us later in that session (in a form of inner dialogue – cf. Wertsch 1980). If, on the other hand, most of the piece was written (or re-written) after the session, then it is possible that her ideas and language were oriented back to what she had been speaking about in her presentation during that session (still in a form of inner dialogue). Or if, as is very likely, the final emailed text was a combination of writing done before the session, some further material added later and also some considerable re-working of the existing text after the session, then the language and ideas would be dialogically oriented both forward and backward in time, anticipating the responses of Jo’s audience and thinking
back retrospectively to their actual responses (in an even more complex notion of inner
dialogue).

Jo concludes by expressing some tentative enthusiasm for teaching with literary theory,
but mediates this position by arguing for the emphasis to be on building self-reflexive
capacity (teachers’ and students’), rather than on making student “converts.” Although
Jo was not present for the previous Inquiry Group sessions, and therefore could not have
intended a direct connection to their conversation, it is possible (for me as an interpreter
of her words) to speculate about a dialogic connection between Jo’s words here and a
similar discussion in the first Inquiry Group session (see Appendix X). In that earlier
session, Jan had explained how she connected her own teaching with literary theory
with the developing of her reflexive awareness of practice. (I might infer from this that
she had noticed or developed a sense of the dialogic potential in the connection between
her developing knowledge of literary theory and an increased focus on reflexivity in her
professional practice.) That is, whether intended or not, Jo’s ideas and her language
make powerful and dynamic dialogic connections with the ideas, language and
discussion in a prior Inquiry Group session. The full dialogic potential of these
connections – ie. affirming or challenging existing ideas, and thereby encouraging the
emergence of new or alternative ideas, and in turn stimulating new dialogic energy
and/or a desire to pursue the ideas further – is realised for me as researcher and writer as
I activate such connections in terms of recommendations for professional learning
practices or policy in this thesis artefact.

It is also possible to further activate dialogic potential by exploring the implications of
certain implied connections in Jo’s text. For instance, she writes about critical literacy
practices that are implicitly connected to other teachers’ practices. I interpret this as
implying her sense of dialogic connection with a ‘unitary’ discourse (ie. critical
literacy), a discourse (or set of discourses) that dialogically connects Jo with other
critical literacy teachers (see Bakhtin 1981a, pp. 270-1). In this instance I may even
speculate about the dialogic potential of discourses that unite, in a form of professional
community, those who teach (with) critical literacy in eastern Australia, Western
Australia, New Zealand, North America or the UK, to mention some places referred to
in this project and thereby seeming to validate such discourses.\textsuperscript{44} Misson and Morgan (2005, 2006) wonder about this sense of community amongst critical literacy teachers. Their discussion, too, can be seen as an example of speculating about dialogic potential, in making explicit the ways in which such connections are tenuous and problematic. It is important to note that dialogic potential does not necessarily signify agreement or consensus (Morson 2004, p. 321; see also Wenger 1998, p. 77).

In analysing Robin’s reflection, I want to begin by stepping back from some of the detail of his discussion of literary theory, in order to notice and develop (and to some extent activate) dialogic potential in the text. As in Jo’s text, Robin devotes early space to explaining specific, situating details. In his case he offers “possible reasons” for what he sees as his “reverting to very traditional ways” of teaching text in his new school in Melbourne. When Robin devotes time to specific situating details at the outset, he (like Jo) is not complying with a professional requirement (or a request from me), although he may well be reflecting some cultural norms in The Inquiry Group conversations, where context was always considered to be crucial in discussing teaching and learning. Nevertheless, Robin is signalling that he values this sort of contextual detail in an account of his professional experiences and knowing.

In juxtaposing the two reflective pieces of Jo and Robin, and drawing attention to similar elements of their ideas and language, as an interpreter of these texts I am noticing and developing (ie. making more explicit) what I see as the dialogical potential implicit in the two texts. Again like Jo, Robin moves (à la Britton) from specific to more general comments about some characteristics of his textual practice with literary theory. (Immediately after this excerpt, he outlines his continuing concerns about some of the language associated with literary theory.) In this approach, again, he is seen to be connecting with his new colleague in The Inquiry Group, Jo, although the two of them are now at different schools. They clearly share some beliefs (and practices) vis-à-vis the value of contextualising their representations of experience, practice or knowing.

\textsuperscript{44} See Misson and Morgan (2005, 2006), for a discussion of the ways in which it is possible to contest the sense of community amongst critical literacy teachers.
In Jan’s reflection, unlike Jo’s and Robin’s, she begins talking about her teaching in Eastern Girls’ College in Melbourne, assuming (quite rightly) that it is a familiar context to all in the group. The contextual details of her story, whilst not explicitly stated, are already shared with colleagues who teach (or have taught) at the college. In a sense, they do not need to be explicitly stated since they constitute part of an existing, if unspoken, dialogue and network of dialogic connections with other members of the group. Vygotsky (1962b) refers to this as “predication,” and cites a conversation between Kitty and Levin in War and Peace, where most words are left unspoken because the interlocutors know so much of what each other is thinking (Vygostsky, 196b2, pp. 139-141; see also Emerson 1986).

Jan moves on to make some generalisable claims about the potential of teaching with literary theory, and like Jo and Robin, this is not a romanticised good news story about the process of students learning with literary theory. In making her general comments, Jan’s experiences connect directly with those of Jo (eg. the “gradual” process of learning, the potentially empowering effect) and with Robin (the way literary theory “validates” or “legitimises” multiple readings of texts). In telling her ‘story’ of teaching with literary theory, Jan also refers to the “destabilising” effect for students of learning with literary theory (“As others have pointed out …”). In this, Jan is developing dialogic potential by making a direct dialogic connection with a range of ideas that emerged explicitly in the previous Inquiry Group session. In that session, Robin had raised the issue of “turbulence” of adolescent life. He was concerned about the effect of teachers introducing further uncertainties into students’ lives – in the form of some literary theory practices, such as deconstructionism – and how this may be undermining these students’ capacities to deal with the turbulence of adolescence in their personal and social lives. (See Figure 6.7.) In developing this dialogic potential, in making this dialogic connection, Jan is not totally agreeing with the level of concern expressed by Robin, nor is she contradicting it. Here, the dialogic connection is a more decentred interaction with the range of ideas and positions explored in that previous conversation rather than a simple aligning with a similar idea or position.

45 With intertextual connections such as these, I see my writing here as both speculating about and activating the dialogic potential of Jan’s text.
I want to suggest that these discourses of noticing, developing, speculating about and activating dialogic potential provide a meaningful framework for thinking about how English-literature teachers are dialogically connecting with, or might dialogically connect with, ideas and language in their work. Having considered a range of approaches to explicit and implicit dialogic potential in relation to these texts, I want now to inquire into the inner dialogue implicit in these texts. This is an attempt to concentrate the inquiry somewhat in a sharper analysis of the dialogicality of language.

In order to refine this analysis even further, I will concentrate on the language with which and through which Jo and then Robin talk about a particular aspect of their learning, the construct of ‘literary theory.’ I will examine this through Wenger’s (1998) frames of reified and/or participatory discourses.

**Dialogic connections within teachers’ texts**

As I will illustrate in Chapter 6, literary theory is a highly contested term in schools and in the academy. After years of debate, academic books are still being published which re-visit, and to some extent re-ignite, past debates about the value or danger or even relevance of literary theory. The debate is often lively, with alternative positions raised and contested on all sides. However, sometimes the debate appears more adversarial – in terms of participants attacking each other – but less dialogic, with one participant (or group) seeming to be unwilling or unable to engage dialogically with others’ ideas and language. Often, this is because of a lack of consensus over what is the field for the dialogue. Questions such as ‘What is a text?’, ‘What is literature?’, and ‘What is theory?’ are as likely to provoke bitter exchanges as the question of ‘What is literary theory?’

Conventionally, in a research text of this scope dealing with teachers’ professional learning of literary theory, one would have expected to read by now a provisional answer, at least, to this latter question, ‘What is literary theory?’ I prefer to delay my provisional answer, and to leave the question open – as it were, bubbling away throughout the research dialogue – until the latter parts of the thesis. In doing so, I seek

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to affirm the deeply contested and dialogic nature of literary theory – rather than suggest a premature sense of closure that is belied by common practice in schools and universities – and to focus instead on the dialogic processes at work when teachers and academics are negotiating their own understanding and interpretations of the term.

In the questionnaire of literature teachers in Victoria, and in the extended follow-up interviews, I avoided asking the direct question, ‘So what do you think literary theory is?’ Nevertheless, there were ample opportunities for respondents to the questionnaires and participants in the interviews to talk about literary theory. And they did so in very different ways. Jo, Robin and Jan share many beliefs and understandings about teaching with literary theory, and there are significant tensions in the way they themselves frame this idea.

Jo’s narrative about her experiences teaching with critical literacy opens with a reified sense of her knowledge of what she calls “critical literacy theory,” whereas at the conclusion of her narrative she seems to be talking about a less reified, more decentred sort of knowledge. What is presented at the start of her text as a tightly framed body of knowledge becomes, by the end, more like emergent knowing, and it is expressed in and through participatory language. At the beginning, critical literacy is something tangible, something congealed, something with a core: it is reified as a “file full of resources” that Jo is poised to “use,” and something which she anticipates “providing [her] students.” The lack of a preposition in this phrase makes the epistemological status of critical literacy ambiguous: it is either (a) knowledge as objectified tool that can be lent to students for them to use and thus to help them acquire their own knowledge, or (b) knowledge as object that can be given or transmitted to her students, or (c) both a and b. By the end of Jo’s text, however, critical literacy seems more like knowing than knowledge. It is “processual” rather than objective, as Bakhtin would say (cf. Morson and Emerson 1990, p. 50).

It is a significant moment in the text when Jo begins to speak about her approach to avoiding her students’ “backlash” by removing herself from the centre of “classroom

47 In the present context, I choose to treat the terms ‘literary theory’ and ‘critical literacy’ as interchangeable, mainly because Jo assumes this to be the case. Misson (1994) points out that this is a widespread view among teachers and academics (p. 1).
discussion” (an ongoing generic form of the noun, rather than a description of a specific discussion). Teaching critical literacy becomes a process of her students “work[ing] through concepts” with Jo scaffolding this process. At this moment, the language with which Jo describes her knowledge of critical literacy loses its sense of a central ‘core’ of congealed meaning (cf Bakhtin 1981a, pp. 270-1). Her final perspective on critical literacy is one where whatever knowing she is speaking about is decentred to such a degree that it is not even clear whether she is still referring to any bounded sense of critical literacy. The change of focus is significant. She moves quite quickly from a confident iteration of a clear, reified, congealed sense of knowledge, to an elusive, slippery, decentred notion of knowing. It is dialogically connected to different notions of critical literacy, and it is difficult to pin down. Nevertheless, the “sense” of it – ie. the multiple connections with different or competing ideas (Vygotsky 1962b; see also Part 3 of this chapter) – is still powerful and clear in her text. One might say “the sense” is elusive and recursive: it exists as both a dialogic discourse (a lively, fecund medium, one might say) and as an ongoing dialogic stimulus (a tool or catalyst) for learning in a reflexive way, and for learning about reflexivity, as she claims.

This change from reified to participatory discourse is reversed in Robin’s text. Many of Robin’s references to literary theory in the latter part of his text tend more towards discourses of reification. The pronoun “it” is repeatedly used in the second paragraph to stand for literary theory, the very conciseness of the little word suggesting a neatly packaged construct of ‘literary theory,’ one that is contained and containable. He writes that literary theory “opens up new ways of reading…,” “it legitimises a plurality of responses,” and “it demystifies the view that texts can only be read in one way.” This communicates a sense of the knowledge of literary theory being more bounded, congealed, and fixed (despite its potential to offer “plurality” in interpretations of texts). This notion is in tension with the participatory sense of literary theory represented in Robin’s first sentences. Early on, he describes literary theory as inhering in some social dynamic with a sense of collective meaning: in this part of Robin’s text, literary theory exists as a “conversation” and “the ideas we discussed.” This is a rich metaphor of participation, in that the dynamic of social activity is privileged over any particular objectified knowledge which may have been at the centre of The Inquiry Group’s social activity. Even the way Robin speaks about his “lack of confidence in the material” and
“the feeling that [he has] not fully assimilated the ideas,” communicates a sense that “the material” is decentred and elusive, and that the process of “assimilating the ideas” is as much a social, dialogic one as an individualistic cognitive one. Indeed, it is Bakhtin (1981a) who writes of learning in terms of “assimilat[ing] others’ discourses,” and he associates this with an intrinsically social process of ‘becoming’ rather than a cognitivist notion of absorbing knowledge. In such a social process, the discourse which is being assimilated “performs … no longer as information, direction, rules, models and so forth” (p. 342).

Ultimately, Robin’s and Jo’s shifting between reificatory and participatory discourses illustrates Wenger’s view that a “tight interweaving of reification and participation … makes conversations … a powerful form of communication” (cf. Wenger 1998, p. 4). It also signals a sense that this interweaving, or what I will call dialogic interrelating, is a powerful stimulus to learning and a powerful set of discourses for knowing about teaching with literary theory.

Some methodological implications

My discussion in Part 2 has shown, firstly, some ways in which the discourse of dialogic potential is meaningful in teachers’ professional learning, and how the interpretive actions of noticing, developing, and speculating about can help to activate this potential. Secondly, I have begun to explore the ways in which participatory, social discourses can encourage inclusive and democratic learning for teachers and their students. (I see this connecting to the work of a number of writers whose work I will refer to throughout the thesis: especially Wenger 1998, Wells 1999, AATE and ALEA 2002a, Cochran-Smith and Lytle 2001, Florio-Ruane 2001, Kooy 2006.) Thirdly, and notwithstanding the value of participatory discourses, the foregoing discussion suggests that much professional learning involves a constant interweaving and interrelating between reificatory and participatory discourses of knowledge and knowing. Through my discourse analysis, I have tried to show how conscious use of these discourses can help to focus professional learning and generate further dialogue and knowing. And I have tried to show that explicit use of these discourses can illustrates how teacher knowledge (especially, but not only, knowledge of literary theory) can be understood to
be social, unstable and unfinalizable because it is mediated by the dialogic nature of language, which is itself social, unstable and unfinalizable.

Finally, it is worth drawing attention to the fact that in Parts 1 and 2 of this chapter I have sought to enact the very discourses and strategies I am advocating. I am arguing for, and offering up for critical scrutiny, some categories, discourses and frameworks for presenting and evaluating teachers’ dialogic professional learning. I am suggesting that these categories, discourses and frameworks may be valuable for researchers and/or teachers who are themselves engaged in accounting for their professional learning activities, whether this accounting is mandated by some regulatory authority or whether it is entered into on a voluntary basis.

48 I am using Bourdieu’s discourse here. Wacquant (1992) summarises Bourdieu’s notion of strategy as “not the purposive and pre-planned pursuit of calculated goals … but … the active deployment of objectively oriented ‘lines of action’ that obey regularities and form coherent and socially intelligible patterns, even though they do not follow conscious rules or aim at premeditated goals posited by a strategist” (p. 25).
PART THREE: TOWARD A DIALOGIC RESEARCH ENTERPRISE

Introduction: dialogic relationships in research

In Part 2, through focused inquiry into Jo’s, Robin’s and Jan’s written texts, I have shown how it is possible to evaluate short reflective texts written by teachers, generated in open inquiry-based contexts. These texts can be seen as rich and “multi-levelled speech acts” (Emerson 1986, p. 24), accounts of teacher knowing that draw attention to multiple voices that contribute to each teacher’s sense of his/her work. By teasing out various categories, discourses and frameworks of their dialogic potential, I have outlined how their knowing is conceptually underpinned and animated by the logic and spirit of dialogism. In Chapter 4, I will argue that it is more difficult to generate and activate the dialogic dimensions of teachers’ learning if this learning has to comply with rigidly framed discourses, such as in centrally mandated tasks, designed to account for individual competence. On these three levels – the rigid framing, the centralised mandating, and the transformation of teacher knowing to individual competence – the likelihood of dialogic potential emerging is problematic. But before I move into this bleaker perspective, I want now to focus on the positive dialogic potential of using dialogic inquiry-based approaches in the research enterprise as a whole.

Clearly, the dialogic potential in teachers’ reflective texts, and the professional learning that this promises, exists on multiple levels. It is more than a dialogue in a linear sense, more than a mere series of point and counterpoint gestures, statements and rejoinders, “in a dialogue laid out compositionally in the text” (Bakhtin 1984, p. 40). In setting out some philosophical ideas underpinning dialogism, Bakhtin (1984) has argued:

Dialogic relationships are a much broader phenomenon than mere rejoinders in a dialogue . . .; they are an almost universal phenomenon, permeating all human speech and all relationships and manifestations of human life. (p. 40)
Bakhtin’s notion of dialogic relationships is fundamental to the research design and to the epistemological foundations of this study,\textsuperscript{49} so I will take some time here to explain the way they play out in this PhD thesis.

**Polyphony, counterpoint and the dialogic author**

To do this, I want to shift the focus away from analysing texts written by teachers in The Literary Theory Inquiry Group, and to concentrate instead on some professional dialogic writing I engaged in with an early-career teacher, Natalie Bellis. It was for a chapter in a book and its focus was professional learning and autobiographical writing (See Parr and Bellis 2005). The chapter was titled *Autobiographical inquiry in pre-service and early-career teacher learning: the dialogic possibilities*. Like this thesis, the book chapter was interwoven with reflexive texts not unlike the teachers’ texts I have just analysed in Part 2. Characteristic of all my dialogic writing, the book chapter both drew on and informed the writing that was progressing in my thesis at that time. One purpose in bringing these two texts together here is to illustrate the dialogic intertextuality that is characteristic of the dialogic writing in this thesis. Another purpose is to show how my own professional writing and learning, like that of the teacher participants in the study (as shown above), is continuously underpinned by dialogic relationships with related people, texts and ideas. Through the work on that book chapter, I came to appreciate the way dialogic relationships can be more readily noticed when “juxtaposed contrapuntally” (Bakhtin 1984, p. 40) in the writing process. I also began to understand how the contrapuntal juxtaposition of these relationships could help to develop further dialogic relationships that may not have been initially apparent (to a writer, a teacher and/or a reader).

In the co-authored book chapter, Natalie and I identified some parts of the text as my voice, some parts as Natalie’s, and other parts were dialogically interrelated such that a demarcation of one person’s voice from another’s would have been disingenuous. As we acknowledged toward the end of that chapter,

\textsuperscript{49} Bakhtin’s (1984) observations about dialogue, referred to here, were originally embedded within an analysis of what he saw as the dialogic relationships permeating Dostoevky’s polyphonic novel. Nevertheless, the relevance of his notion of dialogic relationships to this study is profound.
Even the sense of [our] individual voices … as discrete entities should be considered problematic…. The overall effect [of the co-authorship] tends to blur any ostensible line of demarcation between the individual voices. (Parr and Bellis 2005, p. 34)

A co-authored piece of research writing offers the freedom to make this claim openly. In a text claiming single authorship, such as this thesis, such claims might be more problematic. Nevertheless, it is fair to say that the sorts of multiple dialogic relations mediating the co-authored piece by Natalie and me in many ways still characterise this dialogic, multi-levelled, multi-voiced, and yet single-authored PhD study (cf. Emerson 1986, Voloshinov 1986).

In preparing to write that book chapter, Natalie and I explored the musical discourse of counterpoint in an effort to seek out (ie. develop and speculate about) its dialogic potential for conceptualising our own collaborative writing and professional learning. Early in the collaboration, it became clear that there existed strong potential connections between Natalie’s professional work and interests and my own. We were both English educators50; we shared a background in classical music studies; and we both could connect back to our own understandings of polyphony and counterpoint developed in past musical studies. As these past understandings connected and developed in our ongoing conversations, we began to orient these understandings toward the future addressees of the book chapter, and thus we began to generate newer understandings of Bakhtin’s (and Dostoevsky’s) notions of counterpoint and polyphony in educational discourses.

The dialogic potential of counterpoint

I want to emphasise, here, that Natalie and I were not using the word ‘counterpoint’ merely to represent the cut and thrust of debate, but rather to evoke the notion of interweaving threads of themes, motifs, voices etc. The Grove’s musical dictionary definition (below) was presumably not intended to be read by researchers into professional learning. And yet, read in the context of our work on dialogic writing and professional learning, the dialogic potential of this definition with respect to Bakhtin’s

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50 Actually, Natalie had been a student in my English Education classes during her Graduate Diploma of Education in 2003.
theoretical musings was very powerful and generative for us. This is a clear example of how an idea/language can connect powerfully with unknown/unintended addressees.

*Grove’s Dictionary of Music and Musicians* (1961) defines counterpoint in the following way:

> The term counterpoint … is used to describe music in which the chief interest lies in the various strands that make up the texture, and particularly in the combination of these strands and their relationship to each other and the texture as a whole. (Grove 1961)

In collaboration with Natalie, I described how this notion was meaningful and generative for us:

This metaphor of counterpoint, with its ‘various strands’ or voices, is generative for us because of its value (i) in exposing multiple voices where one narrative voice traditionally dominates over … others and (ii) in representing the dialogic possibilities of language, knowledge and identity in autobiographical narratives. And we see the notion of dialogic possibilities, expressed through and in this metaphor of counterpoint, operating in all the different ways we generate and construct meaning. Importantly, the notion of dialogic possibilities in counterpoint applies as much to our collaborative conversations – literally our dialogue - as to our own learning as individuals. That is, the learning of each of us as individuals is also dialogic. …. (Parr and Bellis 2005, p. 25-26)

Later in the book chapter, we applied this metaphor of counterpoint, and the dialogic possibilities it affords, to the intellectual and professional space that constituted our writing collaboration. For Natalie and me in that chapter, the musical discourse of counterpoint suggested a mode of dialogic activity that, in turn, vividly evokes the dialogic epistemologies of this thesis. In this thesis, as in the chapter written by Natalie and me,

> there is a constant movement to and fro, built into the dynamic of dialogic language itself, and embedded in this is the constant interaction between and among voices or strands that constitute the counterpoint. (Parr and Bellis 2005, p. 27)
For some people, influenced by their own particular dialogic encounters with the musical notion of counterpoint, this may suggest a narrower understanding of counterpoint than we intended. Some people may read ‘counterpoint’ and immediately think of the music of the Baroque composer, JS Bach. While they may connect with Bach’s output as “music in which the chief interest lies in the various strands that make up the texture, and particularly in the combination of these strands and their relationship to each other and the texture as a whole,” they might also think of Bach’s counterpoint as intricately ordered, refined, structured, rule-bound fugues etc. This would seem to be utterly inconsistent with the notions of openness, unfinalizability and decentredness that I have been unravelling with respect to dialogic potential in language, communication and professional learning. There are two points to be made in response to this. One is to ask, rhetorically, whether the experience of listening and playing (or even reading) Bach fugues can ever be reduced to a rigid set of rules, structures and conventions. For performing musicians, or for those who engage seriously with classical music, this point is more easily grasped. The second point, however, may connect with a wider readership. The characteristics of counterpoint, such as explained in the musical dictionary description, are not contained within a particular temporal or cultural space. Karlheinz Stockhausen, for instance, a considerable figure in avant garde musical cultures in the 1950s and 1960s, wrote a massive work for three orchestras and three conductors, *Gruppen* (1957) which engages in multifarious ways with notions of counterpoint. In this work, Stockhausen explores and plays with the relationships of inter-related musical strands to each other and to the texture as a whole. In some ways, this may seem utterly devoid of dialogical relationship with Bach, … until one takes the time to notice, develop, speculate about and/or activate the dialogic potentiality that exists in connections between Bach’s and Stockhausen’s work.

Natalie and I, in that chapter, were inquiring into the dialogic possibilities of teachers’ autobiographical narratives, and we hoped we were enhancing the dialogic and contrapuntal possibilities of the inquiry. Here in this study into teachers’ professional learning, I too am focused in my writing on noticing, developing, speculating about, and activating dialogic possibilities and to promote the conditions for this. In many respects, I am inspired by the polyphonic or contrapuntal fictional works of not just Dostoevsky, whose writing Bakhtin critically scrutinises in the name of dialogism (see especially
Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics, 1984). I also feel some dialogic connection to a number of other fiction writers and poets whose work I cite, and occasionally parody. These texts are also participants in various dialogic ways throughout my text. The dialogic engagement I continue to enjoy with them, in and through the writing of this thesis, often began during my time as a teacher of English-literature in secondary schools, and in some cases it began during the conversations of The Literary Theory Inquiry Group.

“Dialogue reveals potentials”
A feature of my inquiry into teachers’ professional learning is the drawing together of multiple and diverse texts in order to explore dialogic potential for this drawing together. I see my role, as writer-researcher, in this ‘drawing together’ as highlighting the “sense” in which words and utterances uttered by different participants and voices in the study connect in generative dialogic ways. These voices include:

- teachers (who were invited and agreed to participate in The Literary Theory Inquiry Group);
- teachers who knowingly responded to the questionnaires I sent out (ie. they were aware they were participating in research);
- unwitting participants (such as writers of the fictional literature and poetry that I have read and cited; academics and teacher-writers whose work I have read and cited; journalists, curriculum writers and policy makers whose artefacts I have consulted; writers of all types of texts whose work I have read but not necessarily cited);
- myself as writer of this text; and
- colleagues with whom I have collaboratively worked in a research and/or teaching capacity, from whom and with whom I have learned so much.

All these voices are meaningful to me in and through the dialogical relations that connect their words with each other (ie. in terms of agreement, disagreement, or tensions) and through the dialogic relations that connect their words with my words.
At this stage, it seems appropriate to expand upon the thoughts of Morson and Emerson (1990) that I quoted, in brief, earlier in this chapter:

Dialogue reveals potentials. It does so by addressing them, by provoking a specific answer that actualises the potential, albeit in a particular and incomplete way. At the same time, the questioner [or in my case, I, the writer setting up and enabling the dialogue] necessarily undergoes the same process, which helps him [/her] comprehend unsuspected potentials in his [her] own culture. The process then is multiply enriching: it educates each side about itself and about the other, and it not only discovers but activates potentials. Indeed, the process of dialogue may itself create new potentials, realisable only through future activity and dialogue. (Morson and Emerson 1990, p. 55, my emphasis)

As outlined in Chapter 1, this research is engaged in an ongoing dynamic of noticing, developing, speculating about and activating the ‘dialogic potentials’ inherent in English-literature teachers’ experiences, practices and knowledge especially with respect to their professional learning.

Throughout most of my discussion of epistemology to this point, I have endeavoured to keep that discussion grounded within, or emerging from, texts written for or in close relation to this project. I want to conclude this chapter by drawing back from these texts, in order to give focused attention to some theoretical perspectives on dialogism provided by Vygotsky, Bakhtin, Voloshinov and some others, and to use them to shed light upon the dialogic epistemology of this project. In so doing, I want to tease out the ways in which these writers offer a theoretical rationale for my approaches to language analysis in the written texts and the transcripts of spoken conversations of the teachers’ narratives. Much of these texts – like the professional lives and dynamics behind them – effervesce with dialogic potential. If the dialogic epistemologies of this project enable me to construct critical accounts and analyses that illustrate and demonstrate this, then one of my aims in this project will have been achieved.
The logic and spirit of dialogism

In *Thought and word*, Vygotsky (1962b) discusses the characteristics of what he terms “inner speech,” and what I have called ‘inner dialogue.’ In such inner dialogue or inner speech, Vygotsky draws attention to the “preponderance of the sense of the word over its meaning,” a distinction which I confess I found rather confusing at first. Vygotsky had explained the distinction in the following way:

Meaning is only one of the zones of sense, the most stable and precise zone. A word acquires its sense from the context in which it appears; in different contexts it changes its sense. … The dictionary definition of a word is no more than a stone in the edifice of sense, no more than a potentiality that finds diversified realisation in [external] speech…. The enrichment of words by the sense they gain from the context is the fundamental law of the dynamics of word meanings …. The sense of a word … is a complex, mobile, protean phenomenon; it changes in different minds and situations and is almost unlimited (1962b, p. 146).

In the following page of *Thought and word*, Vygotsky builds upon this reference to external speech, proposing the term “inner speech.” Inner speech involves, he says, a word being capable of “absorbing all the variety of sense” in and around it (1962b, p. 147). I originally read this (and the above allusion to some putative stability in language, such as suggested in the dictionary definition of a word) as implying that in inner speech a word begins with a contained monologic meaning, existing in and of itself. Vygotsky seemed to be suggesting that this monologic meaning is subsequently, but only at that point, enriched by association with the words around it. With time and further reflection, I came to understand that such a reading misinterprets Vygotsky’s “dictionary” allusion, and that Vygotsky clearly conceptualises “the word” as it appears in a dictionary as a “potentiality that finds diversified realisation” *in the many contexts in which it is expressed*. I now see Vygotsky as arguing along similar lines to the dialogic dimensions I identified earlier (in Part 1): ie. it is the existence and use of “the

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51 Cf. Wertsch’s (1980) reading of Vygotsky.
52 Locke (2004) points out that Bakhtin in “The problem with speech genres” makes a similar observation: “Bakhtin notes that a dictionary, while it may indicate the stock of words that a culture has at its disposal, cannot account for the way words are used in utterances since this is always individual and contextual” (p. 17). See Bakhtin (1986, p. 84). Bakhtin later contrasts the dictionary definition of a word with its “aura,” and adds that the aura of a word belongs to “that genre in which the word usually functions. It is an echo of the generic whole that resounds in the word” (p. 88).
word” in social contexts, mediated by the various artefacts in that context, that *activates* this potential.

This suggests that “the word,” in inner speech at least, not so much *draws* dialogic potentialities from the variety of ‘senses’ around it, but realizes or *activates* these potential connections in a social dynamic. Thus, sense can be transformed in the process that Vygotsky (1978) refers to as “internalization.” Language, as sense, is internalised and mediated by various artefacts and people in social contexts, and this language interacts with diverse other languages in those social contexts – a word with other words, an idea with other ideas, a text with other texts, a culture with other cultures, a speaker with other speakers. All this interaction *activates* the potential for richer dialogue and thus for richer learning. While dialogic potentiality exists in the inherently dialogic sense of language – and as such can be *noticed* – it is also possible to *act on* this potentiality to *develop, speculate about,* and further *activate* this potential. I want to stress that this potential for richer learning applies as much to the teacher participants in this study as it does to me as researcher, teacher, writer and learner.

Wertsch (1980) points out that when Vygotsky writes about the richer potential of higher mental processes such as occur in “inner speech,” he stops short of using the term “dialogue” (p.154). Nevertheless, Vygotsky (1929) does refer to inner speech as “a unique form of internal collaboration with oneself” (quoted in Wertsch 1980, p. 153). And this collaboration is mediated by the voices and words of others in the social contexts in which they exist. Wertsch (1980) (and later Emerson 1986, Cheyne and Tarulli 1999) goes on to argue that Vygotsky’s conception of language in inner speech is distinctly dialogic. And in this respect there are strong connections with the way that Bakhtin and Voloshinov emphasise the potential of the dialogic word to be oriented outward, beyond itself, to others. For Voloshinov (1986),

> The word is oriented toward an addressee, toward who that addressee might be. . . . The word is a two-sided act. It is determined equally by whose word it is and for whom it is meant. As word, it is precisely the product of the reciprocal relationship between speaker and listener, addressee and addressee…. A word is a bridge thrown between myself and another. If one end of the bridge depends on me, then the other depends on my addressee. A word is territory shared by both addressee and addressee,
by the speaker and his [her] interlocutor. (Voloshinov 1986, pp. 85-6, emphasis in original)

Bakhtin endorses this bridge metaphor, and emphasizes the tension over ownership of the “territory” of any speaker’s utterances. Every word, he claims, is “half someone else’s”:

[The word] becomes ‘one’s own’ only when the speaker populates it with his own intention, his own accent, when he appropriates the word, adapting it to his own semantic and expressive intention ….... Prior to this moment of appropriation, the word does not exist in a neutral and impersonal language – it is not, after all, out of the dictionary that the speaker gets his words; but rather it exists in other people’s mouths, in other people’s contexts, serving other people’s intentions. (Bakhtin 1981c, p. 254)

Bakhtin (1981c) points out that dialogue is commonly conceived as a mode of interaction, an exchange between two participating voices. Ultimately, though, his more complex notion of dialogue, and the notion of dialogue permeating my dissertation, uses this notion of an ‘exchange between two voices’ as a starting point only. As Morson (1986) explains, the common notion of dialogue as positive (or even just benign) exchange understates the epistemological richness of this kind of dialogue and of all communication (Morson 1986, p. 83). The more dynamic logic and spirit of dialogism and the dialogic imagination (Bakhtin 1981c), congruent with Vygostsky’s (1978) notion of higher mental functioning in a social context, describes multiple overlapping interactions between words, between texts, between people, between cultures. It refers to the expression of words, to the creative and analytical process of interpreting these words, and to the hybrid activity of expression and interpretation together that constitutes much dialogue. I see this dynamic in terms of a constant effervescing of dialogic activity and dialogic possibilities.53

53 However, I also like my colleague Alex Kostogriz’s metaphor of a schoolyard of competing voices and discourses: a “teeming … social life in which people establish multifaceted [and changing] relationships between self and the Other, between a person and a culture, and between cultures” (Kostogriz 2005, p.110).
Conclusions

In this chapter, I have drawn attention to multiple, interrelated voices in this research enterprise. I have given particular attention to (i) investigating dialogic written texts that speak to and with each other, (ii) teasing out and proposing a theoretical rationale for the logic (and spirit) of dialogism, and (iii) reflexively focusing on the dialogic activity of the thesis writing itself. I have done this in order to foreground the ways in which language is inherently dialogic, effervescing with dialogic potential. I have wanted to show that this has powerful implications for professional learning, if that learning is approached with a dialogic sensibility, and if and where there are generative dialogic conditions in place (or the potential for them to be created). I will go on to investigate how inquiry-based professional learning structures and opportunities are most likely to encourage teachers to notice, develop, speculate about and activate these dialogic potentialities.

However, I do not wish to create a fantasy of some policy-free or politics-free idyllic environment where the free play of language invariably generates dialogically meaningful and relevant professional learning for all. As I will explain in the following chapter, the dialogic potential of teachers learning about literary theory (or anything else) is mediated by and through the social, political, institutional and policy environments and discourses within which, and through which, this potential exists.

Finally, if I sometimes appear only to enthuse over dialogic language that is oriented outward, towards ‘the other,’ and towards others’ words, then this is only part of the larger story. I recognise that not all language exists in a state of unfettered, positive dialogical potentiality. I will talk, in Chapter 4, about Bakhtin’s notion of centrifugal and centripetal tendencies in language. For the moment, it is enough to acknowledge that just as there are tendencies for language to be dialogically oriented outward, for language to be dynamically connected with other language and language users in ways which destabilise dialogue and render all communication as unfinalized and uncertain, there are complementary tendencies for language to resolve into finalized stable monologic certainties.
Like Dostoevsky’s Underground Man, I fear the day when this might happen – the day when teachers and researchers become “sprig[s] on the cylinder of a [managerialist] barrel organ.” And yet, I recognise that my existence, like that of the Underground Man, is a continuing process of negotiation and mediation between these competing tendencies. As I proceed to investigate, and occasionally advocate for, inquiry-based professional learning practices and opportunities, I am not presenting a finalized formula for professional learning, although I will illustrate and argue the value of some situated approaches and practices. Rather, I will be describing, conceptualising and offering alternative possibilities and potentialities for teachers’ professional learning, what Foucault (1970) calls “modes of being” (p. 30). These “modes of being” tend to be in dialogic conflict with much managerial policy directions in professional learning throughout the Western world. But I offer these alternative possibilities and this dialogic potential in the spirit of what Bakhtin calls a “collective search for truth” (see the epigraph for this chapter), all the while encouraging my reader to dialogically connect with and question my alternative possibilities.
FOUR  —

ECOLOGIES OF PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

Preface

Ozymandias

I met a traveller from an antique land
Who said: Two vast trunkless legs of stone
Stand in the desert. Near them, on the sand,
Half sunk, a shattered visage lies, whose frown,
And wrinkled lip, and sneer of cold command,
Tell that its sculptor well those passions read
Which yet survive, stamped on these lifeless things,
The hand that mocked them and the heart that fed;
And on the pedestal these words appear:
“My name is Ozymandias, king of kings:
Look on my works, ye Mighty, and despair!”
Nothing beside remains. Round the decay
Of that colossal wreck, boundless and bare
The lone and level sands stretch far away.

P.B. Shelley (1817)

In Chapter 3, I explained the dialogic epistemological framework for this study. I argued that this dialogic framework both underpins and destabilises the knowledge that I am investigating and representing about teacher knowledge and about teachers’ professional learning. I made the point that an appreciation of the dialogic potential of language is crucial in interpreting and representing this knowledge, and I recommended some interpretive actions: noticing, developing, speculating about and activating existing knowledge or professional learning for its dialogic potential.

In this chapter I inquire into some policy background to teachers’ professional learning practices and structures in Victoria. The chapter is once again constructed in three parts that are intended to interconnect dialogically.
Part 1: Representing the ecologies of teacher professional learning

This part builds on Chapter 3’s explanation of the dialogic epistemologies of this study. I consider the ways that these epistemologies problematise any attempt to represent the surroundings or background for teachers’ professional learning in Victoria in recent times. In order to do this, I explore some dialogic connections between Freebody’s (2003) discourse of “ecologies” in qualitative research and Foucault’s (1991) genealogical approach to inquiry. I provide a conceptual framework for my inquiry into teachers’ professional learning ecologies.

Parts 2 and 3 are genealogical narratives, in which I give critical accounts of some of the background to teachers’ professional learning in recent times. These accounts relate to professional learning ecologies in Victoria, Australia, in the mid-1990s (Part 2) and then ten years later in the mid-2000s (Part 3).

Part 2: The 1990s in Victoria, Australia

This part describes and critiques a period of intense ‘reform’ in education policy in Victoria. My account of this period is grounded within my own professional perspective as a teacher of English in secondary schools at the time.

Part 3: The 2000s in Australia and other Western countries

The substance of this third part was first sketched out when I had become a teacher educator in the mid-2000s. It develops from my critique of a policy-making artefact published by The Australian Federal Government. The narrative moves in and out of critical inquiry and critical autobiography modes, as I investigate a range of international and local factors and voices that impinge on current professional learning ecologies in Australia.

After the conceptual work in Part 1 of this chapter, I rely heavily on the explicit use of critically grounded narratives to give an account of the policy and socio-cultural ‘background’ of teachers’ professional learning. I use narrative creatively and critically...
to mediate the analytical work I am engaged in, and where possible I reflexively identify my role and socio-critical perspectives in this work. I do not wish to suggest these narratives capture more of the authentic lived experience of these times (cf. Ayers Shubert 1994). I make no claims, Ozymandias-like, as to the power of my narratives, “my works,” to embody some superior objective scientific truth, towering over the research landscape around them – “on a pedestal,” as it were. Nor do I claim for any of these narratives the status of ‘king of truths,’ as some more polemical researchers are wont to do, using the imprimatur that their research is scientifically evidence-based (see Part 3 of this chapter).

Nevertheless, there is a pointed authoritative (but not, I hope, authoritarian) voice in this chapter, which articulates a critique of neoliberal education policy and practice. Often this critique interprets neoliberalism – or managerialism (a subset of practices and structures informed by neoliberal ideologies) – as inhibiting and discouraging dialogic potential. This authoritative voice is not, Ozymandias-like, calling on readers to “look on my [narrative] works” and “despair” – either because I believe my perspective to be pre-eminent (which I do not), or because I believe the only option for educators and researcher is submission to the inevitability of neoliberal dominance (an option that I reject). Both of these beliefs would be antipathetic to the dialogic philosophy of this study. Firstly, I do not see my narratives or my critique as fixed - ‘set in stone’ – or themselves beyond critique. And, secondly, I do not situate these narratives as standing astride the educational landscape represented therein; they do not and cannot remain separate or apart from that landscape. They remain as connected dialogically to the landscapes that I describe here as I myself was when I was living in and through those times.

Amongst other things, Shelley’s poem, Ozymandias, can be seen as reflexive musings on the blurring of boundaries between subject and surroundings, and the fractured interconnections between interpretation and representation. In the poem, the fragmented pieces of King Ozymandias – physically, verbally and figuratively – blend into the surrounding sands, in the process blurring his interpretation and representation of himself through his words. And all characters in the poem blur any putative
demarcation between interpretation and representation: the sculptor, who has interpreted and crafted his statue of Ozymandias; the “traveller from an antique land,” who has observed the scene, interpreted it, and given his account of it to the narrator of the poem (the interpreting being as much a part of the constructing of the account as something that happened linearly after the observing); the narrator of the poem, who has (in turn?) interpreted and given his/her account of it all…. As writer of these genealogical narratives, I too am blurring boundaries between subject and surroundings of teacher professional learning, between interpretation and representation, and I too am musing over (ie. noticing, developing, speculating about and activating) the dialogic potential of this blurring.

So, yes, there is an occasional “frown,/ and wrinkled lip” of critique, embedded in my narratives. But it is mediated as much by the history of my dialogic engagement with this ‘background,’ and by my “passions … which yet survive.” And, fundamentally, it is mediated by the language with which and within which I express my critique. Despite the frown and wrinkled lip of the critique, and notwithstanding some enduring misgivings I have about the impoverishing of English teachers’ professionalism at the hands of neoliberal governments, I confess to some optimism in the future prospects for professional learning ecologies in Victoria. Whatever else can be said, these ecologies continue to be at heart lively, vibrant and changeable – far from the “bare …lone and level sands” that characterise King Ozymandias’s landscape.
PART ONE: REPRESENTING THE ECOLOGIES OF TEACHER PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

Introduction

However well or however long the phenomenon of interest can be made to strike a motionless, life-drawing model’s pose, the surroundings that give it meaning, the ecologies in and off which it “lives,” are changing in both predictable and unpredictable ways – ways that are central, not peripheral, to the phenomenon’s very definition and to the relief with which it can be made to emerge from among its setting in the first place (Freebody 2003, p. 68).

In the epigraph above, Peter Freebody is weaving together painterly and geophysical discourses to introduce his notion of “ecology” in qualitative research. It is interesting in at least two respects:

1. Freebody’s consideration of the interrelationship between the researcher, the phenomenon of the researcher’s interest, and what he tentatively calls “the surroundings” in which the research takes place; and
2. his “play[ing] off” (Wenger 1998, p. 92) of the politics of reificatory and participatory discourses in order to make sense of this interrelationship.

I will discuss each of these in turn, and then consider some dialogic connections between Freebody’s notion of ecology and Foucault’s discourse of the archaeology of knowledge.

Teasing out some tensions

In the one long sentence quoted in the epigraph to this part, Freebody teases out an important tension. On the one hand, there is the notion of the separability of the “phenomenon of interest” from its “surroundings” and, on the other hand, there is the more poststructural idea of the interrelatedness of the subject with its surroundings. The separability is suggested initially in a simple painter-and-his/her-subject analogy. The reduction of the representational challenge (Jameson in Lyotard 1984, p. viii; see also Foucault 1970, Chapter 1) to a matter of the painter (researcher) ensuring his/her subject remains motionless is provocative. It already assumes that the identity of the subject is
separate from, and not influenced by, its surroundings. In one respect, it seems so simple. This separability is represented, again, at the end of the quote in the more complex painterly and geophysical metaphor of the “phenomenon of interest” emerging in relief “from among its setting.” The surroundings may be implicated in the “defining” of the phenomenon, and yet, Freebody posits, the defining is still possible.54 Again, quite a straightforward idea, it would seem.

In between the painter-subject analogy and the painterly/geophysical metaphor, Freebody uses more abstract language – eg. “the surroundings that give [the phenomenon] meaning, the ecologies in and off which it lives” – to emphasise the notion of an interrelationship between “phenomenon of interest” and ever-changing “surroundings.” Here, the idea of the “phenomenon” is decentred to such an extent that the surroundings are deemed to be central to its “very definition.” As it turns out, the final painterly/geophysical “relief” metaphor is not so simple after all. It can be seen as an unstable dialogic representation of provisional separability. And in this respect it speaks to the interrelationship notion more directly than might first appear. For, if the phenomenon emerges “in relief” from its surroundings, and thus has some distinguishable shape and identity (ie. apart from its surroundings), it nevertheless remains a part of its surroundings and in many respects will bear the character of much of these surroundings.

Freebody does not use the discourse of dialogism, as such, but here is a dynamic representation of Bakhtin’s (1981a) centripetal and centrifugal tendencies in language. The centripetal tendency in language – the tendency for similar words and utterances to coalesce and converge in meaning – would enable Freebody as researcher-writer to isolate or finalize the “phenomenon of interest,” and therefore show a clear separation between phenomenon and surroundings. In contrast, the centrifugal tendency in language - the tendency for similar words and utterances to diverge rather than converge in meaning, to fragment and fracture, to provoke more diverse, unexpected and

54 Phillips et al. (2002) point out that Fairclough, despite his poststructuralist avowals, argues for a similar separability. They express it in terms of his drawing a clear boundary between the discursive practice of the subject under scrutiny and the non-discursive social context around it. Phillips and Jorgenson see this as paradoxical, and term it an “essentialist” boundary (p. 89).
problematic meanings and potentialities, and thus to generate more disagreement and instability – problematises this separability. Any effort to represent separately either the phenomenon or the surroundings or even the combination of them both is mediated by the sense in which each influences and draws meaning from the other. Each exists in an unstable dialogic interrelationship with the other.

Freebody (2003) goes on to argue, beyond the section quoted in the epigraph, that the researcher-writer, if he/she is to address the imperative of “warrantability” (p. 69; see also Fenstermacher’s 1994 use of this term,55), has a responsibility to be “rigorous” (p. 70). And this rigour can be achieved “through the use of transparent and consistently applied techniques for analysis and interpretation” (p. 69). Central to my efforts to be “rigorous” in representing both the discursive practices and the social structures in this study, to this point, has been my detailing of the methodological and epistemological frameworks underpinning it all (in Chapters 2 and 3, respectively). Such frameworks allow me to show, I hope, how I as researcher-writer am implicated in any attempt to represent the unstable (dialogic) interrelationship between a putative phenomenon and its surroundings or background. My understanding of Freebody’s term “ecologies,” then, is that while it focuses attention on socio-cultural surroundings or background in the research dynamic, it also draws attention to the interrelationships of all three elements – researcher, phenomenon and surroundings – rather than being just a synonym for “the surroundings.”56

**Implications of these tensions for this study**

In this study, similar ongoing tensions inform and mediate any effort on my part as researcher-writer to represent an experience, a discursive practice or some aspect of knowledge. Much as I will seek for clarity, I acknowledge that it is as problematic for me to attempt to isolate or separate some aspect of policy from its surroundings and

55 In his 1994 article on review of methodological debates, Fenstermacher (1994) makes it clear he is more interested in clearly separable outcomes in education research.

56 The article by Wideen, Mayer-Smith and Moon (1998) in which they make a case for “an ecological perspective on inquiry,” especially with respect to pre-service education, has been influential in my conceptualising of ecologies in the inquiry that constitutes this study. In the case of Wideen et al. and Freebody, the ecologies metaphor is often emphasising the ways that an environment can nurture and sustain a particular relationship or phenomenon. In my use of the ecologies metaphor, I am illustrating both nurturing and somewhat toxic ecologies, and combinations of the two.
context, as it is for me to separate myself as researcher-writer, and my textual practices, from the policy I am representing and critiquing. This is a tension that will mediate my efforts in future chapters to represent notions such as ‘text’ in literary theory, literary theory itself (or separate theories), and what constitutes professional learning or professional knowledge. And the same will apply here in this chapter, in my representation of the policy ‘ecologies’ of teachers’ professional learning policy and policy debates.

These ecologies necessarily exist in dialogic interrelationship – ie. they “give meaning to” and they also draw from – teachers’ professional learning lives and surroundings. Freebody’s approach to exploring his notion of ecology is, in many ways, consistent with my approach in this study. In order to focus dialogue and inquiry, my approach in this chapter will be initially to generate a ‘provisionally finalized’ description of an idea, a phenomenon, a discursive practice, an experience or a background. I take my cue, in this, from Phillips and Jorgenson (2002):

A single study analyses a limited number of discursive utterances, and in order to say something meaningful about them, for example, whether they contribute to reproduction or to change, it is necessary to set them against some sort of a background [albeit provisional]. (Phillips and Jorgenson 2002, p. 140)

As long as the provisionality of this “background” remains at the foreground of the inquiry, I believe such a notion can then be used to generate better informed knowing and inquiry (cf. Bakhtin’s [1981a] notion of “innerly persuasive” knowing)⁵⁷. And, in turn, my hope is that this knowing and inquiry will spawn further dialogue and alternative forms of inquiry. Or, as Bakhtin (1981a) says, it has the potential to “reveal ever new ways to mean” (p. 346).

⁵⁷ Bakhtin (1981a) emphasises the potential in “innerly persuasive discourse” for creative and productive knowing and future inquiry: “Its creativity and productiveness consist precisely in the fact that … a word awakens new and independent words, that it organises masses of our words from within, and does not remain in an isolated and static condition. It is not so much interpreted by us as it is further … freely, developed, applied to new material, new conditions; it enters into interanimating relationships with new contexts…. The semantic structure of an innerly persuasive discourse is not finite, it is open; in each of the new contexts that dialogize it, this discourse is able to reveal ever new ways to mean (pp. 345-6).
The second major area of interest to me in the Freebody epigraph is the way he shifts between discourses of reification and participation (cf. Chapter 3 of this study). The opening analogy of a painter-subject relationship provocatively (and, I would say, purposefully) ignores the textual practice involved in any research enterprise (cf. Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, Kamler 2001, MacLure 2005, Mishler 1991). Leaving aside the relevance of textual practice in the act of representing a “phenomenon of [research] interest,” the logic of this analogy presents the greatest problem in the research enterprise as making the would-be subject “strike a motionless … pose.” Both the isolation (separation) of the model from any social “surroundings,” and the mechanical representation of the life-drawing model itself [sic] without the interruption or mediation of textual practice, are indicative of reificatory discourses in action (see Chapter 3). Like much rhetoric behind the ecology of professional learning I will be inquiring into, the analogy might be alluring in its simplicity. However, I see it as acutely reductive. It seeks to shut down dialogue or inquiry into other aspects of the phenomenon, and it ultimately sheds little light on the research process. There is also alluring simplicity (again, intended by Freebody, I suggest) in the transformation of something that is dispersed, dialogic and participatory into something that is more reified. The dialogic participatory discourse of a “phenomenon of interest” is transformed into the non-dialogic, reified image of the “life-drawing model,” a traditional objectification of the “subject” of positivist research paradigms. At the same time, the deeply problematic challenge of setting up a conceptual frame(work) to represent a ‘phenomenon’ is replaced by the effort of simply making an artist’s life-model keep still!

Freebody’s argument, here, seems intended as *reductio ad absurdum*, and in this respect it does help to explain what Foucault (1980) and others (eg. Blacker 1998) refer to as the power/knowledge regimes that research is particularly prone to reproduce. Clearly, there are many ways in which a power/knowledge regime can exist and many ways in which language operates within such a regime. In the ecology of policy and policy-making debates in the public realm, as I will show, it is often the case that the non-
dialogic knowledge discourses, those characterised by simplicity and certainty, are often associated with people who have the most access to power. Often, those discourses of professional learning and professional knowledge that do not encourage or even brook further dialogue or conversation are appropriated and reproduced by politicians and power-brokers in policy-making in ways that seem to confer legitimacy and authority onto the speaker or writer. Bakhtin (1981a) refers to such discourses as “authoritative,” and characterises such a discourse as follows:

…it remains sharply demarcated, compact and inert…. it demands our unconditional allegiance. … Authoritative discourse permits no play with the context framing it, no play with its borders, no gradual and flexible transitions, no spontaneously creative stylising variants on it. (Bakhtin 1981a, p. 343)

However, Morson (2004) prefers the word “authoritarian” to describe this sort of discourse. He draws a distinction between a “testable authoritative” voice, which “demands attention” but which is still open to contestation, and an “authoritarian” voice which seeks to avoid all dialogue, if possible (p. 321). 58 It is tempting to see Morson’s voice as a dialogic drawing together of the Bakhtinian notion of authoritative discourse and Foucault’s regime of knowledge/power. I see him as noticing, developing and activating dialogic potential in this drawing together.

Foucault (1980) says of the concept of the power/ knowledge regime:

We must make allowance for the concept’s complex and unstable process whereby discourse can be both an instrument and an effect of power…. [It can also be] a hindrance, a stumbling block, a point of resistance and a starting point for an opposing strategy. Discourse transmits and produces power; it reinforces it, but also undermines and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart it. (Foucault 1980, p. 101)

In effect, the strongly “dialogic overtones” (Bakhtin 1986, p. 92) of this last sentence are what drives Foucault’s archaeological project. On the one hand, the geo-physicality of archaeology as a discourse suggests “excavating at an archeological dig” (Foucault

58 Actually, Morson (2004) optimistically asserts that even authoritarian voices in fascist states are eventually drawn into dialogue by some aspect of social activity, rendering them dialogic and therefore unstable (p. 318).
1970, p. xii), where the researcher is engaged in a process of opening up for closer inspection and further consideration all aspects of knowledge related to the research (including all aspects of the research ecologies). Notions of simply “revealing” are much more problematic in this metaphor. On the other hand, there is significant attention given to the genealogy of what is found, the genealogy of the process of “excavating,” and inquiry into the histories of the knowledge about both these aspects (Foucault 1991).

When Foucault (1991) famously says that “knowledge is made for cutting” (p. 88), he is arguing for an approach to research that begins through focusing on fragments, and local interconnections, rather than beginning by looking for over-arching continuities. The genealogical narratives I present in Parts 2 and 3 of this chapter often focus on such fragments. But I do not see this approach as de-valuing or discouraging efforts to generate dialogic connections in the interpretations of the narratives. Payne (1997) describes Foucault’s notion of history in genealogy as follows:

> [For Foucault] effective history works within a shortened time span rather than envisioning “lofty epochs.” Although it affirms “knowledge as perspective,” the perspective effective history takes is slanted, judgemental, and value-laden. But by prominently marking its position, it incorporates a genealogy of itself into the knowledge it produces (my emphasis, p. 24).

And in “incorporating a genealogy of itself,” Payne (1997) continues, “the method of interrogating knowledge begins to be examined itself, as a mode of knowledge” (p. 57). What is needed, then, is reflexive situated historical attention to the phenomenon being inquired into and reflexive situated historical attention to the research ecology. For this reason, Blacker (1998) recommends the use of narrative structures:

> Genealogy has a strategic import, as it may be said to succeed or fail according to how powerfully its narrative examples, its histories ... serve to unsettle established consensus.... [In dialogue with other research approaches, narrative] helps to illuminate and make problematic ... what previously may have been regarded unproblematically, if it was regarded at

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all, as simply good common sense—uncomplicatedly normal. (Blacker 1998, pp. 315, 355)

The power-knowledge regime embedded in Freebody’s analogy begins to be unsettled in the first instance, when one inquires into how the research(er) exercises control and power over its(his/her) subject. One way the researcher can exercise control is to engage in textual practices that isolate and objectify the research subject (ie. engaging in discourses of reification), to some extent discouraging their active participation in the process and their dialogic involvement in the conversation. Wenger (1998) argues that there are substantial dangers in purposefully using reificatory discourses, but he believes such an approach is sometimes necessary in politically charged conversations in the public realm, “in order to combat various forms of partiality that can bias the politics of participation” (p. 92). The alternative is to inquire into the extent to which the social practices of the research have allowed, developed and/or activated (or discouraged?) the dialogic potential of the relationships and interrelationships involving researcher, participants and the ecology of the research enterprise (ie. engaging in discourses of participation).

Below, I will consider the implications of working with discourses of reification and participation in order to generate richer dialogic potential with respect to teacher professional learning. However, before this, I want to pause for a moment to consider some of the ways in which other researcher-writers have managed these tensions in the strategic sense that Wenger is arguing for here.

Conclusions: working strategically

In warning against the dangers of strategically using reificatory discourses, Wenger (1998) reminds researchers that such practices in research communities or in the public domain may encourage others, including policy-makers, to believe that educational issues can be reduced to decontextualised formulae, and that a reified educational phenomenon can be unproblematically “frozen in a text,” a text that does not connect

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60 This, itself, is one example of a writer reducing the complexity of the dynamic for the purpose of unfolding an argument. In this instance, I initially present a simple binary proposition – ie. “either … or” – but I go on to explain that researchers will often engage in a balanced combination of these approaches – ie. “both … and.”
with “the richness of lived experience” (p. 61). He points out the danger of policy-makers misappropriating models of discourse and feeling justified in constructing policy in ways that are disconnected from the richness of human experience across widely diverse and changing contexts. This is, of course, Foucault’s concern too. But he argues that it is impossible to write or speak from outside the regimes of knowledge power, that researchers are always bent into shape and governed by existing language and language practices (Foucault 1980). (See also Gee 2005.)

There are significant dangers in subscribing to prevailing power/knowledge regimes. In interviews, Foucault has acknowledged that certain political exigencies may require a conscious “harmonisation with and attentiveness to” discourses from within these regimes of thought (Blacker 1998, p. 364). Spivak (1993), too, considers the value of researchers strategically keying into “essentialist” knowledge discourses (a term that aligns with my references to non-dialogic, reificatory discourses of knowledge), when dealing with what she calls issues of “tremendous moral and political concern” (p. 5). And many others have argued passionately that education research is inescapably about issues of morality and politics (eg. Ball 1995, Cochran-Smith 2006, Gale and Densmore 2003, Habermas 1996, Hargreaves and Goodson 1996, Locke 2004, MacLure 2005, Pennycook 2001, Sachs 2003, 2005, Sockett 198761). Spivak (1993) encourages researchers to consider the conscious and “strategic use of essentialism” (p. 5). In a variation on Foucault’s warning, she too emphasises the need to be aware of the “dangerousness of using these terms we cannot not use” (p. 5).

Other writers argue that institutional settings, and the reificatory discourses increasingly valued in these settings, have forced researchers into a “devil’s bargain” (Locke 2004, p. 9; see also Goodson 2003, Hargreaves and Goodson 1996). Atkinson (2000) and Ball (1995) are less “forgiving” and call it “faustian deal-making.” The potential consequences of such a bargain or deal are worse than in the case of Faustian or Mephistophelean narratives, where it is just the tempted who gets his comeuppance. Here, all teachers, researchers and students may ‘suffer’ in the long term. For one thing, teachers may end up deprofessionalised, with little intellectual autonomy, shut out of

61 I choose this list of authors to represent a consensus across multiple discourses.
critical conversations about curriculum and policy development (Ball 1995, Cochran-Smith and Lytle 2001). For another, the mode of teacher knowledge that ends up being perpetuated is one which is essentialist, reificatory, non-dialogic and less likely to address the newly arising problems of a rapidly changing world in all its local manifestations (Delandshere and Petrosky 2004, Petrosky 2003). Such are the dangers of using reificatory discourses. The challenge then is to use them in a way that is critically conscious, that develops and activates dialogic potential and that stimulates (opens up) further inquiry. Needless to say, this is no small challenge.

In Part 2 and Part 3 of this chapter, I construct genealogical narratives of two periods from the past ten years of my professional life, in which the English teaching profession in different parts of the Western world was engaged in just this challenge.
PART TWO: THE 1990s IN VICTORIA, AUSTRALIA

Some background

I want to tell a story about professional learning ecologies in Victoria in the mid-1990s. During the time of this story, I moved from teaching in Eastern Girls’ College, in Melbourne, Australia, to spend a year on exchange teaching in a relatively small boarding school in Boston, Massachusetts, USA. At the end of this year, I returned to Eastern Girls’ College. This is a story in which I consider the consequences of what Atkinson (2000) has identified in his UK context as a “narrowing” of the field of inquiry (p. 318), in effect shutting down dialogue in education research. Cossett Lent and Pipkin (2003), in the US, edited a collection of stories written by teachers in the late 1990s, called Silent no more: Stories of courage in American schools. The collection as a whole tells a similar story of a narrowing of the field of educational inquiry in the US. It details the ways in which US teachers were variously demonised and marginalised, shut out of critical debates. In some stories, teachers give dramatic accounts of how they lost their jobs in the late 1990s because they dared to speak out, to question government policy with respect to education, in an attempt to resist this narrowing.62

My narrative makes for less dramatic reading than some of those stories, but it does connect with similar features of a research and professional culture experiencing a narrowing of the field of inquiry. The story begins at a time, in the mid-1990s, when my critical perspectives on education policy might best be described as under-developed. I suppose I was more swimming with the prevailing policy tides, than even raising my head to question them. My early professional identity was as Britzman (2003) generalises about so many early-career teachers: I felt “an inordinate responsibility to single-handedly make students learn” (p. 3). So I was head down, learning fast, but learning perhaps in a narrower sense. It may be that I was, what Connell (1985) terms, a “more or less well controlled agent … of the capitalist system” (p. 3). Perhaps I was seduced by the increasing professionalisation-of-teaching agendas, coming both from governments and from within the profession (Hargreaves and Goodson 1996, Locke 2004). Whatever the explanation, unlike those teachers in Silent no more, I was less

likely, in the mid-1990s, to speak out publicly, to question and critique government policy. I was vaguely aware of changes that were impacting on curriculum and hence my classroom practice, and yet my professional learning focus was on ‘improving’ my classroom practices, and engaging in school life on multiple levels. I was committed to teaching and to a certain paradigm of professional learning. However, as I see it now, this narrower paradigm of professional learning was insulating me from policy debates, limiting my opportunities for noticing, developing, speculating about and activating the dialogic potential in that professional learning.

NARRATIVE (1): ‘RELEASE, REDEMPTION, AND REFORMATION?’; OR HOW TO UNDERMINE TEACHERS’ PROFESSIONAL POSSIBILITIES

Introduction
The educational ecology in Victoria, Australia, in the 1990s, was strongly influenced by the actions of a state government, voted into office with an urgent agenda to cut fiscal costs and rationalise public education, while privatising other public utilities across the board. It was an agenda shared by the Australian Federal Government of the time whose strategies typically consisted of declaring various crises in education – including decrying low levels of student literacy and numeracy (cf. Cambourne 2006, Gale 2006, Sawyer 1997, Teese 2000) and bemoaning the poor quality of some teachers (Kemp 1996, Rowe 2003). This Federal Government proceeded to impose a regimen of benchmarks, standards and centrally mandated curriculums, constructing a battery of tests which they claimed would measure the success of their strategies, and then they trumpeted the success of their reforms by citing various statistics that focused on those areas with demonstrably measurable improvements (See Lee 2000, Parr 2000, Sawyer 1997).

In the early 1990s, the new conservative Victorian State Government decreed that teachers were no longer permitted to make public comment on any aspect of government policy. Initial dismay gave way to fear amongst teachers who might otherwise have spoken out, such that public dialogue diminished considerably, and critical interaction (on a public level) was virtually snuffed out. Teachers in Victoria – and with some flow-on effects for researchers in education – were prevented by law from raising voices of dissent on any matters of government education policy. The consequences of speaking out were the loss of one’s position in a school. The rhetoric
of the government of the time was about liberalising the teaching profession, freeing up teachers in their day to day work, empowering them. They talked of de-regulating the profession, at the same time as debate was shut down, and there was a carefully orchestrated attempt to impose more intense regulations – tighter constraints on professional autonomy and stronger levels of accountability vis-à-vis ‘performance.’

At the very time I was living through these ‘reforms’ in Victoria, Habermas (1996) was writing from across the other side of the world about increasing “administrative intrusions and constant supervision” in schools. His description sounds uncannily accurate with respect to schools in Victoria in the mid-1990s. In the quote below, Habermas begins with Foucault’s familiar metaphor of the panopticon state, where managerial surveillance intrudes into everyday working lives through a combination of legislative and ‘disciplinary’ interventions.

Here a panoptic state not only directly controls the bureaucratically dessicated public sphere, it also undermines the private basis of this public sphere. Administrative intrusions and constant supervision corrode the communicative structure of everyday contacts in … schools …. The destruction of solidary living conditions and the paralysis of initiative and independent engagement in overregulated yet legally uncertain sectors go hand in hand with the crushing of social groups, associations, and networks; with indoctrination and the dissolution of cultural identities; with the suffocation of spontaneous public communication. (Habermas 1996, p. 369)

Reviewing this period in Australian educational history, Smyth (2001) explains the consequences of this alignment of state and federal neoliberal policy ‘reforms’ for teachers and teaching in Victoria:

The emphasis was upon deregulating schools, cutting them loose from an “education system,” requiring them to compete against one another for students and resources, and to operate in a context in which parents would make choices as to where they would send their children based on what they thought was in the best self-interest of them and their children. The rhetoric, not unlike what was being promulgated elsewhere in the Western world, was that of “devolution,” “responsiveness,” “self-management,” and “autonomy.” As a policy move it also represented a vicious attack on teachers and their right to act collectively and collaboratively (Smyth 2001, p. 24).

Don Hayward, Minister of Education in Victoria in the years 1992-1995, wrote his own version of the history of these times soon after leaving his education portfolio. He
would have history record that during his ministry he helped to “advance the personal
and professional development of each teacher” (Caldwell and Hayward 1998, p. 51),
and he sought to raise the level of professionalism of Victorian teachers. Teachers were
promised higher recognition and esteem by governments and the community. His was a
benevolent liberalising role, apparently, freeing individual teachers from “the
impossible task of designing from their own resources learning experiences to challenge
every student: the resources of the world’s great teachers [would] be at hand” – and
teachers merely needed to select and deliver these resources (p. 147). Hayward
valorised the notion of the individual teacher, with his vision of the “individual
professional” (p. 53) – “not part of an amorphous mass” (p. 51), a provocative
reconceptualising of professional communities – and promised “proper recognition” in
the form of “rewards” (p. 52) – ie. promotion and/or unspecified remuneration. State
sponsorship of, or support for, teachers’ professional learning or professional
development needs was significantly absent in this ‘vision.’

In order to evaluate the level of “proper recognition,” Hayward described a
“Professional Recognition Program” (PRP) that would provide for “annual review of
the teacher’s performance by the principal in terms of … previously agreed objectives”
(Caldwell and Hayward 1998, p. 52). Predictably, in the rhetoric of the time it was the
carrot that was emphasised, rather than the stick – as if teachers were being encouraged
rather than threatened. Nevertheless, the level of individual surveillance was clearly
being elevated, with each teacher needing to account for his/her “performance” vis-à-vis
certain pragmatic objectives (p. 51). Foucault (1977) has shown in Discipline and
punish how one of the most powerful ways to normalise narrow notions of individuality
in social systems is to construct the “calculable person” through the imposition of
examinations. In measuring performance in such examinations or performance regimes,
it is claimed that the quality (or lack of it) in an individual can be measured and
demonstrated.

While some teachers undoubtedly adopted meaningful and thoughtful strategies to
continue to develop professionally during these years, many researchers have
commented on the destructive effect that the regime of power/knowledge had with
respect to teachers in Victoria at this time. Smyth’s (2001) description of the combined
effect of these reforms on teachers is one redolent of the imprisoning discourses in
Foucault’s work:
[Victorian] teachers became implicated in the impossible task of delivering on performance-guaranteed outcomes [that had been articulated by outsiders], and when that delivery did not occur (as was inevitable), then such failure was used as a form of censure and was one way to control [their] behaviour (pp. 25-26).

Sockett, in 1987, had anticipated this phenomenon of articulating specific and unrealistic performance outcomes for teachers as a way of setting them up for failure, in his famous critique of Shulman’s (1986b) unveiling of “pedagogical content knowledge.” He was most critical of Shulman for being “politically naïve and institutionally dangerous” (Sockett 1987, p. 216). By the time of the mid-1990s, it would seem some politicians and policy-makers had seized on this strategy and the possibilities it afforded them for validating their own efforts and demonising teachers for their inadequacy.

As prominent as the self-management rhetoric that Smyth identified was the state government’s self-congratulatory discourse of the time. It utilised a mixture of religious zealouness and radical democracy discourses: the government was engaged in release, redemption, and reformation from the woes and foes of the prior education policy; they could and would ensure “a quality education for all.” Central to this reformation was the Victorian Government’s claim to be liberating teachers as “individual professionals” in order to achieve quality (Caldwell and Hayward 1998). And this quality was supposed to facilitate the professionalisation of teachers – ie. improving the public image of teachers.63 This was a significant time in my gradual professional awakening. It seemed to me that the Victorian Government had calculated the most effective way to professionalise teachers was not to construct spaces and places where teachers could be imaginative, autonomous or collaborative, but to show how teachers could be made to work hard and comply with government policy. The significance of ‘to professionalise’ as a transitive verb was becoming clear to me: professionalising was something that was done to teachers, rather than something that teachers were engaged in. Not surprisingly, there was little discussion of any investment in professional learning and/or curriculum development. I was yet to understand fully the extent to which this professionalisation movement was indicative of a wider neoliberal political movement in Western countries.

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Citing the neoliberal “vision” of Osborne and Gaebler (1993, in Caldwell and Hayward 1998, p. 165), Hayward saw his government’s role as “steering” rather than “rowing,” with respect to reform in education. Needless to say, all government policy involves some degree of ‘steering.’ But at this time as Hargreaves and Goodson (1996) discuss – in regard to a similar period in the UK – there was “a shift in steering mechanisms,” which was a central part of many governments’ professionalisation agenda for teachers. Hayward (like so many neoliberal policy-makers in the Western world) advocated governments “vacating the arena of actually delivering the service.” And so with widespread school closures and amalgamations, with the emergence of progressively more prescriptive curriculum documents – ie. Curriculum Standards Frameworks (BOS 1995, 2000) – for students up to Year 10, and with later changes to post-compulsory curriculum (such as the VCE), the Victorian Government steered structural and curriculum changes that required teachers merely to deliver education. It was an education that more fully prescribed the content that was to be taught, and more narrowly identified the particular learning outcomes that all students across the state should achieve. There was neither the need nor the support for curriculum development and more open-ended professional learning by teachers. Meanwhile, many teachers in Victorian schools, who had survived large-scale school closures, who had avoided being declared “in excess,”64 those who were expected to do the “rowing,” spoke of diminished morale and a feeling of their professionalism having been undermined (Berry and Loughran 2001, Lee 2000, Parr 2000).

That is not to suggest that all Victorian teachers felt downtrodden and beleaguered. I continued to be inspired by many of my English teaching colleagues in Victorian schools in the late 1990s. It was during this period of my career that I led my first workshops in VATE conferences. Subsequently, I enrolled in some postgraduate study and began what have become longstanding professional relationships with academic mentors in faculties of education in various universities.

64 These teachers were no longer ‘required’ by the state school who had employed them in the past. They were thus ‘required’ to take a position in a school in a geographically distant location or to put themselves onto the open-market and compete for a position, or part-position, in a more conveniently located school.
PART THREE: THE 2000S IN AUSTRALIA AND OTHER WESTERN COUNTRIES

Some background

Fastforward to 2004. It was now a year since I had been participant and researcher-observer in the professional learning of The Literary Theory Inquiry Group at Eastern Girls’ College. I was now in my second year of a full-time position as a teacher educator and researcher at Monash University. A new state government in Victoria had taken policy steering in a different direction from the government in the previous decade. The rhetoric of release, redemption and reformation gave way to educational blueprints, flagship strategies, and professional renewal. What I had caricatured as religious zealousness transformed into what often seemed like new age triumphalism. But there were promising signs. We were entering a period where there was increasing recognition of the professional learning needs of teachers in schools.

A major government policy document was released in 2004, The Blueprint for government schools: Future directions for education in the Victorian government school system (DE&T 2004). It identified teachers’ professional development as one of several ‘Flagship strategies’ in education policy. Flagship Strategy 5 included some initiatives designed to “provide teachers with significant opportunities for professional renewal” (p. 20). This appeared to challenge the previous positioning of teachers as “individual professionals” subject to close surveillance, although at the time of the release of this Blueprint it was not clear what forms of accountability and surveillance would be attached to the prospect of “renewal.”

The following year, early in 2005, the same state government published a document outlining 7 principles of highly effective professional learning (DE&T 2005). In my more optimistic moments I felt that the days of muzzling professional dialogue were past. The 7 principles talked about “learning communities” and affirmed that “a learning community values diversity” and “learning communities allow dissent and debate among members” (DE&T 2005, p. 8). And yet there was cause for worry. The dialogic potential implied by talk of “professional renewal” and allowance for “dissent and debate” might be significantly limited by the discourses of school effectiveness.
which would require professional learning outcomes to be aligned with “school priorities” and “rigorous systems of accountability.” These systems would be put in place to measure the improvement in student learning outcomes as a result of “targeted” professional development (p. 7).

Was this to be a case of ‘One step forward, two steps back’?

In Australia, in 2005, it had been traditional to think of education and schooling as managed by the separate state governments and therefore enjoying some degree of autonomy from national directives. At a time when the neoliberal federal government in Australia was becoming more interventionist, in regard to education, this autonomy seemed more important than ever. It was of some concern to me, therefore, to see the rhetoric of surveillance and distrust of teacher professionalism in federal government policy-making rhetoric now looming larger in state education policy.

Late in 2004, the Federal Minister for Education, Science and Training in Australia, Dr Brendan Nelson, had commissioned the National Inquiry into Literacy Teaching and the Teaching of Reading in Australia. In December 2005, the report of The Inquiry was handed down. Teaching Reading (NITL 2005a), and the accompanying Literature Review (NITL 2005b) and the Guide to the report ... for parents and carers (NITL 2005c), claimed to identify several “deficits” and “problems” with Australian literacy teachers’ knowledge and “problems” with their professional learning. One characteristic of the narrowness of Teaching Reading was its almost entire focus on the teaching of reading as a particular set of skills and practices for use in primary schools. The report devoted little time or space to inquiring into the teaching of reading in secondary English-literature classrooms. Another characteristic of this narrowness was its framing of teachers’ professional development as the learning that an individual teacher engages in to improve students’ learning outcomes (in standardised tests). Needless to say, on both these counts, I saw Teaching Reading as contesting virtually all my research into teachers’ professional knowledge and professional learning, and especially my research into teachers’ dialogic inquiry-based professional learning of literary theory.
Seeking to solve the problems and deficits that The Inquiry had “identified,” *Teaching Reading* makes multiple recommendations. These recommendations include: a narrowing down, and mandating of, what all teachers should know and do; a call for the development of a single set of clearer, centralised “context-free professional standards” for literacy teaching; some tightly-framed prescriptions for teachers’ professional learning; and a call for the teachers to be held closely accountable for this learning through measuring of their students’ “learning outcomes.” I should point out that, in contrast to my professional response to the neoliberalism of the Victorian Government in the 1990s, where I was inclined to blame a particular government minister or leader, by the mid-2000s I was more aware that this sort of report was not at all peculiar to Australia. I came to appreciate, for instance, how *Teaching Reading* draws on and mimics reports recently generated by governments in the UK and US.\(^{65}\)

I want to outline my critical response to this report by way of a genealogical, narrative-based, ‘set piece.’ This piece includes some dialogic research into professional learning (in Australia and overseas), interwoven with passages of dialogic inquiry with early-career teacher Natalie Bellis (see Chapter 3 for a conceptualisation of my dialogic inquiry with Natalie) and some autobiographical inquiry involving my perceptions of the learning of one of my own children. I begin the narrative with a quote from Charles Dickens’s *Hard Times* that polemically characterises what I felt to be the authoritarian voice (Morson 2004) speaking from the report.

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**Narrative (2): “To be strictly educated?”: Professional Learning Policy in 19\(^{th}\) Century England and 21\(^{st}\) Century Australia\(^{66}\)**

**Introduction**

I shall have the satisfaction of causing you to be strictly educated; and you will be a living proof to all who come into communication with you, of the

\(^{65}\) *Teaching Reading* (NITL 2005a) repeatedly cites evidence from national inquiries in the UK and US to support its findings. These reports were: British House of Commons Education and Skills Committee, *Teaching Children to Read* (British House of Commons Education and Skills Committee 2005), and the US Report of the National Reading Panel (NICHD 2000).

\(^{66}\) Elements of the following narrative are drawn from an article I co-authored with Natalie Bellis. The article was called, “‘To be strictly educated?’: Teaching and learning in an age of neoliberal agendas.” See Parr and Bellis (2006).
In Charles Dickens’s black comedic novel, *Hard Times*, the dour and humourless schoolmaster Thomas Gradgrind addresses himself to the imaginative but hapless Sissy Jupe. He is convinced of her “wretched ignorance” – she doesn’t even know *essential* information such as what a horse is! And Sissy Jupe’s background is problematic for the likes of Thomas Gradgrind. She comes from a ... a circus family – loving, yes, but oh if only they had a “proper” sense of their responsibilities. Regardless of her background, Gradgrind is resolved to reclaim and form her – and in so doing, he will reject her world of experience and her imagination, and efface her identity with a number. She will undergo a regime of “rigid training” and Gradgrind’s fellow teachers will implement this regime: “as per system, schedule, blue book, report, and tabular statements” (Dickens 1854/1975, p. 96).

As I saw it, there was much of Gradgrind in *Teaching Reading*, the report from *The National Inquiry into the Teaching of Literacy in Australia* (NITL 2005a) that had the potential to impinge on professional learning policy in Australia:

- the tone of a ‘social project’ underpinning bleak pronouncements of an educational problem – notwithstanding the positive news of Australia’s “performance” with respect to comparisons with other OECD countries (p. 26). Literacy outcomes in Australia were decried as “unacceptable” (p. 27) … for the “psychosocial wellbeing” of child learners and for their impact on Australia’s ‘knowledge economy’;

- the confidently avowed knowledge that supposedly supported these pronouncements – the frequently touted (albeit highly selective) “evidence-based research” about literacy outcomes and quality teaching outcomes is presented in language such as “unequivocal” (p. 31) or “incontrovertible” (p. 37) ;

- the determination that quality teaching strategies in the hands of quality teachers would prevail, regardless of learners’ family backgrounds. It was the quality teacher that mattered, “not so much what students bring with them from their backgrounds” (p. 19);

- the glib way in which the cause of the educational “problem” was described and the solution prescribed – the cause came down to teachers’
“inadequacy” and their lack of knowledge about “essential skills” (p. 37, emphasis in original), and the solution was “evidence-based teaching”; and finally

- the remarkable absence of language such as creativity or imagination with respect to literacy teaching or reading practices throughout the whole report.67

I read the report, Teaching reading: Report and recommendations: National inquiry into the teaching of literacy in Australia (NITL 2005a), from the perspective of a teacher educator situated in a faculty of education, lecturing in English Education and curriculum studies. In that respect I was in regular contact with schools and with English teachers who teach reading, and I tried to maintain dialogic professional relationships with a number of those teachers. In my work as a teacher educator, I did not and do not focus closely on early years literacy education, although, as I said in the Preamble to this thesis, I do teach a postgraduate unit called, School and community literacy practices, in which foundational and conceptual issues of literacy are explored. At the time of reading the report, I was not teaching young children who were beginning to read. Nevertheless, I believed that learning to read, like all other language and literacy practices, is socially grounded and mediated by a complex dynamic of sociocultural practices and discourses (Freebody and Luke 1990, 2003; Vygotsky 1978). I believed that learning to read does not stop after early years schooling – cf. the position paper from NCTE (n.d.) and the policy paper AATE (n.d.). And in the range of preservice education courses that I was involved in, I taught teachers who would go on to teach reading in secondary schools. For these reasons, I felt a strong dialogic connectedness to the issues raised in this report even though I found much to challenge in the conceptual work of the report and even though I disagreed with much of the research “findings” of the report.

For all the connections I drew, at the time of reading that report, between Dickens’s Hard Times in mid-Nineteenth Century London and neoliberal agendas in education policy in Australia, I acknowledge that the connections might only go so far. Perhaps I

67 For instance, there was one reference to the pleasures of reading (p. 40), but there no reference to the pleasures of learning to read! At one time, the report cited research in the National Reading Project (NICHD 2000) in the US: “The NRP further identified specific … skills, and [explained] how the integration and comprehensive approaches to literacy enable children to develop reading for both learning and pleasure” (NITL 2005a, p. 32). The separation between learning to read and pleasure in reading (as if the pleasure is something which only comes after the learning) is telling.
was being too harsh on the writers of *Teaching Reading*. There *might* be potential for greater public recognition of teachers’ professionalism when the report acknowledges the value of the ‘quality English teacher’, *if* the notion of the ‘quality teacher’ did not read like a reductive fetishising of the complex work of English teachers. And despite the fetishising of ‘the quality teacher’ and the confident belief that it is only quality teaching that makes a difference, “regardless of [students] backgrounds” (NITL 2005a, pp. 8, 9, 12, 33), there *might* be hope in *Teaching Reading* encouraging parental support of, and “involvement” in, school-based teaching and learning (p. 40). *If* only this involvement were not just on the government’s terms. There *might* be cause to feel positive, too, about the talk of encouraging and supporting teachers’ professional learning (pp. 54-60), *if* the notion of professional learning presented in the report were not so antithetical to my experiences and my reading of the socio-cultural research into professional learning. There *might* be.

Unfortunately, as I looked at the detail of *Teaching reading*, and as I engaged in dialogic research and conversation with my English teacher colleagues, I saw it as yet another salvo in the neoliberal attacks on the English teaching profession in Australia recently (see Doecke and Parr 2005a, p. 13; see also Doecke et al. 2006, Gale and Densmore 2003, Smyth 2001).\(^{68}\)

**Shifting paradigms in neoliberal reform strategies**

Gale and Densmore (2003) conceptualise neoliberalism as a belief in liberal political ideals that “link the virtues of the free market to individual freedom.” Traditionally, this means

> Neo-liberals propose the expulsion of the state from the market because they regard markets as a less wasteful and more efficient means of distributing goods and services within society, including the provision of education. (p. 21)

In such a market, individual teachers and teaching as a profession are subordinated to the free-play of economic forces, and thus the status of the profession is diminished and eroded – the stronger the market forces, the less autonomy teachers have, the further

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\(^{68}\) Of course, there was little that was new in this approach to policy making. It is interesting even to compare the similarity of the prose style in *Teaching Reading* (NITL 2005a) with the prose of *Teaching Children to Read* (British House of Commons Education and Skills Committee 2005) and *Report of the National Reading Panel* (NICHD 2000).
they are de-professionalised (See Peters and Marshall 1996). I referred, in Part 2, to the views of Osborne and Gaebler (in Caldwell and Hayward 1998, p. 165) that the state education minister, Don Hayward had so vigorously championed. They advocated this notion of neoliberalism in the metaphor of governments ‘steering’ while they leave others ‘free’ to ‘row’ (ie. to implement government policy). For education policy in Western countries in recent years, this has meant policy makers ‘steering’ through moves to impose increasingly centralised and decontextualised standards (Sachs 2003, 2005, Fullan 2003), the provision (or cutting) of resources, and the setting up of rigid frameworks for accountability (Sirotnik 2004a, Mahony and Hextal 2000, Kress et al. 2005), while steering clear of involvement in delivery of ‘the service’ – ie. “encouraging others to do the rowing” (Caldwell and Hayward 1998).69 In Teaching Reading, once again the steering mechanism seemed to have shifted (Hargreaves and Goodson 1996). Now the demarcation line between ‘steering’ and ‘rowing’ was significantly blurred. Whereas in past years, neoliberal steering tended to involve broad-brush centralised structural reform – and the impacts of this were substantial (Smyth 1993) – the strategy seemed to be somehow different this time.

In 2005, broadly consistent with the National Literacy Strategy in England (from 1997) and projects that have developed out of that – ie. in 2001, the Key Stage 3 National Strategy (DfES 2003), and in 2005, the Secondary National Strategy for School Improvement (DfES 2005-6) – and the No Child Left Behind policy (US Department of Education 2001) in the US, large-scale centralised structural reform was being combined with prescriptive interventions at the level of pedagogy (eg. systematic or synthetic phonics privileged over whole-language teaching). Characteristically, decisions about how this combination was to be organised, enacted, funded and evaluated at the local level were left to implementers – schools and teachers – according to local means and so-called individual choice. The new wave of policy steering for English teachers now included:

(1) deprofessionalising teachers and the teaching profession. There were now direct edicts for teaching English in particular ways, and in so doing professional judgement and autonomy were being taken away from English teachers;

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69 For a critique of this position, see Chapter 6 of this text. See also Lee 2000. For a similar story in the English context, see Goodwyn 2003.
(2) fetishising of the so-called ‘quality teacher’ and quality teachers’ technicist skills and knowledge. This involved the disregarding of socio-cultural context and family ‘background’ in evaluating teaching and learning outcomes;
(3) narrowing of the scope of what constitutes ‘evidence-based’ research and teaching; and
(4) yoking of professional learning programs and possibilities to pre-existing teaching standards and pre-determined student learning ‘outcomes.’ Teachers, too, would be ‘strictly educated’!

Any one of these tendencies in policy-making, it seemed to me, was likely to diminish the dialogic potential for the sort of professional learning paradigm I was investigating and advocating (while still opening up to critical scrutiny, I might add) through my research, my teaching with pre-service teachers and my own professional learning work with teachers. If I were to maintain my enthusiasm for the directions in which my research was heading, I needed to scrutinise the critical ground and assumptions on which each of these tendencies was founded. The following summarises my re-thinking about these tendencies, at about the time I read *Teaching Reading*.

1. De-professionalising teachers and teaching

Since the powerful statements over a quarter of a century ago by Michael Apple (1981) about the tendency to conceptualise teaching into a set of techniques, in which professional judgements are minimal or irrelevant, there has been considerable critique of the de-professionalising of teachers and the teaching profession (Cochran-Smith and Fries 2001, Delandshere and Petrosky 2000, 2001, 2004, Goodson 2003, Lieberman and Miller 2001). (See Chapter 7 of this text.) And yet there must be something very seductive about a government taking control of a people-based profession, announcing a formula, or recipe (or blueprint?) that will ensure this control, and thus minimising the potential for ‘professional’ error. If voters (consumers in a ‘free’ neoliberal market?) can be persuaded by neoliberal policy-makers that quality teaching is about finding the formula or recipe that ‘works’ everywhere (eg. as seen in *Teaching Reading*), irrespective of context or setting, regardless of student background, then neoliberal policy-makers achieve two things:

(a) they can subsume all day-to-day teacher judgements beneath a central government edict; and
(b) they can centralise their control of markets. In these markets, teaching strategies (regarded as context-free ingredients, ie. commodities) can be mandated for all teachers.

These commodities can then be commercially produced in glossy professional development ‘packages’ and sold by ‘independent’ publishers, who proceed to urge schools and teachers to use whatever funding is available to buy both the recipe and the ingredients in one! Ultimately, governments can then argue that the free markets are operating ‘naturally’ in accordance with the will of consumers.

Traditionally, neoliberal governments have preferred to steer clear of producing and distributing these commodities themselves. It’s cheaper, less wasteful and more efficient, to concentrate on constructing the markets. In that way, policy-making can create the demand for the commodities. Increasingly, however, it seems overseas and Australian governments are financially supporting appointed publishers (or educational institutions) to publish and disseminate these commodities (Luke 2004, 2003, Petrosky 2004).

While it is clear that neoliberal governments throughout the Western world remain focused on their steering role in educational reform, and the rhetoric is still of ‘allowing’ others to do the rowing, it is equally clear that they have little confidence in the rowing of these others (the teachers). Consequently, their intervention in education markets, and their deprofessionalising of the teaching profession, is becoming more and more direct. In Teaching Reading, it seems they are intent on specifying the size, weight and shape of oars, as well as providing instructions as to when, how and where to row with them!70

2. Fetishising the quality teacher

The positioning of individual teachers in schools within Teaching Reading is a familiar paradox (Cochran-Smith 2005, Cohen 1995, Fullan 1993): teachers are the focus of the most stringent criticism because of their interminable “inadequacy” (NITL 2005a, p. 37, emphasis in original), and yet they are the “driver” that will improve reading. It is interesting to see how Teaching Reading gushes over isolated instances of quality

70 The Teaching Reading Literature Review (2005b) explicitly denies this agenda: “It is not possible to provide the detail of what and how teachers should implement effective teaching and learning” (p. 31). See Parr and Bellis (2006) for details of the questionable ethics of this report (p. 10).
teaching in selected schools visited in the course of the inquiry. Where teachers are not being denigrated in the report, the writers of the report effuse over the skills of someone whom they judge to be an individual quality teacher – “Members of the Committee found it a moment of awe to observe an effective teacher” (p. 11). It would seem that the hope of the nation resides in such moments of awe. In observing that such moments are possible, and that such moments exist apparently “regardless of student background” (ie. irrespective of socio-economic status, irrespective of the physical conditions of schools and schooling), Teaching Reading is keying into the fetishising discourse of the ‘individual quality teacher’ that is so alluring to neoliberal governments. As Cochran-Smith (2004) explains:

If teacher quality, the ‘great equalizer,’ can mitigate the effects of poverty, lack of opportunity, and inequitable resource allocation … then there is no need to create public policies or programs to ameliorate them. Rather than programs that target the elimination of poverty and the redistribution of resources, only initiatives that enhance teacher quality would be necessary. (Cochran-Smith 2004a, p. 199)

I attended a keynote forum at the 2005 conference of the Victorian Association of the Teaching of English (VATE). It was called “Postcode or individual teacher?: How much difference does the teacher make?”, and it addressed these very issues. Panelists in the forum included Ken Rowe (ACER and Chair of the National Literacy Inquiry), Amanda McGraw (University of Ballarat) and Bob Connell (University of Sydney). Early-career English teacher, Natalie Bellis, also attended this forum. As we sometimes do, Natalie and I emailed each other after the event, reflecting on what we had heard about English teaching and professional learning and considering how it connected with our research and our experiences.71

Natalie began:

Natalie: After the forum, I was driving home, reflecting on all that had been said. I recalled Ken Rowe asking his audience to raise their hand if they could think of a teacher who had made a difference in their lives. Of course I could. I could think of several.

Teachers can make a difference. I haven’t been doing this job for very long, but I’ve seen enough to believe that. That’s why I teach.

71 These and other parts of the email conversation are published in Bellis and Parr (2005) Responding to the forum: continuing the conversation, Idiom, 41.2, pp. 39-47.
Then, paused at the traffic lights, the faces of the students that I have taught over the past two years flickered in my mind. I thought about their lives outside of my classroom, some of which I knew more about than others. I thought about their relationships with family members and friends, book-lined or bare shelves, experiences traveling overseas, out-of-school literacy practices, values, lifestyles, communities and cultures. I wondered how they would feel about Ken Rowe’s claim that I was the only factor that mattered in their English education!

Graham: Yes, the debate about teacher quality at the conference forum was timely: a VATE conference where feathers were flying! Wonderful.

I know where you’re coming from when you speak of teachers making a difference. It’s disturbing though, isn’t it, when your statement, “Teachers can make a difference” and Ken Rowe’s statement, “Teachers can make a difference,” mean such different things. Here we have a classic paradox of the same language being used to construct very different arguments! Bob Connell began his presentation at the forum by saying that most people engaged in education “act on the basis that teaching matters.” It was interesting to see how he proceeded to speak more often of teaching (as a collective enterprise) than he spoke of teachers (as individuals). The distinction in language is very helpful, I feel, in thinking about this issue of teacher quality.

Sachs (2005) and Doecke (2006) have argued powerfully that even the notion of the ‘individual teacher quality’ is premised on a dangerous assumption, that one can pin down and meaningfully measure quality in the ‘performance’ of any individual teacher. They explain how this is done: by de-emphasising the impact of the socio-cultural context of teaching (mainly because it can’t be adequately measured), and by simplifying what Sachs calls “the multiple social, intellectual and relational layers of teachers’ work.” Sachs and Doecke, like Bob Connell at the forum, speak about the ways in which an intense focus on the individual teacher, with an accompanying blindness to the impact of socio-cultural context and historical background on teaching and learning, can serve to advantage already privileged groups in society (whether they be teachers, students or schools)....

And so our conversation continued in a form of dialogic inquiry, which I think we both felt to be energising and generative. However, I was left wondering about the potential for generating dialogue with people such as the writers of Teaching Reading who show their dialogic connectedness (or lack of it) with an alternative theoretical and methodological position by dismissing it as “evidence of pervasive ignorance” (NITL 2005a, p. 56). For such is the rhetoric of this report. The fetishising discourse of the quality teacher (whose knowledge and skills exist independent of context and the family background of the students) has, of course, a lively (and yet rather short) history in educational research and policy. It is central to the rhetoric of school or education...

3. Narrowing the scope of evidence-based research and teaching

As suggested above, all governments need to prove to Jill and Joe Voter the value of the reform agenda they are proposing (MacLure 2005). For neoliberal governments, effectiveness discourses provide them with an accessible language for this, one that communicates simply and unproblematically with a wide audience. Governments also need access to uncomplicated ‘proof’ that these agendas are ‘working effectively’ elsewhere. School Effectiveness Research (SER) conducted in Australia and other countries provides plenty of ‘evidence-based’ findings of effectiveness policy and practices that ‘work,’ although these findings are rigorously challenged by other research using different paradigms and methodologies.

As in all serious inquiry, the methodology underpinning this National Inquiry (including what constituted evidence and what did not) significantly impacted the way in which ‘facts’ and ‘evidence’ were gathered and presented. It is clear, from a study of the criteria for selecting research articles for consideration in the Literature Review of *Teaching Reading* (NITL 2005b, p. 15), that certain sorts of evidence in certain sorts of research were privileged over others, and a great deal of highly respected research (international and Australian) was all but ignored.72

Whatever the reasons, this resulted in a substantive narrowing down of notions of evidence-based research. This narrowing down is directly contrary to recommendations coming from large-scale research into school education and teacher education, conducted by highly respected academics and practitioners working independently of the constraints of neoliberal government-framed projects in the US and UK.73 These internationally respected researchers strongly recommend that future research into teaching and learning in schools and teacher education consider a *wider*, not narrower, scope of what counts as evidence (ie. in student learning outcomes and teachers’

72 See the special edition of Teachers’ College Record, 107(1) (2005) which explores this phenomenon in the major US report, *Scientific research in education*. For similar experiences in systematic reviewing research, in Western countries, see MacLure 2005.
professional learning outcomes). They urge future research designs to be more intellectually imaginative about the ways in which evidence might be gathered, measured and evaluated.

The other explanation for this imperative to narrow down what is considered as ‘evidence’ might also be interpreted as crudely political. The totality of what might count as ‘evidence’ – eg. the multiplicity of ‘outcomes’ of learning and teaching – is inevitably complex, contradictory and elusive (ie. in terms of measurable evidence), and yet neoliberal governments frame inquiries so that there are clear, simple and easily implemented recommendations. Governments need to show demonstrable ‘pay-offs’ for (ie. accountability and/or effectiveness of) their investment in educational reform – see Chapter 7 in this text – so reports of government inquiries need to provide unproblematic advice to show that pay-off. In effect, neoliberal government inquiries provide politically savvy advice for governments to be able to claim full accountability for any successes, and a justification for them to abrogate themselves from accountability for any perceived failures.

Bottery (2005) explains the attractiveness of a traditional SER or educational effectiveness paradigm to neoliberal politicians, to researchers working within government guidelines and to other policy-makers:

First, it is simple and easy to understand, in outline at least, and in an age of turmoil, with too little time for too much work, a research agenda which suggests simplicity is going to be very welcome. Second, it is linear: it suggests \( a \) causes \( b \), and that there will be no occasions where \( b \) causes \( a \), or where \( a \) and \( b \) are interactive. Again the transparency and simplicity appeals. Third it suggests that external direction and policy control is not only possible but actually essential and this research agenda suggests that an objective and distanced look at the work of schools can and should be done. Finally, it justifies institutional responsibility for achieving results, for if the answers (ie. the key factors and the means of inserting them into a school context) are given by policy makers or their representatives to schools as a means of remediating their problems and they fail to do this, then this must be their fault, not that of policy makers. (p. 148)

Natalie and I found it interesting to muse, further, over this notion of evidence of learning that is “transparent.” We ‘talked,’ via email again, about the ways in which learning may be happening and yet not be so obviously evident with respect to student learning and teachers’ professional learning. We wondered: ‘What happens when collaborative professional learning cannot be located within a single individual only?’

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and ‘What happens when professional learning is felt, by the learner/s, to be powerful and full of dialogic possibilities, and yet its value might not be directly visible in particular student learning outcomes?’

Graham: I’m moved to think of my son Daniel who is in his first year of schooling. A few weeks ago my wife and I saw Daniel at his very first annual concert at his primary school. His big challenge in this concert was to read a few sentences, on his own, to introduce his class’s performance up on stage, before joining in the singing and dancing with the whole class. With furrowed brow, clearly conscious of the gaze of the 400 or so people in the audience, Daniel nevertheless spoke confidently into the microphone held by a teacher: “Our class will now sing a traditional Samoan song about cats. When European settlers first arrived in Samoa ....” And so through to the end. He got there, and he did a pretty good job, too.

This would not be so remarkable, except that Daniel has only recently started to read unassisted. After several years of ‘learning to read,’ he’s only just begun to gain confidence and fluency in his reading. Since he was born, my wife Tricia and I have looked to immerse him in rich and imaginative literacy experiences in his home and in his out-of-school life generally. His teachers, at kinder and now at primary school, have used a variety of imaginative and more systematic approaches in the classroom to teach him to read and write. We’d like to think that he has been nurtured, scaffolded and encouraged every step of the way. And yet, up to now any standardized reading test, one that tests ‘performance,’ could only judge that Daniel was ... not reading. The learning outcome for measuring whether he was learning to read, eg. At level 1 of the dimension of English in the Victorian Essential Learning Standards (VELS) (VCAA 2006), the standard for level 1 includes the following statement “Students ... read aloud simple print and electronic texts that include some frequently used words and predominantly oral language structures” (p. 34).
Romantic and reductive notions of the power of the quality individual teacher can be seductive. They claim to be able to see the effects of all learning immediately, and they claim to know where the credit for the learning lies. In Daniel’s learning to read, they lay the credit solely with the quality teacher (singular). They would claim to be able to give particular credit for teaching any other student any other knowledge or skill: it is the quality teacher (singular) that matters.

This line of argument and the critique of SER paradigms generally has a strong genealogy stretching over two decades and across the UK, US and Australia (eg. Sirotnik 2004b, Slee and Weiner 1998b, Morely and Rassool 1999, Angus 1993). It is interesting to note that traditional effectiveness researchers are now reflecting critically on some of the tenuous conceptual assumptions in their earlier work. Some are acknowledging the flaws in the ‘one size fits all’ traditions within effectiveness research (MacBeath and Moos 2004, Reynolds, Stringfield, Teddlie, and Creemers 2002, Saunders 2000). Others are openly acknowledging the intellectual dangers of the privileged position that they, as effectiveness researchers, have held with governments in the last ten years (Harris and Bennett 2005, Reynolds 2005).

4. Teachers, too, will be ‘strictly educated’

There are moments where Teaching Reading explicitly denies that it is engaged in prescribing teaching approaches (see NITL 2005a, p. 31). Nevertheless, it repeatedly circles back to effectiveness rhetoric, implicitly endorsing a one-size-fits-all paradigm such as is central to the notion of a set of generic, context-free standards “for literacy teaching, initial teacher registration, and for accomplished teaching” (Recommendation 8, p. 44). And this is continued into the framing of professional learning that should be tied to context-free standards. Teachers should be more tightly accountable for their professional learning through the results of their students subsequent to that professional learning. The response of Teaching Reading (p. 43) to the widely valued and respected Standards for the Teaching of English Language and Literacy in Australia (STELLA – www.stella.org.au ) is particularly confusing and worthy of close scrutiny.

STELLA operates as a standards site that encourages teachers to engage with (and contest) its standards in their professional learning, rather than just use them to measure their performance (Doecke and Gill 2000, Doecke 2006). Interestingly, Teaching Reading acknowledges that STELLA standards “provide a useful framework for teachers’ professional learning” (p.43). It does not record the fact that English teachers from around Australia have reported on the value of STELLA in their professional
learning as autonomous individual teachers (eg. Bellis 2004, Philp 2005) and as “STELLA scholars” in a research project funded by the Australian Literacy Educators Association (Meiers 2006). And yet the writers of Teaching Reading dismiss the relevance of STELLA in terms of their narrowly evidence-based agenda:

[STELLA standards] are neither sufficiently fine-grained nor targeted to meet evidence-based best practice requirements for: (a) accreditation of teacher education courses/programs; (b) initial teacher registration; and (c) accomplished teaching of reading for children with diverse needs at different levels of schooling. (p. 43)

STELLA is apparently “useful,” it might even be valuable, but its value cannot be measured vis-à-vis the so-called “evidence-based best practice requirements.” According to Teaching Reading, English teachers, and teacher education institutions more generally, need to be made more strictly accountable in matters of professional learning. The implication is that just as English teachers (and teacher educators) cannot be trusted in their day to day pedagogical decision making, so they cannot be trusted to know what they need to know. It seems they, too, need to be strictly educated. As Smyth (2001) says:

The unfounded and unproven claim is that the current batch of economic problems can be sheeted home to teachers who have been less than diligent in the discharge of their duties, who act in self-interested ways, are incapable of pursuing the wider national agenda, and who are, therefore, in need of careful control, auditing, and monitoring to ensure the production of acceptable educational outcomes. (p. 29)

My professional experiences, my reading, my interactions with colleagues, and my personal experiences with my children, continue to be in dialogue with each other, sometimes confirming, sometimes problematising my understanding and knowledge about student learning and professional learning. However, one area where there does seem to be strong coherence is that it is misguided to try to use the STELLA standards as some sort of checklist to measure individual performance or professional learning (at any ‘level’ of experience). A body of rich research is emerging (eg. Bishop, Clarke, Doecke and Prince 2004, Doecke 2006, 2005, Meiers 2006), which tells a different story. It suggests professional learning and renewal that come from working with STELLA standards is not easily measured and will rarely be immediately visible.
Where the writers of *Teaching Reading* see STELLA as “neither sufficiently fine-grained nor targeted” (NITL 2005a, p. 43), I see a highly complex, nuanced, situated, dynamic professional artefact that recognises much of “the multiple social, intellectual and relational layers of teachers’ work.” Where the writers say they want “evidence-based guides for practice” (NITL 2005a, p. 44) over and above what STELLA provides, I see further neoliberal efforts to deprofessionalise the teaching profession via calls for reductive controls of teachers’ pedagogy and professional learning. If this were to eventuate, it would mean prescribing what teachers should learn, when they should learn it, and how to best utilise this learning in classrooms.

* * * * *

**Professional learning in ‘hard times’?**

I learned a great deal from this process of reading, reflecting, researching and engaging in professional dialogue about *Teaching Reading*. The benefits can be summarised using the discourse I have proposed in this study for dialogic professional learning. I was:

- **noticing** the dialogic potential of *Teaching Reading* with respect to its connections (and significant disconnections) between the ways that it framed and reported teachers’ professional knowledge and professional learning and my own dialogic understanding of these;
- **developing** the dialogic potential of the report for me through further reading, research and autobiographical and collaborative reflection;
- **dialogically speculating about** the potential consequences of this report on practice and policy in the professional landscape in 2005 and thereafter; and
- **activating** the dialogic potential of reading the report through the email conversation I was engaging in with teachers and colleagues like Natalie Bellis. Additionally, I was **activating** this potential through various teaching and/or professional conversations I had with preservice students and teachers about the implications of these policies, through the writing that I did at the time of the report’s
release and through the writing I am doing now as I construct this thesis text.

Despite the significant concerns articulated in my ‘genealogical narrative’ in Part 3, I can’t escape the sense that this report is, after all, just one more artefact in an ongoing conversation about the nature and possibilities of educational research, of teachers’ work, and of teachers’ professional learning. The writers of Teaching Reading may well seek to narrow down notions of evidence (in research, in literacy practices and in teaching practices). They may want to discourage, or shut down, dialogic potential for alternative ways of envisioning teaching and professional learning. And yet, alternative, critically grounded accounts exist in the public realm of English and literacy teaching and professional learning, in and around classrooms and staffrooms. And these accounts continue to proliferate in my own country and in neighbouring New Zealand: eg. teacher narratives in the STELLA website (www.stella.org.au); teacher narratives (including collaborations with researchers) published in journals such as English In Australia, Literacy Learning: The Middle Years and English Teaching: Practice and Critique (http://www.soe.waikato.ac.nz/english/ETPC/); the teacher narratives and collaborations in the book I co-authored with Brenton Doecke in Writing=Learning (Doecke and Parr 2005b); and in the recently published Only connect: English teaching, schooling and community (Doecke et al. 2006). Many on-line teacher blogs are also doing valuable work in this regard, in less formal but often richly dialogic spaces.

In many respects, Dickens’s Hard Times provides a salient analogy of the inadequacies and dangers of an agenda in education that understates the complex intellectual, social and relational work of teaching and learning, an agenda that fails to appreciate the powerful mediating nature of personal and sociocultural factors. In the face of such an agenda in Nineteenth Century England, the imaginative and caring Sissy Jupe hesitantly acquiesces, thinking “she should not be the worse” for it. If only it were a matter of being “not the worse for it.” Where neoliberal agendas and ‘free’ markets continue to dominate, my research continues to be motivated by my awareness of the Sissy Jupes of this world (and/or their teachers) who are “strictly educated” and “kept to it,” through a regime of dull, unimaginative, reductive teaching and learning policies and
practices. Sissy does keep to it, and she ends up “low-spirited, but no wiser.” In the mid-2000s, research that considers a rich range of learning outcomes (students’ and teachers’), and research that measures these outcomes in diverse ways, is revealing similar consequences for students, teachers and researchers: there are critical dangers in subscribing to neoliberal agendas of tightly controlled pedagogy, curriculum and professional learning. But these agendas should not be seen as either monolithic or indomitable. My own experiences, my knowledge through professional contexts and my reading of the research, suggest that dialogic potential exists in even the most repressive and apparently monologic ecologies.

Conclusions

In the three parts of this chapter, I have presented a diverse range of perspectives and narratives on professional learning locally (in Victoria), nationally (in Australia), and internationally (with occasional references to England, the US, and New Zealand). I have designed these perspectives and narratives in ways that enable readers to dialogically construct a sense of the ecologies of professional learning as I understand them at the time of this project. I have purposely avoided a smoothed-out, linear depiction of these ecologies. I wanted to enhance the discontinuities as much as to encourage some sense of continuities and coherence. As I said in the preface to this chapter, I am dialogically engaged in and with the diverse ecologies I have evoked here, and there is no escaping that engagement – for better or worse.

In the following three chapters, I will focus attention on constructing critical and creative accounts of the professional learning of The Literary Theory Inquiry Group in Eastern Girls’ College. These accounts will investigate particular conceptual elements and dialogic dynamics, and they will draw on some of the other teacher voices of this research – from the questionnaires and interviews – that speak to and reflect the dialogic learning of The Inquiry Group.
Preface

All social and psychological entities are processual in nature…. Their unfinalizable activity is essential to their identity. Thus for any individual or social entity, we cannot properly separate existence from the ongoing process of communication. “To be means to communicate” [Bakhtin] It is therefore inaccurate to speak of entering into dialogue, as if the components could exist in any other way. To be sure, dialogues may break off (they never truly end), but dialogue itself is always going on….. Dialogue is not a subsequent act but is itself the starting point.

Morson and Emerson (1990, p. 50)

In this chapter, I investigate what dialogic inquiry-based professional learning for English-literature teachers can entail. I consider dialogic activity in a range of settings: teachers responding to a questionnaire, myself as researcher inquiring into professional learning, teachers engaged in extended research interviews, and finally the professional learning conversations of The Literary Theory Inquiry Group at Eastern Girls’ College.

I begin with excerpts of seemingly straightforward communication, when individual teachers responded to my questionnaire, and I proceed to discuss how this communication can be seen as “unfinalizable activity” (Morson and Emerson 1990, p. 50), which is rather less straightforward. I argue that such communication shows characteristics of dialogic professional learning for the teachers involved (and for me as researcher). I propose the metaphor of musical counterpoint to describe this dialogic unfinalizable activity, which is “itself always going on,” which exists as dialogic potential, and which can thus be encouraged, enhanced and developed. Next I consider how teachers “entering into dialogue” with me in extended interviews are also engaged
in the sort of dialogue that Morson and Emerson are talking about above, the sort of professional dialogue that draws on the dialogic potential of others’ words (not just the interviewer’s) and generates further dialogic potential (consciously or unconsciously). There, again, I see this as teachers engaged in professional learning. I explain how “unfinalizable activity” such as this is fundamental to the model of dialogic inquiry-based professional learning that this study is investigating and presenting. In the final sections of the chapter, I examine some transcripts of The Literary Theory Inquiry Group in the light of these frames.

Early in the chapter I present a description of inquiry-based professional learning that is “provisionally finalized” (to use my term from Chapter 4). And throughout this chapter, the different sections consider the extent to which inquiry-based professional learning can be seen as congruent with the dialogic framework for knowledge and learning that underpin the whole study. The chapter sections are as follows:

- Accessing and enhancing dialogic potential
- A provisional ‘model’ of inquiry-based professional learning
- Negotiating possibilities in dialogic language
- A counterpoint of voices in (my own) dialogic inquiry
- Inquiry in and around schools: individual voices in a contrapuntal texture
- Inquiry in schools: negotiating possibilities
- Conclusion: a cautionary note?

As with Chapters 2, 3, 4, 6 and 7, that are divided into three dialogically connected parts, I present the seven sections of Chapter 5 in ways that highlight and encourage the dialogic potential within each section and in the interconnections between the sections.

First, some feisty written comments from VCE literature teachers in the questionnaires I sent out in Phase 1 of the project.

* * * * *
Accessing and enhancing dialogic potential

These literary theories have all had the strong smell of bullshit about them. I’ve avoided any PD sessions dealing with them. Why are you so interested by them Graham? My email is [email address supplied]

‘Paul’ (an experienced VCE literature teacher from a state school in suburban Melbourne)

Whatever happened to just teaching students to APPRECIATE the beauty, pathos, expressiveness, creativeness etc of some of our great works of lit?? (Phone numbers supplied)

‘Virginia’ (an experienced VCE literature teacher from an independent school in suburban Melbourne)

Teachers are a bizarre breed of people and I often find it difficult sharing ideas or eliciting meaningful responses from other teachers. There is a prevailing attitude that sharing our knowledge somehow compromises our intellectual and professional integrity – that insistent fear of “looking stupid” or not as capable as someone else. In addressing P.D. on literary theory, we (you/VATE DOE etc) need to remember that lots of people are defensive about not knowing “everything.” It’d be nice if everyone could get their shit together and just work towards being brilliant but it doesn’t seem to go that way. My point? Lit is still (in spite of VCE changes) an elitist subject and lots of Lit teachers are LOVELY but don’t know how to be brilliant in sharing their knowledge and power. New teachers to it can be easily intimidated and THAT needs to be considered.

‘Tina’ (an early-career VCE literature teacher from a state school in suburban Melbourne)

These comments were written in December 2001 in response to the final item of the questionnaire I sent to VCE literature teachers. (See Appendix I.) The first 15 items of the questionnaire had included demographic identifiers, and a range of questions relating to professional learning experiences, the literary canon, multiple readings of texts, and classrooms practices using literary theory. This final item was the most open-ended of all the items: “Are there any other comments you wish to make?” Of those who returned questionnaires, over 50% (71 teachers) responded to this final question,
and the responses were often as vigorous and expressive as these by Paul, Virginia and Tina. 75

For some of the teachers who responded, it may have been the case that the questionnaire prompted them to focus on a topic they were only vaguely conscious of in their professional lives. If Paul and Virginia had not already crystallized their views on the topic (ie. of literary theory and the teaching of literature) before completing the questionnaire, they certainly have identified a particular problem with it by the time they write these comments. Paul notices 76 literary theory as an irritating and irrelevant intrusion into his professional practice; Virginia notices that literary theory practices may be threatening the aesthetic pleasures of reading and teaching. They both develop the dialogic potential of their topic by questioning the relevance of literary theory knowledge in their own teaching. Part of this potential is activated through entering into dialogue (with me, at least). It may be, too, that they are taking the opportunity to express their resistance to the questionnaire’s (ie. my) implicit positioning of them as teachers who could/should take a professional interest in literary theory. Nevertheless, at the end of their comments, both offer to continue the dialogue with me by leaving their contact details (which was not required). In effect, Paul and Virginia are signaling their willingness to engage in further dialogue. In terms of the framework for interpreting dialogic potential I set out in Chapter 3, they are noticing, developing and activating the dialogic potential of their communication with me, the writer of the questionnaire. 77

Tina is just as vigorous in her writing style. She too notices the potential for dialogue about what she sees as some problems with literary theory and literature teaching. These problems (and/or this dialogic potential) have prompted her to write her extended (richly dialogic) response. Unlike Paul (and perhaps Virginia), Tina is keen to learn

75 I have allocated pseudonyms in order to personalise the succeeding discussion. All questionnaires were totally anonymous, except in cases where a teacher identified him/herself.
76 Here and in the following passages my use of the word “notice” derives from Mason (2002) – ie. in Chapter 2 I describe it as an interpretive action “identifying or acknowledging a connection between ideas or similar language that is more obvious or explicit.”
77 Bakhtin would argue that any dialogic connection need not entail agreement, of course.
more about literary theory, but she is concerned about issues of “knowledge and power” in the ways literature teachers learn from and with each other. And unlike Paul and Virginia, Tina seems more inclined to subscribe to the questionnaire’s implicit positioning of her as a teacher who might reflect on and/or learn more about literary theory. The precise nature of her subscription, though, is not clear. At one moment, she positions herself as an outsider. She pointedly generalizes about the practices and professional identity of “other teachers” – “Teachers are a bizarre breed…,” “There is a prevailing attitude …,” “Lit teachers are LOVELY….” At other times, she positions herself as an insider. For instance, she tentatively alludes to literary theory discourses, recognizing that there are collegiality concerns in terms of “knowledge and power.” Occasionally, Tina draws on discourses of professional collegiality: for instance, she uses first person plural pronouns to suggest that she is part of a collective – “sharing our knowledge” and “we need.” From about halfway through her comments, however, her place in this collective is less certain. She continues in lively dialogic rhetoric – “It’d be nice if ..” and “My point?” – where the style is assertive, even argumentative, but her positioning remains ambiguous. The agency underpinning Tina’s statements is unclear as she asserts: “It’d be nice if everyone could get their shit together” and “New teachers to [literary theory] can be easily intimidated.” Tina may or may not feel she is one of those who need to “get their shit together,” and she may or may not be one who is “easily intimidated.”

But it is less important, here, to try to pin down Tina’s position than to draw attention to the ways she notices dialogic potential in her teaching and in her professional interactions with colleagues so far in her career. It is interesting to tease out the way she develops, speculates about and activates this dialogic potential in her writing. First, her dialogic mode of writing shows her grappling with “a prevailing attitude” amongst her colleagues with respect to professional conversations about literary theory and (by implication) professional learning. She grapples with crucial tensions in some of these conversations, and she speculates about how things might be different. Through all this grappling, Tina is opening up for further dialogue a crucial issue for literature teachers.

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78 Mason (2002) considers “grappling” such as this to be an important part of what he calls “personal development cycles.” According to Mason, these cycles also involve grumbling, griping, groping, grasping, and gripping. I, on the other hand, tend to think that these are dialogically interconnected –
and for those working with teachers in their professional learning. To Tina, at least, such conversations need to be more inclusive, and less intimidating toward those who Foucault (1972) would say are not “in the true” (p. 224). Second, and just as important, are the powerful dialogic ways in which Tina communicates. She often shifts discursive positions and crosses discursive boundaries as she develops and activates the beginnings of a lively professional conversation, a conversation she seems to “need.”

A provisional ‘model’ of inquiry-based professional learning

In the multiple ways that they notice, develop, speculate about and activate dialogic potential, Tina, Virginia and Paul show that they are engaged in a form of dialogic professional learning. That learning involves accessing and enhancing various points of dialogic potential in and through their dialogue with me. In that respect, Tina, Virginia and Paul illustrate some important characteristics of the inquiry-based professional learning model that is at the heart of this study.

In optimal circumstances, the learning in this inquiry-based model is:

- **focused on a (broad) topic**
  In the case of these teachers’ inquiry the broad topic was literary theory and literature teaching.

- **ongoing**
  This involves teachers asking and responding to questions, which tend to spawn further questions, and/or the questions raise issues for which simple answers tend to be insufficient.

- **not restricted to a specific problem**
  Paul, Virginia and Tina express the ‘problem’ of literary theory and professional learning in very different ways. And their expressions of the problem are not restricted by some tightly framed statement or question from me.

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*ie.grappling involves all of the above. This accords more with Hildebrand’s (2004) interpretation of “grappling” in her own writing processes (p. 15).*

*Cf. Pope’s (2002) claim that a typical English/literature teacher “to some extent has plural, hybrid and shifting [theoretical] orientations” (p. 74).*
In optimal circumstances, inquiry-based professional learning is also:

- **utilizing written artefacts**
  
- **generating written artefacts**
  These artefacts could range from annotations in the margins of set readings, or samples of students’ work, to a draft of a possible journal article. They could also be email conversations, journal reflections, or diverse responses to a particular question.\(^{80}\) This is not to suggest that writing is more dialogic than speaking or “inner dialogue” (cf. Chapter 3). However, in many cases the act of writing prompts teachers to engage directly in dialogue with others and with themselves, and it can help them to focus (and reflect on) their dialogue and their learning (cf. Doecke and Parr 2005a). The texts I have selected from Paul, Virginia and Tina show constitute a dialogue with me as researcher. They also constitute focused dialogic artefacts written in response to a particular question.

- **not restricted to generating artefacts that reify learning**
  That is, the artefacts (those which are utilized or written) are not framed by requirements set down by others to ensure that teachers are learning.\(^{81}\)

Finally, in optimal circumstances, the learning in this inquiry-based model is:

- **encouraging creative and critical dialogue between colleagues.**
  
- **seeking to open up possibilities, and build capacity, for further dialogue.**
  These dot points refer to both written and spoken dialogue. Despite the assertive tone of Paul’s, Virginia’s and Tina’s questionnaire responses, in so many ways their communication can be seen as ‘unfinalized.’

\(^{80}\) All of the ideas in this sentence have been utilised in this study.

\(^{81}\) I should add, anecdotally, that in my experience some teachers find the process of negotiating their way through multiple and sometimes contradictory discourses to produce such a piece of writing can be part of a valuable professional learning experience in itself. The texts produced by teachers from The Inquiry Group, which I presented in Chapter 2, suggest just that.
not driven by tightly framed expectations of learning outcomes determined in advance or even by a sense of discursive norms

The writing of Paul, Virginia and Tina ranges across disparate communicative styles and discourses, as does my writing in this thesis.

Figure 5.1 (below) summarises the central characteristics of this model. Clearly, it is a model which invites flexible and creative interpretations of each dot-point, rather than the sort of model that requires compliance with a rigid set of rules or approaches.

In optimal circumstances, inquiry-based professional learning is:

- focused on a broad topic and
- ongoing but
- not restricted to a specific problem;
- utilizing written artefacts and/or
- generating written artefacts but
- not restricted to artefacts that reify learning in terms set down by others;
- encouraging creative and critical dialogue between colleagues and
- seeking to open up possibilities, and build capacity, for further dialogue but
- not driven by tightly framed expectations of learning outcomes determined in advance.

Figure 5.1: Summary of characteristics of the dialogic inquiry-based model of professional learning presented in this study

It is possible to represent these characteristics in a different way, by broadly noticing some discourses that inform my dialogic inquiry-based ‘model’ of professional learning. These discourses are outlined in Figure 5.2 below:
• **Learning as social practice**
  This applies whether teachers are visibly engaged in collaboration, engaging in synchronous (eg. in interviews or professional learning sessions) or asynchronous (ie. questionnaires, emails, blogs …) conversations, or seeming to be learning as individuals.

• **Teachers’ knowledge as social, situated and provisional**
  That is, teachers’ knowledge is contingent on all manner of social, contextual and linguistic factors. It is emergent, ‘unfinalizable,’ and open to contestation.

• **Language as dialogic and involving struggles and tensions**
  These dialogical struggles and tensions mediate all professional learning and knowing.

• **Professional learning as mediated by a range of sociocultural and political ecologies**
  Various discursive practices constitute, and are constitutive of, these ecologies; but also these ecologies are reflected in, and influenced by, these discursive practices.

**Figure 5.2: Broad outline of discourses underpinning the model of dialogic inquiry-based professional learning developed through this study**

This chapter is intended to explore these characteristics and these discourses, and to clarify the model of dialogic inquiry-based professional learning I am investigating throughout this study. As part of this process, I need firstly to provide a more detailed discursive framework for the exploring and clarifying I hope to do.

**Negotiating ‘possibilities’ in dialogic language**

I have spoken in Chapters 2 and 3 about how, for Bakhtin, dialogue is conceived initially as a mode of interaction, an exchange between two participating voices; and how this everyday notion of dialogue as exchange or debate understates the complexity of such a communication and underestimates the epistemological richness of dialogue and of language. I discussed the ways in which a more dynamic notion of dialogism might be seen as congruent with what I called “inner dialogue” and how this draws on
Vygostsky’s notion of higher mental functioning in a social context, with multiple overlapping interactions between words, between people, between cultures. And I drew attention to the unfinalizable nature of language and knowledge, and how that is mediated by the “milling, roiling, teeming, Dyonisian character of discourses” (see Chapter 2, p. 72), and the “effervescing” dialogic potential. I went on to discuss how an appreciation of the dynamic nature of this dialogic perspective on language and social life helps teachers (and researchers) to notice, develop, speculate about and activate dialogic potential in professional learning practices. This dynamism is what makes investigation into the role of language in professional learning problematic, but it is also where the greatest potential for creativity might be seen to exist.

Morson and Emerson (1990) are excited about a Bakhtinian focus on the dialogic nature of language as social process:

To understand language as creative, the self as unfinalizable, and history as fundamentally open, each had to be described [by Bakhtin] so that creativity was inherent in it. … Creativity is always and everywhere. We can now appreciate the connection between unfinalizability in ordinary processes, as Bakhtin puts it, in the very “prose of everyday life.” Those processes are open to the future because they are and have been the product of accumulated tiny alterations constituting the daily “event of being.” (Morson and Emerson 1990, p. 40)

Something of that excitement has been expressed by others. In his Preface to lyrical ballads, Wordsworth (1802/1997) effuses over the creative potential of language emerging from the head (or heart) of a poetic sensibility. He claims to use language to represent “common life, and to relate or describe [this life], as far as was possible in a selection of language really used by men [sic],” although Wordsworth does not or can not use the actual language these men use. Rather, he suggests that the language he uses irrupts out of his poetic sensibility, for example, in a “spontaneous overflow of powerful emotion ….” Even though this emotion is “recollected in tranquility,” it is still from in his head, as it were. By arguing away the socially grounded nature of language, Wordsworth was theorizing language as static, cut off from the very people he hoped to represent, existing apparently outside the chain of utterances that constitutes all
language (Morson and Emerson 1990, p. 41; see also Chouliaraki and Fairclough 1999, p. 49).  

Others have drawn attention to the ways in which the intertextual and interdiscursive character of language, as discourse practice, spawns creative possibilities. Chouliaraki and Fairclough (1999) explain intertextuality as “the presence in my discourse of the specific words of the other mixed in with my words” (p. 49). Fairclough (2001) describes the interdiscursivity of a text or utterance as “part of its intertextuality”; it involves the ways in which particular genres, discourses and styles are drawn upon, and worked into “particular articulations” (p. 124). For many sociolinguists, there is a strong correlation between an awareness of the intertextuality and interdiscursivity in a text or utterance, and a recognition of the potential creativity of such a text or utterance. For Fairclough (1995), “heterogeneity emanates from intertextuality” (p. 2), and Wodak (2001) refers to the “open and hybrid” nature of discourses, and how “inter-textuality and interdiscursivity allow for new fields of action” (p. 66). Phillips and Jorgenson (2002) see the interdiscursive and intertextual aspect of language-as-discourse as contributing to “a form of action through which people can change the world”; at the same time, they recognize that it is also “a form of action that is socially and historically situated and in a dialectical relationship with other aspects of the social” (p. 62). That is, when language is viewed as social practice, as discourse, then it can be seen as 

constituting the social world and constituted by other social practices and social dimensions with which it is in dialogic contact (p. 61).

Fairclough (1995) had tempered any potential excitement about the “seemingly limitless possibilities of creativity … suggested by the discursive concept of interdiscursivity – an endless combination and recombination of genres and discourses,” by pointing out that these possibilities were “in practice limited and constrained by the state of hegemonic relations and hegemonic struggle” (p. 137). Indeed, Fairclough and many

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82 I offer this response to Wordsworth because of its dialogic potential in my argument here, and not because I expect a poet from the beginning of the 19th Century to be offering something different in terms of a reflexive theorising about language. See James Harrison’s article (1971) for a discussion of Wordsworth’s connectedness to “common life.”
others have framed the relationship in terms of a dialectic tension between social structures or systems – which Fairclough (1995) deems to be non-discursive – and linguistic or discursive practices (cf also Locke 2004, Luke 1995, 2002, Phillips and Jorgenson 2002). Misson (1994) uses discourses of “freedom” and “constraint” to frame the dialectic. Wodak (2001) sees the relationship as a duality between particular discursive practices and the specific fields of action ... in which they are embedded. On the one hand, the situational, institutional and social settings shape and affect discourses, and on the other, discourses influence discursive as well as non-discursive processes and actions. (p. 66)

In a way, for Althusser (1971), the tension is less important because he appears to see all aspects of the social (both discursive and non-discursive) as controlled by one entrenched, dominant ideology or another. Althusser’s notion of *interpellation* describes a dynamic whereby a subject is “recruited” into a discursive position in a speech event, where there is little choice other than to be recruited, and where the subject is unable to move away from or transform him/herself from this position (Phillips and Jorgenson 2002, p. 15). This does not account for the inherent instability of discursive practices mediated by intertextuality and interdiscursivity. That is, any one discursive practice is meaningful in terms of its dialogic relationship with (and often its conflict with) related texts and discourses (Gee 1999, p. 132). As Phillips and Jorgenson (2002) point out, Gramsci’s (1991) notion of social hegemonies emphasizes more convincingly both the entrenched power of some social structures and what Bakhtin (1981a) would call the non-dialogic or centripetal tendencies in language that can support these structures. Gramsci also acknowledges issues of interdiscursivity and intertextuality, and the essentially dialogic nature of language reflected in social practices. Althusser’s position would seem to disallow a more ambivalent position, such as I have argued for in Chapter 3, whereby individuals and groups may make a decision to ‘subscribe’ tentatively to a particular discourse position, with an awareness that dynamic intertextual and interdiscursive possibilities are likely to open up new discursive practices and social systems in the future.
These arguments in the literature have important implications for this research. It might have been possible, for instance, to position English-literature teachers in this study as passive, “duped” recruits (Pennycook 2001, p. 40), who need to be saved from a rampaging neoliberal monster in order to reestablish some of their autonomy in social systems and some authoritativeness in their discursive practices. This sort of approach would suggest, on the one hand, determinism with respect to the power of dominant groups (cf. Canagarajah 1999) and, on the other hand, paternalism on the part of the researcher (cf. Pennycook 2001), and I reject it. I prefer to recognize and look to support the lively and feisty professionalism of teachers such as those quoted at the start of this chapter – and those I will be quoting below. And I prefer to encourage even those who seem less powerful and yet do often “find innumerable, creative, even powerful ways to resist inequity” (Phillips and Jorgenson 2002, p. 71). I reject also the suggestion that I as researcher am somehow able to avoid being interpellated or recruited by powerful discourses and social systems whereas my teacher colleagues have no option but to submit. As a researcher and a teacher educator, I do not operate outside managerial practices and cultures. I cannot separate myself from the dialogic chains of language that implicate all within the particular field of education, nor can I operate outside of ideological effects in order to change them (Gee 1999). Indeed, to claim that I can do any of these would be to claim an unlikely alliance with William Wordsworth, sharing a capacity somehow to practise and communicate outside the chain of utterances that constitute dialogic language.

I believe, as Gee does, that “language works in a society to create better and worse worlds, institutions, and human relationships” (Gee 1999, p. 8). I believe that it might be possible through this study to use the dialogic and creative potential of language to engage in dialogic discursive practices (in collaboration with participants and with my readers) to work towards a better world. To return to Bakhtin, yes, on the one hand, there is a tendency for the diversity of language and culture to resolve into monologic

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83 See Phillips and Jorgenson (2002) for a more detailed summary of these arguments (pp. 15-17). See also Pennycook (2001) who considers the issue from the perspective of emancipatory discourses in critical discourse analysis (pp. 40–42). Pennycook claims: “Not only are questions about language always political but so are the answers” (p. 42). Mills (1997) constructs a similar critique and aims it at what he sees as a Marxist model of ideology. Mills interprets this model as implying “a simplistic and negative process whereby individuals were duped into using conceptual systems which were not in their own interests” (p. 30).
(apparently) stabilizing stasis, albeit briefly, rendering debate and dialogue seemingly unnecessary. In extreme protracted cases, this is when cultures do seem to be in thrall to more dominant neoliberal discourses, in the form of Althusser’s (1971) ideological state apparatuses. In professional cultures this can seem like inertia is setting in. There have been moments where I felt this to be the case in the culture of English teaching, when parts of the profession seemed resistant to change. In simple terms, such a culture is more likely to reproduce practices and beliefs than to develop them, and in such cultures debate or controversy is rarely heard, according to Ball (1997, p. 326). Bakhtin explains this as an inherently centripetal tendency in language. On the other hand, I hold to the view that, in an ongoing struggle with this centripetal tendency, there is a complementary tendency for language and culture to fragment and fracture, for any discursive practice to connect dialogically with other texts, or discursive practices – the centrifugal tendency in language. By seeking to stimulate this centrifugal tendency, we encourage more diverse and unexpected outcomes. This is likely to generate more dialogue, more instability and more dialogic potential, and it is also likely to open up more imaginative possibilities for negotiating a way forward.

Both the centripetal and the centrifugal tendencies in language are implicitly acknowledged in Giroux’s (1988) advocacy for a “language of possibility” in educational research generally. Giroux emphasises the need for educators to open up dialogue and critical engagement. He argues that this is done more effectively when teachers and researchers appreciate the capacities inherent in language that enable one to imagine and frame an alternative reality. In a similar vein but with a more rigorous sociocultural theorizing of his position, Leonardo (2004) talks about the value of a “language of transcendence.” In stressing the need for imagination rather than revolution in arresting the tilt toward monologic inertia in managerial cultures, he appreciates the need to negotiate a way through to a better future with some cultures that might otherwise seem inert or alien. He goes as far as advocating “dreaming” for critical social theorists. As he says “dreaming represents less a wandering consciousness and more a refusal to surrender to despair” (Leonardo 2004, p. 15).
I want now to critically inquire into some possibilities for dialogue and counterpoint in inquiry-based professional learning. Initially, this will involve sketching out some of the ways in which I myself have balanced dreaming and wondering with more structured critical investigation, as a researcher and participant in collaborative inquiry. I hope to tease out how I have negotiated the centripal and centrifugal tendencies in my own professional learning and professional spaces. I will then discuss some extracts from interviews with teachers where these teachers are enacting dialogic approaches to negotiating their professional learning and professional space. I will conclude this chapter with some close analysis of an excerpt from a transcript of The Literary Theory Inquiry Group’s professional learning sessions.

A counterpoint of voices in (my own) dialogic inquiry

From the earliest stages of my research into teachers’ professional learning, I have been absorbed by the possibilities that Bakhtin’s notion of “dialogism” held for understanding and investigating professional learning and professional identity. I saw this as applying in my own learning and professional identity, in the learning of the teacher colleagues with whom I was in conversation during my research, and in government policy documents and projects with respect to professional learning. Through a process of opening up and dialogically connecting with other voices (colleagues, institutions, and in my professional reading), and by imaginatively connecting to, and reconstructing, my previous experiences and learning in musical environments, I came to grapple with and reconstruct notions of dialogism in terms of the musical discourse of “counterpoint” (as described in Chapter 3). This proved valuable in my journey to understand my own professional learning and in wondering about the dialogic potential of teachers’ professional learning more generally. I want now to trace out some of that journey.

It is always problematic to identify any learning or ‘new knowledge’ as beginning at a certain point in time. And yet, in this instance, I feel I can locate my earliest encounter with the idea of counterpoint in professional learning in my reading of Edward Said’s (1995) *Orientalism*. My research journal from the time reminds me that I had been reading widely in relation to post-colonial literary theory in preparation for one of the
meetings of The Literary Theory Inquiry Group. In *Orientalism*, I was interested in Said’s reflection on his reading practices and his own “meaning making” in terms of counterpoint. He writes of the need to read not univocally, but *contrapuntally* (Said 1995). My own biography, before becoming a teacher educator, before indeed my becoming an English teacher in secondary schools, had included six years as a professional musician in The Melbourne Symphony Orchestra. It is not hard, in retrospect, to see how Said’s allusion to musical discourse while discussing an idea from literary theory would resonate with me. And yet, here, as in so many aspects of my “meaning making” with regard to dialogism and counterpoint, it would have been impossible to plan for such a moment of learning.

When I subsequently read Ashcroft and Ahluwalia’s (1999) critical interpretation of Said’s work, I found musical allusions multiplying and overlapping.

Contrapuntal reading [in Said’s terms] is a technique of theme and variation by which counterpoint is established between the imperial narrative and the post-colonial perspective, a “counter-narrative” that keeps penetrating beneath the surface of individual texts to elaborate the ubiquitous presence of imperialism in canonical culture…. Contrapuntal reading takes both (or all) dimensions of polyphony into account, rather than the dominant one, in order to discover what a univocal reading might conceal …. (Ashcroft and Ahluwalia 1999, pp. 93, 94)

My purpose in quoting this passage is not to dwell on the ways in which such ideas contributed to my understanding of and engagement with postcolonialist discourses (although these ideas were indeed important to my learning at that time). Rather, I want to pause to record how this profusion of musical metaphors – “contrapuntal,” “theme and variation,” “polyphony,” “univocal” – encouraged me to speculate about and develop some as yet barely noticed dialogic potential. My other purpose, here, is to explore how this (for me) “new” language spawned “wondering” in a more focused and critical way.

Popper and Eccles (1977, in Ball 1995) argue that
We can grasp a theory only by trying to reinvent it or to reconstruct it, and by trying out, with the help of our imagination, all the consequences of the theory which seem to us to be interesting and important. (p. 86)

Where I say I was “encouraged to speculate about and develop some as yet barely noticed dialogic potential,” Popper and Eccles might say I was imaginatively reinventing and reconstructing Bakhtin’s notion of dialogism. Vygotsky (1962b) might draw attention to the “influx of sense” that such a combination of related experiences and languages was encouraging in me (p. 147). And Bakhtin, himself, might notice the centrifugal potential in this dynamic movement within and between languages or discourses. For Allan Reid (2004), such movement would have been crucial for “building new inquiry capacities” (p. 3) in my professional learning.

A subsequent and speculative stroll to a musical dictionary brought me to the description of “counterpoint” that I quoted earlier in Chapter 3 (see p. 124). This description set off an effusion of dialogic connections: powerful dialogic relationships between the discourses of musical counterpoint, my experiences and knowledge as a professional musician, and my emerging understanding of professional cultures of inquiry as a researcher in education. Grove’s Musical Dictionary defined counterpoint as follows:

> The term counterpoint … is used to describe music in which the chief interest lies in the various strands that make up the texture, and particularly in the combination of these strands and their relationship to each other and the texture as a whole (Grove, 1961)

On one level, I saw my voice in educational research communities as one of those “various strands.” My multiple professional, social and academic worlds (and discourses) came together in lively dialogue with each other in complex ways, ways that bubbled with possibilities. And just as I was aware that my voice was made up of multiple inter-relating voices, so it was clear that my inquiry overall was made up of interweaving strands of inquiry, often in tension with each other. The complex and occasionally chaotic (cf. Chapter 7) inter-relating of these strands, and their relationship

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84 To be more accurate, I should perhaps say that this reconstructing involved elements of the work of Said, Ashcroft and Ahluwalia’s as well as Bakhtin.
with an emerging sense of the ‘whole’ for me, might be better represented (as I said earlier) by a twentieth century avant-garde contrapuntal work, Stockhausen’s *Gruppen*, than by JS Bach’s counterpoint. Sometimes, the sense of connectedness between the various strands in my learning has been as difficult to notice as the connections between the various strands in Stockhausen’s massive counterpoint. Or to put it another way, the relationships between the voices and the “texture” of my learning as a whole were not as obvious to me as the relationships of the voices and the whole in a Bach fugue. Indeed, I can now say that my understanding of the “whole” of my professional learning is best articulated in a metaphor that combines these two composers’ contrapuntal (but highly contrasting) aesthetics.

At the time of my speculative stroll to the musical dictionary, as I explained earlier (pp. 122-125), I was collaborating with Natalie Bellis, an early-career teacher who had been a student of mine in her pre-service education course. Like me, Natalie had studied music in her undergraduate degree. Here was an opportunity for us to explore further the potentiality of dialogue and counterpoint that comes from in-depth knowledge of different disciplines and discourses. In the book chapter that Natalie and I were co-authoring about autobiographical inquiry, we had written about how we valued the musical metaphor of counterpoint: (i) it had helped us to tease out multiple voices where one narrative voice traditionally dominated over others; and (ii) it had enabled us to explore the dialogic possibilities of language, knowledge and identity in imaginative and meaningful ways (Parr and Bellis 2005, p. 25).

As part of this imaginative exploration, Natalie and I speculated about the possibilities of critically unpacking the German musical discourse of “Stimme” (roughly translated as “voice”), in order to explain the interrelatedness of different voices in our contrapuntal collaboration. Just as strands or lines of music interrelate with each other and with the texture as a whole in musical counterpoint, so too the multiple voices and factors that contributed to our professional collaboration were interrelating, historically, linguistically, structurally, and socially, in a counterpoint of inquiry. And so we proposed the following application of this counterpoint discourse to the principles that we felt were underpinning the critical dialogic inquiry we were enacting:
In our co-written text … we hope to show that collaborative inquiry-based dialogue does not always come together neatly with one voice. Sometimes the voices “sound” together, sometimes they sound in turn; sometimes one voice responds to another, sometimes two voices are “in harmony with” each other; occasionally the voices are dissonant. (And occasionally we leave the dissonance unresolved.) (Parr and Bellis 2005, p. 28)

Looking back to this writing, I consider it an important artefact in my emerging professional learning. It constituted, and was constituted by, a combination of noticing, developing, speculating about and activating the dialogic potential around me and in my professional biography. It was both an end-product and an important strand or voice in my dialogic inquiry-based learning. It was opening up dialogic possibilities, and it continues to do so. At the time, these possibilities were influenced by various temporal and cultural factors, a range of discursive and non-discursive practices, and they were coming together in productive and unexpected ways. In part, they were a consequence of Natalie’s and my open-ended and collaborative approach to inquiry. In other respects, they derived from a grounded and explicit theoretical base to our inquiry. And partly they were a function of chance or good fortune. In my own case, I was using past and present experiences in different learning cultures and discourses (musical, literary, and educational) to construct a ‘newer’ conception of inquiry that could be meaningful to me and to others. It seemed to me to provide aesthetic and critical possibilities, and a focus for developing more possibilities in further inquiry.

The emergence of such dialogue was influenced, but not necessarily encouraged, by the managerial cultures that Natalie and I were experiencing in our different professional settings – ie. in schools and in teacher education institutions – where technologies of surveillance were requiring us to be accountable for more and more of our professional work. I’m speaking of the sort of cultures that seek to atomize teachers’ work, by requiring them to demonstrate competence in individual performance outcomes according to centrally prescribed lists of professional standards. (See Mahony and

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85 I was co-editing the book, *Writing=Learning* (2005), with my colleague and mentor Brenton Doecke at this time. When searching for a sub-title of a collection of chapters in one section of this book, we agreed on the term, ‘Counterpoint’, and used the definition of counterpoint from the musical dictionary as an epigraph to that section.
Hextal 2000. See also Chapter 4.) It is all very well for me to say, from my current vantage point, that the dialogic inquiry that I was engaged in at that time was generative in many ways. Approaching that period of inquiry, I could never have predicted the exact ways in which the inquiry would pan out. This is not to suggest that the inquiry was random, serendipitous and bereft of professional planning. I like to think that the planning was more strategic than that. I was planning for possibility and potentiality rather than rigidly adhering to some set of pre-determined research or professional learning requirements. And yet it was planning that required negotiation with, and within, the increasingly managerial structures and systems in which I was required to operate as a teacher educator in a university.

**Inquiry in and around schools**

(1) *Individual voices in a contrapuntal texture*

In my own professional learning as researcher over the course of the three years it took initially to generate and organise the data for this project, my inquiry into English-literature teachers’ professional lives uncovered many stories of rich and generative professional learning. That is not to deny every bleak story that made its way into the columns of newspapers and out of the mouths of politicians. (See Chapter 6.) But it’s worth stating at this juncture, that the sheer number and diversity of stories I encountered during my research suggests that the full story, the full “sense,” of professional learning in schools (and universities), was rarely heard in mainstream media or political discussions. In this section of the chapter I want to present and dialogically reflect on some of these stories.

In the extended interviews I conducted with individual teachers in Phase 1 of this project, these teachers often related tales of what I would describe as dialogic inquiry-based professional learning. These stories showed their resistance to being “recruited” to dominant managerialist discourses and systems of professional learning. I present below four short excerpts from these extended interviews in order to draw out and critically explore the ways in which these teachers were learning. In particular, I’m interested in the ways their texts show them to be both participating in and generating
dialogue with their colleagues. I’m also interested in the dialogic ways these stories speak to and with each other in a dialogue or counterpoint of professional learning.

In the following section I will consider excerpts from four separate interviews with:

1. Kris
2. Sam
3. Julia and Larry
4. Teri

I will discuss two of these interviews at a time, in order to highlight and activate various dialogic elements. I begin with excerpts from Kris and then Sam.

1. Kris is an experienced teacher of senior English in a secondary school situated in a lower-middle class area on the outskirts of Melbourne. She is speaking in the following excerpt of her long-term involvement in a professional network of English teachers that was originally convened to provide short-term collegial support across schools through the early stages (in the late 1980s through to the mid-1990s) of the introduction of the Victorian Certificate of Education, a new curriculum document for senior English in Victoria.86

   I was in [RH’s] network, which persisted long after other networks. We went on for about 5 or 6 years. And that was enormously valuable. We had really interesting speakers, lots of energy, lots of really lively competent teachers from a very wide range of schools …. Oh we had the occasional visitor from [neighbouring schools] who popped in …. That was really good professional development, and really good support, in cross marking, and sharing of resources and approaches…. People participated, and were expected to participate, as professional people. It wasn’t the expert coming to hold forth. [Invited] speakers obviously had expertise, that we were … very glad to tap into, but it wasn’t a … it was a question of opening out possibilities rather than coming out with gospel truth, closing things down.

   Kris, transcript of extended interview, 2001

86 The Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE) Study Design for English teachers, in its first iteration, gave Victorian teachers in schools considerable professional autonomy to construct a curriculum that was appropriate for their particular school setting. Teachers responded to the challenge by forming networks of teachers from different schools to support and collaborate in the construction of these curriculum documents. See Howells (2003) for a critical account of the efforts of English teachers in Victoria maintain their autonomy in the face of increasing intervention by governments, bureaucrats and certain voices within the popular media.
2. Sam is an experienced teacher of senior English in a large independent girls’ school in a middle-class suburb of Melbourne. She is speaking about an occasion where she and a colleague were preparing for a professional learning session for Year 12 teachers in the senior English department in her school. She and a colleague, Penny, had been asked to lead one session in the day’s activities.

... [Penny and I] pulled out three passages from *Cat’s Eye* which we knew very well. But some teachers new to Year 12 didn’t know *Cat’s Eye* at all…. We pulled out these passages and even when the two of us were talking about them before meeting with the whole group, there were things emerging from the passages that you don’t pick up unless you read it in very close detail. It’s looking at the narrative details and looking at the words and the way that the words are being used in that context…. [These sorts of experiences] made me much sharper in my analysis of a literary text [even one] that I know well.

Sam, transcript of extended interview, 2002

Kris’s and Sam’s stories present different and yet dialogically related perspectives on professional learning, and they reflect many of the characteristics of inquiry-based professional learning as set out at the start of this chapter and in Figure 5.1. The voices are Kim’s and Sam’s; in terms of the musical metaphor of counterpoint, they are different and yet interrelated *stimmen*. Although speaking at different times, in different conversations with me, their voices can be seen as in dialogue with each other on the page here (and by implication in the profession).

‘Listening in’ to their dialogue, I perceive at least two reasons to be sanguine about the dialogic potential of professional learning in their schools. First, while Sam’s professional learning day for Year 12 English teachers took place in a well resourced independent school in the leafy middle-class suburbs of Melbourne, it would seem from her story that the socio-cultural exclusivity of the school setting had not given rise to professional complacency amongst its English teachers. There was plenty of dialogic potential evident in their conversations, if the collaboration between Penny and Sam is any indication. Second, while Kris’s network of teachers met in the outer eastern suburbs of Melbourne, with their highly multicultural student population and often ‘troubled’ social settings, it would seem that these teachers in the network remained
energetic, committed and critically engaged in their professional learning lives. In terms of Figure 5.1, their inquiry-based learning was not restricted to a specific problem, and it was seeking to open up possibilities for further dialogue. The learning was clearly ongoing; the teachers were sustaining the energy of their learning ‘for the long haul.’ The voices of Kris and Sam are confident, clearly articulate and purposeful. And their stories (here, as in other parts of our conversations together) are replete with references to their dialogic relationships with colleagues – that is, relationships which enhance the potential for ongoing collaborative learning.

As in the metaphor of musical counterpoint, where a single strand or stimme is keenly responsive to stimmen around it, the contrapuntal learning spoken about here is characterised by these teachers’ responsiveness to the voices and views of others around them. Drawing on a discourse of collegial collectivity, Kris repeatedly affirms her respect for her colleagues – they are “interesting,” “lively,” “competent,” “professional” – and she identifies the nature of the dialogue that characterised their ongoing learning as “opening out possibilities.” Sam, too, expresses her respect for her colleagues but in more indirect ways. Prior to this excerpt, she acknowledges the role of her Head of Department in organising the professional learning day and in encouraging others to take leadership roles in the session. It is interesting to see Sam’s positioning of herself in relation to her colleagues and to their collective learning experience in the excerpt. This can be done through examining her sense of agency with respect to the verbs she uses. She begins with first person plural descriptions of the early stage of her collaboration with Penny (“we pulled out these passages”, “we were talking about it”). Significantly, she shifts to agentless verbs when describing the moments of richest learning (“there were things emerging from the passages,” and later “it’s looking at the narrative detail…”), and in so doing she does not claim individual credit for this learning. In describing the learning she was engaging in with Penny, she uses the generalising second person (“things … you don’t pick up unless you read it in very close detail”), as if to suggest a principle of collegial inquiry that she has developed before or since this episode. Finally, she returns to the first person singular “me” and “I” to show her appreciation of her collaboration with Penny (“[It has] made me much sharper in my analysis of a literary text that I know well”).
In my journal entries following Kris’s and Sam’s telling of these brief stories of their professional learning, I noted their openness to new experiences and to the ongoing potentiality of future learning. As I read their words in the transcripts now, I still see a professional humility that readily affirms the role of different colleagues and contexts in their learning. This humility plays out in a strongly dialogic conception of their professional learning. It is learning which is consciously and powerfully mediated by the people (and contexts) with whom (and in which) Kris and Sam are learning. In musical discourse, this might be expressed in terms of the responsiveness of individual voices to the texture of the ‘whole.’ In other ways, too, this is consistent with a dialogic and contrapuntal dynamic of inquiry-based learning. The value in the professional learning they describe derives as much from the particular details or strands of subject content as from their sense of a rich professional learning ‘texture.’ It is worth adding, before moving on, that an important aspect of that professional learning texture is the medium from which it is woven: ie. Kris and Sam are using narrative in creative and critical ways as they describe their professional learning during their conversations with me.

3. It was Julia and Larry who suggested that I interview them together. They are married, they teach senior literature at the same large state school in regional Victoria, and their senior literature classes are timetabled in blocks (and in close proximity). Julia is speaking about the times when her students can hear Larry speaking to his class about a particular text both classes are studying.

    **Julia:** But it’s quite interesting, we both teach opposite each other in the corridor and my kids will go, “Oh God, listen to him. There he is in there again.” [laughter] We can hear him going on ...

    **Larry:** I’ll go into my kids’ class and say, “She [Julia] doesn’t know a thing that she’s talking about. Don’t take any notice of what she says.” [laughter] You know, and of course Julia and I will argue about it, the text we’re doing, right, and...

    **Julia:** ... We like to argue in front of the kids [laughter] ‘cos they love it …

Julia and Larry, transcript of extended interview, 2001
4. Teri is an experienced teacher of senior English-literature in a well-resourced independent school in Melbourne. Like Julia, she teaches at the same school as her husband, but Teri and her husband teach in different departments.

This whole Roland Barthes idea of the death of the author…. I can remember reading that and discussing that with my husband and really having trouble getting my head around that …. I’d come from this really traditional background [of literature study] to this …. and, and it [was] really turning everything I knew on its head…. [My husband] teaches chemistry, he has a PhD in bio-chemistry …. He reads very widely and in a very diverse sense and we will discuss books endlessly and ahh it’s something that, you know, I really enjoy about our relationship…. He reads most of the books on the [postgraduate] course that I am doing and … he always has a look at my essays and will come to things with different ideas so even though he’s not trained in that way, … He’s trained to think in a very analytical [scientific] fashion and that’s been a great help to me. So we’re often throwing ideas around ….

Teri, transcript of extended conversation, 2001

I shall focus on Teri’s excerpt first and come back to Julia and Larry later. In my conversation with Teri, I suggested to her that “throwing ideas around” with her husband and working through a literary idea that was challenging “everything [she] knew” could be considered a powerful element of her professional learning. She was talking with me about this at a time when she felt few colleagues at her school were willing to discuss literature outside of their classrooms, and fewer still seemed interested in grappling with ideas such as Barthes’s ‘death of the author.’ She agreed with me, and we proceeded to discuss how, as if to compensate for this lack of collaboration in her school setting, she was developing (or just noticing) a space for professional collaborative inquiry outside of her school setting, outside of her university postgraduate tutorials, outside the opportunities traditionally offered in her school for professional learning. And yet, this collaborative inquiry was with (i) her husband, who was (ii) not an English teacher, but (iii) a scientist, and man who was (iv) a published writer (in science journals) … It wasn’t just Barthes who was turning things on their heads! The notion of a Stockhausen counterpoint comes to mind again, where the connections between strands are elusive – or, at least, unexpected. On so many levels this dialogue would seem to be transgressive (bell hooks 1994; see also Chapter 6 of my
text) in terms of professional learning expectations. Teri’s conversations with her science teacher husband are effervescing with dialogic potential, and the mode of their professional learning inquiry is consistent with the dialogic inquiry-based professional learning that I framed at the start of this chapter and in Figure 5.1.

Like Julia and Larry, Teri and her husband are two professionals with an interest in literature and teaching. In professional as well as personal terms, they seem to be a dialogic partnership. As in Figure 5.1, the partnership is ongoing and their dialogue is not always focused on a tightly-framed problem. Their professional conversation sometimes utilises written artefacts – literary or theoretical texts, and/or the essays that Teri is writing for her postgraduate studies. Written artefacts are an important part of their professional learning. They read and discuss each other’s writing, and beyond this they read widely and develop contrasting views on their reading. Their relationship encourages critical dialogue and it seeks to open up possibilities for further dialogue.

Both husband-and-wife partnerships are prepared to work through their different views. Their professional dialogue occurs in dissimilar conversations but these conversations are mutually enjoyable nevertheless. For Julia and Larry, this enjoyment is implicit in the laughter that punctuates their playful punch-and-judy dialogue, whereas Teri’s appreciation is more explicitly stated: “ah it’s something I really enjoy about our relationship.”

Once again, this is consistent with a dialogic and contrapuntal dynamic of inquiry-based professional learning, and I can no longer feel comfortable calling it merely idiosyncratic or something that happens by chance. It seems to me that to call such learning idiosyncratic would be to slip within the purview of managerialist discourses of professional learning as outlined in Chapter 4. Policy-makers using these discourses have urged schools to construct professional learning programs or events that are convenient and cheap to organise, whose pre-determined outcomes can be soon observed and easily measured, all with a view to ensuring that teachers within the school learn…. (or be accountable for the consequences of not learning) (Petrosky 2003a and 2003b; see Chapter 7, Part 1). Dialogic inquiry-based professional learning,
in contrast, does not begin by aiming to achieve pre-determined outcomes. It does not necessarily take place within the spaces (temporal or geographical) that are conventionally provided for professional development ‘events’ in schools. And while accounts can be constructed of the learning, such as the teachers themselves describe in their interviews (and alternatively as I have described in this chapter), these accounts often fall outside the imperative for measurable learning outcomes that external regulatory bodies are wont to prescribe (see Chapter 3).

(2) Negotiating possibilities

Up to now, I have tried to show the complex and subtle ways that various teachers have managed to preserve a (perhaps unconventional) space for dialogic inquiry in a policy environment that privileges only certain forms of knowledge and professional learning. And yet I recognise that these teachers’ professional learning might still be perceived by some readers as merely idiosyncratic, and thus easily trivialised or dismissed as an aberration. In order to address this perception, I want to move now to explore a more conventional setting for professional learning where inquiry-based professional learning is richly dialogic and effervescing with dialogic potential for further learning – ie. it is ‘unfinalized.’

The sixth session of The Literary Theory Inquiry Group was held in December 2003, and was titled *Gazing at the gaze*. The “gaze” refers to the collection of critical theories and discourses that explore notions of power in reading and interpretation, especially in literature studies, but also in various social and artistic interactions. Frequently, these discourses explore power through spatial metaphors and mediums (such as in painting but also in architecture and literature), where the perspective and the gaze of the painter/author/creator as well as the perspective of the viewer/reader/receiver are unpacked and investigated.

The transcript excerpt below is taken from toward the end of this session. In this excerpt, without any soliciting from me, the teachers expressed their enthusiasm for The Inquiry Group sessions. As they considered the value of these sessions, they began to explore the contrasts between the spaces when/where they met together as a group, and
the recent changes in the physical spaces back in their staffrooms. This led to some
critical speculation about the ways this might be impacting on their collegial dialogue.

Figure 5.3 : Excerpt from transcript of Session 6 of The Literary Theory
Inquiry Group, Gazing at the gaze (4 December 2003)
It needs to be remembered that this part of the conversation occurred within a session ostensibly organised to learn about literary theory. In many managerialist cultures, especially in the US (cf. Petrosky 2004), teachers are required to ‘tick off’ their pre-determined professional learning outcomes and to provide ‘evidence’ that they were generating new knowledge such as a ‘new’ practical teaching strategy to implement in their classrooms. In Australia, too, the requirement for individual teachers to be accountable for their professional learning is widely enforced (see Chapter 4). Working within such managerial cultures, it is beholden on teachers (and university researchers) to work with some of the managerial discursive practices, and so to look to record ‘evidence’ of valuable learning taking place. As Cochran-Smith and Zeichner (2005) recently suggest, we have to “ask the outcomes question.”

I will address later in this chapter some underlying concerns I have about the ‘outcomes’ of this episode of learning. At that time, I will foreground the sense in which both the positive outcomes and any lingering concerns are illustrative of the ongoing negotiation of professional learning that this group was engaged in. For the moment, I want to identify and discuss the positive outcomes.

A less dialogic approach to the “outcomes question” would seek to calculate or measure the effectiveness of the teachers’ professional learning by a before-and-after, pre-test and then post-test, comparison of teachers’ students’ test scores. This, of course, would be based on the assumption that there is a simple linear causality between teacher learning and student performance (Bottery 2005), that such things are readily visible, and that they can be accurately measured by test scores (Petrosky 2004). If only it were that simple (Gale and Densmore 2003). I want to suggest that the outcomes of these teachers’ professional learning can be more meaningfully located and evaluated by scrutinising the very professional conversations that teachers are engaged in – ie. the processes of their learning – such as in the excerpt above. As Payne (1997), citing Foucault, suggests, the knowledge produced can be meaningfully examined and evaluated by focusing on the processes of its production as much as any end product (p. 57).
In order to tease out the learning of these teachers’ conversation, it is probably necessary to look beyond the teachers’ stated enthusiasm for these inquiry sessions (lines 1-3), although these sorts of affective responses to professional learning experiences should never be dismissed. Leaving that aside, how else might one account for these teachers’ professional learning? At this stage of The Inquiry Group session, the teachers were not explicitly interpreting literary theory readings or engaging in structured activities. A first glance at the transcript excerpt might suggest that they are not building their knowledge and understanding of literary theory, *per se*. For instance, there is no discussion of a practical classroom activity that could be taken into a classroom and used in the future, although Appendix XII shows that such things had been part of the session before this exchange. Admittedly, the teachers do speak about some effective ways in which they collaborate (in informal and practical contexts) in their staffrooms (lines 27-32). But in other respects, they are (merely?) identifying or discovering the ways in which collegial dialogue does and does not occur within their own English department.

In accounting for the learning in this particular conversation, it is crucial to recognise that the discourses with which these teachers are addressing the issue of collegial dialogue are keying into – Vygotsky (1978) would call it “internalising” – several discourses that the group has been learning about in this and previous sessions. These discourses had ranged across post-colonialism, feminism, feminist poststructuralism, and the gaze. Their knowledge and understanding of these discourses are evident in repeated allusion to “spaces” (by implication the professional, temporal and intellectual spaces in their working lives), the notion of “fractured” spaces, their “physical displacement” and the notion of a “spatial issue.” Like much of the expressive conversation that Britton (1986) observed in secondary classrooms, exploring “tangents” – I would call it, ’speculating about dialogic potential’ – can be relevant and meaningful in the process of learning. From a dialogic standpoint, the participants in the excerpt show themselves to be developing and activating the language and discursive practices from various readings and artefacts, from previous Inquiry Group sessions, and from other social practices in their teaching lives.
The collegial discourse utilised in this exchange compares directly to the earlier discussion of excerpts from my extended interviews with individual teachers (see pp. 14-22). First, and most obviously, there is a willingness on the part of these teachers to be responsive to the contributions of particular colleagues (lines 14-15) and there is much affirming of the “possibilities” that collegial conversation provides (passim.). This is powerful recognition of the value of a dialogic approach to professional learning, one that bespeaks an appreciation of the “texture” of dialogic inquiry for each of these teachers and for the group as a whole.

Second, there is a willingness and a facility to move from parochial concerns to broader professional issues. Sometimes the focus is on local and specific matters: eg. seating arrangements (“fractured” and “displaced” – lines 10-11); furniture types (enclosed carrels replacing open desks - lines 21-22 ) in the staffroom; and role-playing conversations in staffrooms (“Oh, I had a really good class,” “looking over somebody’s shoulder and saying, ‘That looks great’ ” – lines 29-31). But the conversation can quickly shift to consideration of the professional identity of English teachers that arise from these local details and back again. For instance, the discussion of local staffroom details actually emerges from Jo’s statement about the factors that “dampen the possibilities” for teachers’ professional conversation (line 4). Interspersed between illustrations of local details, these teachers dialogically draw on discourses of intensification (“crowded curriculum … busier working day” – line 24), historical perspectives on their work places (“there was a time when those workrooms were much more carefully organised” – lines 12-13), and finally the discourses of a collegial culture (“We’ve got a culture of sharing in the English Department but we haven’t got that casual sharing other than in tiny little spaces” – lines 32-34).

Third, then, on so many levels these teachers are engaged in a form of criticalist discursive practice, what Reid (2004) calls questioning “taken-for-granted assumptions.” They are critically reflecting not only on their professional practice but here, quite explicitly, they are focused on “the context in which this learning occurs.” Further than this, and so fourth, in their concern to set up another professional space for future inquiry – “Maybe that could be brought up in some forum” (line 19) and “Maybe
we need to get the [on-line] discussion board up and running again” (line 35) – they are consciously looking to build inquiry capacity. This seems a very positive example of teachers developing and activating dialogic potential, planning for possibilities. This is not just a romantic hope for better times ahead. These teachers are appreciating that future possibilities for dialogue must be negotiated from within the sorts of managerial cultures that are working to intensify their workloads, fragment their work spaces, and dampen the possibilities for collegial dialogue.

**Conclusion: a cautionary note?**

All this would seem to give cause for optimism. It is heartening to know that teachers are able to practise and learn in meaningful ways within managerialist cultures and technologies of control that are in so many other ways eroding their professionalism (Locke 2001, 2004; see Chapter 7) and dampening the possibilities for professional learning. They can still be seen building capacities and potentialities for inquiry and further professional learning. They can be seen noticing, developing, speculating about and activating dialogic and contrapuntal potential of their professional learning lives, at a time when other pressures are working to diminish this potential.

And yet, I shouldn’t get carried away. One hardly needs reminding that this is all taking place within ecologies of large-scale government inquiries into education in Australia, which would seem resistant to dialogic inquiry-based learning. Reports such as *Teaching Reading* (eg. NITL 2005a), as discussed in Chapter 4, seek to construct the teaching and learning of teachers in ways that, at the very least, diminish teachers’ professional autonomy. So it seems appropriate to conclude this chapter on a cautionary note – to mediate the effusion of possibilities that my consideration of The Inquiry Group conversation and my own conversations with Kris, Teri, Julia and Larry and Sam (and the questionnaire respondents) have opened up.

The excerpt from session 6 of The Literary Theory Inquiry Group explores so many possibilities. I’d go as far as to say that it shows an impressive capacity on the part of this group of teachers to engage in dialogue and counterpoint with each other, on a number of levels, opening themselves up to other voices that speak to and/or challenge
their practices and beliefs. They are as able to dream of possibilities as they are to critique the present situation, and yet … the final lines of this transcript come across like the end of French existentialist play. It’s like the characters are left on stage, rather tired, having excitedly talked with each other, as they explored a number of rich possibilities. And now they are left deflated, somewhat inert, as the language dwindles to shorter statements of decreasing optimism. I noted in my journal that this seemed like ‘a low point’ in the session. The tone of the repetition of “It’d be better than nothing” (lines 40, 41) seemed more like sighs of resignation than a call to action. Leonardo (2004) warns of the dangers of surrendering to despair. These teachers were a long way from that. And yet for me, in my particular professional setting, those final lines had particular resonance as I heard our Federal Education Minister bemoan what he saw as problems in the “standards, scientific and academic rigour … of education faculties” (Nelson 2005). Minister Nelson talked enthusiastically about funding yet another national inquiry, this time into teacher education. Leonardo, Giroux and Reid would argue these are the very times when it is necessary to maintain our willingness and our imaginative capacity to dream and wonder.

As it turns out, the low point in The Inquiry Group’s conversation was momentary. The session had not finished. Jan would soon proceed to lead the group in an inquiry-based discussion about the work of John Forbes, an Australian poet. The focus was on how teachers might use discourses associated with “the gaze,” to develop their readings of Forbes’s poetry, and from there, in turn, how they could help students to develop their own readings. There was much still to talk about and to learn…. 

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87 There had already been several state-based inquiries into different aspects of education and schooling in the years between 2002 and 2005. The Australian Federal Government would now be responsible for three further national inquiries. They were the National Inquiry into the Education of Boys, the report of which was published in 2002 (Standing Committee on Education and Training 2002), the National Inquiry into the Teaching of Literacy in Australia, the report of which was published in 2005 (NITL 2005a), and this new inquiry, National Inquiry into Pre-Service Teacher Education, the report from which would be published in late 2006. I would have welcomed all this investment into inquiry in education if it did not appear to me that the 2002 and 2005 inquiries were set up merely to validate the neoliberal agenda of the Australian Federal Government, and the latest inquiry seemed to me to be headed in the same direction.
Preface

It was never random, it was never just wandering, it was never wilderness. I think it was more like my own wondering.


As my work on this study progressed, I watched with interest as more politicians in Australia and around the world pledged their commitment to improving teachers’ professional learning. No longer did this appear to involve merely mouthing support for teachers’ professional development, as Don Hayward had done in the early 1990s in my home state of Victoria. Now governments were prepared to make financial commitments to supporting teachers’ learning. In Australia, some states made bold gestures to design whole new curriculum systems that purported to open up notions of what constitutes students’ learning and teachers’ learning – eg. Queensland’s *New Basics* (The State of Queensland 2004), Tasmanian *Essential Learnings* (Department of Education Tasmania 2006), and *Victorian Essential Learning Standards* (VELS) (VCAA 2006b). Occasionally, there have been encouraging instances of dialogic thinking about professional learning – see the document, *Professional Learning Design Principles* in Tasmania, which presents four sets of principles in dialogic proximity, encouraging teachers and professional learning groups to construct their own version of professional learning principles. (See Appendix XIII.)

Other discussion of professional learning, however, was tightly framed by school effectiveness models – eg. DE&T 2004 (see my discussion of school effectiveness rhetoric in Chapter 4, Part 3) – with little interest in epistemological discussions about
what constituted teacher knowledge or teacher learning. If governments were to commit to teachers’ professional learning, they were still drawn to models where they could act quickly to fill perceived “gaps” in teachers’ knowledge and prove the value in improved student learning outcomes. Attempts to slow this process down by opening up the policy conversation to the nuances and complexities of teachers’ knowing or professional learning were likely to be rejected as wasting time (at best). Politicians and policy-makers, who wanted quick solutions and measurable improvements, had little incentive in generating more dialogic potential and professional learning possibilities. Why would they bother? So where did that leave a researcher whose developing understanding of, and belief in, dialogic inquiry-based professional learning was of little interest to politicians and policy-makers? When the imperative is decisive action, quick, simple and measurable outcomes, where is the value in messy dialogue, and … literary theory?

In my dialogic inquiry into these questions in this chapter I sometimes feel like Kim Scott’s narrator in his disturbing novel, Benang, set in colonial Australia. For teachers, the first decade of Twenty-First Century Australia is also a disturbing time. This chapter is part of my attempt to negotiate a better outcome for teachers through this period, via some creative and critically focused wondering. But I like to think it is “never random [and] never just wandering.” The wondering in this chapter involves teasing out an important tension: between, on the one hand, the political imperative to act quickly to fill knowledge gaps, and on the other, the professional imperative to promote meaningful dialogue that generates both present knowledge and further possibilities.

Once again there are three dialogically related parts to Chapter 6:

- **Part 1: Contrasting accounts of English-literature teacher professionalism**
  In this part, I provocatively juxtapose contrasting perspectives on literary theory in Australian English-literature classrooms. I use CDA to analyse some ways in which English-literature teachers’ practices and professionalism can be influenced by their knowledge of literary theory. For
one perspective, I choose an excerpt from a flurry of editorials and opinion pieces published in April 2006 by Australia’s national broadsheet newspaper, with headlines such as *Rubbish postmodern teaching*. For another, I select a short excerpt from a transcript of The Literary Theory Inquiry Group that shows one teacher’s account of how she thinks about and teaches with literary theory.

- **Part 2: Dialogic ‘transgression’: learning and teaching with literary theory**

  My investigation, in this part, changes to a more creative and exploratory mode. At first, I re-tell a Nineteenth Century literary short story, in order to generate a critical framework for reflecting on dialogic inquiry-based professional learning as a transgressive construct. The story, *The yellow wallpaper* by Charlotte Perkins Gilman, can be read as a metaphor for English-literature teachers wanting to engage in transgressive professional dialogue at a time when managerial systems and discourses, intended to force teachers to learn, are burgeoning. Following my discussion of this story, I sketch out the transgressive possibilities of literary theory and professional learning and the dialogic synergies connecting both.

- **Part 3: ‘How much turbulence can they cope with?’**

  Here, I return to some transcripts of The Literary Theory Inquiry Group. In analysing these transcripts, I look particularly at the nature of the professional knowledge being generated by these teachers and I give an account of the teacher professionalism evoked through this conversation. I am also interested in foregrounding the elements of creative transgression that generate dialogic potential in professional learning. Once again I am seeking feasible and persuasive ways to ‘account for’ teachers’ learning, ways that may mediate between the imperatives of those seeking immediate measurable ‘evidence’ of teachers’ professional development and those understanding the nuances and complexities of dialogic inquiry-based professional learning.
PART ONE: CONTRASTING ACCOUNTS OF ENGLISH-LITERATURE TEACHER PROFESSIONALISM

“Rubbish” postmodern teaching

The following editorial was published in the national broadsheet newspaper, The Australian, a day after the Australian Prime Minister, John Howard, had threatened to withhold federal education funding to states whose English teachers continued to teach what he described as “gobbledygook” theory (Lewis and Salusinszky 2006).

Giving out bad Marx: Trendy ‘isms’ are incompatible with lasting knowledge

The Australian strongly believes there is much more to life than race, sex and class, and that literature is a great way to understand the transcendent themes of human existence. Love, hate, war, jealousy, greed, charity, faith, hope, despair: these are the universals of human experience, and great and ancient literature speaks to us about these themes from across the years. Sadly, a small-mindedness has infected Australia’s education system, producing an obsession with politics and power relations that has infected the nation’s classrooms like a mould. Those who defend current teaching methods by setting up a straw-man argument – ‘all we’re trying to do is teach students that there are different points of view’ — are being disingenuous. For, in forcing students to accept dull interpretations of ‘texts’ in which everything becomes political, the postmodernists exhibit the worst sort of narrow-mindedness. The first job of teachers introducing students to the works of any great writer should be to instil a love of literature and learning. And English teachers everywhere must focus more on basics such as spelling, punctuation and grammar, all of which lose out to trendy theories like critical literacy and outcomes-based education. …. One of the most bizarre aspects of the controversy is the postmodern fixation on Karl Marx as an appropriate filter through which to examine literature…. It is tragically obvious what this obsession with Marx leads to – namely, students with poor skills who have had the love of books beaten out of them.

The Australian [Editorial] (2006, April 21)

The focus for the Prime Minister’s attack was hard to pin down, but editorials such as this one (and another published five days later, The bard unmoored: Trendy theories hurt students – and Australia) seemed to want to clarify his argument. In addition, as part of a clear campaign by The Australian, several staff journalists wrote lengthy
opinion articles criticising English teachers’ “methods” and/or rejecting current English curriculums as “Marxist ideology hiding behind the mask of postmodernism” (Auty 2006), “a sterile and formulaic exercise in political correctness” (Donnelly 2006), or “political correctness dumbing down the curriculum” (Lewis and Salusinszky 2006). One writer referred to English teachers “indoctrinating” children (Auty 2006). Each of these accusations is present in the editorial: Marxism-conflated-with-postmodernism has turned teachers into obsessed, fixated dupes of ideology (line 6-9, 13-14, 20-1); curriculums are being made dull and mechanical (lines 12, 23-4); and teachers and curriculums are inhibiting students’ learning possibilities (lines 1, 6-7, 11-12, 17-19, 23-24). The problem, as The Australian constructed it, is that students’ learning is being ill-served by English-literature teachers in Australian schools. And the problem is traced to teachers’ knowledge of a disparate conglomerate of “trendy” theories. This conglomerate includes literary theory (including “so-called postmodernism,” deconstruction, Marxism and feminism), but other “trendy theories” such as critical literacy [sic] and “outcomes-based programs” are also to blame.

It is hard to understand how outcomes-based programs could be so simply conflated with “trendy isms … obsessed with politics and power.” It is just as difficult to fathom how all the “trendy isms” could be treated as a single entity. There has been a long and colourful history of disagreement and animosity amongst literary theorists that relate as much to theoretical boundary-setting as to claims over professional territory. In the case of feminism, Marxism, postmodernism, and theoretical writings of Michel Foucault, the boundaries are far from settled. For instance:

- debates between different forms of feminist literary theory are as robust as debates between pro- and anti-theorists;
- although there are some similarities, Foucauldian theory is generally thought of as fundamentally opposed to Marxist ideology (cf. Olssen 2004);
- Foucault (1988) has both distanced his work from Marxism (p. 22), and agreed that there are Marxist elements in his approach to research (p. 46);
- many postmodernist critics vehemently challenge Marxist theory for what they see as Marxist theory’s preoccupation with class and economics and its
lack of interest in issues of gender, culture and colonialism, and/or they take
issue with Marxism’s penchant for universalising meta-narratives (eg.
Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin 1989, Spivak 1993, Lyotard 1984 \(^{87}\)); and

- Marxist theorists frequently upbraid postmodernist theory for what they see as
its paralysing reflexivity, which they say makes any potential for social
change impossible (Eagleton 1986\(^{88}\)).

These details and complexities seem of little interest to the rhetoric denigrating English-
literature teachers recently. And, as The Australian editorial makes clear above, all this
is really a distraction from English teachers’ abrogation of their prime obligation to
focus on “basics such as spelling, punctuation and grammar.”\(^{89}\)

Australian researcher and teacher educator, Bill Green (1998), argues that the exact
details of such debates are unimportant in the end to those attacking English teachers
and English teaching. In his wide-ranging research into English curriculum histories in
Western countries, Green has drawn attention to the vulnerability of English teachers to
regular and repeated attacks by politicians and policy-makers wanting to demonstrate
their credentials for upholding standards (see also Green and Beavis 1996, Green,
Cormack and Reid 2000). He finds multiple examples of the strategy of pronouncing
literacy levels to be in a state of “crisis” and describing English teachers as in need of
“disciplining,” since such crises are clearly the fault of English teachers (see Green
1998, pp. 197, 173; see also Brock 1998, Sawyer 1997). The recent intensification of
attacks by journalists, policy-makers and politicians on the English teaching profession
in Australia has seen the focus shift from bemoaning a lack of knowledge in primary
school teachers of how to teach reading (see Chapter 4, Part 3), to denouncing the

\(^{87}\) Inevitably, however, there are some critics who seek to emphasise the similarities in Marxist and
postmodernist theoretical positions. (See Howard 1991.) Even Derrida (1994) sought to mediate the
differences between the two broad positions in The Specters of Marx.

\(^{88}\) Eagleton, at least in his earlier work, saw Marxism as “the only ultimately adequate response in an
epoch of capitalist crisis, growing social devastation and intensified anti-imperialist struggle” (Eagleton
1986, p. 4). In his latest book, After theory, he criticises postmodernists who advocate the sanctity of the
individual in an age of globalisation. He claims they are mirroring and supporting the very capitalism that
they say they oppose (Eagleton 2004, p. 29).

\(^{89}\) There is nothing particularly new about this sort of critique of contemporary schooling in Australia,
particularly public schools. The Australian has published editorials in that vein for some years: eg. “The
irrelevant knowledge of *secondary* English-literature teachers such as literary theory and/or critical literacy. This might seem to be a shift from away from a deficit view of English teachers, but such an appearance is deceptive. The ‘new’ charge is no longer that English teachers lack just essential knowledge. It is that English teachers lack basic ethics or care for the welfare of their students, and all this comes from having irrelevant or dangerous knowledge. Too much knowledge is a dangerous thing for teachers, it appears. It blinds teachers from seeing what they need to see. And it prevents them from understanding what they need to understand.

Notwithstanding the shift in focus toward literary theory, the rhetoric denigrating English teachers in Australia is familiar. Overlapping discourses of derision, fear-mongering, and righteous indignation are familiar to those who have studied similar attacks in other Western countries in the past thirty years (Ball 1990, Goodson and Medway 1990, MacLure 2003). Most recently, English teachers in Australia are being derided for the “gobbledegook” – an Australian colloquialism for nonsense or meaningless jargon – that they speak and teach. *The Australian* argues that this gobbledegook is evidence of Australian English teachers’ “narrow-mindedness.” And yet there are contradictions aplenty in *The Australian* editorial’s argument.

For instance, postmodern interpretations of texts are inevitably “dull,” and yet they are somehow alluring and infectious. Their effects are powerful, deeply disturbing and enduring, and yet they can be dismissed as mere “trendy theories.” And much power can be ascribed apparently to this gobbledegook language in which the trendy theories are articulated. Interestingly, this language seems to pre-exist the social systems and artefacts that all teachers connect to and work with – which explains how the contagion spreads. The language has infected classrooms and syllabus documents. 90 It has infected the minds of those teaching, and it is likely to infect the innocent students who are “forced” to accept dull interpretations. This pathologising of the language of literary theory interestingly suggests social implications. Such a conceptualisation of literary theory might even be perceived as dialogic – in the sense of Bakhtin’s (1986a) “chain

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90 Actually, as explained in Chapter 2, Part 1, the syllabus documents in VCE English and literature are but one example where the curriculum documents can be, contrary to the conservative rhetoric, very ambivalent about the value of literary theory in teaching VCE English or literature.
of meaning” – were it not for the way in which it is otherwise presented as an unchanging fixed commodity constructed of “basics such as spelling, punctuation and grammar.” And these basics are apparently, like the themes they help to articulate, “universal.” Embedded within the discourses of derision and fear-mongering, there are the inevitable eruptions of moral outrage and righteous indignation at the thought of literary theory, often in the guise of postmodernism destroying English as it used to be and even hurting our children. The arguments may be full of contradictions but the moral outrage directed against English-literature teachers is a constant.

In short, postmodernism and all those other ‘trendy theories’ are seen as deeply transgressive. Because they are “hurting students – and Australia” (as the editorial put it) – they are anathema. Teachers need to be exorcised of these theories to save students and the country. It matters little whether the theories are “indoctrinating” students in Marxist values, as some argue, or whether they encourage amoral relativistic values, as others argue, or both – as conservative commentators like Kevin Donnelly (2004) try to argue.

“There’s somewhere between absolutely black/white and absolutely chaotic”

The Australian editorial’s disparaging views of English-literature teaching are not supported when one visits some school classrooms and staffrooms and hears how literary theory is “infecting” at least some professional conversations. The following excerpt of professional conversation is taken from the second meeting of The Literary Theory Inquiry Group at Eastern Girls’ College. Just prior to this excerpt, the group was talking about some of the ways in which literary theory influences their teaching practices in different classrooms with different groups of adolescent students. In particular, they were considering approaches to analysis that involve deconstruction and binary oppositions.

Jan, who does most of the talking here, has taught in VCE English and VCE literature courses, but she is referring specifically to her teaching of Theory of Knowledge in the International Baccalaureate (IB) Diploma curriculum, which is also taught at Eastern Girls’ College. There are two Theory of Knowledge classes in this school. Those who
teach it collaborate with each other, and there is some degree of collaboration with teachers in neighbouring schools who also teach Theory of Knowledge. The approach in the classroom is to study an eclectic range of texts – fictional novels and short stories, works of non-fiction (including history books and journalistic pieces), poetry. These texts are intertextually related in sometimes obvious sometimes less obvious ways; they can be understood as speaking to, or in dialogue with, each other. In teaching these texts, Jan prompts her students to engage with this intertextual dialogue, and this usually involves wide-ranging dialogue amongst her students about the different ‘theories of knowledge’ that underpin the texts. Such dialogue entails students reflecting on the way different theories of knowledge underpin their own knowledge and understandings as much as interpreting the way such theories ‘operate’ within set texts.

Jan begins by explaining to teachers in The Inquiry Group who have not taught Theory of Knowledge how she approaches her teaching in this subject.
Jan: One of the things [in Theory of Knowledge] is to look at the way some texts set up binary oppositions and then blur them. And students find it interesting to re-examine the value judgements attached to each [side of the opposition] and think again about “Why should this be good and that be evil?” “Why should this be right and that be wrong?” “Why should this be better than that?” I think many students, some, might find it threatening; some find it liberating.

Graham: The more threatening it gets, the more paralysing it can be for some [students].

Jan: One of the things that happens in Theory of Knowledge is when you start looking at questions for example of morality and talking about the difficulty of making a ... of arriving at a framework that helps you apply moral judgements sort of across the board. So they’ll listen to [international ethicist] Peter Singer talking about a framework that he sets up to help us work out how we make a moral judgement. But they are very apt to come to the position of, “If it’s moral for me,... That’s what I think. That’s my truth. That’s my morals,” and so on.

Graham: So that’s the refuge that they’re entitled to?

Jan: These [are the] alternatives, either .... On one hand, there’s the black/white view: that ‘This is clearly right and this is clearly ‘wrong’. And then[there’s] the other position they sometimes get to: ‘If it’s right for me, it’s right.’ Which is another position that you ...... especially in Theory of Knowledge, you are wanting to steer them away from that to... There’s somewhere between those two positions of being absolutely black/white and absolutely chaotic .......

Figure 6.1: Excerpt from transcript of Session 5 of The Literary Theory Inquiry Group, Reader response theory: how democratic is it, after all? (10 September 2003)

The fact that Jan is talking about teaching using some literary theory discourse in an international curriculum, the IB, already challenges some accusations made about Australian curriculums by The Australian. It may suit the editorial writers to imply that the damaging effect of literary theories such as deconstructionism is peculiar to Australian curriculums. But it would appear that this sort of knowledge is relevant to curriculums and teaching practice across the world. And, as Peel, Patterson and Gerlach (2000) have shown, in this age of globalisation, the more sophisticated approaches to

91 I showed a draft of this part of my thesis text to Jan, and asked whether she was happy with the way I had characterised her teaching dynamic in IB. She replied that she was happy with my account of IB, but that she was uncomfortable about her own use of language, when she suggests a teacher might “steer the [ie. students] away from that [position].” Her email said, in part: “On reflection I'd not use the term ‘steer away from’ - but rather ‘question.’ I am wanting the students to question an individualistic position that does not consider moral questions as being applicable ‘outside of self.”
English-literature pedagogies and theories are by no means restricted to Australian classrooms or Australian curriculums.\footnote{Actually, the study by Peel et al. (2000) finds that English curriculums and teaching practices in Australia are equal or superior to practices elsewhere in the western world. I don’t wish to give undue emphasis to this finding. Nevertheless, it does suggest that some internationally based researchers would give very different accounts of English-literature teaching in Australia.}

At the time of writing this thesis, it was only a small number of very well resourced schools that could afford to offer not just a variety of state-based curriculums – in Victoria there are four different English study designs that students and schools can choose from in senior years – as well as the International Baccalaureate (IB). In that respect, a professional learning conversation where English-literature teachers have the chance to compare their teaching experiences across different state-based and international curriculums is relatively uncommon. However, it often seemed to be the case in The Inquiry Group that comparisons across curriculums, such as Jan is engaged in here, enabled these teachers to generate some valuable insights into their teaching in any one curriculum or subject.

It is worth looking closely at the way Jan is talking about her practices here. Her students’ study of texts begins with seeking oppositions in these texts.\footnote{The identification of oppositions is actually a characteristic approach of new criticism from the 1960s and 1970s. It is a textual practice that seems to be approved of in the opening sentence quoted in the editorial. According to the editorial, the “transcendent … universals of human experience,” should be central to the study of literature, and in the editorial they are expressed in traditional binary oppositions: “Love, hate, …greed, charity … hope, despair: these are the universals of human experience.”} Having described her teaching practice as beginning with such oppositions (not necessarily those “universals of human experience” listed in the editorial), Jan immediately talks of “blurring” them (a practice that challenges the notion of “transcendent … universals”). She then connects these structural concerns in texts (ie. oppositions) with “value judgements” that underpin oppositions in the text, and with value moral judgements in her students’ lives. Part of the process of blurring the oppositions in the texts, which Jan finds so helpful here, is a process of blurring separations between the world of the text and her students’ worlds, a notion implied in her expression, “apply moral judgements sort of across the board.” In so doing, far from showing a lack of basic ethics or care for the welfare of her students, Jan is connecting powerfully with her students’ lives and thereby demonstrating her concern for their individual biographies and backgrounds.
Conservative critics often accuse those who teach literary theories such as deconstructionism and postmodernism of producing students who are “morally adrift” (eg. Donnelly 2006a94), but this is not the way Jan sees it. She challenges her students to move beyond a sense of “If it’s moral for me …. That’s what I think. That’s my truth. That’s my morals.” Speaking in the second person, as if to say to those around the professional learning table, ‘You would do the same,’ Jan explains: “You are wanting to steer them away from that to … there’s something between these two positions of being absolutely black/white and absolutely chaotic.”

Jan’s approach is not unique. It resonates with much of the professional learning conversations about literary theory that took place in The Literary Theory Inquiry Group through our six meetings, and this connects with much that is seen in English-literature classrooms in Victoria (and around the world). In the end, it appears that this sort of teaching is transgressive (cf. hooks 1994, Janks 2002, Morgan 2002), but not in the way that the Australian Prime Minister and the commentators in The Australian understand this term. Teaching informed by literary theory knowledge does not inevitably result in good teaching in a simple good knowledge/bad knowledge binary, just as postmodernism is not utterly chaotic or relativistic in a simple order/chaos binary. The Inquiry Group professional learning conversations suggest that literary theory can be valuable in English-literature teachers’ knowledge and in their classroom practices for diverse reasons, which do not fit into any simple binary framing as proposed by the Australian editorial writers (and other conservative critics of English teaching in Australia).

In the stories of teachers like Jan, we hear that literary theory can provide an intellectual framework to enable noticing, developing, speculating about and activating dialogic potential of a wide range of ideas, cultures, emotions, texts, experiences and even moral judgements. If the embedding of such theories in English-literature curriculum amounts to a form of transgression, and the transcripts that I analyse throughout this chapter suggest that it can, then this embedding can be productively transgressive. This is especially the case when the teaching and learning values dialogic (as opposed to a non-

94 See also Slattery (2006) who characterises “Theory” as one of the “dark arts.”
dialogic) approaches to generating knowledge and to the study of English or literature. It can be productively transgressive, too, when it prompts teachers, in their professional learning, to engage in dialogue with those dominant discourses which seek to shut down dialogue and inquiry within professional learning activity and about professional learning policy.\footnote{Cal Durrant (2005) is also highly critical of The Australian newspaper in their “War of the words” attacks on the English teaching profession in Australia. He argues that their position is to “orchestrate debates” but “the one thing we can be sure of is that we are … not engaged in anything that constitutes a dialogue” (p. 12).}
PART TWO: DIALOGIC ‘TRANSGRESSION’: LEARNING AND TEACHING WITH LITERARY THEORY

Introduction

Once again, I want to shift the mode of my inquiry into more creative and exploratory modes, drawing on a range of literary and narrative approaches. In re-telling a Nineteenth-Century short story, I will playfully explore ways in which knowledge of, and learning about, literary theory can be productively transgressive. I will provide a ‘provisionally finalized’ description of literary theory, and consider a range of rhetoric from the literature associated with this much contested area of English-literature teachers’ knowledge. And I will argue that learning about literary theory has strong dialogic potential if it is embedded within a dialogic conception of teacher learning and classroom practice.

In the second meeting of The Literary Theory Inquiry Group, the teachers were discussing Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s (1892/1996) much-anthologised short story, The Yellow Wallpaper. Gilman’s story was one of a number of readings distributed to participants in the group in the weeks leading up to this session. The readings included excerpts from critical and literary works, selected to stimulate an ongoing conversation about literary theory and the place of literary theory in our professional lives and our classroom practice. (See Appendix VIII.)

I would feel justified in drawing attention to Gilman’s story in this chapter for no better reason than to recommend it for study in English-literature classrooms. I have greatly enjoyed teaching this story to a wide range of students in different schooling contexts. However, my main purpose here is to present a kind of metaphor for English-literature teachers engaging in dialogic inquiry-based professional learning, at a time when managerial discourses are proliferating in policy-making across the Western world as part of moves to ensure that teachers are learning.

Prior to the first Inquiry Group session, I had suggested to the group that they read The yellow wallpaper in dialogue with the chapter by Deborah Madsen (2000). In her
chapter, Madsen outlines various literary theoretical frames – a hybrid combination of feminist and Marxist critical theories – and presents a detailed interpretation of Gilman’s short story. I saw the two texts as dialogically linked – ie. they ‘spoke’ to each other – and I hoped that this dialogue would stimulate further dialogue amongst the group. Like the combination of texts that Jan spoke about in her Theory of Knowledge classes, I had chosen *The yellow wallpaper* story and the Madsen chapter to stimulate critical inquiry into a range of issues, but I did not wish to frame too tightly these emerging issues. My plan was that the teachers may want to affirm, contradict or further develop Madsen’s reading of Gilman’s story, but I also saw dialogic potential in a process of deconstructing the hybrid Marxist/feminist literary theory that underpins Madsen’s interpretation. I hoped that the two complementary texts could challenge each of us in The Inquiry Group to articulate our critical positions with respect to literary theory, that this sort of discussion could prompt some challenging of these positions, and that this whole process could constitute meaningful learning. As it turned out, the discussion prompted by these two readings ranged much more widely than teachers agreeing or disagreeing with Madsen’s reading of the story.

Before looking at transcripts from the second Inquiry Group meeting, I provide my own reading, here, of *The yellow wallpaper*. This reading sees the female narrator, who is also the central character in the story, struggling to stay ‘in touch with’ herself and her world, as managerial voices limit her potential for meaningful dialogue with others. I draw parallels with professional learning ecologies in Victoria, where managerial policy-makers (like the writers of the editorials quoted at the start of this chapter) characteristically seek to limit or shut down dialogue about the professional learning of English-literature teachers. Throughout my re-telling of the story, I invoke the notion of dialogic potential in terms of language spelled out in Chapter 2: ie. *noticing* (identifying or acknowledging a connection …that is more explicit or more obvious), *developing* (making obvious or explicit a connection … that is implicit or less obvious), *speculating about* (predicting or imagining a connection), and *activating* (applying what has been noticed, developed or speculated about in a new or different context and exploring the implications for this).
A literary tale: thinking about a ‘condition’

An unnamed woman narrates *The yellow wallpaper*. Most of the narrative is in the form of an inner dialogue, as this woman struggles to make sense of her world and her sense of herself in this world. She begins:

> It is very seldom that mere ordinary people like John and myself secure ancestral halls for the summer … I will declare that there is something queer about it…. John laughs at me, of course, but one expects that in man. John is practical in the extreme. He has no patience with faith, an intense horror of superstition, and he scoffs openly at things not to be felt and seen and put down in figures (p. 87).

In time, we learn that the woman is “resting” in the hope that she will recover from her “condition.” It is a condition that her husband, John, pathologises as “nervous weakness” and he is no doubt that it is her individual problem. Some way into the story, it becomes clear that the woman is being shut off from the rest of her world, kept in her room when possible, and sequestered from dialogic contact with outsiders. She seems to be under the control of her husband and family. The actions of the woman’s husband and family may be well-intentioned; members of her family may feel they are acting in her best interests to improve her condition. (Such a reading would be generous in the extreme, but let’s allow that this might be possible.) Needless to say, these actions come to appear deleterious to her sense of self as an individual and as a social being within a community.

John’s treatment for her “nervous weakness” is regular doses of common sense. John, himself, administers this common sense – “there is no *reason* [for you] to suffer,” he tells his wife – along with regular “prescriptions” of “cod liver oil and lots of tonics and things” (p. 88). The whole regime is underpinned by a set of strictures including no contact with “stimulating people.” Members of the family avoid any potential for stimulating dialogic interaction with her. And under no circumstances is she to engage in self-reflection or inner dialogue – “John says the very worst thing I could do is think about my condition” (p. 88). To that end, she is denied the use of a writing journal (although she proceeds to break this ‘rule’). John also tries to discourage any exercise of her imagination, urging her instead to exercise her rational logical faculties – “He says I must use my will and self-control and not let my silly fancies run away with me’ (p. 94). And he certainly brooks no dialogue and no questioning in his treatment of her – “I am a
doctor, dear, and I know” (p. 95). In many ways, the authoritarian figure of John can be seen as a caricature of managerialism. He tells his wife that it is her problem and that her recovery is in her own hands, and yet he has taken away all of her sense of agency and community, and acutely limited her means to generate any agency or dialogic potential with/in any community. But it is not just John who is managerial.

From here on, I will use the term “managerial voices” to encompass the people and systems seeking to
(1) limit or shut down any potential for dialogue in the narrator’s existence;
(2) pathologise her condition as an individual problem; and
(3) control and ‘cure’ her condition, with a view to re-establishing order and certainty.

John (a “physician”) is confident that he knows what’s best for his wife. His certainty seems to be informed by medical science and its discourses, and he is supported in this by the woman’s brother (who is also a physician) and that brother’s wife. After an initial phase when the woman narrator trusted implicitly in this certainty and in the proposed cure, the authority of the scientific discourses (a crucial element in managerialism) begins to lose its appeal for her. In spite of the authority of these discourses, and against her own better judgement – “[John] is very careful and loving…. I feel basely ungrateful not to value [his support] more” (p. 89) – she slowly begins to question and contest the managerial voices.

It is the very act of questioning that seems to start a process of transformation in the narrator. In her effort to make sense of her situation, she doesn’t just look at herself and her own “failings” (as she is urged to do by John and others). She notices more of her surroundings. She notices and begins to interpret the “markings” on the yellow wallpaper covering her room, and this proves to be powerful in a gradual process of undermining the dominance of her family and their discourses. However, initially she attempts this through a form of the very same rational and “scientific” discourses that serve to oppress her. This is evident as she begins to look for order, structure, simplicity, and certainty in her chaotic and confronting world. At one point in the story, she is trying to interpret the markings that she sees in the yellow wallpaper.

I know a little of the principle of design, and I know this thing [the markings on the wallpaper] was not arranged on any laws of radiation, or alternation, or repetition, or symmetry, or anything else that I ever heard of (p. 93).
She proposes a “scientific hypothesis”: it is the yellow wallpaper that is the single most important cause of all her troubles! But this hypothesis is as unhelpful as her husband’s attempts to rationalise away her “condition.” The simple explanation she feels she needs is inadequate; the certainty she seeks is elusive. Her noticing and questioning subsequently develop beyond these scientific discourses to take on a more dialogic and diverse form of inquiry. As part of this inquiry, she experiments with hybrid narrative forms that serve both to express and to ‘story’ her sense of herself in relation to her surroundings and her history (the ecologies of her existence).

Fundamental to her inquiry is her ability to develop meaningful dialogue and dialogic potential with … someone. Her readers? Herself? This dialogue is something explicitly forbidden in the non-dialogic regime planned for her by John, and such a move signals a more pro-active transgressive approach on her part. She resumes writing in her forbidden journal – it becomes a crucial artefact, which helps her to focus her inner dialogue – and she is presumably writing and drawing on the yellow wallpaper, at this stage. (Later, she will begin to tear the paper down as her efforts become even more transgressive). She becomes more open in her contesting of the dominant, narrowly rational and scientific discourses, and in doing so she both develops and activates her dialogic potential. And she speculates about complex hybrid identities and social practices for herself! Interestingly, her family perceives this behaviour as profoundly transgressive, and for them this signals a loss of hope for her “recovery” – rather, in their eyes, her nervous weakness is turning to madness. Despite developing a sense of dialogue with the narrator, some readers may feel positioned to see her behaviour as indeed that of a madwoman. However, feminist and poststructuralist readers may be all too aware that, like the madwoman in the attic in nineteenth-century fiction (Gilbert and Gubar 1979/2000), it is only through, and in, the monologic authoritarian discourses of patriarchy (and traditional medical science) that this narrator is seen as mad.

Significantly, the story ends ambiguously with the axe-wielding husband being overcome and disarmed, and without any other individual resorting to violence. The narrator seems to have achieved some sense of emancipation in her story, so that she can proclaim “I’ve got out at last,” even though she is “creeping” around rather than leaping with joy! Significant, too, is the sense that there is no certainty in her emancipation, although it clearly offers more dialogic potential for personal and social growth than the repression under which she has laboured till now.
**Inquiry into *The yellow wallpaper***

This late Nineteenth Century story, as I have re-told it in the first decade of the Twenty-First Century, explores traditional and transgressive notions of narrative, identity and social practice. To begin with, there is evidence of a traditional mode of narrative: a narrator (the unnamed woman), an audience (the reader) and a subject (her worsening situation in “the ancestral halls”). There are some gestures at conventional causation driving the narrative – an action by John to restrict her movement and her dialogue with others prompts a response by his wife, which sets in train a further series of events. And there is perhaps a traditional sense of beginning, middle and end to the story. However, these traditional characteristics of narrative are problematised. (See my discussion of dialogic narratives in Chapter 2, Part 2). For instance, in my re-telling, there are at least two obvious story tellers – the unnamed narrator telling her story and myself, re-telling it with my own emphases and voice. To complicate this, we have the Bakhtinian notion that even the ‘original’ narrator’s voice is peopled by a number of voices. At times the narrator is speaking with/through the scientific discourses provided by her family; at other times her voice breaks into a number of voices, including the voices from ‘within’ the wallpaper, and these voices seem encouraged by the range of “stimulating” alternative discourses she has read about in books of fiction. In terms of structure, far from there being a single narrative with a beginning, middle and end, there appear to be multiple overlapping narratives. And the final moments of the story do not at all satisfy conventional expectations for resolution and closure. Rather, they highlight the unfinalizable nature of the text, throughout, and tend to prompt further interpretive discussion and dialogue.

My re-telling (re-storying) of the Gilman narrative to this point has suggested ways in which discursive practices can constrain or develop the dialogic potential of the individual narrator in the story. In doing so, I am drawing attention to the ways in which questions about power and agency in various sociocultural practices are posed by the story in the ‘first place.’ My re-telling of Gilman’s short story thus serves to notice and emphasise the dialogic potential in the narrative, and my re-telling of Gilman’s story in an educational research text suggests that this potential can be meaningful in contexts far beyond those in which the story was first published.
Already, it can be seen that this story has dialogic potential for what Foucault (1981) would call a disruptive existence within a predominant culture. I have mentioned several ways in which notions of subjectivity are dispersed (rather than any resolution toward a fixed central figure, as would be required in a conventional non-dialogic narrative), both in the unravelling of the complex, elusive subject and in the ambiguous conclusion. These are typical of what Foucault explored in the way any notion of subject is mediated by discourse in narrative representations (Young 1981). My retelling of the story might subscribe to Derrida’s (in Young 1981) notion, too, of a ‘literary text’ (in the broadest sense of this term) that “transgresses the commonly accepted representation of literature” in its “structure of resistance to the philosophical conceptuality which might have claimed to dominate” (p. 18), that is, in conventional interpretations of it. If I may appropriate some of the language of postmodern research literature in regard to representation: the “juice of lived experience” is suggested in this story, at the very times when “intractable uncertainties” and “unstable ambiguities” are foregrounded (Scheurich 1997, p. 63). Neither Gilman’s story, nor my re-telling, accedes to the demands of any dominant literary discourse that might require “a rhetorical reduction of complexity to simplicity, of differential relations to firm identities … of diffusely textured situations to tightly sealed containers” (Ryan 1989, pp. 1-2).

For all these reasons and more, it is possible to imagine how Gilman’s story could prove generative for teachers inquiring into the pedagogical possibilities of teaching with literary theory in English-literature classrooms. In Part Three of this chapter I focus on some specific extracts from The Inquiry Group’s conversations which explore these possibilities. But, before that, I want to remain with the story and my re-telling of it. In particular, I want to investigate the notion of transgression raised through *The yellow wallpaper*, and use this to inquire into the dialogic potential of transgression in English-literature teachers professional learning ecologies. I will draw on the notions of uncertainty, unfinalizability, agency and dialogic potential that are raised in my re-telling of the story as a framework for further inquiry into The Inquiry Group conversations.
Transgression and transgressive dialogic potential

Freud (1950) defines ‘transgression’ as a significant lurch in the social practices of an individual from the territory of the acceptable into the territory of the unacceptable. As the narrator’s behaviour in *The yellow wallpaper* becomes more socially unacceptable (in the opinion of John et al.), the term ‘transgressive’ would seem to be more and more appropriate to describe such behaviour. Actually, Freud applied the term ‘transgression, like the term ‘taboo,’ to areas as diverse as humour, sex, and madness. According to the *Oxford Dictionary*, since the time of Freud everyday uses of the term ‘transgression’ tend to have associations with a violation of the sacred or an aberration against civilised norms (in individuals or groups). The notion of transgression I will be focusing on, in this chapter, is one where apparently aberrant behaviour and/or language is seen as challenging or destabilising these norms, where the notion of ‘norms’ suggests the maintenance of unequal power relations as much as any psychological reading of ‘normal’ individual behaviour.

bell hooks (1994) combines the notions of taboo and transgression in her exploration of the socio-political value of transgressive pedagogy, in *Teaching to transgress*. She asserts that teaching should itself be deeply challenging and destabilising. It should be an act of political resistance against dominant groups and against the notion that social disadvantage is inevitable. Like Freud, she isn’t suggesting that transgression always needs to be serious and sober. On the contrary, hooks (1994) talks about her desire, when teaching in higher education classrooms, to “disrupt the atmosphere of seriousness presumed to be essential to the learning process.” And she describes as “transgressive” her willingness to “encourage excitement” in these settings (p. 10).

The transgressive work of teachers and researchers like bell hooks, spanning as it does anti-racist pedagogy, feminist pedagogy and critical pedagogy – see also Gore’s (1993) *The struggle for pedagogies*96 – serves to “disrupt the [pedagogical] atmosphere” at the local level and beyond. On broader socio-political levels this preparedness to disrupt

96 I might also add in here Giroux’s (1992a) *Border crossings – cultural workers and the politics of education.*
can also generate profound dialogic potential, as it resonates across issues of social justice and civil society. A similar notion is implied in the phrase, “against the grain,” as used by Giroux (1991, p. 53) and also by Cochran-Smith (1991). Henry Giroux, Jennifer Gore, bell hooks, and Marilyn Cochran-Smith, whether or not they literally use the term ‘transgression’ certainly embed this notion within their concern for teaching and research to expose the oppression of minority or subaltern voices and groups. The notion of transgression underpins their sense of obligation to “disrupt the atmosphere” – in the language of this study, to “destabilise monologic stability” – constructed in and by authoritative discourses at the local and global levels. In so doing these writers reveal their desires to generate dialogic potential on a number of levels in teaching and learning.

The title of this chapter implies a dialogue with the work of hooks, Gore, Giroux, and Cochran-Smith and the transgressive way with which they go about dialogically engaging with, and destabilising, the dominant discourse practices and social practices of their worlds. Hilary Janks’s (2002) discussion of transgression, with regard to critical literacy, is also crucial. Janks plays with and extends Freud’s notion of the transgressive as “flirting with the forbidden” (Freud 1916, in Janks 2002, p. 12). This sort of transgression still has connotations of a social practice that is unsettling, but it involves an obligation to present an alternative vision of a ‘norm,’ of ‘what should be’ in the world. In Janks’s use of the term, ‘transgression’ connotes a powerfully dialogic, sometimes playful, movement between socio-cultural spaces, over borders and beyond boundaries, and it serves to contest beliefs and values that are fundamental to various dominating discourses. Janks, though, lays emphasis on the effect of the transgression on her South African participants who are largely immersed in and constructed by dominant fields of discourse.

98 I note here McQuillan, MacDonald, Purves and Thomson’s (1999) playful aligning of literary theory with forbidden substances in secondary schools. In response to those who would deny students the opportunity to learn about literary theory in secondary English-literature classes, McQuillan et al. suggest: “Kids want their Theory, and if they don’t get it at school they’ll get it somewhere else” (p. xiv).
It needs to be pointed out that for teachers and researchers not utterly immersed in, or constructed by, dominating discourses, a transgressive text or pedagogy may itself be a cue for exhilaration or excitement. I am thinking here of the pleasure of reading or learning about a fresh, newly theorised interpretation of a novel (for instance) that seems to open up powerful new ways of thinking about that text and the world.

But whether it is in the developing world of South Africa or in more privileged Western countries, transgressive professional learning pedagogy still may be emancipatory for those whose oppression at the hands of dominant discursive practices and social systems goes on largely unnoticed. Classroom practices informed by literary theory may be emancipatory even when the oppression against which they transgress is not obvious. Working in teacher education in Australia, Wendy Morgan (2002) describes as “potentially transgressive” pedagogy an assignment she set which required students to create a form of poststructuralist hypertext to story their professional journey of becoming a teacher. By using the term “potentially transgressive,” she is careful to avoid any deterministic framing of a technological affordance or a narrative mode in which hypertext, or hypertext structures, are seen to inevitably destabilise firmly established beliefs in these pre-service teachers’ views of the profession and the world. To do this would be to invoke a reductive notion of cause and effect that bears a striking resemblance to the managerial voices trying to cure the condition of the narrator in *The yellow wallpaper*. Morgan is not prescribing poststructuralist hypertext as a simple remedy to cure a perceived ‘condition’ of ignorance in the pre-service teacher! There is good reason to retreat from any sort of uncritical fetishising of transgression as a particular method or approach that has a direct linear effect on its ‘subjects,’ just as it is important not to make a fetish of a rigid model of dialogic inquiry-based professional learning.

Like Morgan, Scheurich (1997) broadens the notion of transgression in order to open up a valuable perspective. He argues that any potential for transgression is itself transgressive. This would suggest that it is the potentially dialogic character of a textual or pedagogical practice that can make it transgressive. In Scheurich’s vision of an education field of discourse, he recommends “the transgressive power of figures of in-
betweenness” and “hybridity,” which resist resolution and simple explanation (p. 128). (See also MacLure 2003, Stronach and MacLure 1997.)

In this study, my sense of the transgressive potential of inquiry-based professional learning is congruent with Scheurich’s conception of transgression. I see dialogic inquiry-based professional learning as “potentially transgressive at the very least” and, I argue, it is this potentiality which is the crucial element in planning for professional learning. Let me explain this by addressing the question: ‘What is dialogic inquiry-based professional learning transgressing against?’ At its simplest, the answer to this question is that it is transgressing against the voices of managerialism, the various figures, forces and systems in English-literature teachers’ professional lives that seek to control their learning. This control is sought through shutting down or limiting debates about teacher knowledge or teacher professionalism, identifying so-called ‘gaps’ in essential teacher knowledge (for individual teachers) and acting to ‘fill’ the gaps in as cost-effective a way as possible. In doing so, managerialism atomises English-literature teaching into conglomerates of individual teachers (thereby rejecting the social nature of teachers’ knowledge and teachers’ work) and it thereby ignores or rejects the expertise of English-literature teaching professional communities. The following provisionally finalized description of transgressive professional learning (Figure 6.2) summarises the arguments I have been presenting above.

Transgressive professional learning involves discursive and social practices that explicitly or implicitly, potentially or actionally, inquire into, question and destabilise prevailing norms of professional knowledge, discursive or social practices in teachers’ professional lives. This inquiring, questioning and destabilising may end in a resolve to affirm what exists or it may prompt change. It is informed by a principled agenda, but this agenda is itself open to inquiry, questioning and destabilisation.

Figure 6.2: A ‘provisionally finalized’ description of transgressive professional learning

Transgressive professional learning can be enacted in many ways and forms. The form may be characterised by hybridity when homogeneity is the ‘norm.’ It may be complex
and paradoxical when simplicity and common sense ‘reason’ are expected. It can encourage movement across borders (or even dwelling on borders), when teachers feel more comfortable to be on one side of the ‘fence’ or the other. And it promises uncertainty, provisionality and unfinalizability where certainty is apparently required. In an institutional context, where individuals or groups of teachers seem to be more constituted by discourse than able to use the discourse to construct their own sense of self, the presence of some transgressive element can give cause for optimism. Conversely, the absence of any transgressive element is cause for concern, in classroom practices, in professional learning resources, and in any professional learning dynamic. The transgressive offers dialogic potential for some degree of sociocultural emancipation at the local level. Beyond this its presence may be a catalyst for change toward a more democratic community or society in which individuals and groups can be constructive participants, not just constructed parts.

Clearly, the unnamed narrator in *The yellow wallpaper* takes some time to develop, speculate about and activate transgressive ideas and forms of inquiry, but these eventually enable her to move beyond the direct oppression of John and others. Just as clearly, the “ancestral halls” (and all that they represent) in which she was ‘locked up’ will continue to be influenced by the discursive practices and physical constraints set in place by John and others. Any notion of John as the villain here is misleading. The forbidding sounding “ancestral halls,” which have not disappeared at the end of the story, are an appropriate metaphor for the complex network of discursive and cultural practices and systems that live on in managerial ecologies, with or without the ‘Johns’ of this world. (In Chapter 7, I will go on to explore how the managerial ecologies ‘live on’ in Eastern Girls’ College, and how the teachers in The Literary Theory Inquiry Group have to negotiate their continued presence.) All these practices and systems have the potential to dampen down dialogic potential and to limit potential for transgression.

**Inquiry in(to) the “ancestral halls” of teacher professional learning**

One only has to glance at the latest offerings from educational publishers and policy-makers to see the extent to which professional development resources (both events and publications) are still generally ‘marketed’ as offering teachers control and certainty in
the short-term. It would seem that Apple’s (1981) early concerns about the deskilling of teachers through top-down professional development and teacher education programs with a “technicist-imperative” are now more pressing than ever. On a professional level, Lieberman and Miller (2001) see multiple voices in the US seeking to de-professionalize teaching by devaluing “teacher experience, discretion, and knowledge” (p. viii). These are the very voices who call for the disciplining of teachers (cf. Green 1998). Throughout the Western world at this moment, and certainly in my home state of Victoria, there are multiple voices seeking this control and such voices speak in what is increasingly recognisable as “managerial discourse” (Doecke et al. 2004).

This managerial discourse, under the banner of school and teacher reform, seeks to make individual teachers more rigidly accountable for the professional learning ‘obligations’ that are increasingly spelled out for them by people who are not teachers (Elmore 2000, Morely and Rassool 2000). These managerial voices claim success in their approaches by citing measurements of ‘value-added’ teaching against centralised prescribed standards and the production of tests that specifically test achievement of these standards (eg. Thomas B. Fordham Foundation in the US; See Kanstoroom and Finn 1999). Hargreaves, Earle, Moore and Manning (2001) and Doecke et al. (2004) describe the dangers of centrally imposed professional standards and narrowly prescribed curriculum content as contributing to this de-professionalising of teachers. And they warn of the dangers of professional development programs constructed by outsiders that are premised on managerial conceptions of knowledge. The idea in such programs is that certain essential knowledge can be transmitted to teachers, through ‘targeted’ professional development, and then, in turn, this knowledge can be transmitted directly to students. Or else, a particular teaching strategy demonstrated in a professional development program will have a simple cause and effect reaction on student learning outcomes back in teachers’ schools, irrespective of context and student background.

99 See Stotsky’s (2005) report for the Thomas B. Fordham Foundation into teaching standards in the US. The report generates report cards with quantified measurements of the ‘value added’ teaching by teachers of English/Language arts in virtually all states according to centralised standards. Throughout this report there is vehement criticism of those states who have what Stotsky considers “unteachable standards” – ie. those standards that do not readily translate into testable and therefore quantifiable standards of achievement.
For over a decade, Cochran-Smith and Lytle (2001, 1993), among many others, have consistently recommended inquiry-based research for practitioners, and “inquiry-as-stance” involving school and university partnerships, as worthwhile approaches to addressing these tendencies toward de-professionalisation. Importantly, they have done so without recourse to promises of certainty and control. They are quite explicit that such inquiry inevitably generates more dialogic potential than simple answers in an ongoing dynamic of learning as becoming. That is, as inquiry-based professional learning seeks to solve questions that have been asked or address problems that have been noticed, it almost always raises more questions and notices more problems that also need to be solved or addressed.

From the perspective of inquiry as stance, professional development is associated more with uncertainty than certainty, more with posing problems and dilemmas than solving them …. Inquiry both stems from and generates questions. (Cochran-Smith and Lytle 2001, p. 56)

And yet the case for inquiry-based professional learning paradigms still needs to be made persuasively, and differently, today. Cochran-Smith and Lytle (2001), speaking of their American context, were surely emphasising the positive potential rather than reporting on any huge groundswell, when they wrote of “a new paradigm of professional development emerging” (p. 45). In the same year, Stokes (2001) pointed out that “most teachers experience precious little support in their workplaces for critically inquiring into their practice” (p. 142). Presumably, Stokes was referring to structures within American school districts and at local school sites. The power of these structures, and their attendant discourses, to resist engaging in inquiry or dialogue, can be traced in the “sceptical and even contemptuous” reactions of some teachers to any notion of educational research (Cochran-Smith and Lytle 1993). Similar stories can be found in many an Australian context.

The response rate for my questionnaire inquiring into teachers’ attitudes to literary theory for this study was very gratifying. Over sixty percent of teachers returned their completed questionnaires. However, some of the teachers who took the trouble to fill in their questionnaires (and not forgetting those who ‘binned’ the questionnaire when it appeared in their pigeon hole at school) responded by seemingly thumbing their nose at
the research. One teacher responded to a question about the importance of the canon in literary studies, writing: “Anyone who seriously questions the value of the canon is an out and out moron!” I mentioned another teacher in Chapter 4, who, despite my having explained the purposes for my research in a covering letter, posed the question: “Why are you asking these questions, Graham?” as if he suspected some insidious or underhanded agenda. (I would like to have responded that my agenda was indeed subversive and transgressive, but that I hoped this was explicit and not underhanded.) Indeed, other questionnaire respondents (below) were critical of English departments in “universities” that have “their own agendas” in teaching literary theory.

At VCE level students are still grappling with personal responses to texts and theory often complicates their entrée into a more analytical appreciation. Unfortunately universities are dogmatic about theory and students who are unprepared for this approach are discouraged from further Eng. Studies.

Zach (response to open-ended item in my questionnaire)

I think it’s a pity that universities focus so much on literary theory, rather than the texts themselves, and what they have to offer.

Leanne (response to open-ended item in my questionnaire)

Often students and teachers at university have a “top down” approach when considering the work teachers do in literature and English at Secondary level.

Veronica (response to open-ended item in my questionnaire)

A bit more reaching into classrooms from [name deleted] University to secondary schools might be a very good idea. VATE has provided an excellent conduit but many “experienced” teachers are still quite isolated.

Stephanie (response to open-ended item in my questionnaire)

It would seem that some aspects of the professional ecologies for English-literature teachers are limiting the potential for dialogic inquiry-based approaches to their professional learning, at present. At the same time, some teachers themselves consider the mode of inquiry proposed by this research (and, by implication, any educational research) to be of limited relevance to their professional lives. So it behoves me to pause at this moment and explain why I chose to inquire into literary theory in this study of English-literature teachers’ professional learning.
Why literary theory?: (1) A particular focus for inquiry into professional learning

There are two main answers to the question of ‘Why literary theory?’ The first relates to the emerging research design that I outlined in Chapter 2, Part 1. I decided, early on in this project, to narrow the focus of my study to issues related to literary theory in order to provide a particular focus to what was in other respects a broader study of English-literature teacher professional learning. As the study proceeded, it became unhelpful to insist always on this narrower focus, but literary theory remained a locus to which I would return throughout the study for a more grounded discussion of professional learning. Literary theory continues to be an area of professional knowledge and learning that provokes passionate responses among English-literature teachers, the academy, policy-makers and the media. Prior to the recent interest in literary theory among the media, there had been a colourful history of debate about literary theory amongst (and between) teachers and academics. I will sketch out some of that history here as a way of opening up some of the synergies between literary theory and professional learning that became increasingly apparent in the course of this study.

Literary theory: a history of dialogic struggle

Not long after literary theory was deemed to have ‘arrived’ in the field of literary criticism in the late 1960s, pronouncements began to be made that literary theory was ‘finished.’ In some cases, this was part of a strategy to denounce literary theory by pointing out its flaws and/or its irrelevance (eg. Olsen 1987). But, more often, to posit the end of literary theory was to provoke a critical inquiry into the very question of what literary theory was. As MacQuillan et al. (1999) playfully quip: “Nothing stimulates the production of theory like the proclamation of its own death” (p. ix). Robert Young (1982), writing in the Oxford literary review, was one of the first to signal the “end of theory.” Since then, lively discussions of literary criticism and reading after- or post-theory (Butler, Guillory and Thomas 2000, Cunningham 2002, Docherty 1996, Eagleton 2004, Harris 1996, MacQuillan et al. 1999, Payne and Schad 2003) have continued to the present day.

Most writing identified as after-theory or post-theory tends to be not so much a rejection of the value of the philosophical activity that enables and problematises textual
interpretation so much as a rejection of crude theoretical orthodoxies or “sausage factory” thinking about theory. For example, MacQuillan et al. (1999), in their book, Post-theory, reject the assumption that literary theory is like a sausage machine, pouring in texts at one end, producing ‘new’ readings at the other…. Nothing could be less radical or more depoliticising than the closing off of questioning in an endless repetition of predetermined textual exegesis. (MacQuillan et al. 1999, p. x)

If literary theory were only a matter of endless repetition of predetermined textual exegesis, then it would be fundamentally contrary to the dialogic principles underpinning this research. At its most generative, dialogic and transgressive, literary theory is much more than this.

Until recently, the traditional conversation about literary theory, especially amongst academics, has taken the dialogic tensions in the concept and created professional cultures that were more divisive than richly dialogic (Abrams 1972, Barcan 2002, Frye, 1957, Rosmarin 1983). The subject of literary theory seemed to bring out the worst of professional antipathies in teachers at both secondary and tertiary levels, and in literary critics. Hirsch (1983) coined a particular phrase, the “rhetoricity of interpretive theories” (p. 243), to describe the range of discourses in which different critics or theorists argued for or against the merits of a particular theoretical approach. Just as often, though, some journalists, policy-makers, school teachers or academics have taken a similar approach to the editorial writers and journalists quoted at the start of this chapter (see pages 207-211), which is to assert the merits or ‘dangers’ of any literary theory or any educational theory, rather than being concerned about the particulars or nuances of different literary theories. Ruth Barcan points out that despite the entry into university departments of a “new breed of younger, theoretically literate academics” – and the same might be said of schools and teachers – the rhetoric attacking all literary theory in terms of bodily metaphors of “death and disease” continues to live on (Barcan 2002, p. 344). The metaphor of theory as a virulent infection certainly underpins the rhetoric of the campaign in The Australian newspaper to discredit “trendy theory” (see page 207).
Those attacking literary theory and literary theorists – the bodily metaphors easily translate into personal attacks – have used all manner of divisive rhetoric. Literary theory has been constructed as being everything from a mere irrelevance and a distraction (Hampshire 1954, Olsen 1987, Weitz 1965) to “a monstrous excrescence” (Gross, cited in Bonnycastle 1998), “corrupting students’ minds” (Lentricchia 1996), even perpetrating the “soul-murder of professors and students alike” (Paglia 1994). On the other side of the academic landscape, there are sometimes vituperative attacks on those who reject theory. Rosmarin (1983), too, uses divisive rhetoric, referring to “anti-theorists” (p. 776). Scholes (1985), in the earliest of his books on literary theory in schools, contemptuously rails against the “lunatic perversion of New Critical thought” (p. 52) and Eagleton (1983) dismisses the “genteel amateurism [of New Critics] which regards criticism as some spontaneous sixth sense” (p. 214).

Just as this debate often escalated into “acrimony”, “enduring prejudices” and a “strong emotional repugnance” in academia from as early as the 1950s (Frye 1957), so too some tertiary academics have attacked secondary schools (and by implication secondary teachers) for what they see as a “near scandalous” and “quite staggering” lack of awareness of theory in students beginning undergraduate English courses (Fuery and Mansfield 2000, p. xxi). Anecdotal evidence, supported by teachers’ responses to my questionnaire in 2001, suggests that the level of strong feeling about literary theory still ran deep amongst some secondary English-literature teachers at the turn of this century. Language in the questionnaire responses such as “bullshit,” “theory shmeory!” and “out and out moron” used by those sceptical of, or opposed to, literary theory would seem to support this suggestion, and yet large numbers of respondents to the questionnaire in this study wrote as excitedly as Toni Vernon (2002-3) does in Literary theory and VCE literature: from personal excitement to teaching practice. The following statements from teachers in response to my questionnaire give some indication of the nature of this excitement:

I think teaching literary theory is very important …. It is an essential part of understanding literature! …. One of the reasons why I returned to study and continue with it (even though it’s very demanding when I’m teaching full-time) is because I would feel it slipping away after 6 months out of
university! I think to teach it effectively and successfully, you have to engage in and practice it.

‘Fiona’ (a mid-career VCE literature teacher from an independent school in suburban Melbourne)

I’ve been grateful to have been exposed to literary theory in the way that I have so recently because it coincided with my teaching of senior Literature. Whatever one might … say about literary theory, it at least invites debate and discussion as well as offering some challenging concepts – all great strategies for a Lit classroom.

‘David’ (an experienced VCE literature teacher from a state school in suburban Melbourne)

Engaging in theory keeps me ‘switched on’ and benefits my students as I am practising the theory I am teaching, keeping it fresh and current.

‘Stacey’ (a mid-career VCE literature teacher from a state school in suburban Melbourne)

Not surprisingly, any deeply felt antipathy toward literary theory does not encourage dialogic inquiry into the subject, but neither do the attacks on theory-sceptics. And so there is much evidence that English-literature teachers have often eschewed altogether the topic of literary theory in professional conversations; or they have ignored opportunities for dialogue between teachers; or else they have used opportunities for dialogue merely as a chance for airing professional and personal animosities. On the other hand, some teachers are wanting more effective collegial dialogue. Yet when they have some access to formal professional development events or resources about literary theory, they can feel intimidated, alienated or marginalized, especially when it comes to the dense and forbidding discourses in which some theorists write and/or talk about literary theory (Beavis 1997, Fuery and Mansfield 2000, Misson 1994, Worth 1998).

In talking about their less worthwhile experiences of learning about literary theory, teachers complained about “the jargon,” about the language being “difficult” and “requiring too much previous knowledge,” and about the pedagogy which they considered “obscure” or intent on “cramming” in too much, leading to “information overload.” Many teachers were like James, who wrote:

I have two books which help me – one a dictionary of literary terms, the other a kind of work book on “Gaps and Silences”, “Feminism etc” …. I wish there were more and simpler texts. I wish there were accessible PD
sessions to give me time to more thoroughly understand all the facets of literary theory. I am very anxious about teaching it and want to be given the opportunity to upgrade my skills in a non-threatening, non-intensive environment.

‘James’ (a more experienced VCE literature teacher from a state school in suburban Melbourne)

There are some interesting parallels between the tensions that separate teachers with respect to their attitudes to literary theory, and the tensions that separate teachers with respect to their attitudes to professional learning (or professional development).

**Why literary theory?: (2) Keying into synergies**

My second main reason for focusing on literary theory in this study may seem more subjective and selfish. Literary theory was and is an area of particular interest in my own professional learning. As Loughran (1999) puts it, research can be mutually beneficial, both to one’s own teaching and professional life and to those with whom one is researching. This already suggests a rich dialogic synergy. As my research into inquiry-based professional learning has unfolded, and as my understanding of the importance of professional dialogue across disciplines and across professional territories has increased, it has now become apparent that the choice of literary theory was particularly apt. The uncertainties, unfinalizability and boundary crossing that I see as characterising the richest experiences of dialogic inquiry-based professional learning are already deeply embedded conceptually within the notion of literary theory. The synergies of working in and across both areas promised lively and generative dialogic potential.

As Stronach and MacLure (1997) point out,

> It is precisely the *impurity* of literary theory – its resistance to containment within its own disciplinary field, and its infidelity to the fences erected around others – that … constitutes its power to question the axiomatics and foundation principles of disciplines. (p. 3).

Given this ‘impurity’ of literary theory, it should not be surprising that, amongst the teachers who participated in this study (ie. by completing a questionnaire, participating
in an extended interview, and/or being part of The Literary Theory Inquiry Group),
many were unsure about how to explain literary theory. Some teachers were quite
straightforward and expressed their anxiety about not knowing. For example, in her
extended interview with me Kris confessed, “I’m anxious about that [literary theory]. I
need to be better informed” (Kris, extended interview). In Julia’s interview, she wove
her anxiety into a compelling metaphor:

I’ve read about the theory and done short [PD] sessions. None of that was
inadequate. Every bit of it I felt was better. It was like another little door
opens but they’re only little doors, and they all led off to passageways but I
haven’t got to the big room where they all come together yet, you know?
And so I’m still lost in a passage somewhere.... I can’t put it all together.
Julia, extended interview, 2001

Those teachers who provided some definition of literary theory revealed quite different
understandings of what literary theory is or might be, and how it is or might be used in
their classrooms. In research studies and practitioner resources published on literary
theory in English-literature classrooms the perspectives are similarly varied.

**Framing and teaching with literary theory**

As with most dialogic concepts central to this study, framings or definitions of literary
theory have varied greatly over time and in different contexts. Some definitions are
distinctly circular. For instance, Nodelman (2005) reports that some teachers and
scholars have seen literary theory as referring to “all the varieties of theoretical
discourse that literary scholars draw on as a way of grounding their thinking about
texts.” That is, literary theory is what literary theorists use! Misson (1994) suggests that
boundaries between terms such as “literary theory,” “critical theory,” and even “critical
literacy” (at times) are seen by teachers and some academics as slippery and
contestable. Others define literary theory in terms of an elite group of French
intellectuals from the 1960s and 1970s, including Foucault, Derrida and Lacan. I tend
more towards Terry Eagleton’s recently espoused position, when he says that literary
theory ‘began’ when literary scholars “paused to reflect on their own purposes and
assumptions. It is this critical self-reflection that [one] know[s] as theory” (2004, p. 17).
For the purposes of this study, I have developed the following provisionally finalized description of literary theory. This description is presented here to sketch in some conceptual boundaries and to identify two different elements to the concept that can be significant in analysing teachers’ practices and beliefs. Those two elements are shown below in Figure 6.3:

(i) Literary theory (a broad collective noun) as a self-conscious approach or disposition to reading and meaning-making for all texts, from literary to popular culture.
   *This approach or disposition is constituted by and through loosely interconnected philosophies, methodologies and discourses that guide and prompt rigorous reflection and dialogue about the processes of constructing meaning in and with literature.*

(ii) Literary theory as a variety of more prescriptive ‘tools’ (ie. theory as a noun that can be pluralized)
   *This means there can be different theories (that are themselves constantly open to contestation and constantly evolving), which guide and prompt dialogue about the ways readers (and writers) construct meaning with and in texts.*

Figure 6.3: A ‘provisionally finalized’ description of literary theory

In whatever ways teachers or academics have understood the concept of literary theory – eg. as a self-conscious approach or disposition or as a variety of more prescriptive tools – there continues to be great interest in the teaching of literary theory in secondary English-literature classrooms from a wide spectrum of people working in diverse contexts and teaching and learning cultures.

Ray Misson (1994) is an Associate Professor in Faculty of Education at the University of Melbourne. At a fundamental level, he sees literary theory and literary theories as enabling teachers to teach students “how to read” (p.2). However, writing with Wendy Morgan, Misson expresses caveats about the ways in which literary theory can so easily turn into a series of orthodoxies which transform reading into a more mechanical exercise, potentially blunting aesthetic engagement (see Misson and Morgan 2005, 2006). English novel writer, Robert Alter (1994), believes that “our understanding of works of literature can now be more complex and more satisfying” as a result of using
theory (p. 13). But in a more sceptical mode, ten years earlier, he worried that literary theory’s “attack on mimesis ultimately depends on defining experience out of existence” (Alter 1984, p. 9). Some teacher education students in America enthuse over the way theory “abets a reader’s response [to texts] in ways that can enliven, shock and even transform the way we think” (quoted in Wilhelm 2002). And yet, I am cautious of any enthusiasm for literary theory that can so easily tip into zealousness. In reviewing Deborah Appleman’s book on literary theory, and in quoting her own teacher education students, Wilhelm claims that literary theory can turn English that was seen by students as “boring and meaningless” into something “vitally social, interesting, significant” (p. 128).

Cathy Hatters (2001), teacher of VCE literature at a TAFE institution in Melbourne, Australia, associates literary theory with benefits for her students’ learning on two levels. She describes (1) how literary theory enables her students to engage “far more directly and confidently with their texts;” and she says that (2) “a few [students] were able to take this a step further and become more independent of their teacher…” (p. 45). And yet Hatters is uncomfortable with the potential that literary theory has to reinforce some of the elitism that it seeks to demystify and deconstruct. Her students speak about those who know about literary theory in terms of an elite community, one that they want to enter. As one student says, learning literary theory allows you to read “wanky looking stuff that makes you look intellectual on the train” (p. 38).

Stephen Bonnycastle (1998), a professor in the Faculty of English in a Canadian university, is teaching in a different context again. In his experience, the value of literary theory lies in stimulating students to engage with issues of social justice, encouraging them to “combat absolutism and fundamentalism, and help people live with tolerance and openness in a varied world” (p. 13). On the other hand, he would like to reserve this enthusiasm for what he regards as “good theory” (p. 17). His tolerance does not easily extend to historicist theories. And he is very critical of some literary theory academics, whom he characterises as self interested “specialists” intent on “dominating” literary theory conversations (p. 20).
In spite of the enthusiasm of some advocates, knowledge of literary theory does not guarantee engaging, meaningful, creative and dialogic English-literature classrooms. Nevertheless, the tensions evident in the brief overview of attitudes to literary theory I have presented here suggest that literary theory is a rich field for inquiry, itself, and the dialogic potential for professional learning in this field is similarly rich. However, in this study I would argue for a conception of literary theory (as collective noun or as pluralised noun) that is epistemologically dialogic and for professional learning of literary theory to be framed in appropriately dialogic ways.

**Professional learning rather than professional development?**

In Part Three, I will analyse some professional learning about literary theory that I argue is dialogic, both epistemologically and pedagogically. However, before this I should explain why I have chosen to use the term ‘professional learning’ rather than ‘professional development’ throughout this study. Holly (1989) is one of the early writers in this area to question the value of the term professional development. For him, the notion of professional development carries implications of needing to fix a deficiency in individual teachers, to heal a “pathology” (p.175). (Since all this discussion is emerging out of my re-telling of *The yellow wallpaper*, it seems appropriate to substitute the word ‘condition’ for ‘pathology’ here.) Clarke (1992) points out that most “professional development,” both in conception and in practice, is something that is “done to teachers.” The implication is that “teachers need to be forced into developing” and that “teachers have deficits in knowledge and skills that can be fixed by training” (p.75). (See also Little 1993.)

Such concerns underlie a vigorous, ongoing conversation in the literature and in schools about the nature and the preferred models of professional development. Some of the major issues animating this conversation include:

- the extent to which professional development is immediately relevant to teachers (Baird and Mitchell 1997, Ingvarson 2002, Loughran 1999);
• the value or danger of top-down (targeted) or bottom-up (inquiry-based) professional development, and how issues of agency are affected in these conceptions (Fairclough 1995, Fullan 1999, 1993, Hargreaves 1994, Hargreaves and Goodson 2001);
• the extent to which there is a direct cause-and-effect relationship between teachers’ teaching and learning and students’ learning – Shulman (1986) refers to this as a “process-product” conception – as opposed to the “messiness” of any teaching and learning dynamic (see also Fogarty, in Schmuck 1997, Hoban 2002, Schön 1983, 1987, Shulman and Sherin 2004);
• the value and dangers of learning communities of teachers. This question often involves a critical evaluation of different forms of collaboration (Fullan 1999, 1993, Goodson 2001, Grossman et al. 2001, Hargreaves and McLaughlin 1997, Little 2001, Raphael, Florio-Ruane, Kehus, and George 2001); and

In most instances, I am more comfortable with the term ‘professional learning’ because it foregrounds the ongoing and dialogic ways in which groups of teachers construct their knowledge and develop their skills, and because it tends to eschew discourses of individual passivity and inadequacy. However, I do acknowledge that some researchers and policy-makers have appropriated the term ‘professional learning’ with its richer dialogic connotations in an otherwise managerial and less dialogic professional development program for teachers – ie. a particular ‘injection’ of ‘targeted’ professional
learning will make good the teachers’ knowledge deficiencies, and ‘fill the gaps’ in their knowledge and skills.  

Ultimately, the broader notion of professional learning that I am proposing draws from the enabling models proposed by McLaughlin (1997) and Little (1993, 2001). The notion of “inquiry as stance” that emerged from the work of Marilyn Cochran-Smith, either on her own (2003, 1991) or in partnership with Susan Lytle (2001, 1993), is also important for this study. However, to the extent that the model I am proposing is premised on the centrality of language in the dialogic conceptualising and enacting of inquiry-based professional learning, it owes much to researchers inquiring into a range of learning fields, including Bakhtin (1986a, 1981c), Barnes (1976), Britton (1970), Florio-Ruane (2001), Kooy (2006), Petrosky (2006), Vygotsky (1961), Wells (1999, 2001), and Wenger (1998).

Together, such a group of names represents a paradox. They all advocate student and/or teacher professional learning that is transgressive in some ways – that is, learning that challenges and destabilises connections with dominant beliefs, practices and knowledge. And yet, because of their dialogic conceptions of language, they would see any transgressive approaches to learning as still dialogically connected with those dominant beliefs, practices and knowledge. It is professional learning on the boundary in so many respects. Such an ambiguous notion of transgression suggests a mode of existence that would not be permitted in those “ancestral halls” of *The yellow wallpaper* where managerial discourses seek certainty and control. My analysis of the discussions in The Inquiry Group, in Part 3, show that a transgressive dialogic model of inquiry-based professional learning is much more than a good idea that perhaps might ‘work.’ But, as I will show, it is a model that is problematic to enact in professional ecologies that are resistant to dialogic inquiry-based learning.

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100 See Ingvarson (1998), who argues that professional development should be tied to, and measured against, generic teacher standards and that this will help to build “an infrastructure for professional learning” (p. 7). See also NITL 2005a.
“More than intentions”

Douglas Barnes’s (1976) description of curriculum as “communication” in secondary school classrooms is comparable to much of the curriculum that was planned for, and enacted, in The Literary Theory Inquiry Group. In the following quote, Barnes is referring to the dynamic between pupils and teachers, whereas the setting of The Inquiry Group involves teacher learners and a researcher-facilitator. The idea applies equally well to both settings.

When people talk about ‘the school curriculum’ they often mean ‘what teachers plan in advance for their pupils to learn.’ But a curriculum made only by teachers’ intentions would be an insubstantial thing from which nobody would learn much. To become meaningful a curriculum has to be enacted by pupils as well as teachers, all of whom have their private lives outside school. By ‘enact’ I mean come together in a meaningful communication – talk, write, read books, collaborate, become angry with one another, learn what to say and do, and how to interpret what others say and do. A curriculum as soon as it becomes more than intentions is embodied in the communicative life of an institution, the talk and gestures by which pupils and teachers exchange meanings even when they quarrel or cannot agree. In this sense curriculum is a form of communication.

(Barnes 1976, p.14)

In secondary school learning, this curriculum “communication” involves a multiplicity of decisions being made every day, in class and outside of class, before, during and after classtime. In some of these decisions teachers actively involve students in the decision-making process. In others, teachers show an awareness, at least, of these students’ needs and wants, as well as the concerns of other groups and regulations. In this final part of Chapter 6, I will explore how Barnes’s notion of curriculum plays out in some aspects of the professional learning of The Literary Theory Inquiry Group.

Part of the “coming together in a meaningful communication” of The Inquiry Group required me, as researcher-facilitator of the professional learning, to mediate continually my intentions and plans for the group, with the immediate concerns and needs of individuals within the group, and to a lesser extent other institutional and curriculum demands. For the second session of The Literary Theory Inquiry Group, I
distributed a variety of readings for teachers to read before the session. These included: Gilman’s (1896/1996) short story, *The yellow wallpaper*; a chapter from a book on literary theory by Deborah Madsen (2000), which included an interpretation of Gilman’s story; and a chapter from a book by Deborah Appleman (2000) reporting on experiences of teaching literary theory to secondary students in the US. I hoped we could consider Madsen’s Marxist/feminist interpretation of *The yellow wallpaper* as we discussed Gilman’s story. This, you could say, was my planned curriculum.

Early in the session, however, it became clear that two teachers in the group had not read Gilman’s short story. Some teachers wanted to discuss *The yellow wallpaper* but they did not want to exclude those who, for all sorts of professional reasons, had not had time to read the story. The following excerpt from this session shows how the group dealt with this dilemma.¹⁰¹ Jan, one of those who had not read the story, is the first to speak.

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¹⁰¹ I have identified myself in this and all other excerpts of The Literary Theory Inquiry Group, but pseudonyms are used for all other teachers in the group to help preserve anonymity.
Figure 6.4: Excerpt from transcript of Session 2 of The Literary Theory Inquiry Group, *The influences of literary theory on teaching practices* (14 November 2002)

There is a strong sense that teachers are willing to work together in this excerpt, partly evident in the way decisions are made, with input from everyone. For instance, a solution to the problem of not everyone having read the story emerges from many voices – ie. Jan, Graham, Robin, Fil and Sam – rather than a directive being spelled out by just one voice. And this seems to be to the satisfaction of all in the group, eventually. The idea to summarise the story seems to come spontaneously from several teachers, and not from me as the facilitator, although one could argue that the facilitator’s influence is not completely absent. My opening up of the discussion to a possibility of different voices – “My mini-version? Someone else’s mini-version?” (line 3) – might be seen as nudging the conversation in an inclusive direction. Later, my agreement with
others’ suggestions – “Ok,” and again “Ok, one sentence,” and then “30 seconds pause while we…” (lines 12, 18) – could be construed as confirming the direction of the conversation.

Part of me wants to believe that this sort of confirming of direction was coming as much from the rest of the group as it was from me, the facilitator, and that as the researcher/facilitator I was really just one of the group. And yet I must ask myself whether the facilitator’s position could be seen as centralist and managerial after all. It is possible to read my confirmation here as formally validating, as it were, the suggestion by my colleagues. This reading would suggest that the other participants were all the while recognising my position in the group as managerial, and so they willingly acceded to my direction-setting. Was this curriculum, this communication, infected by the very managerialism that I was seeking to transgress? And, if this were so, then rather than bemoaning this as a dilution of the dialogic principles underpinning The Inquiry Group, it is worth asking whether this might not be a necessary part of my negotiating a role that was neither just group member nor just researcher/facilitator. This sort of role – neither insider nor outsider – is often enacted by university-based critical friends in partnerships with school groups, anyway (eg. Cochran-Smith and Lytle 1993, Florio-Ruane 2001, Kooy 2006, Wells 2001; see also Petrosky 1998), although in this case my existing collegial relationships with these teachers made such negotiations much less problematic than they are sometimes when the university partner is more of an outsider.

As well as these concerns, it seems important to investigate the atmosphere of collegiality in this exchange. The good-humour and shared respect that comes across here are always possible with an ‘outsider’ facilitator coming in to the school environment to lead or direct a professional learning ‘event,’ although the process of negotiating relationships to eventually achieve this usually takes more time. Typically, a one-off professional development event leaves precious little time for this. A warm spirit of collegiality in the group is clearly evident in the spirit of fun and laughter, and in the turn-taking – lines 6-18 involved 12 quick changes in speaker, and involved six different speakers – and in the relaxed response to interruptions (lines 22-25). And this all helps to deal with a
potentially awkward moment in the learning: Some colleagues haven’t done their homework! Where do we go from here?

Something about the conversation dynamic seems to encourage the teachers to feel free to suggest an alternative strategy – “Could I just have a little mini-version…” (line 1) – and later to spontaneously share a teaching moment – “I got my [literature] girls to do that with a book they read over the holidays…” (lines 22-3). This excerpt presents an apparently inclusive dialogue between all group members. It is demonstrative, also, of a flexible, communicative, dialogic curriculum which is shaped as much by teachers’ existing knowledge and present needs, as by any prepared plan or any pre-determined learning outcome set by an ‘outside’ facilitator or regulatory body. And, importantly, a moment of potential awkwardness – ie. not everyone has prepared similarly for the meeting – when considered for its dialogic potential, does indeed help to generate more dialogue and more dialogic potential.

Consistent with bell hooks’s (1994) transgressive pedagogy, all participants in the group already seemed to be enjoying each other’s company, judging from the frequent interjections of laughter. Indeed, there was no sense of a heavy “atmosphere of seriousness” that bell hooks was concerned to disrupt in her teaching and learning context. Evidently, there was already a somewhat transgressive culture in this group before they came together to learn about literary theory. The various responses to Sam’s suggestion, “We should all sum it up in one sentence” (line 9), are further evidence of the transgressive elements animating the inquiry. Sam’s idea is unexpected for at least one teacher in the group: Fil’s response of “Oooh” (line 10) seems to suggest this, and yet the tone of voice here also suggests that the idea holds exciting potential. The idea is transgressive to the extent that it is a bit of a different approach to professional learning. It’s even professionally challenging. Robin is perhaps voicing some scepticism to the idea at first – “Mmm” (line 13) – and then later: “[It’s] hard” (line 22). In fact, all in the group are ‘put on the spot’ to think quickly, creatively and publicly to summarise a very complex story in just one sentence. And yet, all agree to provide their summaries.
The dialogic potential of ‘labels’

In terms of what Bakhtin (1986b) calls “speech genres,” a number of categories can be seen. Teachers shift from one genre of conversation (light-hearted chat, planning for further learning [lines 1-14]) to another (a creative/analytic activity such as might be enacted in one’s own English-literature classroom [lines 15-21]), to another (a teacher relates a story from her classroom [lines 22-27]). Immediately after this excerpt, the teachers shared their different summaries of *The Yellow Wallpaper*.

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td><strong>Marianne:</strong> Alright, I’ll start…. It’s about a woman who is locked in a room and who is consumed by the yellow wallpaper.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td><strong>Jan:</strong> Doesn’t tell me enough.</td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td><strong>Fil:</strong> OK, I’ve got one for you. A woman is made mad by a hideous husband and she sees her life in the wallpaper.</td>
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<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td><strong>Jan:</strong> Tells me a lot more.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td><strong>Robin:</strong> I was going to say … An internal monologue of dark … the exploration of madness. <em>[giggles of appreciation by other teachers]</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td><strong>Graham:</strong> So [Fil]’s got a feminist version and you’ve got a Freudian [reading]. <em>[brief giggle]</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td><strong>Sam:</strong> I believe it’s about a woman who’s her own worst enemy but whose condition is made worse by her husband also.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td><strong>Jan:</strong> OK, so that’s sort of a patriarchal version! <em>[extended giggle]…</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td><strong>Graham:</strong> …<em>[spoken over the giggle]</em> story narrated by a woman as she experiences gradual dissolution of a sense of herself and that dissolution is caused by the husband and some … other man and …some other unknown factors.</td>
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**Figure 6.5:** Excerpt from transcript of Session 2 of The Literary Theory Inquiry Group, *The influences of literary theory on teaching practices* (14 November 2002)

In many ways the structure of this part of the conversation may be commonplace in any inquiry-based English-literature (or Theory of Knowledge) classrooms around the world. An inclusive dynamic (in the early stage of a conversation, at least) allows all in the group to have their say, although the one exception in this excerpt is when Jan abruptly and provocatively evaluates Marianne’s summary by saying, “Doesn’t tell me enough” (line 3). As other teachers offer their summaries, members of the group continue this line of evaluation, but something about the dynamic makes it seem more inclusive than judgemental. In this evaluation, a literary theory ‘label’ – in terms of theory-as-tool – is suggested to categorise the summary just offered (see lines 9-10 and
13). However, listening back to the tape of this session it seemed more like students ‘calling out’ (interjecting) in a class discussion than teachers engaged in formal evaluation (if I may be permitted to indulge briefly in some pedagogical stereotypes). The transgressive and yet inclusive character of this ‘calling out’ is suggested in the transcript by the giggle that follows each comment. Each comment can be seen to constitute as much a playful quip as a serious contribution to the building of knowledge about literary theory.

And yet, here again, as bell hooks’s (1994) research repeatedly shows, out of the playful comes some pragmatic, grounded approaches to learning. In the first meeting of The Inquiry Group, Sam had mentioned a classroom practice she uses to encourage students to reflect on the ways that broad theoretical perspectives are framing and informing their readings of texts. She described one class, where she encouraged all students in the class to categorise one student’s comments about a literary text, in this case Sophocles’s Antigone, using a literary theory ‘label.’ She then asked students to construct a contrasting interpretation of the same text using a contrasting literary theory ‘label.’

**Figure 6.6: Excerpt from transcript of Session 1 of The Literary Theory Inquiry Group, Introduction: teachers sharing attitudes, experiences and ideas (23 October 2002)**
Sam went on to explain how such an approach can encourage students’ critical thinking and independent decision-making when developing interpretations of texts. Students can come to understand how their own readings relate in different ways to different interpretive traditions and discourses. This encourages them to question rather than blindly accept an assumed authority figure or an authoritative voice or ideology, whether this be in a classroom (ie. a particularly confident student or ‘strident’ teacher), in a newspaper or in a published study guide. Students are urged to critique voices that appear authoritative or commonsensical, and to reflect on the assumptions and theoretical grounding of those voices. This sort of urging counterbalances the potential for thinking of literary theory as merely a set of neat labels or a set of prescriptive tools.

In Figure 6.5, the teachers were enacting a similar process to the one Sam is describing in Figure 6.6. What I described as “calling out” by the teachers in Figure 6.5 could be seen as a feasible classroom activity: the teacher learners are reflecting on each confidently avowed interpretation of the short story and then they are suggesting different theoretical categories that might be underpinning the different interpretations. In doing so, they are experiencing the ways that literary theory as ‘labels’ may be used productively by students in classroom discussions, and they are being reminded about the ways in which different theoretical perspectives stimulate contrasting understandings of texts.

“What might we say if …?”

The hybrid mix of conversation genres evident in Figure 6.5, with its crossing of genre and discipline boundaries, is also evident in the following excerpt from the second Inquiry Group meeting (Figure 6.7). By this time, the group is considering another of the readings set down for discussion, Deborah Appleman’s (2000) *Critical encounters in high school English: Teaching literary theory to adolescents*. In this book, Appleman describes and critically reflects on a variety of secondary English classroom experiences of teaching literary theory. Appleman had worked in the classrooms of some colleagues who were teaching literary theories, one theory (tool) at a time. Their approach was to present each new theory as a new “lens” through which literature and the world can be viewed. The passage I am reading from Appleman’s book at the start of this excerpt is a quote from a Year 9 student, Rachel, as she addresses her teachers.
during classtime. After a unit on “deconstruction,” Rachel is expressing her anger and frustration at having learned about this theory.

1 Graham: [Rachel says:] “Why have you told this? I’m so sorry I know about this now. How could you have told us about this now? What are trying to do, destroy us? ….” And so I ask the question, now, what does literary theory say in this instance? What might we say in our classroom if the discussion ends up like this?

2 Fil: Can I give another example, Pav [nickname for Graham], slightly different, but in a…Another teacher was saying the other day how one of her students said to her, ‘Well, this year I have had to unlearn everything I have learned. And it was discomforting, but also …’ She didn’t use the word ‘empowering’ but it was, I think, what she meant.

3 Graham: In what way empowering, do you think?

4 Fil: It was a new confidence, I think. A new sense that she was able to do something different in a reasonably short period of time.

5 Robin: And what part does readiness play here? It seems to me that there are some [students] who are ready to accept the ambiguities of life and that richness, whereas others will want to hold onto those oppositions we were talking about.

6 Jan: That’s right.

7 Robin: And how do you measure that? Because I worry about the turbulence. We all begin on this turbulent journey, and undermine all their certitudes, then what are we doing for them to help them grow and to help them with that confident self-image.

8 Sam: But are we undermining? Or are we simply asking them to re-examine? And that also implies the notion of ability to reaffirm? As long as they perhaps re-examine their values and their beliefs, and become aware of the Framework within which they are operating…. That doesn’t necessarily leave them in a kind of existential limbo.

9 Robin: I’m just wondering whether it’s happening at all levels, though, in their… if it is happening at family level, at friendship level… You know, how much turbulence can they cope with?

10 Graham: But you see I don’t think that it’s anarchic.

11 Sam: No, I don’t either.

12 Graham: And the turbulence [you speak of] does imply that. But I think that’s really important for us to talk about. I think there is a difference.

Figure 6.7: Excerpt from transcript of Session 2 of The Literary Theory Inquiry Group, The influences of literary theory on teaching practices (14 November 2002)

Once again in this excerpt, members of The Inquiry Group seem comfortable to move between discourse territories and to navigate across genre boundaries. There is a noticeable shift in the tone compared with the previous one: from laughing over the
challenge of summarising a complex story in one sentence to serious engagement with complex and troubling issues. Here in this excerpt, too, the conversation shifts and turns from genre to genre: from an invitation to evaluate a reading (lines 1-5), to the telling of another story from a classroom (lines 6-10), to some critical reflection on that story (lines 12-13), to raising for consideration the notion of “readiness” – i.e. readiness to deal with different challenges in a student’s schooling (lines 14-22) – to a lively contestation of various philosophical positions as they relate to school students’ lives in and outside the classroom (lines 22-34). It is interesting to consider the dynamic of the collaborative or dialogic learning in this excerpt.

To the extent that the group seems collectively comfortable in negotiating the crossing of genre boundaries, it seems fair to say that there appears to be a sense of a shared culture binding the group together. In that respect, one might say they are like-minded. But there is a danger of limiting the dialogic potential of learning if all in the group think alike and their collaboration only amounts to reinforcing habitual practices or beliefs of individuals (Fullan and Hargreaves 1991; see also Doecke 2004). In this excerpt, within this element of like-mindedness, there is still dialogic potential for disagreement and questioning, and thus for disrupting and challenging different teachers’ habitual beliefs and/or presumed ‘norms.’

The issues of agency and dialogic inclusivity are important in this exchange in many ways. From the moment when I propose the question, “What might we say in our classroom if …” (lines 4-5), and Fil responds by introducing the teacher story, to the vigorous exchange of views that follows, there is a sense in which different voices and different perspectives are being heard. Often the questions do not come from me as the facilitator (lines 14, 19, 23, 24, 30), so the inquiry is not entirely framed from ‘outside’ as it were. This in itself signals a strong sense of dialogicality amongst the group. Also, within this group, the level of sophistication of the conversation is set very high, time and again, with the use of abstractions or complex nominalization: “a new confidence” (line 12), “readiness” and “the ambiguities of life” (lines 14, 15); “existential limbo” (line 27). The abstractions, nominalizations and the clarity of the logic evident in this excerpt suggest a degree of confidence, of certainty, in these teachers. Along with this
confidence comes rich dialogue potential as teachers challenge, affirm, speculate and illustrate in response to some strongly articulated views. Notwithstanding all this, the whole conversation is littered with hedging expressions (“do you think,” “I think,” “It seems to me,” “I’m just wondering,” “you know,” “you see,” and “I don’t think”). These gestures of tentativeness or provisionality frequently preface robust statement of points of views, as if the ideas were more propositional than definitive. Characteristic of conversations in this Inquiry Group over the 14 months of the study, many ideas seem to be rehearsed as much as pronounced, which serves to cushion some of the rhetorical sharpness and some of the ‘edge’ of robust dialogue.¹⁰²

Conclusions

The question of how much turbulence (or uncertainty) that adolescent students can cope with might also be asked of teachers engaged in professional learning. Transgressive inquiry-based professional learning, constituted in and provoked by robust dialogue and playful exchanges, can often be about ‘edge’ of one sort or another. In The Literary Theory Inquiry Group, this notion of ‘edge’ is an important element. For some outsiders it might seem like the discussion analysed above was transgressing into uncomfortable territory. It did seem like we were pressing up against the edge of our professional comfort zones. In Barnes’s (1976) terms, there is more evidence here of “the talk and gestures by which … teachers exchange meanings even when they quarrel or cannot agree” (p. 14).

Perhaps we were moving further away from certainty the longer we talked. The longer this study continued, the more strongly I felt that spaces for dialogic inquiry-based learning often do involve teachers working on boundaries, where ‘solving’ of one problem spawns a variety of other problems, where coming to some resolution about one dilemma or question invariably raises other dilemmas and further uncertainty. The transcripts of The Literary Theory Inquiry Group in this chapter would suggest that the teachers valued these sorts of spaces, spaces where dialogic potential seemed more

¹⁰² Locke and Daley (2006) have commented on similar ways in which the robustness of dialogue amongst professionals and in research conversations can be ameliorated by observance of “politeness cues.”
important than simple clarity and certainty. While there may have been moments of authoritative ‘edge’ in some of the conversations, there was never a clear sense that this or that was the clearly dominant discourse or that this person or that person remained the dominant figure or voice in the conversation.

In Figure 6.7, as with so much of the inquiry-based learning involving this group of teachers, several voices raised challenging and problematic issues that remained unresolved: for instance, the ‘question of readiness’ and the issue of ‘turbulence’, as Robin posed them. Beyond a strong agreement that ‘turbulence’ remains an important issue to be aware of – and in that respect, one could argue there was consensus in the group – there was no monolithic unity to be found in details of the different teachers’ beliefs and practices. There didn’t need to be. This is an instance of what Harris (1989) calls “community without consensus.” (Harris was speaking about a community of student writers, but his idea is just as valid for a group of professional teachers engaged in learning.) In this dynamic, there was no axe-wielding ‘John’ ready to cut down any dissenting, subversive or transgressive voices. If managerialism were lurking – in terms of dominant voices or managerial discourses – they were not so dominant as to be pronouncing, with certainty, simple solutions to complex problems. The teachers in this Inquiry Group meeting did not see themselves as suffering from a ‘condition’ that needed to be cured; they did not require certain outcomes for their professional learning about literary theory to be validated. The transcripts I have analysed in this chapter show English-literature teachers engaged in something meaningful and worthwhile, something that was addressing their desire to learn and that was contributing to their capacity to develop dialogic potential beyond this particular professional learning.

Some of the learning reported on in this chapter was explicitly and directly about literary theory (in the collective sense) and literary theories (in the sense of tools). And some was about the way students might respond to literary theory or uncertainty (or turbulence). Some of the learning was locally focused and grounded in their classroom practices, such as workshopping a simple strategy for beginning a class conversation about a set text (ie. summarise it in just one sentence); other learning looked to the bigger socio-cultural picture of adolescents being ‘unsettled’ by certain aspects of
literary theory knowledge and the short-term and long-term implications of this. In a different sense, through the teachers’ enacting of this form of dialogic inquiry, they were learning what they might hope their students were learning: to make the most of dialogic potential through noticing, developing, speculating about and activating dialogue across different perspectives. They were using uncertainty (or turbulence) as a prompt for dialogic possibilities rather than an obstacle or a limitation. For these secondary English-literature teachers as much as for their students, some degree of dialogic turbulence (as opposed to turbulence that is completely disabling) is preferable to inertia and shutting down of dialogue. But ‘Where to draw the line?’ is the unfinalizable question. Yet another boundary to negotiate in English-literature teachers’ work….
SEVEN

AROUND AND IN THE “UNCONTAINABLE EDGES”

Preface: moving across and through professional learning worlds

[Jim Saddler] had a map of all this [landscape] clearly in his head, as if in every moment of lying here flat on his belly watching some patch of it for a change of shape or colour that would be a small body betraying itself, he were also seeing it from up high like the hawk…. He moved always on these two levels, through these two worlds: the flat world of individual grassblades, seen so close up that they blurred, where the ground feeders darted about striking at worms, and the long view in which all this part of the country was laid out like a relief map in the Shire office – surf, beach, swampland, wet paddocks, dry, forested hill slopes, jagged blue peaks.

David Malouf, Fly away Peter (1982)

If previous chapters appeared to be moving toward a “victory narrative” (Lather 1994) with dialogic inquiry-based professional learning as the key strategy, then this chapter moves in a different direction. To facilitate this move, I return to the geophysical metaphors of a “relief map” and landscapes that I originally explored in Part 1 of Chapter 4. This is not to suggest that my approach in Chapter 7 is totally new. Throughout the study I have been, like Jim Saddler in Fly away Peter, intellectually and creatively moving across and through different levels and worlds as I inquired into teachers’ professional learning. In Part 3 of Chapter 6, for example, I examined close up (and in amongst it, as it were) the English-literature teachers at Eastern Girls’ College learning about literary theory, and that enabled me to draw out important characteristics of dialogic inquiry-based professional learning. There as elsewhere in my text, a close up view also involved some blurring, especially with respect to traditional epistemological boundaries. I prepared the way for this close up view by generating something of a longer view perspective: ie. through examining broader debates about literary theory and English curriculum in the national Australian media. I connected this to a consideration of lively (if divisive) dialogue between teachers, academics and
commentators about literary theory throughout the Western world. It all contributed
toward my dialogic, dynamic but in the end provisional ‘map.’ I can’t claim to have the
map finalized in my head, as Jim Saddler apparently does, or on the page. The dialogic
nature of my map means that it remains unstable, dynamic and thus unfinalizable, as it
should be.

My investigation into a bleaker landscape in this chapter begins with an international
“longer view” perspective of professional learning ecologies. One feature of this longer
view is the continuing attempts from various quarters across the Western world to
deprofessionalise teachers’ professional learning. It makes for a bleak and disturbing
view from many perspectives. However, it is an article of faith in dialogic paradigms of
research that my dialogic inquiry – noticing, developing, speculating about, and
activating the dialogic potential of these perspectives – helps to generate ‘new ways of
seeing’ and more possibilities. These possibilities are not intended to idealise dialogic
inquiry-based professional learning. I do not provide a package called “dialogic inquiry-
based professional learning” that will cure ailing professional learning ecologies, just as
I do not present dialogic inquiry-based professional learning as guaranteed to improve
student learning outcomes in the short term. What I do present is an account of teachers
productively negotiating their way through the tensions between, on the one hand, the
managerial understandings and prescribed programs of professional development and,
on the other hand, the inquiry-based understandings and dialogic potentiality of
professional learning.103

The nature of such negotiation is suggested in the evocative, if somewhat elusive trope
of “around and in the uncontainable edges.” This term emerged from Session 4 of The
Literary Theory Inquiry Group (which I will discuss in Part 3), where Jan had spoken

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103 Throughout this chapter, for the sake of clarifying what are, in most respects, extraordinarily complex
professional learning ecologies, I have demarcated the dialectic in terms of “Managerial understandings
of professional development” and “Alternative understandings of professional learning.” In most
instances, situating the term ‘professional development’ in a dialectic with the term ‘professional
learning’ is helpful, in order to distinguish different approaches to teachers’ learning. But the distinction
is not always clear-cut. Some managerial policy, practices and resources have appropriated the discourse
of ‘professional learning’ when the paradigm could hardly be called dialogic or inquiry-based. On the
other hand, some practices and resources that are titled professional development would seem to be
dialogic and inquiry-based. Where there is doubt as to which language is appropriate for the particular
about working around and in “the uncontainable edges,” which might be interpreted as ‘the interstices’ of a large school’s learning environment. The trope weaves through all three parts of this chapter:

- **Part 1: Control and chaos in teachers’ professional learning**
  This part, for the purposes of argument, constructs a dialectic between ‘commonsense’ managerial understandings of professional development, on the one hand, and alternative understandings of professional learning, on the other. I examine the implications of this dialectic for teachers’ professional learning and teachers’ professionalism. In this part, I appropriate and re-tell a literary short story – another narrative from David Malouf - this time as a way of illustrating and teasing out some of the implications for these different conceptual and ideological understandings of professional learning.

- **Part 3: Banking on/in traditional professional development paradigms**
  I explore the ambiguity of ‘banking’ – ie. (i) relying on, and (ii) transacting, depositing and withdrawing (cf. Freire’s, 1972, metaphor of education as banking) – to inquire into some individualistic conceptions of teaching. Freire’s conceptions, I argue, underpin managerial understandings of professional development. I explore the impact of these conceptions in three areas of schooling: (1) teachers’ roles in schools; (2) teachers’ work in schools; and (3) teachers’ professional identity.

- **Part 3: Negotiating between contrasting understandings of professional learning**
  In Part 3, I discuss and analyse several transcripts from The Literary Theory Inquiry Group. In my discussion and analysis, I reflect on the ways in which this Inquiry Group was negotiating ‘around and in’ both dialogic inquiry-based professional learning and managerial understandings of professional development. Embedded within the teachers’ dialogic professional learning
was evidence of their having to grapple with different understandings of professional learning and professional knowledge. There are particular tensions that are provoked by the ways in which the group is positioned by colleagues and by managerial policy at the institutional (school) level.
PART ONE: CONTROL AND CHAOS IN TEACHERS’ PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

Introduction

The extent of the bleakness I describe in this chapter is captured by Terry Locke (2004), writing in New Zealand. Taking a ‘longer view’ of education and schooling, he sees significant “erosion” of teachers’ professionalism in recent times.

The introduction of performance management systems [in schools] has been accompanied by a raft of accountability measures at the very time that teachers have been asked to implement a range of state-mandated curriculum, assessment and qualification reforms that have marginalized the voices of many teachers. For over a decade professional development has been replaced by what I would call induction into ideological compliance. Never has teachers’ work been so controlled, and at all levels, as deprofessionalisation has begun to work hand in hand with work intensification. (Locke 2004, p. 120)

Whilst Locke’s view about the erosion of teachers’ professionalism in New Zealand is bleak, it is a view corroborated by much recent research into teachers’ work, teachers’ knowledge and professional development practices throughout the Western world. For instance, Cochran-Smith and Fries (2001) refer to a growing tendency toward the “utilitarianisation” of teachers and schooling in America. They suggest that resources and programs for teacher professional development increasingly position teachers as mere implementers of predetermined, decontextualised tasks and strategies (see also Cochran-Smith and Lytle 2001, Delandshere and Petrosky 2000, Lieberman and Miller 2001). This would seem to affirm the concerns raised in previous years by Michael Apple (1981), amongst others, about the threats to teachers’ professional autonomy. Apple (1987) warned in Marxist discourse of the “proletarianisation” of the workforce (p. 37), and he drew attention to what he saw as the “de-skilling of professional teachers” (1986/1995). In England, Goodson (1992) had taken up this concern in his view of teachers being reduced to “objects which can be manipulated for particular ends” (Goodson 1992, p. 188). Ten years later his concern is no less acute when he sees teachers positioned as “interchangeable and essentially depersonalised” functionaries in an impersonal school system (Goodson 2003, p. 23).
In Australia, too, a steady erosion of teachers’ professionalism is happening in some areas of policy-making and in professional development programs offered by and for schools, week by week. It is happening, but it seems to suit many stakeholders in debates about professional learning to understate (or bracket out as insignificant) the evidence of this erosion. It has to be admitted that the professional perspective of a researcher in education who is operating, officially or in effect, as an advisor to government policy-makers, is full of tensions and conflicting ‘voices.’ And so there are perhaps understandable reasons why certain researcher-advisors (eg. Ingvarson 2002, Lovat 2003), who are arguing for different approaches to reform of teachers’ professional learning cultures and systems, might understate the factors militating against their proposed changes. After all, they are trying to build momentum for change and to bring teachers with them. It is understandable that they would express their faith in the profession, their faith in teachers’ willingness to embrace both the need for change and the changes advocated. However, when these researcher-advisors understate or bracket out the potential erosion of teachers’ professionalism in this reform, they run the risk of appearing paternalistic, of disavowing that faith in teachers, and thus they themselves may be contributing further to the erosion.

In a discussion paper for the Australian Council of Deans of Education (ACDE), The role of the teacher: Coming of age?, Terence Lovat (2003) says he is advocating “a seismic shift in the way education and teaching is understood.” In this paper, he finds cause for optimism in Western governments throughout the world, who value education because it is “vital both to national economic prosperity and to social cohesion” (p. 1). Lawrence Ingvarson (2002), another researcher-advisor advocating large-scale change, argues for what he says is a “new system” of teacher professional learning in a paper titled Building a Learning Profession. In arguing for such a system, he seeks to reassure readers that the starting point for building this new system is a certain commonsense understanding of key issues.

While stakeholders in education have their differences in other areas, they have a common interest in promoting the quality of teaching [my emphasis]. Everyone has much to gain from a stable and effective professional learning system with capacity to engage all teachers. (Ingvarson 2002, p. 18)
This sort of rhetoric operates in the hope of translating the problematic notion of a “common interest in promoting the quality of teaching” into approaches to “promoting the quality of teaching” and “engaging all teachers” in professional learning which are common to all stakeholders. It is a seductive hope. Unfortunately, even a cursory consideration of recent trends in teacher professional development programs in Australia and the Western world suggests that the challenge is somewhat greater than Ingvarson is claiming it to be.

**Understanding teachers’ professional learning differently**

The plethora of literature recently published on teacher professional development and professional learning shows contrasting discourses in an ongoing dialogic struggle. In a recent co-authored chapter for a book, my colleague Brenton Doecke and I (2005a) teased out some of these discourses in terms of an ongoing dialectic between “managerial professional development” and “alternative understandings of professional learning.” The following table, drawing on this work, illustrates aspects of the dialogic struggle.
Table 7.1: Contrasting understandings of professional development and professional learning (derived from Doecke and Parr 2005a, p. 2).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Managerial understandings of professional development</th>
<th>Alternative understandings of professional learning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Teachers are positioned as “individual professionals” (Caldwell and Hayward 1998).</td>
<td>• Teaching is considered to be collaborative in nature, a function of the network of relationships in which individual teachers and groups of teachers operate.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Professional learning is presumed to be generic in nature, and can be applied to all educational settings regardless of their particular character. It can be unproblematically transferred or exported from context to context.</td>
<td>• Professional learning is anchored in the specific contexts in which teachers operate.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Knowledge of teachers and teaching is imported from outside and ‘delivered’ through professional development programs.</td>
<td>• Knowledge of teachers and teaching develops from, and involves, sustained inquiry into teaching and learning, including focused observation of learners.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Knowledge of teachers and teaching is unproblematically avowed, and typically delivered as a remedy for deficiencies or gaps in teachers’ existing practices.</td>
<td>• The findings of research into the knowledge of teachers and teaching are considered provisional and contestable, especially with regard to how those findings might be applied to other settings.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Evidence of the knowledge of teachers and teaching is often demonstrated in large-scale surveys or “scientific, evidence-based research” (eg. NICHD 2000, NITL 2005a), that systematically bracket out the specific nature of school communities.</td>
<td>• Evidence of the knowledge of teachers and teaching is often explored in non-canonical forms of inquiry, such as action research, narrative inquiry, and other types of qualitative research that include some focus on the nature of school communities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Teachers’ professional practice is judged against pre-existing or traditional outcomes - outcomes which are unproblematically measurable, such as their students’ standardised test results.</td>
<td>• Teachers draw on academic and practitioner research and theory in order to review and critique their existing practices.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Teachers are rendered accountable through performance appraisals which require them to specify targets (for themselves and for their students) and to demonstrate that these targets are achieved.</td>
<td>• Teachers work together to create a culture of critical inquiry at their school in which everyone – teachers, students, parents – can participate. They are mindful, nevertheless, of the managerial systems within which they continue to be accountable.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As explained in that co-authored chapter, these contrasting understandings are not simply translated into either one or another professional learning practice. Nor do they present as simple either/or choices for teachers. Rather, they are positions between which teachers must mediate in the course of their professional lives. [Teachers] cannot close their eyes to the managerial forms of control and accountability that have been reshaping their professional practice, although they might still steadfastly adhere to an alternative model of professionalism and critique those [managerial] forms. (Doecke and Parr 2005a, p. 11; see also Parr and Doecke 2006)

Still working on the level of broad tensions, I want now to sketch out the dialogic struggle in a slightly different way: in terms of tendencies in professional learning policy and practice throughout the Western world. On the one hand, there is the tendency for groups or networks of teachers to work in critical, dialogic, inquiry-based paradigms. In such paradigms, teacher-learners are knowledge builders and generators as well as sharers of knowledge and expertise such as I have conceptualised in Chapter 5. The notion of professional learning underpinning these paradigms is broadly consistent with the alternative understandings of professional learning set out in the Table 7.1, and can be articulated in the following ‘provisionally finalized’ description of professional learning developed for and through this study.

Professional learning constitutes the diverse and ongoing ways in which individual teachers and groups of teachers (and researchers) engage in critical dialogue that acts on and generates dialogic potential. This involves teachers

(i) building on and critically examining their existing knowledge,
(ii) developing their capacity for further learning, and
(iii) enriching their professional identity.

Figure 7.1: Provisionally finalized description of professional learning

Implicit in this description is the assumption that not all professional learning contains all three elements at the same time, although the most dialogically generative and often the most satisfying learning tends to involve a lively interplay of all three.
On the other hand, there is the tendency toward managerial approaches to professional development, informed by the sort of understandings of professional learning seen in the left hand column of Table 7.1. Here again, there is no sense in which the managerial approaches preclude inquiry-based or dialogic professional learning, but rather that, for reasons I will outline, they tend to militate against it. These managerial approaches tend to be designed and constructed by people other than teachers, who identify the needs of teachers (usually in terms of gaps and deficiencies in individual teachers’ knowledge and skills) and prescribe what they see as remedies. These approaches include:

1. more prescriptive programs for professional development
   Here the content and practices that teachers are expected to learn are closely tied to existing student learning outcomes;
2. an intense focus on ‘practical matters’ in teachers’ professional development.
   In this focus, an assumed separation between theory and practice is emphasised, rather than problematised. And there is a further assumption that teachers have neither the time nor the energy to see their teaching as different from this separation of theory and practice; and
3. administrators, policy-makers and publishing companies aligning and tailoring professional development programs and resources
   This alignment is advocated for pragmatic reasons. Beyond the obvious economic bonanza for the commercial groups involved, it is supposed to help teachers meet the rigid accountability requirements imposed on their learning.

I will take each of these approaches, in turn, and summarise the ways in which these tendencies are being enacted in professional development programs and ‘spaces.’

1. More prescriptive programs for professional development
An overwhelming trend in professional development practices recently, as identified by Ingvarson (2002), is for “professional developers” – a telling phrase (also used by

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104 This is not to engage in any culture of blaming individual teachers. Given the steady and continued intensification of teachers’ work that Locke refers to (see also Hargreaves and Goodson 1996), it is quite understandable that teachers might feel they have neither the time nor the energy to take up the challenge of “seeing” their teaching differently.
Shulman and Shulman 2004) – to frame professional development programs around the dictates of already established student learning outcomes. These student learning outcomes are often derived from curriculum documents serving very different contexts (Homer 2004), and yet their status as centrally prescribed outcomes ensures that they pay little heed to the variations in teaching and learning in these different institutional contexts. They exist ostensibly to help teachers identify and describe students’ learning for assessment and reporting in a coherent and ‘standardised’ way. The expectation is that, in order to improve students’ achievement of these outcomes, teachers should systematically focus in their professional learning only on the specific knowledge or skills they will be required to teach their students. Underpinning this approach to teachers’ professional development is a conceptualisation of teacher knowledge as a stable and fixed commodity, unconnected to the social or cultural context of the learners, to be consumed and then passed on in a simple series of learning transactions (Wells 1994).

Elmore (2000) critiques the inadequacy of this conceptualisation in terms of the potential for a sort of mis-match between a teacher’s knowledge and his/her students’ needs. He rejects the notion that teachers should think of professional learning as simply adding on existing knowledge and skills in the hope that this will cover future teaching and learning requirements:

> What is missing in this view is any recognition that improvement [in teacher knowledge] is more a function of learning to do the right things in the setting where you work than it is of what you know when you start to do the work. (Elmore 2000, p. 25)

Locke (2004) approaches his critique of this conceptualisation of teacher knowledge, on the other hand, through a sensitivity to both the sociocultural nuances of the construction of knowledge between individual teachers and learners, and an awareness of the ethical concerns motivating teachers who teach individual children not just cohorts of learners. So in considering what teachers might be learning, he wants to “start by accepting as a given that knowledge is plural, rooted in human experience” (Locke 2004, p. 115), and that any question of teacher knowledge begins with “Who is the Other I teach?” (p. 116).
The Standards for Teachers of English Language and Literacy in Australia (STELLA) (AATE and ALEA 2002b) also foregrounds the ways in which student diversity in any one classroom must mediate teacher knowledge.

Accomplished English/Literacy teachers recognise each student's uniqueness. They are aware of their students' diverse sociocultural, language and ethnic heritage and have specific knowledge of the community to which each student belongs, including the literacy practices of that community. They know each student's preferred learning style and linguistic and cognitive capabilities. They recognise and affirm each student's potential and achievements; they know their histories as learners and members of the school community. Accomplished English/Literacy teachers are sensitive to the individual dispositions of their students, the ways they interact with their peers, their engagement with schooling, their values and interests and their aspirations and ideals. (AATE and ALEA 2002b)

Doecke and Gill (2000) endorse the ways that the STELLA standards recognise and are mediated by students’ “diverse sociocultural, language and ethnic heritage.” However, they find much to critique in the way that NBPTS (2000) standards in the US engage in generalisations about “all students” in accomplished teachers’ classrooms. Such generalisations discount these students’ sociocultural diversity, their family background and their individual biographies (Doecke and Gill 2000, p. 9). Nevertheless, Doecke and Gill do appreciate the language in which NBPTS standards statements acknowledge that teachers’ knowledge is mediated by an understanding and knowledge of their students.

Accomplished Early Adolescence/English Language Arts teachers systematically acquire a sense of their students as individual language learners.... Accomplished middle-grades English teachers create classrooms centered around students .... While they believe all students can learn, teachers are keenly aware that not all students learn in the same way.... (NBPTS 2000, p. 55)

Both Elmore’s (2000) and Locke’s (2004) critiques, and Doecke and Gill’s (2000) description of professional standards, expose the danger of yoking all professional learning to a set of centrally prescribed student learning outcomes. This is quite apart from the sense that this yoking would be artificially constraining the professional
learning possibilities for teachers. There is plenty of research showing the complexity of the sociocultural factors that problematise attempts to quantify student learning, and point to the dangers of drawing simplistic conclusions from student performances in high-stakes tests (eg. see Clements and Ellerton 1995, Meiers and Ingvarson 2005a, Petrosky 2003). Petrosky (2003) and Clements and Ellerton (1995) illustrate how problematic it is to ‘demonstrate’ quantitative improvements in students’ test scores as a direct result of employing a ‘targeted’ approach to professional development linked to student learning outcomes.

Occasionally in Australia, and increasingly in the US, there have been attempts to quantify the ways teachers ‘convert’ their professional learning into improved student learning outcomes. In Australia, a two-year long federal government-sponsored project led to the report, *Investigating the links between teacher professional development and student learning outcomes* (Meiers and Ingvarson 2005a, 2005b). This project was established to identify and measure the assumed direct causality between professional development and student learning outcomes, consistent with the research of Supovitz (2001), as shown in Figure 7.2 below. The likelihood of being able to demonstrate this direct causal link was enhanced by narrowing the research focus to what was called “research based evidence.” Meiers and Ingvarson explain that this sort of evidence came from choosing “PD [professional development programs] most likely to have an impact on teacher practices and student learning identified in the first three stages of the project” (p. 1). In addition, dot point 3 in their set of criteria for selection of programs for this research stated that the only programs that qualified for inclusion in their project were those which “were designed to lead to changes in teaching practices that are likely to improve student learning, and to generate measurable outcomes [my emphasis]” (Meiers and Ingvarson 2005a, p. 1). That is, the research had already separated out any professional learning that may have produced less direct influences on student learning and any program whose effects were not easily measurable. Notwithstanding these precautions, the research findings still made it clear that there are “difficulties in finding evidence about how teacher learning is linked to student learning” and that there are “many difficulties in researching the impact of teacher professional development on student learning outcomes” (Meiers and Ingvarson 2005a, p. 3). Indeed, the first major
conclusion of the research was that “it is essential, in investigating links between teacher learning and student learning … to avoid narrowing outcomes to those that can be easily measured” (p. 4). In stating this so unequivocally, the researchers all but reject the assumptions of the likes of Supovitz on which the project was based. This is consistent with the arguments of Elmore (2000) and Locke (2004), who see profound dangers in using the simple reporting of test scores to reflect the outcomes of professional learning, and they raise serious questions about the depth, value and flexibility of professional knowledge developed in such a constraining paradigm (see also Petrosky 2003).

2. An intense focus on ‘practical matters’ in teachers’ professional development

In addition to raising these serious questions about the sorts of knowledge generated from constrained professional learning paradigms, a number of researchers are reporting a tendency for teachers to focus more narrowly on ‘practical matters’ in their professional development. They are concentrating on what Goodson (2003) calls the “technical things that teachers do in classrooms” (p. 19). Whilst not denying the importance of practical matters, Goodson critiques the narrowness of this focus as the latest political “panacea” of the moment. Ingvarson, seemingly more wary of simpler explanations here, cites research with teachers that exposes the inadequacies of this panacea:

The more successful PD programs focused first on influencing teacher knowledge, not practice. The effects of programs that focused first on promoting specific pedagogical practices were more likely to fade with time, because they did not deepen teachers’ understanding about the content and how students learn it. (Kennedy 1998, quoted in Ingvarson 2002, pp. 7-8)

And there are multiple studies from within different research traditions that reinforce such findings (eg. Elmore 1996, 2000, Hargreaves and Goodson 1996, Wells 1999, 2001). Some of this research reports on rich and generative debates about professional teaching standards that have developed momentum in recent years. Included amongst this research are powerful and provocative cross-continental conversations about standards and their relation to professional learning and growth in different continents.
Some research poses the question as to whether it is possible to meaningfully describe the deeply contextualised professional learning that occurs in very different school communities in a set of generic professional standards anyway (Burroughs, Schwartz and Henricks-Lee 2000, Sachs 2005).

However, the dialogic potential of such conversations is being subverted by a third tendency in professional development practices: the imposition of performance management schemes such as referred to in Locke’s quote (at the start of Part Two of this chapter – see page 260), in order to ensure greater accountability of teachers who participate in professional development activities. And the professional development programs themselves are being tailored to meet specific performance management requirements.

3. Administrators, policy-makers and publishing companies aligning and tailoring professional development programs and resources

Across the Western world for several years now, performance management schemes have typically been conceived by bureaucrats, distanced from the day to day work of teachers (Elmore 1996). The schemes are supposedly designed to encourage professional learning and to measure the progress of this learning (of students and teachers). Partly, the effort to measure professional learning is intended to demonstrate administrative competence in, and control over, the inescapably messy and unpredictable dynamic of professional learning (cf. Morely and Rassool 2000).

Nevertheless, in the US there is increasing support for linking teacher learning with teacher performance measured by improvements in student learning outcomes as part of increasingly rigid accountability regimes (cf. Sclafani and Tucker 2006). Groups such as American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC) and ERIC Clearinghouse are proceeding with plans to reward teaching “merit” with pay increases (see ALEC 1998-2005 and Ellis n.d.). A common claim is that merit-based pay encourages teachers to ‘do more professional development’ and that it induces expert professionals in related fields to become teachers. (For an Australian perspective see also Committee for the Review of Teaching and Teacher Education 2003, Actions 29 and 30.) The problem, as Kleinhenz and Ingvarson (2004) point out, is that such “managerial models of
accountability rarely match their own rhetoric, either in terms of accountability or [their perceived value as] professional development” (p. 35). Along with efforts to control teachers’ professional learning and (so the rhetoric goes) teachers’ performance, comes the increasing prevalence of alliances between government policy (that emphasises simple technical or technicist solutions to complex problems) and educational publishers. As Comber and Nichols (2004) show, “publishers and consultants have investments in maintaining the focus on techniques, strategies and materials” (p. 45; see also Petrosky 2004).

‘Taking control’ in teachers’ professional learning?

So one is left wondering whether the supposed “common interest” of different stakeholders, with respect to debates over teacher professional learning, is really as “common” as Ingvarson seems to assume it is. In these debates, there is a palpable culture of different stakeholders wanting to take control, and for many stakeholders the first priority is to take control of teachers in the form of accountability schemes that discipline them (cf. Green 1998). Ingvarson (2002) asserts that “everyone has much to gain.” But it is apparent that some of those who seek to gain, seek to do so at the expense of teachers’ knowledge and teachers’ professionalism.

The rhetoric of Australian governments, at the national and state level, like so many Western governments, would suggest that they are valuing teachers’ professional development and professional learning more highly now than ever before. For instance, politicians in Australia have repeatedly proclaimed that teachers’ professional development or professional learning is high on the list of their priorities (Department of Education and Training, DE&T 2003, The Allen Consulting Group 2003, NITL 2005a.) (See also Kleinhenz and Ingvarson 2004.) The rhetoric of these arguments is characteristic of the managerial voices that I discussed throughout Chapter 6. Such rhetoric has regularly been used in debates concerning teacher professional learning in Victoria and Australia in order to argue the need for neoliberal reform.

In Chapter 4, I illustrated some examples of this rhetoric and the voices that used it. Let me refer to another example here, from Victoria in 2002. A state supported research
program, the Middle Years Research and Development Project, MYRAD (Centre for Applied Educational Research, CAER 2002), published recommendations for “professional development reform” in which it was claimed that improved teacher knowledge and skills in particular areas would provide a direct and measurable impact on students’ learning. Implicit in these claims was the assumption that there is a simple linear causality between professional learning, the teaching which follows this learning and the learning which follows this teaching, and that the value of the professional development can ultimately be measured by student performance on tests ‘at the end of the line.’ (See Figure 7.2 below.)

![Figure 7.2: Assumptions in managerial understandings of professional learning of a linear causality between teacher learning and student learning. (Derived from Supovitz 2001. See also Meiers and Ingvarson 2005a, p. 6.)](image)

The recommendations from the MYRAD project directed professional development programs to focus on “the actual teaching-learning approaches and practices that are successfully directed to the learning outcomes for the knowledge society” (CAER 2002, 10.1). In doing so, MYRAD was endorsing a paradigm of teachers’ professional development that was tied to existing, prescribed learning outcomes. It seemed to be constructing teaching as an individual endeavour. A teacher’s knowledge was constructed from a set of decontextualised techniques that could be taken from one context and delivered in another without difficulty. A year later, DE&T (2003) in Victoria announced plans to “customise” professional development programs that meet individual teachers’ development/learning needs, and to set up a “performance and development culture” in schools with respect to teachers. Such a culture, it was argued, would identify and measure the quality of those schools (not just individuals) who
“performed” most highly, but the potential was there to see teaching as performance with all of the reductive associations that term has, as explained above.\textsuperscript{105}

Reference is frequently made in the literature to the uncertainties of our postmodern world (and its education systems). This uncertainty characteristically encourages managerial governments and employers to search for greater and greater levels of certainty (Delandshere 2004). As governments and employers are ‘investing’ in professional development, so they look for certain and rapid ‘returns’ – a familiar imperative of shareholders in the world of corporate finance who want a quick return on their investments. In so many respects this would seem to explain the appearance of more and more managerialist practices and policy. These practices and policies seek to:

(i) reduce and narrow the observable scope of what is considered ‘evidence’ of teachers’ knowledge, screening out as irrelevant or peripheral everything else that a teacher might be learning. (This simplifies the means of measuring the value of professional development.)

(ii) establish neat and tidy systems that enable quantifiable measurements of students’ improved learning that follows a teacher’s professional development. (This enables policy-makers to point to ‘evidence’ for the linear causality between professional development and student performance.)

(iii) employ managerial discourses such as ‘quality assurance’ and ‘performance management.’ (This gives the appearance of policy-makers and politicians effectively controlling the complex and multi-faceted nature of teaching and learning of professional teachers.)

If Terry Locke and others are right in their research into the effects of managerialist practices and policies throughout Western world, then the impact of similarly managerialist practices and policy for teachers in Australia is likely to lead to further erosion of these teachers’ professionalism, limiting potential for innovation and

\textsuperscript{105} And, of course, this promised to set school in competition with school, rather than encouraging
creativity in their professional environments (cf. Gale and Densmore 2003, Smyth 2001).

A literary tale: “a place you have to have seen and been into”

I am reminded of a short story, called *Jacko’s Reach*, from David Malouf’s (2001) collection called *Dream Stuff*. As with the story *The yellow wallpaper* that I re-told in Chapter 6, Malouf’s story is one I have enjoyed teaching in secondary English classrooms. And, like *The yellow wallpaper*, it continues to prompt my professional learning in unexpected ways, well beyond the classroom contexts in which I first taught it. My retelling of this story, here, draws on some of the narrative conventions employed in the ‘original’ story. Various narrative fragments are referred to as the overall narrative ‘unfolds’ in my re-telling, and these are interspersed with commentary and analysis along the way.

The story is ostensibly about four and a half acres of “bush” in a modern urban ecology. It looks back at the colourful, sometimes disturbing history of this bush and the surrounding town, and it looks forward to present a biting social commentary on contemporary tendencies to encourage what the story presents as depersonalising development at the expense of fundamental human values and interactions. The narrative is a complex interweaving of story fragments and voices from this history. Malouf’s fragmentation of the narrative elements repeatedly disrupts expectations of a conventional linear story. Each fragment/voice is in dialogue with the other fragments/stories, sometimes extending an idea that was previously touched upon, sometimes challenging the dominance of a previous narrative, sometimes prefiguring a narrative yet to come.

The overall texture of these interweaving narratives is reminiscent of what I have called a counterpoint of voices, in the musical understanding of the term counterpoint (see Chapters 3 and 4). In a literary artefact, this structure suggests it has dialogic potential...
for a somewhat disruptive existence in the predominant culture of the literary canon (see Foucault 1981). And as with Gilman’s short story, my re-telling of Malouf’s narrative in an educational research text suggests that this potential can be meaningful, and powerfully dialogic, in contexts far beyond those in which the story was first published and in which I used to teach it.

In some ways the literary landscape is typical postcolonial Malouf. A contemporary urban culture is characterised by dominant groups trying to take control over apparently disordered and uncontrolled aspects of a culture. Landscapes and peoples and aspects of culture are oppressed in the process. The dominant groups (property developers) seek to take control of “Jacko’s Reach,” the “last pocket of scrub” in town, and so limit the potential for uncertainty and disorder in the town.

The narrator, in this story, begins by describing Jacko’s Reach in characteristically nostalgic terms:

> It is a place you have to have seen and been into if you are to have any grasp of it. Most of all you have to have lived with it as the one area of disorder and difference in a town that prides itself on being typical: that is, just like everyone else. Or you have to have been hearing, for as long as you can recall, the local stories about the place, not all of them fit to be told …. Or you have to have stumbled there on something no one had warned you of. (Malouf 2001, pp. 94-5)

Looking beyond the narrator’s nostalgia, it would seem that Jacko’s Reach is a place full of contradictions. In one respect, it appears to be a messy and disordered environment, its wild bush generating chaotic and disturbing stories. But perhaps one shouldn’t over-emphasise this chaos. It may have chaotic elements, but there is also a complex structure evident in the richly layered “local stories” and human histories that give the place its character. (It’s worth pointing out that, for all of the propensity of Malouf’s narrator to romanticise and celebrate disorder and chaos, Malouf’s text still depends on, and so to some extent implicitly values, elements of structure and order. The story itself exists as a sophisticated literary structure.) In another respect, Jacko’s Reach seems mysterious. It spawns unfinalizable truths; its identity is not reducible to simple explanations. And yet it remains open to all who may wish to investigate and inquire into this identity. As such, it lies like a provocative challenge for dominant groups intending to take full control of it and to replace its uncertainties with certainty.
The attraction of the story, *Jacko’s Reach*, as a provisional analogy for current professional learning ecologies in Victoria begins with the creative interplay between sophisticated, imaginative structures, like the tracks that weave through the trees and “scrub.” But the place, like the story, is about more than just structure. It is imbued with richly human stories. Not all these stories are pretty, but their humanness resonates beyond the page. Finally, despite the unsettling developments, I get the sense as I read that Jacko’s Reach is always open to possibilities.

Lest the romantic lilt in the narrator’s tone in the passage quoted above be over-emphasised, it is important to note that the “local stories” that emerge from this place are not all “fit to be told.” Some stories can indeed be disturbing. This notion of disturbing has two possibilities, here. One reading suggests that along with any notion of this place being open to possibilities come risks – disturbing, unfortunate risks at times. The space that is Jacko’s Reach, like the open-ended inquiry spaces affording dialogic professional learning, is not a ‘safe’ place. And that is potentially disturbing. A second interpretation might focus on questions about who is disturbed. Elsewhere in the story, we read that Jacko’s Reach is a place that spawns “unruly and unsettling dreams.” Who is unsettled? one might ask. Well, all are unsettled to some extent, but the dominant groups see the unsettling character as unproductive, it would seem. They deem these unruly and unsettling dreams to be unhelpful, even destructive, and they attribute this to the “disorder and difference” of the place. The very open-endedness of spaces – literally, in Jacko’s Reach, and figuratively in terms of dialogic inquiry-based professional learning – is disturbing to those who seek to control them.

For a time in the story, Jacko’s Reach remains an unpredictable space, and the proliferation of colourful local stories bears witness to a powerful human presence, with human interaction and dialogue a central feature of the colour. It is a space for those who don’t want to be “just like everyone else.” A space where you are always likely to stumble upon something unexpected, something “no one had warned you of.” (The metaphorical implications are that this is a far cry from the neat and tidy managerial programs of professional development.)

In this respect, as a provisional metaphor for a professional learning space, it nevertheless bears a strong correlation with what I described as “transgressive professional learning”: 
Transgressive professional learning involves discursive and social practices that explicitly or implicitly, potentially or actionally, inquire into, question and destabilise prevailing norms of professional knowledge, discursive or social practices in teachers’ professional lives. This inquiring, questioning and destabilising may end in a resolve to affirm what exists or it may prompt change. It is informed by a principled agenda, but this agenda is itself open to inquiry, questioning and destabilisation.

As an analogy for teachers’ transgressive dialogic professional learning possibilities, Jacko’s Reach does hold some appeal. Of course, it is not an ideal place. However, in as much as the space is open to dialogic possibilities, so too it is open to change, to improvement, to transformations. Indeed, some change is always welcome as one seeks to improve the space and the possibilities it affords.

Nevertheless, we read in Malouf’s story, that property developers are about to take control of Jacko’s Reach. It is to be “cleared and built on,” replaced by “the bars of neon lights and the crowded shelves and trolleys of the supermarket, the wheels of skateboards, the bitumen walks and solid, poured-concrete ramps” (p. 93). As part of the drive for more managerial control and certainty in Jacko’s Reach, rest assured there will be the equivalent of a performance management system set in place to ensure quality assurance of the working lives of all those employed there. It all sounds eerily familiar….

In Part 2, I will briefly revisit the ways in which this is indeed familiar in terms of neoliberal rhetoric about professional learning more generally. However, I want to move on from there to explore the particular implications this has for teachers’ professional identity.
PART TWO: BANKING ON/IN TRADITIONAL PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT PARADIGMS

Introduction

It is characteristic of neoliberal politicians’ rhetoric about education reform throughout the Western world that a spirit of optimism about the potential of teachers’ professional development – a predilection to fetishise apparently ‘new’ approaches to professional development systems or programs – will always accompany dramatic pronouncements of crisis, doom and disaster in schooling and in teacher education. In recent years in Australia, echoing repeated outcries in the USA and England, media reports suggest that levels of public anxiety have risen about the quality of teaching in Australian schools and Australian teacher education institutions (see Chapter 4).

These levels of anxiety expressed in the media are incited and encouraged by conservative governments and some policy-makers sponsored by these governments, who feel the best way to address the ‘crisis’ is to cast aspersions on individual ‘problem’ teachers, first, and then on the teaching profession more generally. The best way for neoliberal politicians to assuage the anxiety, it would seem, is to shut down any dialogue about the nature of teachers and teaching and the context of any perceived problems, and to act decisively. Predictably, the disparaging aspersions are followed up by enthusiastic calls for the upgrading of individual teacher skills, or recommendations of crude measures for ‘value adding’ onto the performance of individuals teachers. (See Doecke et al. 2004, for a critique of the discourse of ‘value adding’ in neoliberal education reform). This effusion of optimism is often accompanied by calls for ‘tightening up’ accountability or increasing quality assurance measures for individual teachers engaged in professional development programs (eg. The Allen Consulting Group 2003, DE&T 2003, NITL 2005a). In many ways, this is merely a continuation of a long tradition of conservative rhetoric disparaging and disciplining teachers.

Professional development and the individual teacher

On the one hand, it has suited neoliberal political agendas to declare the teaching problems in schools to be endemic (see Brock 1998, Green and Beavis 1996, Lee 2000, Sawyer 1997) and to attack all aspects of the teaching profession, not just teachers (see
Chapter 6). On the other hand, any solutions that accompany such attacks tend to be cast in terms of punishing the failings, or curing the ills, of individual teachers. The quality individual teacher is valorised, even mythologised, while in a pseudo-medical paradigm a prescription is written up for those teachers who are not ‘up to scratch.’ The ‘effectiveness’ research base for this approach constructs a view of schooling in which students’ backgrounds, and the sociocultural context within which they learn, are much less influential than the individual teacher in measurements of students’ learning (Hattie 2004, Lovat 2003, p. 11, NITL 2005a, p. 19, Rowe 2003, p. 1; see also Chapter 4.).

‘Effective’ professional development programs are driven by scientific, evidence-based research that identifies teachers’ ills and they are subsequently designed to ‘dispense’ various prescriptions. In such programs, professional development is presented as a treatment, or course of treatments, that will fix individual teacher deficits or fill gaps in their knowledge or skills (see the inoculation theory, Schmuck 1997; see also “one-or-two-shot dog-and-pony-shows,” in Petrosky 1998). The dispenser of a professional development treatment, the “professional developer,” may home in on individual pathologies or problems in individual teachers – indeed, Shulman (1999) uses this very term, “pathologies” in relation to teachers, without irony.107 (See Clarke 1992, Little 1993, for a critique of this particular discourse.) Occasionally, the ‘professional developer’ in the role of a government department or a non-government institution, may promise to single out and reward a few individual teachers for specialised professional treatment and learning opportunities, such as through scholarships (DE&T 2003, General Teaching Council for England, GTCE 2000, Shulman 1999). This singling out of individuals is motivated by the hope that an individual teacher’s improved knowledge and skills will subsequently rub off on, or filter down through, his/her colleagues in schools when he/she returns to school and engages in some form of collaboration. Sometimes this collaboration is framed as setting off a “domino effect”

107 It should be pointed out that Shulman seems to have moved on from this individualistic notion of teacher professional learning more recently. In the *Journal of Curriculum Studies, 36*(2), he and Judith Shulman (2004) claim that their “analysis of teacher learning … has moved from a concern with individual teachers and their learning to a conception of teachers learning and developing within a broader context of community, institution, polity, and profession” (pp. 267-269). Nevertheless, they still invoke the discourse of “professional developers” (p. 263), which would seem to undermine any socio-constructivist principles in their conceptualising of professional learning paradigms.
There is a prevailing paradox in such rhetoric, in that the very individualistic discourse that describes these professional development paradigms severely limits the potential of any planned for, or hoped for, collegial dialogic learning, as I will explain below.

All these approaches are premised on a view of teaching that is narrowly individualistic in conceptual terms. It is a view of teachers and teaching that Hoyle (1975 in Locke 2004) termed “restricted professionality” – ie. isolated teachers “doing their own thing” – or as Elmore (1996) puts it “solo practitioners operating in a structure that feeds them students and expectations about what students should be taught” (p. 2). Since about the time of the publication of Judith Little’s (1990) powerful article, *The persistence of privacy*, large numbers of researchers have inquired into the cultural, historical and political factors that contribute to isolating cultures in some areas of the teaching profession.

Connelly and Clandinin (1995) would seem to be interested in teachers’ stories of their past practice and how these have contributed to their current practices and beliefs. But, for all their optimism in encouraging and enabling teachers to tell their stories and share them with colleagues, Connelly and Clandinin nevertheless have moments of pessimism, suggesting that they believe that isolation in the teaching profession is inevitable: “In the end, teaching is a secret enterprise” (p. 13). Ingvarson (1998) seems to agree. He speaks of a “prevailing attitude among professional teaching cultures that successful teaching is an individual trait rather than a body of professional knowledge and skills deliberately acquired” (p. 14). (See also Elmore 1996.) Both Ingarvson and Connelly and Clandinin, however, would seem to fall into the same trap of conceptualising teaching (and the knowledge that informs teaching and the knowledge that students learn) as individually constructed. They under-appreciate the social ways in which knowledge as much as individual attitude develops, and they underestimate

108 Kennedy (2005) refers to this as “The cascade model” and rightly points out that the nature of any knowledge that is “passed on” in such a model “supports a technicist view of teaching, where skills and knowledge are given priority over attitudes and values” (p. 240).
109 It is remarkable that this article, written over 15 years ago still seems so current today. Little was describing and explaining the ways in which teaching has tended to be an isolating profession despite
how the relentless pathologising of teachers’ work by policy-makers, the popular media, some employers, governments, and some researchers, powerfully contributes to such attitudes within the profession itself.

In Chapter 3, I outlined the epistemology of individualistic notions of teacher knowledge, and I showed how such notions fail to appreciate both the dialogic potential inherent in all language and the potentially dialogic nature of knowledge. I want, now, to consider this individualistic notion of teacher knowledge with respect to Paulo Freire’s metaphor of education as banking, so often invoked with respect to students’ learning.

*The individual teacher and a banking conception of learning*

In banking education, according to Freire (1972), the student learner passively receives or absorbs an input of the latest information or knowledge banked in by the teacher. Sometimes the transaction involves a new skill, or technique, or practice ‘input’ that is banked into his/her current ‘credit’ of skills, techniques and practices. It is a persuasive ‘commonsense’ metaphor, and it is central to individualistic conceptions of teacher learning. The notion of professional learning as transactions of professional knowledge in a ‘free’ global marketplace of education, is clearly congruent with narrowly practical, instrumental, or technicist conceptions of professional development (see Chapter 6, Part 2), where teacher knowledge is a commodity to be traded or imported in a knowledge economy (Delandshere 2004). The expectation for teachers who learn in the crudest form of banking paradigm is that all inputs ‘banked in’ during their professional development can be withdrawn at appropriate moments in the classroom, to best suit the required problem. The trends in professional development practices reported on earlier in this chapter would suggest that this paradigm is increasingly enacted in teachers’ professional development ‘one-off events.’ This is a situation that has implications for the professional identity of teachers.

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research showing the dangers of this. My reading and my experiences throughout this study, have suggested that for many teachers this continues to be the case.
Implications of professional development as banking

In this section, I examine the implications of this metaphor of professional development as banking for: (1) teachers’ (prescribed) roles in schools; (2) teachers’ work in schools; and (3) teachers’ professional identity.

1(a) Teachers’ (prescribed) roles in schools: teacher as jester

‘May not an ass know when the cart draws the horse?’ (*King Lear*, I.iv.229)

It sometimes seems that teachers in schools are in a position similar to the Fool in Shakespeare’s *King Lear*. As jester to the King, the Fool is at the bidding of his master. He is required to keep the King entertained, and to ‘perform’ this role according to the whims and fancies of the King. As long he does as he is bidden, he will remain in the King’s employ. Being in the employ of the King, he is afforded some conditional rights and even some privileges, so much so that he seems to have a voice of his own: he can speak out and try to raise issues of importance, he can try to prompt increased self-awareness in his master. This is what the Fool is doing in the quote, above. He wants Lear to realise that Gonerill, the conniving daughter, is actually manipulating the King (the horse turned ass) to her (the cart’s) full advantage. But the ideas and values of the King’s jester (like the subjugated teacher in school), while mildly irritating, can continue to be ignored, and so eventually lose their impact. As long as the jester-teacher plays his role – to serve and to perform, faithfully, effectively and reliably – then he can continue in his employment and his views can be comfortably dismissed.

Where teachers’ professional learning is conceived of as receiving inputs and credits like banking, it should not be surprising to see the role of teachers constructed by neoliberal governments, commentators in the media and some employers as to serve and to perform, faithfully, effectively and reliably. In 2004, Australia’s Prime Minister John Howard intervened in the education debate by accusing teachers in state schools of not performing and not fulfilling their professional responsibilities. There was too

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110 In Australia, state schools (sometimes referred to as “government schools”) are traditionally funded by state governments.
much “political correctness” in state schools, he said. And state school teaching was “values neutral.” This was not the sort of thing that he (or parents) expected or desired (Crabb and Guerrera 2004).

Don Hayward, the Minister for Education in Victoria in the 1990s referred to in Chapter 4, similarly tried to discipline teachers about their place in the system. In a book published after his time in office, Hayward explained his argument in the following way:

The customers of education are the students and their families. It [is] the responsibility of the school to meet the needs of these customers. … Teachers and schools … clearly [see] that the only reason for their existence [is] to add value to a student’s time at school. (Caldwell and Hayward 1998, pp. 45, 79)

The positioning of students and parents as “customers of education” in a global economy is a common strategy of neoliberal commentators on education, and it presents a stark contrast to the notion of schooling as a community service, a public good, committed to social justice and enhanced democratic participation. Also commonplace is the generalisation that teachers and schools see the only reason for their existence being to “add value to a student’s time at school.” Hayward assumes that this applies to all teachers and all schools, and presents the notion of “adding value” as an unproblematic commonsense concept. The implication is that students and families alone should decide what is of value, and that teachers’ prime responsibility is to “meet the customers’ needs” in a marketplace of “free choice.”

This presents a situation in which there is little room or time for dialogue or debate, little or no scope for negotiation or partnerships between schools, teachers, and universities. I have already discussed some of the research that critiques this notion of ‘value-added’ education. But even if value-addedness is granted as a meaningful concept, then it is clear that teachers, and other researchers and teacher educators, are undeserving of any intellectual contribution to debates about what should be valued and what should be added. All this had been foreseen by Drucker in 1995.
There is very little doubt that the performance of schools [and teachers] will increasingly become of concern to society as a whole, rather than be considered ‘professional matters’ that can safely be left to the educator. (Drucker 1995, p. 205)

And this concern of society, especially of parents, can be seen enacted in the concerns of some principals who seek to suppress in their schools any critical questioning or inquiry, any differing views or values voiced by their teachers. Reid (2004) and Hargreaves (1994) warn of managerialist cultures in schools where the only views or values about teaching and learning that gain a voice are those of the principal. In such an environment,

management becomes manipulation. Collaboration becomes cooperation…. Having teachers conform to the principal’s vision minimises the opportunities for principals to learn that part of their vision may be flawed, that some teachers’ vision may be as valid or more valid than theirs…. (Hargreaves 1994, p. 250)

In such an environment, the choices for individual teachers are limited and invidious. They may choose to subscribe provisionally to managerial requirements, and work towards change in more subtle ways, in the hope that change may happen by stealth, as it were. Ball (1997) calls this “calculative compliance.” This approach is professionally risky, requiring considerable negotiation skills and professional dexterity, and yet it may be preferable to the alternative options. Alternatively, teachers may: (i) remain in the school and submit to the prevailing ‘vision,’ and thereby become somewhat anonymous; (ii) remain in the school and maintain their views (privately), but forfeit any right to a ‘voice’ or agency within the school community; or (iii) resign or be ‘forced’ to leave. In such environments, the implications for teachers’ professional identity are troubling to say the least.

1(b) Teachers’ (prescribed) roles in schools: teacher as technician

A banking model of professional development has disturbing implications for the autonomy or anonymity of teachers. One effective way for a teacher to raise his/her professional status in a heavily hierarchical organisation or system, such as these banking metaphors encourage, is through crude forms of competition: ie. teachers
compete with their colleagues to cooperate more enthusiastically and assiduously with the principal’s vision. Where professional learning takes place in such an environment, it requires teachers to accept the paradigm of learning, and the knowledge teachers are required to learn, without serious question. The more comprehensively a teacher cooperates in implementing the principal’s vision and ingesting what is on the PD menu – essentially complying with someone else’s values or rules – the more he/she gains notional professional status in that environment (see Locke’s [2004] “induction into ideological compliance;” see also Hargreaves and Goodson 1996). But in so doing, the individual teacher must subjugate his/her own ideas to those of another (Apple 1986), thus forfeiting his/her professional voice or individuality in any meaningful sense. Little (1993) draws attention to the dangers in a school of any program of professional development built on such a premise. He calls it professional development “in the service of implementation” (p. 130). (See also Delandshere and Petrosky 2000.)

Through such programs of professional development, teachers can be positioned and rendered as voiceless and anonymous technicians. In the words of Malouf’s narrator, they can become “just like everyone else.” And the Faustian pact that teachers have entered into by transacting in a banking metaphor of professional development may leave them burnt, with little sense of professional ‘soul.’

2. Teachers’ work in schools: receiving and transmitting knowledge and skills?
Up to this stage, my focus has been on the broader socio-cultural implications of the banking metaphor on teaching and teachers, and how the construction of the role of teachers as effective, faithful and reliable implementers discourages the very individuality that it claims to endorse. From here, I want to draw attention to some of the specific, situated, work-related issues of teachers in their various teaching and learning contexts. I will discuss how these sorts of issues undermine, from within, the very notion of individuality touted by these managerial understandings of teaching and professional development.

Apple’s and Goodson’s warnings about teachers being treated merely as technicians have been reiterated in so many ways. The warnings can take the form of almost
caricature, such as Ritchie and Wilson’s (2000) “additive model” of teachers’ professional development, in which teachers remain constant and faithful (and anonymous) implementers, endlessly adding strategies or methods to their repertoire of teaching practices (p. 17). The caricature is less extreme, but no less demeaning to teachers’ professionalism, when Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1993) see some teachers positioned as “increasingly sophisticated consumers of other people’s knowledge [of teaching and learning]” (p. 88).

Wells explores the idea differently again. He inquires into the potential for paradigms of professional development to be positively linked with the ways that students learn in democratic classrooms. He does this by parodying the suggestion that knowledge (students’ or teachers’) is merely “a commodity that is stored in individual minds or in texts or other artefacts.” He pursues this line of logic to expose the absurdity of the implications of such a view.

Like other commodities, [knowledge] can be transmitted from one person to another; it can also be itemised, quantified and measured. On this transmissionary view, classroom dialogue is … seen as an unnecessary waste of time; all that students [and by implication, teacher learners] need to do is to read and listen attentively to the knowledge conveyed through authoritative texts and lectures and absorb and remember it for subsequent reproduction. (Wells n.d.)

Instrumentalist or technicist construction of the work of teachers (including both their teaching and their learning) are premised on what Dewey (1916/1961a) calls a “static, cold-storage ideal of knowledge” (p. 158). Advocates of collaborative critical inquiry are still agreeing with Dewey almost ninety years after he wrote that such an “ideal” is “inimical to educative development” (p. 158). In fact, Wells’s parody of dialogue being “an unnecessary waste of time” is almost universally rejected by researchers of all traditions. Differences of opinion do emerge, however, when these researchers discuss the details of how open-ended or ‘efficient’ this dialogue should be.

Frequently, policy-makers, researchers or employers will enthuse over the need for collaboration. For instance, Lovat (2003), in the earlier mentioned discussion paper for ACDE, contends that his paper should contribute to “enhancing the professional status of teaching, to transform teaching into a mature profession on a par with medicine, engineering and social work, a modern profession” (p. 1). As part of this enhancing and transforming, he urges a “reconceptualisation of teacher education … underpinned with a commitment to collaboration” (p. 2). He cites government research in Victoria, in the belief that this would be congruent with his call for a “commitment to collaboration.”

Public education: the next generation, Report of the Ministerial Working Party …. found broad support for PD to be delivered at the level of the school rather than centrally. This is so that the special needs of the school and its students can be addressed in light of the recognition that PD for teachers is most effective when teachers can learn from each other. (Lovat 2003, p. 21)

It looks promising at first glance. However, problems begin to emerge when one looks more closely at the discourse here. Teachers are described as learning “from” each other. This would be fine as far as it goes, except for the continued absence of any mention of teachers learning ‘with’ each other (collaboratively generating or transforming knowledge). Throughout this document, Lovat himself speaks of professional development as something which is “delivered.” Whether it is delivered from outside or delivered from within the school ends up being of little consequence. This is keying into a discourse of knowledge as commodity and professional development as banking in a knowledge economy. Importantly, Lovat goes on to report on the rich professional learning that can be generated and enacted when teachers engage in graduate studies that have them reflecting on their classroom practice. But when he refers to the subsequent collaboration or interaction between these researching teachers and their colleagues “back” in schools, he significantly slips back into a knowledge-as-commodity discourse and a transmissionary discourse of collaboration: “valuable knowledge,” he explains, “is transferred to the school and used to resolve problems and induce change” (Lovat 2003, p. 22, my emphasis).

Although many of Lovat’s ideas are welcome contributions to policy debate, his tendency to slip into transmissionary discourses for professional learning is problematic.
While calling for radical rethinking of professional learning, Lovat and others run the risk of reinforcing individualistic notions of teaching and teachers. And this, in turn, has serious implications for both the roles and the work that may be constructed for teachers in schools by policy-makers and employers.

3. Teacher professional identity

My argument to this point has pursued the depersonalising influence of a discourse of professional learning-as-banking on individual professional identity. I have argued that, despite the liberatory, individualistic rhetoric, the more likely effect of professional learning-as-banking is to produce a workforce of anonymous, ‘voiceless’ teacher technicians. However, if there is any substance to the individuality that is encouraged by the banking discourse – ie. if the individual is not rendered utterly anonymous – then this individuality would seem to be informed by humanistic notions of a rational, singular and autonomous psychological identity (Ritchie and Wilson 2000, p. 9). This might be fine too if there were any agreement about the nature of this identity. A quick survey of sociocultural perspectives on identity reveals that there is no such agreement. Rather, such a survey suggests that there is a considerable body of research literature that contests, if it doesn’t actually debunk, humanistic notions of individual identity.

Early in the twentieth century, Dewey was a long way (chronologically and theoretically) from any postmodern notion of the ‘dispersal’ of social identity that was gaining support at the end the twentieth century. However, the beginnings of a sociocultural reframing of identity had begun in the early part of that century, with Dewey’s writing. In The individual and the world (1916/1961c), he was beginning to explore “the social quality of individualised mental operations” in communities of learners (p. 297). Later in the century, with the emergence of the work of Vygotsky and Bakhtin (amongst others) – and notions of identity being embedded within a dialectic or complex dialogic struggle between and amongst individuals, groups and cultures – the broad notion of a sociocultural identity was by no means a marginal theory in education literature. The twentieth century subsequently saw the evolution of discourses associated with activity systems. For instance, Engeström, Miettinen and Punamäki (1999b) propose that “all human cognition and behaviour [is] embedded in collectively
organised, artefact mediated activity systems” (p. 380). And Latour (1993), in outlining actor network theory, speaks of sociocultural networks of actors (human and non-human) who all contribute to hybrid identities rather than the notion of a singular individual identity. Adorno’s (1973) contribution to debates about identity was to challenge what he called reductive “identitarian thinking,” and to encourage instead an awareness of the irreducibility of human beings. In particular, he took issue with “the fictitious claim … that what is biologically one must logically precede the social whole” (p. 134). And there are the traditions of Marxist critical theory (such as in the work of Williams or Eagleton or Jameson), applicable to literary and education studies, in which the notion of the individual is always mediated by and within particular political, historical and cultural contexts, and as such is the site of ongoing struggle and tension. In the related traditions of critical pedagogy (eg. Giroux 1991, Kincheloe and McLaren 1998, McLaren 2003) and feminist critical pedagogy (eg. Gore 1993, Lather 1991, MacLure 2003), writers offer various critiques of Enlightenment notions of reasonable and rational debate between individuals. Giroux, for example, urges researchers to “explore knowledge/power relations,” rather than simple individual identities, and to engage in collective efforts to “resist the abuse of power and privilege, and [instead] construct alternative democratic communities” (Giroux 1991, pp. 48-9).

Needless to say, none of these sociocultural perspectives on identity could brook the simplistic notion of a single unitary individual gaining or possessing a detached and asocial commodity called knowledge. Nor could any perspective mentioned here accept the notion of a decontextualised teaching practice or technique, as the banking metaphor of teaching and learning suggests happens. There is a further concern and this is ethical. Complementary to the tendency to conceptualise identity as a sociocultural construction, there is often an ethical or socio-critical edge. This edge, coming out of a concern with social dynamics, recognises the links and interconnections between the ways knowledge and identity are mediated by sociocultural factors and the power inequalities that exist throughout Western democracies.
All this amounts to an emerging awareness of the dangers of trying to separate out the process of generating knowledge from the social contexts within which this occurs. At the level of the personal this was already worrying to Dewey (1916/1961c):

> When knowledge is regarded as originating and developing within an individual, the ties which bind the mental life of one to that of his [sic] fellows are denied or ignored. When the social quality of individualised mental operations is denied it becomes a problem to find connections which will unite an individual with his fellows. (Dewey 1916/1961c, p. 297)

This brief sketch, above, of sociocultural perspectives on knowledge and professional identity draws attention to the inadequacies and the dangers of the banking metaphor that underpins managerial understandings of professional learning (as set out in Table 7.1). And yet, the banking metaphor continues to inform much of the discourses (and policy) in debates about professional development and professional learning.
PART THREE: NEGOTIATING BETWEEN CONTRASTING UNDERSTANDINGS OF PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

Introduction

In Part 3 of this chapter, I want to move beyond noticing and speculating about the dialogic potential (or rather the lack of it) in banking metaphors of professional development, beyond critique of professional development involving knowledge “transactions,” to focus close up again on some conversations of The Literary Theory Inquiry Group. Needless to say, Eastern Girls’ College is not insulated from banking metaphors. There are significant managerial influences that continue to influence the professional landscape of teachers in that school, such as I indicated in my interpretation of the “ancestral halls” living on beyond the end of The yellow wallpaper story. And The Inquiry Group is not all ‘good news stories.’ I present some multifaceted stories, below, to round off my account of the ways in which these teachers were involved in nuanced and challenging negotiations at every level of their professional learning.

“That esoteric group”

The first conversation I focus on is taken from Session 3 of The Inquiry Group, which took place in May 2003, several months after the first two meetings in 2002. There were several reasons for the long break between meetings. The most telling reason relates to my resignation from a part-time position as a secondary teacher in Eastern Girls’ College to take up a position as a full-time teacher educator and researcher in a different university from the one where I had previously held a part-time position. This change required some different work practices and a steep learning curve with respect to the work of a full-time academic. It was a change that demanded so much of my energies and time that even existing research projects such as this one were put ‘on hold’ for the early months of 2003.

I returned to Eastern Girls’ College in May 2003. To my dismay, I found that the other professional learning groups in the senior English department who had come together at the end of 2002 had already ‘finished’ their work. The projects they were engaged in, it
emerged, were only ever conceived as short term activities. It had been important to
demonstrate to school management some clear professional learning outcomes and to
demonstrate them quickly. There had been talk, early on, about a forum for these
professional learning teams to report to each other about their work. However, in a
decision that again suggested a more managerial approach to leadership and
professional learning in the department, it was decided there was no time to run these
planned forums. The plans were shelved, despite concerns expressed by some in The
Inquiry Group. Further, the artefacts that had already been generated by The Inquiry
Group, with a view to promoting dialogue about literary theory in the senior English
department (see Appendix V for excerpts of teachers’ stories of their first awareness of
literary theory), were not distributed to other teachers in the department. My research
journal records this as a time of some considerable frustration. To add to the frustration,
and in large part this may have been due to the lost opportunity for The Inquiry Group
to open up some of the dialogue they were enjoying amongst themselves with other
members of the senior English department, teachers who were not attending The
Inquiry Group meetings would occasionally refer to us as “that esoteric group.”

Session 3 of The Inquiry Group began with a brief period of writing where teachers
reflected on the ways literary theory had been influencing their teaching in recent times
(see Chapter 3). Following this, Jo presented something of her professional
autobiography to the group. As I explained in Chapter 3, Jo had joined the staff at
Eastern Girls’ College at the start of the year after teaching for four years in Perth,
Western Australia. There were two main reasons why Jo’s presentation was potentially
valuable for the group. Firstly, if Jo and the rest of the group were to build meaningful
dialogic relationships, it was important for us to learn more about each other. Jo’s
talking about some of her professional biography provided a focus for us all to get to
know her and for those who had been in the group from the start to continue to share
their experiences in response to Jo’s. This was building on conversations from the
previous year, when we took some time to share our anecdotes of our earliest awareness
of literary theory (see Appendix V). Secondly, Jo’s arrival promised a fresh new
perspective on our ongoing professional learning. The longer any group is in dialogue
with itself, without input or challenge from ‘outsiders’, the more likely it is that the dialogic potentiality of the group will begin to weaken.

Jo was new to Eastern Girls’ College, and that in itself was potentially generative for our professional dialogue. Her experiences of teaching and learning in Western Australia had been different in many respects from those of other teachers in The Inquiry Group. There were some similarities: as with the VCE in Victoria, the senior English curriculum in Western Australia was separated into English and Literature subjects. Nevertheless, there were some significant differences between the two states’ curriculums, and Jo would go on to talk about classroom practices that were quite different from those generally seen in Eastern Girls’ College. She would also talk about her experiences in pre-service teacher education, with its heavy emphasis on literary theory, contrasted with the pre-service experiences of most in The Inquiry Group. Finally, she would discuss a range of experiences she had had teaching with literary theory in different classrooms in contrasting socio-economic settings.

Toward the end of the third Inquiry Group meeting, and without naming any names, I drew attention to what I saw as the damaging effects of some colleagues reinforcing unhelpful stereotypes about literary theory in casual conversations around the staffroom. At the start of this transcript, I repeat my belief that even light-hearted references by a Head of Department to “that esoteric group” were counterproductive to our attempts to show that literary theory need not be – indeed, should not be – considered esoteric. The exchange that followed illustrates some of the ways in which

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112 As Jo explained it, the literature syllabus in Western Australia in the late 1990s framed the study of texts rather tightly. There was plenty of evidence of literary theory as prescriptive tool in the syllabus. It was common practice, Jo explained, for her and her colleagues in Western Australia to “specify incorporate those terms - class, race and gender - and ask the students to then construct the text in [relation] to those three, in language that drew heavily on literary theory discourse…” (Transcript of 3rd Inquiry Group meeting, 8 May 2006). It emerged that this approach tended to be along similar lines with different texts. This was something of a contrast to the more open-ended approach often spoken about by teachers in The Inquiry Group.

113 Jo described how all pre-service teachers were totally immersed in literary theory discourse from the beginning of her pre-service course in Western University, whether they had a background in literary theory or not: “The first few tutes I was thinking, ‘Oh, my God! I don’t know what the hell he’s talking about … What are these words, ‘discourse’, and you know, ‘hegemony’ and ‘deconstruction’ and … All of these terms which I really hadn’t come across before.…. [Like me, many of my peers] did feel pretty alienated by it … There were a couple of students there who’d just come from doing media studies at
The Inquiry Group was grappling with the professional tensions described in Parts 1 and 2 of this chapter. In particular, it shows how teachers were negotiating their different ways through the sorts of managerial and alternative understandings of professional learning I discussed in Table 7.1. At the start of this excerpt, I refer to myself as “an outsider,” since this was the first meeting of The Inquiry Group when I was not on the staff of Eastern Girls’ College. On reflection, now, I see that I was by no means a complete ‘outsider,’ since my participation in the group was still informed and mediated by a deep knowledge of the school (having taught there for nine years) and by the strong relationships I had built up with some colleagues during that time.

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**Figure 7.3: Excerpt from transcript of Session 3 of The Literary Theory Inquiry Group, Literary theory and mixed abilities in the classroom (8 May 2003)**

It’s interesting that Robin situates himself as “a bit like you, Graham.” (By the time of this third session, Robin and I were no longer members of staff at Eastern Girls’

[another university] and so they were very familiar with this discourse and the rest of us were kind of on the outer. But gradually we started to get used to it.”
College.) Adding to his perception of himself as an “outsider,” because he had left the school, he explains that he is “feeling a bit alienated.” The conversation up to this point of Session 3 had featured a great deal of literary theory discourse. Jo had been discussing her experiences learning literary theory in her preservice teacher-education course in Western Australia, and she had then proceeded to discuss in some detail her approaches (and her colleagues’ approaches) to teaching with literary theory in different school settings while in Western Australia.

As facilitator of The Inquiry Group, over the course of our meetings, I had been consciously trying to develop a culture, within the group and within the senior English department, in which literary theory was not seen as esoteric (lines 1-3). Despite my efforts, Robin says he feels “a bit alienated” (line 5) and “not comfortable … with the language” (line 7). In explaining his discomfort, here, Robin is drawing on Jo’s own language when she was describing her preservice experiences – where she and her peers felt “pretty alienated by” all the literary theory discourse – and this is also the very language in which Robin reflected in the piece written before the start of this meeting (see Chapter 3). So, in one respect, there is much that is dialogic in his language here, and there is evidence too of his having internalised at least some literary theory discourse. However, in his reflective piece, as in this part of the conversation, Robin speaks of “trying to assimilate” the language of literary theory, suggesting this is an aspect of professional knowledge that appears exterior to his existing professional discourses and practice, and that this needs to be fully internalised before “[he] can begin to think about teaching the way Jo teaches” (line 6).

At the same time as Robin is clearly a collegial and dialogic participant in the ongoing conversation, there is still evidence (lines 4-7) of his understanding teaching and professional learning in individualistic terms. Robin implies that he teaches in a particular way, that this is separate and different from “the way Jo teaches,” but that at some point in the future this may change. Such comments are more consistent with managerial understandings of professional development and professional identity rather than a sense of teaching knowledge emerging from, and involving, “sustained inquiry
into teaching and learning” (see Table 7.1) such as I was hoping to facilitate in The Inquiry Group. Nevertheless, this is only part of the story. When Robin subsequently refers to any change being part of a professional learning “journey,” he organically links together aspects of this journey through several iterations of the conjunction “and.” He gives the impression of building further reflection onto his original comment (lines 4-7), something more consistent with the “alternative understandings of professional learning” as represented in the right-hand column of Table 7.1. Whether he is aware of it or not, Robin here is grappling with and negotiating the dialogic tensions between managerial and alternative paradigms of professional knowledge and professional learning.

Jan, too, can also be seen to be engaging in a sort of professional negotiation between contrasting understandings of professional development and professional learning. In response to my comment about the “whole variety of journeys” in any department in a school, she is characteristically open both in her politely articulating her “resistance” to my idea – “It’s funny because part of me resists that” (line 9) – and in her (dialogic) musing out aloud about the tensions she is inwardly grappling with. Initially, the focus of her resistance is not clear. She suggests that all these journeys “can shut things down” (lines 10-11). Her later comments might suggest that, in using this phrase, she was talking about shutting down the potential for professional learning, and/or subverting the orderly and efficient running of an English department. Jan then proceeds to clarify what she means by “shutting things down.”

It is significant that she chooses to situate her resistance to the notion of multiple or diverse journeys in the trope of the “coordinator’s hat.” This “hat” seems in some ways separate from Jan, and it speaks almost of its own volition: “and then my coordinator’s hat sits on and says: ‘How would I teach my staff to teach this?’ ” (lines 14-16). Here, the “coordinator’s hat” begins with a concern about certain gaps and deficiencies in “[her] staff,” and in doing so it urges Jan to subscribe to a neat and tidy, commonsense managerial notion of teachers’ professional learning, where teachers’ learning involves an orderly and direct transfer of knowledge that will then be taught in the classroom. The implication seems to be that this will help to reduce the diversity of learning.
journeys in the department. In such a notion, the teachers in the department are positioned in passive roles. The language of the coordinator’s hat implies that teachers would be taught the content (or methods) that they will later teach (or implement), and that the choice of the content or method will be made by the coordinator (or head of department).

And yet, Jan’s immediate response to her hat’s managerial sort of question is to suggest, on the other hand, that teachers’ learning is something that must be “individually embraced.” Indeed, the following sentence succinctly and powerfully critiques the commonsense managerial position that her coordinator’s hat has just enunciated. In this alternative understanding of professional learning, the agency shifts so that it is once more with teachers who may “want to do very positive things.” She shows how it is not just teachers’ agency, at risk; their positivity is also jeopardised if they are “compelled to do [for example] this critical literacy thing” (lines 17-18). In these few lines of dialogic speculation, Jan provides an illustration of one of those teachers whom my colleague Brenton Doecke and I describe as continuously negotiating between contrasting professional learning paradigms:

[These teachers] cannot close their eyes to the managerial forms of control and accountability that have been reshaping their professional practice, although they might still steadfastly adhere to an alternative model of professionalism and critique those [managerial] forms. (Doecke and Parr 2005a, p. 11)

One might speculate that it is Jan’s immersion in managerial cultures, from within the school and within the competitive systems in which Eastern Girls’ College operates, that prompts “part of” her to resist richer notions of professional learning and to espouse commonsense understandings. Where there exists a managerial imperative in this institution it is seen in the need for neat and tidy, simple linear paradigms of teachers’ professional development: “How would I teach my staff to teach this?” One might also observe that it is salient and not a little troubling, too, that this thinking is immediately associated with the role of a leader (coordinator/Head of Department) in a professional community. The concern is not so much that a leader, the putative “coordinator’s hat,” should not have an idea or even a vision of ways to help improve
the professional learning, professional knowledge and professional practice of teachers in this department. Rather, the concern is that this idea or vision is conceptualised, and in all likelihood operationalised, in language which renders the teachers passive learners. By implication, the same language does not openly value teachers’ existing knowledge and practices, and it seeks to turn professional learning and professional knowledge into less dialogic concepts. The effect of such language is to contribute to the sort of deprofessionalising of teachers that Locke is talking about in the quote at the start of this chapter. Let me be clear here. I am not suggesting that Jan, or even Jan’s hat, was openly advocating anything approaching the deprofessionalising of teachers per se, just as I am not insinuating that Robin was an apologist for managerial professional learning.

Whatever the particular sources of the managerial understandings of professional learning, it is clear that Jan, like Robin, like all members of The Inquiry Group, could not afford to close their eyes to these understandings. At the time of this third meeting of The Inquiry Group, it was disappointing that the other professional learning projects in the senior English department at Eastern Girls’ College were not continuing in any overt way. As I have said, I felt it was a lost opportunity that the planned forums for sharing with the whole department the knowledge generated in these projects did not eventuate. And it continued to be frustrating that there was a sense from both within and outside The Literary Theory Group that our ongoing work was occasionally perceived as ‘esoteric.’ Nevertheless, the group resolved to meet again, the following term, in July 2003.114

“But oh the possibilities!”

Our fourth meeting was titled Post-colonialism and colonialism: unpacking the discourses. From the very first meeting the previous year, some members of the group had expressed a desire to devote one meeting to learning more about postcolonial literary theory. All teachers in the group had begun to learn about and teach with postcolonial ideas, but there was a collective sense they were less confident in teaching postcolonial approaches to text than feminist and Marxist approaches, for example. The
plan for the session involved a reading from, and discussion about, the overtly colonialist children’s story, *Babar the Elephant*, by De Brunhoff. Other texts to be discussed in the course of the meeting would include David Malouf’s *Dream Stuff* (which includes the short story, *Jacko’s Reach*) and Patrick White’s *A Fringe of Leaves*. Most teachers in the group had taught these latter texts at some time, and some members of the group were actually engaged in teaching one or both texts in the very term that we were meeting. In addition to discussion of these texts, some other activities were planned. One involved my reading out a list of colonialist literary terms, and inviting the teachers to write down and then discuss their understandings of these terms. And, for the other activity, two teachers had agreed to report on the ways they had used the notions of colonialism and post-colonialism in their reading and teaching of VCE literature.

In the lead-up to the following excerpt, the conversation had moved to consider the ways in which notions of civilisation in literature and in modern societies are reliant on simple constructed binaries such as order and disorder, coherence and chaos. Members of the group proceeded to relate classroom stories of how they had explored these sorts of ideas with their students. I contributed an anecdote from one of my own Year 12 English classes, some years ago, when the students were preparing for an oral presentation. I was musing with members of The Inquiry Group about how outsiders (including parents) might see the classes leading up to the performances of these orals as utterly chaotic and disordered. I explained that when these students came to present their orals to the class and then to inquire into the significance of the ideas explored therein, I was struck by the quality of their learning – it was often emerging as rich, coherent and complex. Perhaps, I suggested, the students needed a freer intellectual and social “space,” some freedom to be chaotic and disordered for a time. Perhaps, such an open space was an essential element for inquiry into, and trying out, ideas. Perhaps it was an important part of the process of organising ideas and making meaning with/of them. (I need to point out that Sam and Jan, two members of The Inquiry Group, had been sharing the interim roles of co-coordinators of the senior English department for

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114 Albeit with one less member. Robin did not attend any further meetings of The Literary Theory Inquiry Group.
some months prior to this meeting. Jan ironically characterises their leadership as “running the English department.”}
Graham: .... Maybe that’s an important part of the creative process.

Sam: It’s a bit like the way we ran the English department. [much laughter from everyone]

Jo: But oh the possibilities!

Jan: Yearnings and hopes anyway.

Sam: But chaos is a good place to be.

Graham: It’s potentially a good place to be. And the repression [of it] is …. by definition undesirable?

Jo: Yeah, well it’s problematic. Because if you repress chaos well what else are you repressing?

Sam: Well, sexuality for a start.

Jo: Yes, exactly. Sexuality…

Jan: Sexuality is chaotic.

Jo: Aboriginality…

Sam: Well, it is. It is.

Jan: And that’s another thing …. You know almost every man that ever appears in Fringe of leaves Ellen looks at … as a … you can see, you know…

Graham: … as a possibility…

Jan: …that she looks at him as a possibility. [laughing] You know this is … it’s fantastic.

Gill: I think that’s really liberating for the girls to understand too isn’t it? …

Jan: Yes.

Gill …that they have such enormous expectations and yet rigid boundaries.

and even to be able to talk about their dreams and what they might mean has been great.

Graham: It’s a it’s a great opportunity … to talk about the sort of contradictions which are inherent in this [school] here: the drive to more and more order, and more and more neat packages, and more and more [control]… as against the sort of subversive things that happen in local pockets …

Jan: In English classrooms!

Graham: For instance! Exactly. In all seriousness. It’s a great place for contestation.

Jan: That student … [Jan says first name but can’t remember surname. Some discussion in the group until Jan remembers the surname.] …Her mother who was a Marxist and so ashamed of sending her daughter here [to this elite independent school], said that the one thing that was … that gave her heart was that the school was so big that it was uncontainable. And around, in the uncontainable edges, some wonderful things happened.

Figure 7.4: Excerpt from transcript of Session 4 of The Literary Theory Inquiry Group, Post-colonialism and colonialism – unpacking the discourses (7 July 2003)

In this conversation, the tone appears to be informal, convivial, even light-hearted at times. Yet, despite the light-heartedness, the ideas being discussed are serious and challenging and the rapid movement of the discussion across a range of topics would
seem to have required a reasonable level of intellectual engagement from all participants.

The good-humour which lies just beneath the surface of the otherwise serious discussion occasionally bubbles up in outbursts of laughter (lines 2, 15, 20). The transcript illustrates how all colleagues know each other well, in particular in the comfortable turn-taking between each of them. Occasionally colleagues finish off or verbally punctuate each other’s sentences (lines 9-10, 13-14, 16-8). Notwithstanding this personable atmosphere, there is no shortage of confidence or willingness in any member of the group to contribute ideas and opinions. The dialogue is halting or staccato in effect, regularly shot through with succinct assertions – “But chaos is a good place to be” (line 5), “Sexuality is chaotic” (line 10), “It’s a great opportunity” (line 19) – or a type of abbreviated syntactical structure – “Yearnings and hopes anyway” (line 4), “Aboriginality…” (line 11), “In English classrooms” (line 24), “Exactly. In all seriousness” (line 25). This is reminiscent of Vygotsky’s (1962b) notion of “inner speech,” and specifically “predication,” which he argues can often characterise conversations between people who know each other well and who therefore do not need to fill out the details of the subject/s the other is talking about. In Language and Thought, Vygotsky illustrates this by allusion to a passage in Anna Karenina, showing how Levin and Kitty are capable of almost reading each other’s minds (Vygostsky 1962b, pp. 139-141). Reading each others’ minds is clearly taking the idea too far in this instance, but there is an element of inner speech in the excerpt above. And yet the net effect falls well short of “contrived collegiality” or “group think” (Fullan and Hargreaves 1991).

Most of the questions that are asked might be deemed more rhetorical than explicitly requiring information or knowledge in response (lines 6, 7, and 16). With a different social dynamic, this might result in a spirit of one-upmanship or intellectual point scoring, where the intention is to shut down dialogue rather than promote it. In each case here, however, these rhetorical questions, as with the other staccato contributions, seem only to encourage others in the group to explore an idea further or prompt them to inquire into an alternative perspective on the topic.
But, inquire into what? What are these professional teachers learning in what seems to be a rather idiosyncratic discussion? I can answer the question in several ways. They were learning:

- something about chaos in classroom practices (line 1)
- something about notions of chaos …
  … in literary contexts (lines 13-16)
  … in human psychology (line 7-10)
  … and in broader society terms (line 11)
- something about the novel, *Fringe of leaves* (lines 13-16)
- something about the sort of students we were teaching at this school (lines 17-20).

It would seem they are learning about all these things, and more. Indeed, I might add that the speed with which the conversation moves through each of these topics, and then lurches into a critique of the culture of the school (lines 21-30) appears chaotic in itself. However, as in the Malouf story I re-told earlier in this chapter, there are some underpinning structures which support and allow for some of this chaos. (I am thinking of the formal way in which the sessions were scheduled, of the fact that there was always some sort of agenda published before each session – albeit provisional and open to negotiation). This is professional learning characterised by a dialogic tension between underpinning structures and a propensity for chaos. As such, it contests the managerial understandings of efficient professional development where the focus tends to be on simpler prescribed student learning outcomes, or on ‘practical matters’ so that teachers learn a new strategy and take it into next literature classroom.

As in other Inquiry Group sessions, some of the learning in Session 3 was firmly grounded in classroom practices. For instance, the exchange in Figure 7.4 could encourage teachers to take more risks in their classroom practices, especially when experienced colleagues’ classroom stories are seeming to validate a certain (if brief) descent into disorder in classroom dynamics. Bearing in mind that these teachers “cannot close their eyes to the managerial forms of control and accountability that have been shaping their professional practice” (Doecke and Parr 2005a, p. 11), I now
recommend some further grounded ways in which these teachers might ‘demonstrate’ or account for the value of their professional learning. I shall use this excerpt to keep my recommendations as grounded as possible.

‘Accounting for’ dialogic inquiry-based professional learning

With a little creative thinking and a professional culture which is open to possibilities, there will always be several ways in which teachers can demonstrate the value of their professional learning from even a short episode of professional learning such as in Figure 7.4. (See Figure 7.5 below.) One way would be for teachers to examine transcripts of their discussion, as I have done, and to write and share accounts of their learning in and beyond this discussion. With respect to the above excerpt, it would be generative to reflect on the different interpretations that emerged of an abstract term like ‘chaos.’ Teachers could speculate about how these interpretations might impact on their reading and teaching of texts, and how these interpretations might influence the way they plan for and enact their teaching more generally.

In several ways in this conversation, chaos is explicitly linked to: school classrooms, sexuality, aboriginality, a literary novel, adolescent lives, and the wider school community. By raising, and to some extent investigating, such a diverse range of readings of chaos, it can be seen how the group was collectively building a strong basis for constructing complex post-colonial understandings of chaos, in texts and perhaps even in their professional identity. If one were looking to demonstrate the relevance of this discussion to particular teaching practices, then it could be argued that such an understanding of chaos could be applied to a post-colonial reading of Ellen Roxburgh’s character in A fringe of leaves. It could inform a sophisticated appreciation of the value of disorder (and the threats posed by an obsessive desire to impose a culture of control and order in contemporary life and work) in Malouf’s story Jacko’s Reach. And, in terms of some contribution to a teacher’s own professional identity it could contribute to the long process of learning about and clarifying beliefs or values in teaching. Part of this might develop through an increasingly complex awareness of the implications for English-literature teaching of stifling orderliness and/or creative disorder in one’s particular classroom context.
In the spirit of negotiating the tensions between managerial and dialogic inquiry-based notions of professional learning, I offer the following list of tasks (Figure 7.5) in which teachers might dialogically account for their professional learning in Figure 7.4, even as they build on the learning that took place in the original conversation. In each case, the task or activity leads to the generation of a particular product, such as is inevitably required in more managerial accountability systems. But I would argue that the process of generating each product has the potential to combine elements of noticing, developing, speculating about and/or activating the dialogic potential evident in this single transcript of professional conversation.

**Dialogic possibilities for a teacher to ‘account for’ his/her professional learning in this inquiry-based setting**

1. Write an account of the professional learning session just concluded, including some more detail about your understanding of one or more ideas that were of particular interest to you as an English teacher and/or reader. Distribute this to colleagues who were unable to attend.

2. Plan a sequence of classroom activities in which students learn about and investigate notions of chaos/order in a particular text or selection of texts. Write a brief commentary on the ways in which this sequence was informed by the professional learning just concluded. Share this with colleagues who are teaching this text (or may do so in the future).

3. Write a summary or tabular representation of your understanding of the binary opposition chaos/order. Discuss, or present to a different group of colleagues, the ways in which these notions have influenced your classroom practice and/or professional identity in the past, and/or the ways in which they might influence it in the future.

4. Set up, and manage, an online discussion forum (or a website) about one or more of the ideas in the professional learning session just concluded.

5. Write a reflective narrative about the ways that particular students in your class have responded to the tensions between the need in your school (or classroom) for structure and order and the invitations to more creativity and open-endedness. How does your understanding of this influence the way you teach these students? If students agree, perhaps publish this in a professional publication (using pseudonyms, of course).

6. Set up a collaborative action research project investigating how a group of teachers began to incorporate postcolonial discourses and/or ideas into their classroom practices and/or text study. Share findings with colleagues.

**Figure 7.5: Activities for teachers to develop, and account for, their inquiry-based professional learning (vis-à-vis Figure 7.4).**
My purpose in presenting this particular conversation (Figure 7.4) and this list of professional writing activities that could emerge from it (Figure 7.5) is not to showcase them as a benchmark or ‘best practice’ for professional learning, in the tradition of managerial pinning down of quality. For instance, there are aspects of the discussion that are somewhat idiosyncratic. Indeed, much powerful and engaging learning (for students and teachers) may be just that, idiosyncratic, especially in inquiry-based paradigms such as in The Inquiry Group at Eastern Girls’ College. Teachers who have taught in and/or learned in an inquiry-based space can attest to that. To appropriate the words of Malouf’s narrator: They’ve seen and been into it; they’ve lived with it and in it. It might be argued that these teachers, given some flexibility, scope and intellectual space to dialogically inquire into and reflect on their conversation, could benefit as much from the written reflection and inquiry as from the professional learning session itself. And in managerial terms, they may well prove themselves ‘accountable’ through such a process. This ‘proving’ may take place, too, in collaboratively generated, critically focused, professional portfolios, although (as I argued in Chapter 3), there are dangers in trying to ‘capture’ all of one’s professional learning in a large-scale artefact.

One might speculate about a myriad of rich, multi-layered accounts of the professional learning that took place in Session 3 of The Literary Theory Inquiry Group. And yet, if the managerial mandates of (i) restricting professional learning to existing student learning outcomes; (ii) maintaining a focus on ‘practical matters’; and/or ‘(iii) tailoring professional development to the narrow requirements of quality assurance measurements were in place, one wonders whether such a conversation would have even begun.

Conclusions
The research cited in this chapter suggests that where the tendency to exert more managerial control and impose more constraints over teachers’ professional learning opportunities continues, the consequences are likely to affirm and exacerbate Terry Locke’s view of teachers’ professionalism being eroded. The metaphor of Jacko’s Reach being tamed and modernised illustrates the effect a little differently from the erosion metaphor, but the effect is similar. The evidence of the effect of managerial
understandings of teacher professional development in Western countries suggests a “concreting over” of the uncertainty that characterises teachers’ dialogic professional learning spaces. The resulting landscapes might appear to feature a more controlled, more ordered, more effectively-managed force of teachers, but these teachers would tend to be impersonal technicians, limited in their professional learning potentialities, and inhibited in their potential growth. Indeed, it may be, as Goodson (2003) says, that such an environment turns teaching into a job “attractive only to the compliant and the docile, and conversely unattractive to the creative and resourceful” (p. 84).

My experiences as a secondary English-literature teacher, as a teacher educator, and as part of The Literary Theory Inquiry Group, have taught me the value of leading and prompting critically focused dialogic inquiry. All these professional perspectives have encouraged in me a predisposition to be optimistic, to be excited by possibilities, even while I confess to occasionally despairing over managerial attempts to erode teachers’ professionalism and the deleterious implications of this for students’ learning. It is this same optimism that fuels my belief that managerial understandings of professional development that drive efforts to shut down dialogue, and to control teachers’ professional potential through the utilitarianising of their work, are destined to fail. What might be termed the ‘managerial project’ is always going to be too ambitious, beyond the scope of even the most obsessive and assiduous managerial bureaucrat, employer or politician. The spaces of English-literature teachers’ professional learning in this state and country are – if I may appropriate the words of the parent reported in last conversation excerpt – so big as to be uncontainable. And around, in the uncontainable edges some wonderful things can indeed happen.

As Morson says of Bakhtin’s optimism throughout the worst monologic excesses of Stalinist Russia:

Despite Bakhtin’s experience as a Soviet citizen, where the right perspective on just about all publicly identified perspectives was held to be already known and certain, he was well aware that outside that circle of presumed certainty life is still governed by opinion. It is not just that rival ideologies – Christian, liberal, and many others – were still present; beyond that, each individual’s experiences led to half-formed but strongly held beliefs that enjoyed no formal expression. Totalitarianism was surely
an aspiration of the Soviet and other such regimes but it could never realise its ideal of conformity …. There is always too much contingent, unexpected, particular, local, and idiosyncratic, with a historical or personal background that does not fit….

(Morson 2004, p. 318)

In my more sanguine moments I too want to believe that, just as the spirit of Jacko’s Reach will continue “pushing up” under the developers’ poured concrete (Malouf 2001, p.100), so too will English-literature teachers such as those in this Inquiry Group continue to find productive, dialogic ways to mediate and, where appropriate, resist those managerial understandings and structures that seek to control teachers’ professionalism.
CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction: “a helpful thing to understand”

Dear Mr Curly,

the [sic] journey is livelier and more enjoyable than ever. I attribute this to the fact that I am losing my grasp of things. How pleasing it is to lose ones [sic] grasp!

There is a time to grasp and a time to hold and there has been too much grasping and too little holding in this life.

Holding is of the arms and the breast and the heart. It … requires commitment. Grasping rhymes with gasping and is essential for certain emergencies. It is a desperate activity of the hands which would much rather be touching, constructing, dismantling, picking flowers, patting animals, scratching the head or stroking the chin. I must say however that in order to hold something it is sometimes necessary to grasp it first like a duck, after it has been spooked by a sinister beast!

Anyway Curly, I hold something very dear to me which you said to me many years ago: “The bird of paradise does not alight on the hand that grasps.”

This is a helpful thing to understand and I thank you for those words. And many others too.

Yours faithfully,
Vasco Pyjama


As I approach the end of this PhD research, the dialogue about teachers’ professional learning continues. For the English-literature teachers reported on in this research, indeed for all teachers, the ecologies of their professional learning are … as lively as ever. I see this month in The Australian newspaper that the major opposition political party in Australia has all but endorsed the incumbent federal government’s policies by (1) pledging to increase support for particular forms of teachers’ professional development, (2) promising to introduce competitive ‘performance-based pay schemes’
for individual teachers and (3) threatening to ‘get tough’ and increase control and accountability of individual teachers’ ‘performance’ (Maiden 2007). All this could induce pessimism about the future of teaching and teachers’ professionalism, as I indicated in Chapter 7. And yet I continue to enjoy my professional journey and the dialogue that mediates it, in one respect at least. I have confidence in the dialogic potential of inquiry-based professional learning frameworks to help teachers to learn and to enable teachers, institutions and policy-makers to negotiate a better future for the teaching profession and for students.

In this final chapter, I will be noticing and reflecting on the accounts I have constructed of inquiry-based professional learning by English-literature teachers. In addition, I will be developing, speculating about, and activating the dialogic potential I see as inherent in these accounts. Once more, at the start of the chapter, I am using someone else’s words, a literary text – if *The Curly Pyjama letters*, by iconic Australian cartoonist Michael Leunig, can be considered a literary text – to help articulate my dialogic position. I have purposely chosen a quirky text, one that makes explicit its own dialogicality, to reaffirm the dialogic nature of my text and this study overall. This is consistent with my approach throughout this study to look to newer combinations of genres to develop, amongst other things, newer ways of seeing.

**Dialogue within dialogue, dialogue from dialogue: the possibilities**

The dialogic nature of Vasco Pyjama’s words begins with the epistolary form of those words. Put simply, Vasco’s words exist as one side of an ‘exchange’ – Vasco is writing to Mr Curly in an ongoing correspondence. But his letter, like my PhD text, is more dialogic than a single statement in a to-and-fro exchange between speakers. Yes, there are elements of dialogue-as-exchange in my text; I include quotes from email conversations I have had with teachers and colleagues. This is one of the ways I have sought to make explicit the dialogic status of the text and of the study overall. Much of the text consists of accounts of a professional dialogue that involves others – teachers, researchers, policy-makers, journalists – and in that respect my text is a product

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115 I make these connections in the knowledge that neither Vasco nor Leunig would use the precise language of Bakhtin. I would argue, however, that there is generative potential in noticing, developing, speculating about and activating this potential dialogicality.
emerging from their dialogic input. But it also exists, itself, as a conversation, constituted as much by my words as by the “words” of others. I have sought to emphasise the sense in which my text is constituted by, and constitutes, these dialogic words and elements. Where possible I have made some attempt to provisionally demarcate each of the multiple voices in dialogue with each other – or, to use another metaphor, I have drawn attention to the multiple and diverse voices interweaving with each other in a creative and critical counterpoint. However, in the end, this demarcation of voices can only be provisional because of the dialogic ways in which one person’s words are interwoven with another person’s words.

Vasco refers to (and acknowledges the significance of) past words spoken by his interlocutor Mr Curly, and yet these words connect with more than just his friend and intended audience. Clearly, they connect with me. In my appropriating of Vasco’s words, I show them reaching out to readers and listeners in forums neither Curly, nor Vasco, nor Michael Leunig would have anticipated. Vasco thanks Curly for those words – and for others too. In my acknowledgements in the early pages of this thesis, I took the opportunity to thank those teachers and researchers who contributed to the dialogue and the research conversation of this project. I thanked them for the words that I have attributed to them … and for many others too. I repeat those thanks here. But there are of course words from others that have also contributed to the thesis. These others include teachers and researchers with whom I agreed, and others whose words challenged my words. And there are others whom I have invariably failed to acknowledge, but whose contribution to the dialogue is valuable in ways that the scope of this thesis has not allowed me to articulate. I thank those “others” too.

I have tried to show in this study that it is of the nature of dialogic professional learning and dialogic knowledge that its unfinalizability extends not only to the certainty with which one is able to package and contain teacher knowledge, but also to the possibility of isolating a particular voice or indeed to enumerate all voices that might be deemed sources of learning and knowledge. When Wenger (1998) talks about “knowing” he emphasises the continuous nature of knowledge and thus the blurred nature of any prior “source” of that knowing.
Our knowing – even of the most unexceptional kind – is always too big, too rich, too ancient, and too connected for us to be the source of it individually. At the same time, our knowing – even of the most elevated kind – is too engaged, too precise, too tailored, too active, and too experiential for it to be just of a generic size. The experience of knowing is no less unique, no less creative, and no less extraordinary for being one of participation. (Wenger 1998, pp. 141-2)

The dialogic potential of knowing that emerges through professional learning can be trivialised when it is expressed as a finalized piece of knowledge. Vasco thanks Curly for his words of advice about “the hand that grasps” and the “bird of paradise,” but this knowledge is clearly not restricted to the moment when that particular bird approaches. Similarly, the dialogic potential of professional learning that I have presented in the accounts in this text and the recommendations I will offer in this final chapter are in one sense limited by their situation in a particular time and place. However, in presenting my accounts of professional learning, I also construct an account of the professional ecology in which that learning takes place. I have argued that it is only through understanding the professional ecology of any one account of professional learning, in dialogic connection with knowledge of the characteristics of the learning in that particular setting, that readers can critically reflect on the dialogic potential of this account for other settings. This understanding is crucial if one is to notice, develop, speculate about and activate that potential for readers of my text … and many others too.

Another way in which Vasco’s letter and this PhD text are connected is in the sense that each is engaged in a conversation which embeds within it some principled position, some ethic that underpins its critique of social/ideological practice/s. Vasco is concerned about “too much grasping and too little holding in this life.” He makes use of some classical (biblical?) linguistic structures – “a time to …, a time to …” – in order to communicate the seriousness of his position and his critique. One fundamental principle which has driven this thesis has been my concern about the prevalence of managerial conceptions of teachers’ knowledge and professional learning in teachers’ working lives. As I have argued throughout the thesis, I see this having serious implications for
teacher professionalism and for the ability of schools to address the needs and aspirations of a wide diversity of student learners and socio-cultural backgrounds.

In Vasco’s letter, he is worried about “too much grasping and too little holding in this life.” Vasco’s framing of grasping and holding as a binary – his judgement that there has been “too much” of one and “too little” of the other – indicates his desire to advocate for “holding.” And yet even as he articulates this principled position he does not ignore his intellectual awareness that the binary is not as clear-cut as it might seem. Yes, grasping rhymes with gasping, but a certain amount of “grasping” is “essential for certain emergencies,” Vasco accepts. And with this acceptance, he shows his awareness of the dialogic tensions that animate the co-existence of grasping and holding in his own experience and more broadly “in this life.”

There has been a principled position underpinning my distrust of managerial paradigms of professional learning throughout this text. It is a position that suspects most managerial attempts to control teachers’ professional learning are more about grasping to control teachers than any willingness to inquire further into the complexities of teachers’ knowledge and teachers’ learning. Nevertheless, I cannot ignore the dialogic tensions between crucial terms in this study that I have framed as provisional binaries. Included among these provisional binaries has been the notion of inquiry-based professional learning as against a range of practices that I have characterised as ‘traditional professional development’ (see Figure 5.1 and Table 7.1). In a similar way, I have set up a provisional binary that contrasts processes of professional learning as against so-called ‘outcomes’ or products of that learning. While I have sometimes advocated a preference for one side of a provisional binary – for instance, I have advocated for productive transgression in professional learning, as an alternative to traditional professional development (cf. Figure 6.2) – this has never come down to a simple matter of recommending either this approach or that approach. Occasionally, my method of investigation has been to blur the boundaries and frames of a concept, and then to inquire around and in the “uncontainable edges” of this boundary. In the same way that the provisionally bounded term, literary theory, invites multiple interpretations
and frames of inquiry, so my inquiry into professional learning has recognised different interpretations of key terms at times.

Different interpretations are at the heart of the dialogic tensions and dialogic potential inherent in language such as ‘inquiry’ and ‘accountability.’ Each of these terms has the potential to be drawn into what Bakhtin (1981a) calls the centripetal tendency in language – such as when professional learning outcomes must be clearly defined (and measurable) to be officially validated, resulting in professional learning with inhibited or constrained dialogue. But ‘inquiry’ and ‘accountability’ also have centrifugal potential. In a dialogic inquiry-based paradigm, professional learning can be more actively negotiated by teachers. Teachers can frame their learning in ways that open up creative and critical possibilities. In turn, the manner or pedagogy of their professional learning, and the potential value and use of this learning in the future, can also be open to creative and unpredictable possibilities.

And finally, there is Vasco’s quirky pleasure in “losing his grasp.” There may have been times in this study, where my account of dialogic inquiry-based professional learning of English-literature teachers in Victoria appeared so positive as to be more like the “brightly jewelled colours” in Vermeer’s camera obscura than a critical account of authentic professional learning. There may have been places where my critique of managerial policy and practice came across as trenchant, to the point where the writing appeared more ‘authoritarian’ than ‘authoritative’ – cf. Morson’s (2004) use of those terms (see p. 142). And as I write this concluding chapter, I am still conscious of the need to avoid the research narrative overall becoming like a victory narrative (cf. Lather 1994) with myself as victor. Part of “the truth” I have been seeking, in dialogic association with the many other voices represented in this study, is that there has never been a time where the solution to problems of teachers’ professional learning, or indeed English-literature teachers’ learning about literary theory, could be firmly “grasped.” I’d like to think that my position has remained closer to Vasco’s notion of “holding” than “grasping” in this. I have maintained my commitment to enact dialogic inquiry-based professional learning through the process of this study, even while I was representing the dialogic inquiry-based professional learning of some participants in this research. I
see my seeking of truth in this study as part of an ongoing process. Thus, I have avoided
presenting a fully fleshed-out model as a fetish for professional learning, one which
might be mechanistically implemented by others. I have no desire to achieve certainty
and closure in my dialogue about professional knowledge and professional learning.
Nevertheless, I do have some recommendations.

**Provisional recommendations**

Vasco makes a few suggestions in his letter to Mr Curly that I see as having some
dialogic potential for teachers’ professional learning. There might be some value in
putting Vasco’s suggestions to teachers, institutions and policy-makers in their planning
for professional learning. Leaving aside the picking of flowers and the patting of
animals (!), they could plan for the possibilities of

- “constructing” and “dismantling” (with respect to teachers’ knowledge,
  beliefs and experiences); and
- “scratching the head” and “stroking the chin” (ie. teachers engaging in
  ongoing critical reflection).

And yet these actions, by themselves, are not dialogic in the way I have conceptualised
the term, and they are not in themselves adequate to the demands and possibilities of
teachers’ diverse working lives. They seem more reminiscent of Schon’s (1983/1991)
individualistic paradigm of reflective practice, which, I have argued, can serve to inhibit
rather than promote the dialogic potential of teachers’ knowledge and professional
learning. The model of dialogic inquiry-based professional learning I have been
presenting, modelling, investigating and advocating in and through this research
recognises the dangers in conceptualising teaching, or professional learning, or research
in *individualistic* paradigms. I take this opportunity, then, to recommend the following
additions to Vasco’s list.

The process of planning for teachers’ professional learning could, where possible,
include:
• **planning for multiple spaces of ongoing professional inquiry and dialogue**
  This could involve different forms/forums of face-to-face dialogue, but it could also involve a wide range of forms/forums where teachers could be brought into dialogic connection with each other, either through electronic means or through sharing dialogic reflective writing.

• **valuing imaginative wondering, flexibility and interdiscursivity, in teachers’ learning more than rigid planning, structuring and abiding by discursive norms**
  That is to say, wondering, dreaming, creativity and flexibility are probably most generative when they mediate thoughtful and strategic planning for possibilities.

• **beginning with a provisional focus on a topic, or with a focus on a broader topic, and from that encouraging teachers to frame their specific situated problems**
  Teachers could be encouraged to see the framing of their own versions of ‘the problem’ as a powerful and fundamental part of their dialogic learning.

• **focusing learning around reading, sharing and interpreting diverse artefacts.**
  The intention of this recommendation is to encourage teachers to plan to generate some form of texts/artefacts *within* their professional learning settings and to reflect on these in collegial, supportive and yet critical ways. These artefacts could be ‘new’ syllabus or curriculum documents. They could also be reflective pieces of prose – or multimedia or film-making – where teachers notice, develop, speculate about and activate the dialogic potential of their current beliefs, understandings or practices, and ideas from beyond their own professional setting.

• **grounding teachers’ inquiry in classroom practice as a starting point, or a point of reference, for noticing, developing, speculating about, and activating dialogic potential**
  This means that even predominantly conceptual or philosophical ‘musing’ is
likely to be generative, perhaps in unexpected ways, when an attempt is made to ground these musings within particular settings or curricular contexts.

- **encouraging participant teachers to generate written and/or multimodal texts during their professional learning, or soon after, in the form of critical dialogic accounts of their learning.**
  
  These texts can be the focus of a professional learning session, and they can provide alternative ‘evidence’ of these teachers’ professional learning. In that way, teacher learners can show themselves accountable for their learning in more rigorous, nuanced and meaningful ways than quantitative computations of improvement in students’ test scores that are premised on simplistic causal paradigms of teaching and learning.

and, finally,

- **thinking of professional learning more as interrelated levels of intellectual, creative and relational work, and less as meeting predetermined outcomes or centrally fixed standards.**

**Some (unfinalizable) outcomes**

Before I conclude, I wish to take some time to consider the longer term ‘outcomes’ of the research dialogue for the English-literature teachers who participated in this project. I want to include here those teachers who responded to my questionnaire, although I can say little about them since their participation was anonymous. Other participants I can comment on in more detail are those teachers with whom I had extended interviews. Some of these teachers I have stayed in contact with, and our conversation continues. I know much more, however, about the English-literature teachers who came together to learn more about literary theory in what came to be known as The Literary Theory Inquiry Group. And then there is me: the researcher, yes, but also a participant in The Inquiry Group and in the research dialogue that contributed to and constitutes the project.
I will begin by discussing some of my own learning ‘outcomes.’ One way of articulating an outcome for me is to say that, whatever the context of my dialogue with English-literature teachers in Victoria, I appreciated the sense of give and take throughout the whole process. Whether the dialogue was regular and ongoing, as it was with teachers in The Literary Theory Inquiry Group, or whether it was limited to a one-off lengthy interview, or whether it was restricted to a series of questions and responses in a questionnaire, I found the dialogue professionally enjoyable and generative in all sorts of ways. I valued the contribution and participation of these teachers in terms of their input into this project, whether they welcomed the opportunity for dialogue or whether they participated somewhat grudgingly. Perhaps grudgingly is not the right word…

Perhaps it is fairer to say that some teachers’ participation seemed more ‘peripheral’ than others. There were those teachers who, for instance, did not return my questionnaire. They did not actively participate in the research, and yet …. There were teachers who, in responding to my questionnaire, seemed to wave aside my invitation to inquire into literary theory: eg. “These literary theories have all had the strong smell of bullshit about them. I’ve avoided any PD sessions dealing with them.” There were those, like the teacher who dismissed anyone “seriously interested” in questioning the value of the literary canon as “an out and out moron.” And looking to The Literary Theory inquiry Group, there were some teachers who attended only one or two sessions. Perhaps their participation could be considered peripheral. Should I interpret all this as an attempted dialogue that failed to generate possibilities, as a dialogue that never got started, or should I interpret it in some other way?

Lave and Wenger (1990, 1999) might answer me by pointing out that all professional learning is at, at some level, peripheral. And, Wells (1999) might add:

Each event [eg. that a professional learner is involved in] has the potential to contribute, beyond the immediate moment, to a transformation of [the learner and] the wider culture. Whether or not it actually does so, however, depends on a number of factors…. (p. 56)
It is beyond the scope of this research to inquire into this “number of factors.” It is beyond the scope of this research, also, to record teachers’ participation in conversations about literary theory beyond the processes of the project (such as in their own classrooms or in their own collegial settings). My central questions in this project involved conceptual inquiry, in the first instance, and questions of possibility situated in a number of authentic teacher learning conversations. I asked: “How might an inquiry-based model of professional learning facilitate …?” and “How might dialogic inquiry-based professional learning connect with and enable …?” It has not been the focus of this research to evaluate the extent to which any teacher’s participation was peripheral and/or legitimate (Lave and Wenger 1990). There is scope for future research to investigate the ways in which inquiry-based professional learning mediates teachers’ classroom practice over time. However, in this study I make no finalized judgements about the value of teachers’ participation in inquiry-based professional learning in terms of their classroom practice.

Inevitably, some teachers found the ‘give-and-take’ of professional dialogue in this project to be less worthwhile. However, there is much evidence to suggest that many teachers did value the dialogue and their participation. Teachers in The Inquiry Group expressed their appreciation of the ongoing professional learning conversation in different ways: eg.

When I read these readings last night I went, ‘My god, they’re so useful to what was being discussed yesterday [in class].’ And not that they [the students] necessarily needed to be taught that, but some of the language….

I need these discussions all the time.
We need them once a week. (see Figure 5.3)

You know this is … it’s fantastic! (see Figure 7.4)

Some teachers in the group continued the dialogic conversation about literary theory in other classroom and professional settings. Some teachers spoke, during The Inquiry

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116 It is unfortunate, in many respects, that the anonymity I promised to participants in this research means I am unable to identify the artefacts published by them since their involvement in The Literary Theory Inquiry Group.
Group sessions, of using particular materials or ideas generated during these sessions in their conversations with students in classrooms. Some went on to lead workshops about teaching with literary theory or critical literacy in VATE workshops. One teacher in the group, who had already published in professional journals, went on to write a chapter in a book that built on ideas discussed in these sessions. One teacher I interviewed went on to publish her first article about literary theory in a professional journal. Beyond The Inquiry Group, several questionnaire respondents wrote that they found the questionnaire provocative, and some referred to the “conversations in the staffroom” that had been stimulated by the very presence of the questionnaire in their school. As one said, “I found this a very interesting and relevant survey. It has generated a lot of discussion amongst English teachers at [name of school], both ‘old’ (like I am) and fairly recently graduates.”

These, of course, are only the tangible, demonstrable ways in which the dialogic potential of professional conversation can be seen to generate and activate rich professional learning in other settings. There are further accounts in this study, such as in reflexive narratives, where I have inquired into less readily reifiable outcomes of professional learning. I include here the ways in which the professional identities of all participating in the research influenced, and were influenced by, our dialogue.

But it was more than just give and take. A Bakhtinian perspective, here, argues that the professional dialogue and the dialogic relationships in all these instances were not just a matter of researcher and participants being interlocutors in a linear professional conversation, where sometimes one gave and sometimes one took. For any participant in this project, researcher or teacher, even when he/she seemed to initiate a conversation, or speech event, he/she was already keying into a dialogic community. As Bakhtin (1986) says,

Any speaker is himself a respondent to a greater or lesser degree. He [sic] is not, after all, the first speaker, the one who disturbs the eternal silence of the universe…. He presupposes not only the existence of the language system he is using, but also the existence of preceding utterances – his own and others’ – with which his given utterance enters into a kind of relation or another (builds on them, polemicises with them, or simply presumes that they are
already known to the listener). Any utterance is a link in a very complexly organised chain of other utterances. (Bakhtin 1986, p. 69)

The participation of a wide variety of English-literature teachers in this study involved them in complex negotiation of dialogic relationships. My focus on the small group of teachers in Eastern Girls’ College shows that these dialogic relationships can often be as complex in a single institution as they are in larger professional communities. There are relationships embedded within, and influenced by, the very words teachers speak and/or write to each other. There are relationships mediated by a range of linguistic, political, socio-cultural and institutional influences. They can be mediated by the texts that teachers read and interpret with each other (and with their students), and by the texts they generate with each other. It is a fundamental belief that I take with me from this study, that the negotiation of dialogic relationships between teachers can be powerfully mediated by a shared appreciation of the dialogic potential that inheres in, and is possible from, teachers coming together to learn in inquiry-based professional learning settings.

And many others too …

Paradoxically, one of the most optimistic perspectives I draw from all this is the sense that the dialogic learning about literary theory of many of the teachers who participated in this project by no means began with or ended with my involvement. For instance, the teachers in The Literary Theory Inquiry Group came together for an extended period of time (fourteen months). Over the course of this time, they sketched out ‘provisional’ points of focus for their professional learning (literary theory broadly, and in particular, Marxist theory, feminist theory, reader-response theory, post-colonial theory). Their inquiry was by no means restricted to these points of focus only. My accounts of their professional learning have shown them utilizing and generating various written artefacts as they negotiate their complex professional learning ecologies, and working to draw on and enhance the capacity of their dialogic potential. The accounts are consistent with the model of inquiry-based professional learning outlined in Figure 5.1. All this is a story worth sharing with others.
Yet this dialogic potential continues to be compromised and potentially diminished by managerial policy, practices and discourses that serve to increase surveillance of teachers’ working lives and to decrease their professional autonomy. In my text, I have presented teachers creatively and critically negotiating traditional structures and expectations, and ‘newer’ managerial discourses, in ways which often seem to enhance the dialogic potential of their professional learning. I have done this, in part, by creatively and critically negotiating traditional thesis structures and expectations in order to generate newer knowledge and newer possibilities. In my own professional learning, and through the whole research journey, I have found this helpful and generative. At the conclusion of this PhD research, the journey seems (as Vasco would put it) “livelier and more enjoyable than ever.”

Some of this enjoyment comes from a belief that my words are able to do some justice to, and to account for, the dialogic professional learning of English-literature teachers in some settings in Victoria. I like to think I am providing some form of validation and a framework for future professional learning of this nature.

Notwithstanding managerial efforts to limit or shut down professional dialogue, this study aims to stimulate and enhance the professional learning possibilities of not just English-literature teachers at Eastern Girls’ College, but also English-literature teachers elsewhere in Victoria and Australia and beyond. The interpretive framework I present for teachers can open possibilities to all teachers as they negotiate the demands of their different professional, institutional and community settings. This is indeed what Yasmin was intuitively drawn to do in the crisis of wartime in Israel just a few months ago, where the potential for dialogue involving her, her students and her whole community, was fundamentally threatened. In Australia we should not need ‘real war conditions’ to prompt us to notice the dialogic potential we already have in schools, and to awaken us to the possibilities of developing, speculating about and activating this potential. But the richest work in this area will emerge where there is a widespread belief in the value of such dialogic potential. I trust my study might help persuade teachers, administrators, researchers, policy-makers and politicians of this value.
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http://education.ucsc.edu/faculty/gwells/Papers_Folder/NCTE.html


Questionnaire sent to VCE Literature teachers

Thank you for taking the time to fill out this questionnaire.

Please place a tick in the most appropriate box for those questions which give you a choice of options. Where there are lines provided, please feel free to expand on the questions asked. If you need more space use the reverse side of this questionnaire.

1. Age
   - 22-35
   - 36-45
   - 46-65

2. Sex
   - Female
   - Male

3. Type of school at which you currently teach?
   - state school
   - independent school
   - catholic school
   - College of TAFE
   - Other _______________(please specify)

4. Number of years you have been teaching literature at VCE level?
   - 0-5
   - 6-10
   - 11-20
   - 21 or more

5. Period when you most recently undertook literary studies at university
   - 1960-69
   - 1970-9
   - 1980-89
   - 1990-99
   - no literary studies at university

6. Have you been involved in any professional development sessions (such as those run by VATE) relating to critical theory, feminist theory or poststructuralism?
   - Yes, more than 1
   - yes, but 1 only
   - No (Go to question 10 )

7. How worthwhile was/were the session/s?
   - Extremely worthwhile
   - Very worthwhile
   - Quite worthwhile
   - Not worth the time or effort

   ___________________________________________________________
   ___________________________________________________________
   ___________________________________________________________
   ___________________________________________________________
9. Identify and explain one aspect of a professional development session you have attended on literary theory that made it more or less worthwhile for you?

_____________________________________

_____________________________________

_____________________________________

_____________________________________

_____________________________________


10. In your own literary studies at university, were you conscious of any literary theory component?

☐ Very conscious
☐ occasionally conscious
☐ rarely conscious
☐ no memory of any literary theory component at all

_____________________________________

_____________________________________

_____________________________________

_____________________________________

_____________________________________


11. In your literature classes are you conscious of incorporating or teaching literary theory?

☐ Very conscious
☐ occasionally conscious
☐ rarely conscious
☐ literary theory does not play a part in my literature teaching

_____________________________________

_____________________________________

_____________________________________

_____________________________________

_____________________________________


12. In your literature classes are you conscious of incorporating or teaching literary theory?

☐ Very conscious
☐ occasionally conscious
☐ rarely conscious
☐ literary theory does not play a part in my literature teaching

_____________________________________

_____________________________________

_____________________________________

_____________________________________

_____________________________________


13. How important to you is your emotional response to any piece of literature you are teaching (i.e. how you 'feel' about a text)?

☐ Very important
☐ quite important
☐ relatively unimportant
☐ unimportant

_____________________________________

_____________________________________

_____________________________________

_____________________________________

_____________________________________

(See next page for question 14.)
14. To what extent do you feel that the 'canon' of literature (i.e., the notion that there is a set of 'great books' which all serious students of literature should study) is a useful concept for your teaching?
- very useful
- quite useful
- not very useful
- not familiar with the concept

15. To what extent do you find the notion of 'multiple readings' of a text a useful one for VCE literature students?
- very useful
- quite useful
- not very useful
- not familiar with the concept

16. Are there any other comments you wish to make?

Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire.
If you would like to speak with me further about these questions, or about any other aspect of my research, please contact me at any of the contact points listed below.

Graham B Parr
Department of Learning and Educational Development
Education Faculty
Alice Hoy Building
University of Melbourne
Parkville VIC 3052
Ph. 8344.8411
Email: g.parr@edfac.unimelb.edu.au
Thursday 23 November 2000

Dear VCE literature teacher,

As part of a research project for my Master of Education degree I am conducting a questionnaire of VCE literature teachers. In this project I am investigating professional development for VCE literature teachers in the area of literary theory. My concerns in this area have evolved as the most recent review of the Study Design for VCE literature mandates a more explicit teaching of literary theory, and yet many teachers find themselves uncomfortable about enacting this aspect of teaching literature.

The data gained from this initial questionnaire will provide part of a developing picture of (1) the way teachers have been responding to professional development sessions on literary theory up to now and of (2) how they feel about teaching literary theory in their own classes. Ultimately, it is intended that the research project will give a clearer understanding of what teachers require for professional development in this area, and it may provide some practical alternative models for teachers to engage with and then draw on in their teaching of literary theory with their senior literature students.

I realise that this time of the year is a busy one, but I am hoping, with some of your senior students already finishing up for the year, that you will be able to find the time to complete this questionnaire. It should take you approximately 20 minutes, depending on how long your responses are.

These questionnaires are completely anonymous. There are no markings to identify either you or your school on the questionnaire. You may, however, contact me by phone or email as below if you wish to discuss any of the issues in this questionnaire or my research overall.

Please could you complete the questionnaire and return it to me before 8 December in the envelope enclosed?

Thank you for your participation in this research project.

Yours sincerely,

Graham Parr

Classroom Teaching and Learning Unit
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APPENDIX III: AREAS FOR DISCUSSION USED IN THE EXTENDED INTERVIEWS WITH SENIOR ENGLISH/LITERATURE TEACHERS

1. The teacher's professional journey leading to VCE literature teaching
2. Some interests of the students taught by the teacher (now and/or in the past)
3. The teacher's beliefs about, and attitudes to literature, including likes and dislikes in regard to particular works or literature (or writers, or genres, or periods)
4. The teacher's responses to past professional development experiences in literary theory
5. The teacher's understanding of, and attitudes to, literary theory (but this was not asked as a direct question)
6. The teacher's classroom practices that involve literary theory (if any). Reflections on the teacher’s experiences with literary theory in the classroom and in his/her own professional and/or recreational reading.
The University of Melbourne

Department of Language, Literacy and the Arts
Department of Learning and Educational Development

**Project title:**
*Professional development in literary theory for literature teachers: a new model?*

**Principal investigators:**
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**Other investigator:**
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e-mail: g.parr@edfac.unimelb.edu.au

This research project constitutes work toward a Master of Education degree.

The project will examine an alternative model of professional development for VCE literature teachers wishing to learn about literary theory and ways of incorporating it in their own practice. The project will initially analyse questionnaires of VCE literature teachers from across Victoria; subsequently, it will involve two mentoring sessions (one-to-one) with six to eight teachers, a peer professional development workshop and, finally, a follow-up interview with these same teachers. The mentoring sessions and interview (45 minutes each) and the peer workshop (one hour duration) will be audio-taped for analysis. Those participating in the mentoring sessions will meet other participants in the peer workshop, which suggests some limited implications for individual anonymity. The mentoring sessions and the workshop will be genuinely collaborative. This means the researcher will not be completely directing the sessions, but rather opening up for negotiation with the participant both the content and structure of each session.

You are invited to participate in this project on the understanding that:
1. Your participation is entirely voluntary
2. You are free to withdraw your consent to participate at any time
3. You are free to withdraw any unprocessed data that you have previously supplied
4. Your information will remain confidential, and both you and your school will remain anonymous in the publishing of any data through the use of pseudonyms and fictional school names.
5. If you have any concerns and/or complaints concerning this project, you should contact the persons listed above or the Executive Officer, Human Research Ethics, The University of Melbourne (ph. 8344.7507; fax:9347.6739).

The data will be kept in locked facilities in the Department of Learning and Educational Development for a period of five years from the date of publication of the research, after which time it will be destroyed.

Thank you for considering your participation in this project.

Graham Parr  
Department of Learning and Educational Development  
Education Faculty  
University of Melbourne  
ph: 8344.8411  
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Assoc. Prof. Ray Misson  
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Department of Language, Literacy and the Arts  
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Senior Lecturer  
Department of Learning and Educational Development  
Education Faculty  
University of Melbourne
Professional learning about literary theory

Session 1 – Wed 23 Oct 2002
Teachers sharing attitudes, experiences and ideas
(edited ‘highlights’!)

Contents

- Early awareness of literary theory
- Bringing our knowledge to the classroom
- Teaching strategies and resources
- Yeah, but is it theory?

Participating teachers

Fil
Graham (also as critical friend)
Jan
Lydia
Marianne
Robin
Sam
Early awareness of literary theory

When did you become aware that literary theory, or something like literary theory, had some bearing on what you were doing in teaching English or Literature?

1. Marianne
For me, it was when LM presented her ideas 4 years ago, when I first joined the department. I found it quite intimidating at the time, because I’d never come across anything about it before. Its presentation was very much as you suggested before, an expert coming in, running a session, and then I wasn’t really sure what we were supposed to do with it thereafter. …I can remember LM had put together some really interesting handouts about I think it was predominantly feminist … or Marxist feminist readings of nursery rhymes and advertisements from quite a long time ago - from the 1900s? While they were very interesting to look at, I wasn’t quite sure what the purpose of looking at them was, and whether we were supposed to then take that into our classrooms and explore that with our girls. And to what end? … Then later, I think we were studying Fly Away Peter, and LM again had done some presentations on post-colonial theory. That was the first time I had ever come across the notion.

2. Jan and Sam
Jan: I went to a series of 6 PDs on literary theory at Monash University.
Paula: Yes that’s what got me started. For me, I suppose it was academically interesting and so it held some challenges there. Because I don’t find it easy.
Graham: Mm. I don’t think anybody does.
Sam: Mm. But also, I mean it just seemed so obvious to me that it does inform our teaching.

3. Lydia
I have trouble separating the teaching of English from literary theory because that was the focus of my English degree. It was very much literary theory based, then straight into Dip Ed, then straight into teaching. My undergraduate degree was at La Trobe. La Trobe was challenging a lot of the literary theory that was coming out of Melbourne University and indeed Monash, so there was kind of a literary theory war going on between universities. Very good. A lot of fun. We were the Marxists and the feminists, and they were the deconstructionalists and it was kind of good.

4. Lydia
One of the earliest glimmerings I had that we were already using literary theory was maybe initiated by issues work where you talked about the way people were positioned by particular texts. Then that made me more aware of the fact that that was what we were doing in the
English classroom when we were talking about text. And, I’d come from Melbourne University, where we all got a big dose of deconstruction and also feminist literary theory. That’s something that I think we’d been doing anyway in our classrooms if we went to university and used these approaches there. But then doing it unconsciously and being aware of it are two different things, aren’t they? And then maybe, if you’re aware of it, I suppose what you need to do then is foreground that and make the students aware of it. So that was a step that I needed to take.

5. Robin
I was a bit surprised, after 25 years post my degree, to go back to university and look at the English literature course. And where our diet had been the literary canon, suddenly I thought, ‘I couldn’t do this degree. I don’t know what you’re talking about here.’ And so I felt marginalized by this whole debate …. I was just surprised. As my contact with students who were doing the course grew, I was expecting to be able to help them. And I suddenly realised that I couldn’t help them. I had not been a participant in the debate at all, and while I can see how it was informing some of the ways I was teaching, it certainly was a very inchoate sense of it. And I just felt entirely at sea. I thought, Oh, I don’t know what I am doing here. I don’t know how to participate. I don’t know the anchors, the parameters, the language. I felt really alienated. So I sort of retreated [laughter] back to my literary canon where I ended up reading more Dickens.
Bringing our knowledge of literary theory into classrooms

How does your knowledge of literary theory inform what you do in the classroom? Do you spend time explicitly introducing students to literary theory language or discourse? Or do you find it problematic to introduce some of the terminology or the discourse up front?

1. ‘I needed to let them know that … there were other ways of reading the text’

Sam: It seemed such a sensible thing to do with a text, to produce a feminist reading. And having gone through Melbourne University in the 70s and 80s, that was the way we looked at texts. So it seemed to me a natural thing to do, to question the patriarchal assumptions in a text. And it took me a while, I suppose, to think about the fact that maybe the students didn’t take it for granted the way I did. And I needed to let them know that this was a way of reading the text, but there were other ways of reading the text. And I think __’s PD sessions on critical literacy made me more aware of a variety of different perspectives and ways in which we could maybe make students aware of what those were and how they were operating.

2. ‘I’ve not spent a lot of time in the classroom really looking at literary theory’

Jan: I think that I’m really explicit with students about some things such as … you know, the meaning doesn’t just reside neatly in some printed page but we bring to our readings our interests and perspectives and so on, and we create that meaning and we have to … So that is very explicit in the Literature classroom. Very explicit, that the meaning is up for grabs and that you can read it from different perspectives and so on. And we will talk about doing a feminist reading of something, or doing a Marxist reading of something, but I have not spent a lot of time in the literature classroom really looking at literary theory.

3. ‘Some theories lend themselves better than others’

Marianne: This might be totally naïve, but I think that some theories lend themselves better than others to the classroom at this level, because students have had a background in some theory - for example, psycho-analytic theories, like Freud’s theories. They’ve learned about them in Psychology, or are currently doing it, and they’re able to apply their knowledge of that to what we do with literature. I’ve had some recent success, I think, introducing those notions to Yr 11 Literature students. But I would fear having to do that perhaps with structuralist or perhaps
post-colonial theory… I don’t think I would feel so confident with some of those other theories.

4. ‘I have tried to be much more explicit about literary theory … but …’
Lydia: I have tried to be much more explicit about literary theory this year with the IB students. And I’ve tried to introduce different theories, but sometimes I feel that it’s a little, like you were saying, a little bit false … when I’m trying to give them a nutshell definition and see how they can apply it. And some texts, like some of the ones we’ve been doing, like some of the Latin American texts, obviously lend themselves to Marxist and feminist criticism. But I wouldn’t be trying to do a post-structuralist interpretation of them. There are limits to how useful I find it, I suppose. But it’s absolutely essential to what we’ve been doing with these particular texts.

Graham: Essential in terms of the way that you have constructed your reading as the teacher, or you and your students…?

Lydia: I think both.

5. ‘In IB, the world lit assignment pushes us to use literary theory’
Lydia: One of the assessment tasks for IB is a world literature assignment, where students have to compare two of the texts, and they have to come up with different topics, and they have to come up with their own topics. So it forces them to look for things that they may not normally look for. They might compare two female characters, and we might look at the construction of that, and then we might point them toward some feminist theory. Or they might be looking at the role of the political structures, the church and government, so what does that tell us about, you know, post-colonial influences or whatever. So I suppose the world lit assignment pushes us to use literary theory even just for the purposes of coming up with different topics…

Graham: It actually helps students to frame essay topics if they are framed in terms of some theoretical view?

6. ‘Different theoretical frameworks are raised’
Jan: I think this is very similar to what we do in ‘Views and Values’ questions in VCE Literature. In devising the questions, which we’re really doing with the class, those different theoretical frameworks are raised. We’ve just done The Bacchae, and you know the students have got a reading on The Bacchae which would make...
gender central. And a reading on The Bacchae which would make the psychological drama central. And a reading on The Bacchae which would make the old notion of piety to the gods or whatever central. And they will read critical readings which ask them to think about, and take them through, some theory. But we haven’t foregrounded that in the teaching.

7. ‘I thought students would be completely distracted by those sorts of debates.’

Robin: My knowledge of literary theory made me reassess my agenda, which had been implicit in much of what I had said in class, but I had been unaware of it. And so it made me much more sensitive to the ways in which I presented, and I wanted to do something about the plurality of approaches to texts. But I didn’t really want the framework, or the structure or the language of it, to become the issue. So I tended to avoid the terminology. I might introduce concepts, I think as you were suggesting, and I might talk about ways to use literary theory concepts. But I didn’t say: ‘Here’s a Marxist theory.’ or “This is…” because I just thought that students would be completely distracted by those sorts of debates.

8. ‘Literary theory like a sausage factory?’

Graham: We may be used to approaching our teaching of texts in a particular way, perhaps with a particular theory underpinning our teaching. But if all of the texts end up sounding the same way, or if our classes end up sounding the same way, then literary theory is actually not working. It becomes a bit like a sausage factory: you put in the text and out comes the reading. And that’s something that we want to avoid.

9. ‘It informs my practice … makes me more reflexive’

Jan: Did you see in the Education Age earlier this year, there was a little article reporting on an academic – I don’t know where she was speaking – but saying that literary theory was leading to very sterile classrooms, and ‘What was happening to the love of the story!’? … They were asking me if I thought that English teachers were moving over to theoretical approaches to literature and losing the other. And I was saying I just didn’t think it was that clear a dichotomy at all, between one and the other. I talked about what literary theory did for me. It informs my practice, makes me much more self-conscious about things that I used to just … It makes me more reflexive, I suppose, or self-conscious about the ways I might perpetuate particular power relations, by my very blindness to what I was doing. But in our own English classrooms, I’m sure that there is not that feeling that

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1 Margaret Cook (2002). Critical need to keep the fun in literacy.’ Education Age, 31 July 2002, 3.
students are losing the sense of making their response to a text because they’re somehow being asked to cast some framework over it. I don’t think that happens in our teaching.

10. ‘She’s doing a feminist reading!’

**Sam:** In my Year 11IB class, we started off with an overview of a range of critical perspectives. I talked about them and told the girls what they were. And in reading journal exercises I asked them to do particular readings of particular parts of the text. We had a moment in class the other day when [name of student] – I don’t know whether any of you know [student name] but she can be fairly dogmatic and the others can be a little bit overawed by her sometimes – and she was expounding her point of view about something about Antigone, and I said: ‘What kind of reading is [student name] doing there?’ and someone said, ‘She’s doing a feminist reading.’ And we said, ‘Well, can you do another kind of reading?’ So that kind of thing is, I think, a good thing to be happening in a classroom.

11. ‘The reading that is given there might not necessarily be valid.’

**Fil:** The thing about the IB is … We were looking at a poem today, and one kid said: “Oh, yeah, but the reading that is given there might not necessarily be a valid one or the only one or…” You know, there is that strong sense of meaning being negotiated, and doing that close analysis of language does help students to … And Lydia’s right, given some theoretical background they will, even looking at a George Elliot passage as they were today, they come, they understand Mr Arthur Donnithorne versus Hetty…

12. ‘They’ve got to defend the way they read’

**Jan:** I really think that something that has changed in my awareness as I teach is how comfortable students are now with that notion that they’ve got to defend the way they read it, and they’ve only got the text with which to do it. But, you know, they can just really have a go. And that is so different from, well, my own time as an English student, where I was so anxious about what the text meant.

13. ‘And now we’re having a class on literary theory?’

**Jan:** It’s so hard to be sure about how explicit you are in teaching literary theory. But we didn’t have a class where I said, “And now we’re having a class on literary theory.” Although, at the beginning of the year I certainly would have introduced them to notions of reading and meaning being negotiated between the mind of the reader and the words on the page and the values implicit in those words… the values of the person who’s bringing the interpretation to bear … and the values of the writer in their constructing of the text. So
we would have had classes like that. And we would have given them readings where we’d say, “Look, here is a feminist analysis of Mrs Roxburgh.”

14. ‘Struggling with the concept’

Jan: This morning two of my Year 12 English kids came to me and said: “We’re struggling with the concept of the male gaze … When you’re talking about the male gaze in relation to Vermeer’s portrait of Griet in Girl with the Pearl Earring, and you talk about the power of the gaze …” What they were saying is: “The power of the gaze: Is it her gaze out to the audience? Or is it the audience’s gaze looking at her?” And we were talking about that. And they came to very sophisticated conclusions about it, but …. I talked to them about the fact that this was a term that came out of feminist theory. But, you know, we weren’t presenting it like it was a lesson in feminist theory.
Teaching strategies and / or resources

1. ‘Writing on the text’: ‘Jack and Jill’ or ‘Thomas the Tank Engine’ (or other child’s literature)
   - Scan some pages of a well-known child’s storybook to make a narrative on PowerPoint that can be accessed on-line. (Choose a narrative, like ‘Jack and Jill’, where there are clear gaps and/or absences in the narrative.)
   - Ask students to perform a quick role-play of the narrative to represent a so-called ‘natural’ interpretation.
   - Discuss - in small groups? - the ways the reader is positioned by the text, with particular attention given to gaps or absences in the text.
   - Each small group creates their re-constructing of the narrative, drawing attention to the gaps in the text by ‘writing on the text’: ie. adding in dialogue with callout balloons or text-boxes on (or between) the existing slides.

2. Subverting conventional fairy stories
I’ve done that, much more explicitly, with fairy stories or a combination of fairy stories, where the only good woman was a dead woman – or the woman is silent and conscious and can’t speak, but is very beautiful. And that works well. And then, of course, you could put it alongside, you know, the fairy stories that completely subvert that notion. [See transcript for details of some Chalkface Press titles that can be used with these sorts of strategies.]

3. Deconstructing contemporary music videos
[See Deborah Appleman’s strategy for students deconstructing a contemporary music video – from Teaching theory to adolescents]

4. A frame for literary theory?
Often it is the case that some of the discourse that we’ve already integrated into our understanding and our readings of the text, we introduce in a classroom a little at a time. … Occasionally we may need to highlight a particular term like ‘ideology’ or ‘commodity’. Some terms like that we might actually spend a moment, put them on the board, and explain them. We don’t … we tend not to do this with a huge list of vocabulary and then ask the students to go away and learn it, because we don’t think that is particularly good for authentic or long-term learning. So I just think that a lot of the time, we are actually teaching this language explicitly, but we’re not teaching it in a frame that says, ‘This is just literary theory.’

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5. Situating politics of fictional literature into current day political events

(i) In our reading of *Antigone* at the moment, in Year 11 IB, we’re looking at the way we are positioned to be sympathetic to Antigone and to be critical of Creon. And if you put it into the context of Antigone being a … suicide bomber and Creon being George Bush, then all of a sudden students start to see it in an entirely different way.

(ii) We did that with *The Bacchae* in Year 12 VCE Literature…The students were so critical of Pentheus and, you know, Dionysus was some sort of foreigner with long hair and flowing cloaks and strange religious beliefs. But when I suggested ‘Well, what about President Bush and Osama Bin Laden?’ …

6. Using reading journals

In my Year 11IB class, we started off with an overview of a range of critical perspectives. I talked about them and told the girls what they were. And in reading journal exercises I asked them to do particular readings of particular parts of the text.
Yeah, but is it theory?

To what extent are we teaching with literary theory here, especially in the fun little activities mentioned above? Are we teaching with literary theory? Are we teaching literary theory? Or a watered-down version of theory?

1. ‘A stepping stone’
   **Marianne:** Oh, it’s a stepping stone, I think. It’s a start into it, at a very accessible level. We have students in our classes who are not going to enjoy the nature of this discourse, I suppose, just purely on the complexity level. So it’s a good way into it for them, and for building on that thereafter.

2. ‘Handlebars’
   **Lydia:** I agree, because I think these are the handlebars. With the unseen passages and poems that we give the girls in IB, sometimes they have trouble understanding the basic concept of what the passage might be. And it does give them, potentially, ways in.

3. ‘to make visible what has been naturalised’
   **Jan:** But also it is a way to help them understand what I think they still – and, indeed, all of us - find it hard to understand, the ways that dominant social values are invisible to us, because of the very fact that they are the dominant social values…See, my students when we’ve been talking about *Cat’s Eye*, still basically believe that that was the ‘40s, and [laughter] our world today is entirely different…. and it’s very hard to make visible what has been naturalised for them in their world. So I think that little exercises like that are, you know, initially, really good ways of helping them to see what we don’t make explicit.

4. ‘to validate a multiplicity of readings’
   **Fil:** And it does help validate a multiplicity of readings, by showing that students’ own readings may have some validity because there is a wide range of theoretical readings of something and they are entitled to agree or disagree with them.
Other issues

1. Teachers’ own learning experiences in secondary school English

Jan: In my own time as an English student, I was so anxious about what the text meant.

Sam: Well, we were taught the right way to analyse it, weren’t we? We were taught what it meant.

Lydia: And we were in search of the author’s meaning, which was …

Jan: And it existed! It existed!

Marianne: It existed, yes.

Sharna: And all teachers knew it.

Lydia: And the author was infallible as well, because they had a gift from God … just kind of transferred through the pen onto the page, and we were the ones who had to unlock it.

2. You’ve turned them into cynics?

Hilary: When Robin and I showed our classes The Killing Fields, my poor kids had been through a sort of anti-American diatribe from me. And they were watching it together. And when it came to the ending of the film there were distinctly different readings. When the photographer and Dith Pran were reunited, Robin’s class were sort of going ‘Ohhh’, and my class were going ‘Urgggkhh’ … And Robin said, ‘You’ve turned them into cynics,’ and I thought, ‘Oh ’…

3. Teachers should keep their opinions to themselves?

Paula: Do you know what [name of student] said to Stevie? “Ms Brahn, I don’t think it’s fair that you should be giving your opinion so explicitly in that way and trying to persuade us.”
Toward post-colonial literary theory

Colonialism in history

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<th>Colonial periods</th>
<th>Post-colonial periods</th>
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<td>A period during which imperial colonizers sought out and gained /assumed power over so-called ‘new’ lands (or just other lands) and their peoples (especially indigenous peoples). This classically includes the British and European colonizers before the 20th Century as they colonized the ‘New World’. But it also applies to the USA in contemporary times, through the powerful influence of US popular culture internationally. And we in Australia know that this sort of dynamic can operate within a country in the actions and discourse of the dominant colonizing power toward indigenous cultures or minority cultural groups.</td>
<td>A period following colonization during which people become/became aware of the oppressive consequences of colonization (especially on the colonized peoples and lands). One common focus for much of this awareness is a laying bare of the colonizers’ assumptions of cultural superiority. Another focus is an ongoing exploration into the manner in which the tensions between the colonizer and colonized were/are rationalised, subverted or perhaps perpetuated by different people (ie in hegemonies – ie. where the oppressed group/s participate in and seem to support the systems and discourse that help to maintain their oppressed condition).</td>
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Reading literature

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<th>Pre-colonial literature</th>
<th>Colonial literature</th>
<th>Post-colonial literatures / Postcolonial discourse</th>
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<td>This period in literary terms refers to any time in a place leading up to the imposition or introduction of an apparently external culture that would substantially alter the ‘existing’ or indigenous culture. This period is often represented in literature and films in romanticised terms as a state of innocence, of purity about to be defiled.</td>
<td>Any literature (or film) whose intrinsic imperialist values are evident in the sense of the success of the colonizing process. Often such literature positions the reader to believe certain underlying assumptions about the superiority of the colonizing culture and the inferiority of the colonized culture or peoples. Some ‘classic’ examples of texts that fit this category include: H. Beecher Stowe’s Uncle Tom’s Cabin, Rudyard Kipling’s Kim and The Jungle Book(s), Boldrewood’s Robbery Under Arms (See also stories of Babar the Elephant!!)</td>
<td>A post-colonial text is one that seems overtly to position a reader to critically reflect on the world as it exists/existed during the period of imperial domination by a colonizing power and to consider the effect that this colonization has had on the colonized culture ever since that time. Writers we may be familiar with whose writing is unarguably post-colonial include: Margaret Atwood, Jean Rhys, VS Naipaul, Patrick White, JM Coetzee.. A post-colonial reading of any text may be one that highlights overtly post-colonial views and values in a text. It may also seek to expose certain colonial values, views or belief systems that are less overt (or naturalised) in a text that may not seem to be particularly concerned with colonial power relations or colonial assumptions. Just as a reader may well use feminist or Marxist or deconstructionist theory to construct a reading of a variety of texts, so too it is possible to use post-colonial theory to read a wide range of literature. For instance, one very popular reading of Shakespeare’s The Tempest features a concern with what is seen as the arrogant colonizing assumptions of the magician, Prospero, especially in his treatment of the apparently ‘beastly’ Caliban.</td>
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A guide to developing post-colonial readings: Binary oppositions themselves are often considered a colonial construction, usually privileging one side of the opposition in favour of the dominant colonizing culture. However, when beginning to develop a sense of post-colonialism in the classroom, it may be helpful to consider post-colonial approaches to literature in opposition to some seemingly colonial or imperialist approaches. The language highlighted in pink is part of the discourse of postcolonialism.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Colonial or Imperialist approach</strong></th>
<th><strong>Post-colonial literatures (and/or readings of literature) seek to …</strong></th>
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<tr>
<td>English literature as a discipline requires careful and close study of a set of civilizing books (the canon) and these books tell of universal ‘truths’ of good character and moral values. (The study of English was historically closely associated with the growth of the British Empire,)</td>
<td>… subvert the influence or control of the canon in thinking about literature. Then post-colonial sensibility sees the canon as including and privileging only a very narrow view of certain cultures’ (often dead, white/British males) views of the world. Post-colonial approaches seek to broaden an awareness of the full range of cultures in the world (multiculturalism) and to appreciate the rich diversity of literatures written and produced throughout the world.</td>
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<tr>
<td>The ‘moral values’ referred to above are constructed from simple binary oppositions, which seem to be self-evident (naturalised): eg. civilisation / savagery; humanity / barbarism; modern / primitive; self / other ….</td>
<td>… expose the constructed nature of these oppositions, and in so doing problematise them. For instance, Was the colonizing power really civilised in their massacre of indigenous peoples? Is it appropriate to celebrate 1992 in America (quincentenary) and 1988 in Australia (bi-centenary) as moments deserving of great pride in the Colonial enterprise, when the earlier events were quickly followed by such horrific treatment of the indigenous peoples?</td>
</tr>
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<td>In values, cultural practices, institutions and art there is always a ‘privileged norm’ at the centre of the colonial enterprise, and anything that varies from this is considered not essential, is different and therefore of less value, or is different and therefore dangerous. Anything not ‘central’ was the more easily dismissed or rejected.</td>
<td>… deconstruct and expose the way this system of ‘privileged norm’ operates. The language that is used to discuss/analyse such operations includes words like ‘privilege’, ‘central’ and ‘centred’, whereas the other terms are referred to as ‘peripheral’, ‘marginal’, ‘marginalised’ and ‘alienated’. Often, post-colonial readings will seek to ‘de-centre’ a system of values that has assumed that something like culture or identity is ‘central’ or ‘at the essence’. (That is, they will argue how the idea of this culture being central is a construction that suits those belonging to the dominant colonising culture. They may show how other cultures have just as much right to be central. Or else they will challenge the whole paradigm of a world where people feel the need to have a central dominant culture.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colonising cultures will often make claims for objective analysis, or objective truth. This is either a conscious or an unconscious desire to hide certain prejudices or cultural biases that strongly underpin a viewing of the world.</td>
<td>… expose the various prejudices, biases and cultural assumptions that undermine any claims to objectivity and universal truth.</td>
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<tr>
<td>The British colonizing enterprise was about transferring the values and cultural practices of Britain into countries and places throughout the western world. This served to de-emphasise any differences in landscape, climate or environment (or culture) except in terms of it being different from Britain as a place, and thereby inherently inferior to it (or quaintly / trivially exotic).</td>
<td>… emphasise the importance of place, and landscape, and to illustrate the significant ways in which places are different from each other. This translates into a concern for individuals’ feelings of “connection”, “displacement” or “alienation” when confronted with a different place or environment. In turn, this gives rise to a characteristic post-colonial preoccupation with the individual’s relationship with place (land). The fact that many indigenous cultures have such a strong sensitivity to this relationship, and yet this sensitivity has been historically ignored or undervalued by colonizing powers is clearly of interest to any post-colonial sensibility. (NB. David Malouf and Margaret Atwood)</td>
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<tr>
<td>There is a prevailing European tendency to want to generalise about the human condition or about universal truths</td>
<td>… explore the validity of these generalising tendencies. Often, they are shown to be hiding or ignoring differences that do exist in cultural beliefs and practices. A post-colonial reading seeks to explain, understand and value these differences rather than dismiss them in an all-consuming desire to generalise.</td>
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Excerpt from an email from Jan to Graham: 30/06/2004 4:38 PM

Comments on draft of article written for *English teaching: practice and critique*

The quote below gives just a ‘flavour’ of Jan’s comments. They refer to a section of the article with the sub-heading “Contesting the rhetoric of individual professional.”

“This point encapsulates my own experience, Graham. I have always thought that my involvement in VATE was almost entirely self interested – in that it makes me enjoy the classroom more. And that is because I get a buzz out of the sort of collaborative and informal learning that comes from being part of a community of teachers. And I feel quite certain that the buzz is transferred on to the students. When I gave my class that article on critical literacy in the Literature classroom which you once gave us [ie. Vernon 2004], they read it with fascination, because they could see how I was engaged in thinking about what was happening in our very own classroom – and that I was in no way an all-knowing presence. In other words, I don’t want a formula, or ‘diagnosis’ of my pathology or anything like that from my professional development – I just want a bit of a zing through my blood, and that is what I want to pass on.”
APPENDIX VIII: A SUMMARY OF ACTIVITIES, READINGS AND RESOURCES FOR ALL SESSIONS OF THE LITERARY THEORY INQUIRY GROUP (OCTOBER 2002 TO DECEMBER 2003)

Session 1: Attitudes and pathways to literary theory (Wed 23 Oct 2002)
- Sharing autobiographical stories about early awareness of literary theory and its relevance to our teaching and professional identity
- Bringing our developing knowledge of literary theory into the classroom
- Discussion of some classroom approaches and texts used in these approaches: eg. ‘Jack and Jill’ and ‘Thomas the Tank Engine’
- Proposing some metaphors for literary theory

Readings:

Session 2: The influences of literary theory on teaching practices (Thurs 14 Nov 2002)
- Inquiring into the notion of ‘resistant readings’ – stories from the classroom
- Critically considering theories of ‘Deconstruction’ and classroom practices associated with this: Is it a ‘dangerous tool’ for the literature classroom?
- Further consideration of the big picture of literary theory and its relationship to literature teaching and our professional identity
- Deconstructing and collaboratively constructing readings of John Donne’s ‘The Good Morrow’

Readings:
- Donne, John, ‘The Good Morrow’
Session 3: Literary theory and mixed abilities in the classroom (Thurs 8 May 2003)

- Writing about professional learning in literary theory (Reflecting on the professional learning process with this group and outside)
- Listening to and responding to Jo’s ‘story’ about her professional pathway to, and experiences of, teaching with literary theory
- Reflecting on Toni Vernon’s article (2002) “Literary theory in VCE literature: from personal excitement to teaching practice”
- Literary theory and assessment – linking into VCE and IB
- ‘Talking back to the text’: Critical reflection through (literary) parody (‘Little Miss Muffett’ and J. Donne’s ‘The Flea’)

Readings/Resources:
- ‘Jo,’ “Implementing critical literacy in the classroom (in WA)” – a collection of resources and student samples

Session 4: ‘Post-colonialism and colonialism – unpacking the discourses’ (Mon 7 July 2003)

- A reading of, and reflection on, Babar the Elephant
- The discourse of colonialism in literature: constructing and re-constructing understandings of post-colonial discourse
- Reporting on postcolonial readings and approaches to Dream Stuff
- Discussing some excerpts of VCE literature texts in post-colonial terms

Readings/Resources
- Brunhoff, Jean De., Babar the Elephant
- Malouf, D., Dream stuff, from Dream stuff
- ‘Jan,’ ‘Dream stuff, by David Malouf’ (Ppt presentation made to colleagues in senior English department at Eastern Girls’ College)
- Parr, G., ‘Post-Colonialism & Colonialism’ – Handout for teachers and possibly students
- Excerpts from Patrick White’s A fringe of leaves and Jack Davies’s No sugar
Session 5: ‘Reader Response theory: How democratic is it, after all?’ (Wed 10 Sept. 2003)

- ‘Posting’ anonymous (and sometimes playful) interpretations of William Blake’s ‘The Sick Rose’; these were later re-distributed to members of the group who then developed these interpretations into fuller readings of the poem (again, often in playful ways)
- Sharing some thinking and experiences of teaching with reader-response theory
- Discussing articles by Eagleton and Fish in terms of the question: ‘How democratic is reader response theory?’

**Readings/Resources**

- Blake, W., The Sick Rose
- Britten, B. Serenade for tenor, horn and strings, op. 31 (Peter Pears, tenor, and Barry Tuckwell, French horn, with the LSO, cond. By B Britten)


- Exploring notions of the gaze: A reading from, then reflections on teaching Tracey Chevalier’s *The girl with the pearl earring*
- Considering Fuery and Mansfield’s perspectives on ‘The gaze’ – also Eagleton’s reactionary response to the gaze and other theories
- Constructing a reading of J Wright’s ‘Woman to man’ and some poems by J Forbes

**Readings:**

- Chevalier, T. (1999) *Girl with a pearl earring*
- Forbes, J., ‘Love Poem’ and ‘Three songs for Charles Darwin’
- Wright, J., ‘Woman to Man’
APPENDIX IX: REFLECTIVE WRITING ACTIVITY SCHEDULED FOR THE START OF SESSION 3 OF THE INQUIRY GROUP. THIS INCLUDES CHOICE OF FOUR STEMS THAT TEACHERS WERE INVITED TO USE IN THEIR REFLECTIVE WRITING

LITERARY THEORY INQUIRY GROUP
Thursday 8th May 2003

Reflective writing (about 10-15 mins)

Please choose one of the following:

1. In our two sessions so far, we have talked about a range of ‘issues’ in relation to literary theory. What do you see as the central ‘problems’ of teaching with literary theory? How (if at all) have you dealt with these ‘problems’ in your teaching of (or preparing to teach) a senior literary text this year?

2. Do you remember the story, related in Deborah Appleman’s book, concerning the student who passionately upbraided her teachers for teaching her about deconstruction? It generated tremendous discussion in our group. Indeed, many of our group members have used stories as a productive way of opening up an idea with the group. Give a brief account of a literary theory ‘moment’ – from your classroom or from the ‘staffroom’ (ie. English department). It does not have to be world-shattering or life-changing. As we know, sometimes it is the small or seemingly innocuous moment from a teacher’s professional life that proves most rewarding for reflection.

3. Finish some or all of the following stems. Feel free to write in more detail, or at greater length, in response to one or another of the prompts, as you wish.

   One thing that excites / intrigues me about literary theory is …

   One aspect of literary theory that I want to know more about is …

   One way in which I feel my students have benefited from my interest in literary theory is…

   One thing that (still) bothers me about teaching with literary theory is …
APPENDIX X: EXCERPT FROM TRANSCRIPT OF SESSION 1 OF THE LITERARY THEORY INQUIRY GROUP (23 OCTOBER 2002), WHERE JAN SPEAKS ABOUT HER BELIEF THAT LITERARY THEORY HELPS HER TO BE REFLEXIVE ABOUT HER OWN THINKING ABOUT TEXTS

Jan: Did you see in the *Education Age* earlier this year? There was a little article about … reporting on an academic – I don’t know where she was speaking – but … saying that literary theory was leading to very sterile classrooms, and ..What was happening to the love of the story?” … and so on.

Graham: I didn’t read that….

Jan: Well, it was just a little thing in the *Age*, because *The Age* rang me up and asked me to comment on it, and so I made a little comment on it.

Graham: And what did you say?

Jan: Oh, … ah, I can’t remember [laughter] exactly, but it was the fact that … so they were asking me as … you know if I thought that English teachers were just moving over to theoretical approaches to literature and losing the other. And I was saying I just didn’t think it was that clear a dichotomy at all - between one and the other … that what literary theory did for me was inform my practice, um make me much more self-conscious about things that I used to just … make me more reflexive I suppose or self-conscious about the ways I might perpetuate um you know particular … um power relations, by my very blindness to what I was doing, but … I didn’t I don’t think I mean - and all of us think in our own English classrooms, I’m sure - that … There is not that sense that students are losing that sense of making their response to a text because they’re somehow being asked to cast some framework over it. I don’t think that happens in our teaching.

Graham: Well, it’s nice if we can say that. I also think that it’s something we need to stay conscious of, that if any of the theories end up being another orthodoxy that um we just reproduce and … texts go in and come out looking exactly the same … responses are predictable [ie.] when you take a feminist response to a text, you can predict what people area going to say about it. It’s a worry. Can I …? Sorry, Sue, go on.

Sam: I was going to say, it’s nice that we have the idea of competing readings operating. And we’ve got students expressing a point of view from a particular critical perspective about the same text in the class. …
Given the political siege under which the English teaching profession in Australia was operating in 2005, the summer brought some welcome relief. The attacks on the profession had climaxed with the release of *Teaching Reading*, the fundamentally flawed report from the Federal Government’s *National Literacy Inquiry*. This report, together with the clamorous and regressive calls for a national English curriculum had capped off a difficult year for the profession. True, the clamour had not completely died down. *The Australian* newspaper continued to publish the neo-conservative rantings of the likes of Kevin Donnelly about falling literacy standards, the evils of postmodernism (and other enduring educational ‘fads’ [sic.]), and the idiocy of teacher education courses and educational research. There were occasional splutters of outrage from letter writers still proclaiming phonics as cure-all. Apart from this, education generally and English teaching in particular were largely off the mainstream media’s radar-screens for the summer.

So it was that I began to read *Silent no more: voices of courage in American schools* in late January, a slim volume of teaching stories, published in 2003 by Heineman. The ‘voices’ in the title refer to the autobiographical narratives of once highly acclaimed classroom practitioners in the US now writing about their struggle to keep their jobs (or, more often, to reconstruct their decimated professional and personal lives). Such is the fate, apparently, of teachers who refuse to submit in silence to the sweep of neoliberal educational reform across America. The title might suggest melodrama to some readers, but with few exceptions, I found the voices to be restrained, carefully modulated, and absorbing, the more impressive because these teacher-writers had been treated so shabbily in a Kafka-esque world of obfuscation and mystification.

The blurb frames the collection by sketching out the educational environment in America, just prior to the introduction of George Bush’s *No Child Left Behind* policies (ie. in 2002): ‘In the current restrictive educational atmosphere of high-stakes testing and narrowed, scripted curriculum, teachers’ voices are often muted by ….’ Inevitably, my thoughts drifted uncomfortably to the recent calls in Australia, such as in the *Teaching Reading Report*, for more and more testing of reading skills in schools, and the recommendations in the same *Report* for scripted teaching of phonics (what Mem Fox has appropriately dubbed ‘extreme phonics’). And I shuddered at the prospect of a reductive one-size-fits-all English curriculum being imposed on Australian teachers and students.

That shudder recurred many more times as I got further into the book. Early in the collection, there is a narrative account by experienced teacher and principal, Dr Joanne Yatvin, of her involvement in the US National Reading Panel (NRP) in 1998-9. In the
ironically titled, ‘Science means what we say it means, or, My adventure in wonderland’, Yatvin writes of her voice being repeatedly ignored when she tried to question the reductiveness of the NRP’s definition of ‘research-based knowledge’ about reading and literacy. (Sound familiar?). Further, she documents the manner in which she was sidelined in the pseudo-debate after the release of the panel’s report, and explains how any position as teacher or administrator in her school district was ultimately made untenable for her because she was seen as subversive in the NRP process. She wasn’t officially sacked, though.

Less fortunate were several of the other teacher-writers in this collection. Their principled and critically informed beliefs about teaching and learning in a democratic society prompted them to make public statements or to take public stands on key educational issues. For speaking out, they were punished. Several teachers bore the brunt of professional and personal threats because they chose to focus their teaching on the interests and needs of the particular students in their charge (mostly those in cultural disadvantaged settings), rather than mechanically implement the one-size-fits-all curriculum they were told to teach. Other teachers dared to speak out about the dangers of mandatory centralised testing, and publicly critiqued some deeply flawed high-stakes tests. Their teaching licenses were terminated, and/or they lost their jobs, and/or they were threatened with imprisonment.

Of course, one cannot attest to the veracity of all claims in this book, but the highly litigious environment from which these teachers are writing does, ironically, provide some guarantees. You get the feeling these teachers cannot afford to be fictionalising their accounts.

Having said that, I must say it is reassuring when these teacher-writers ground their narratives within a carefully considered critical reflection on the educational issues at stake. In the most compelling chapters, stories of citizens’ fundamental human rights being abused – disturbing enough! - are interwoven with arguments about the dangers of standardised testing in schools or mindless implementation of scripted curriculums. When this combination – dramatic narrative and critical grounding - is achieved, the writing powerfully invites professional dialogue with its readers, challenging them to respond proactively, rather than merely shocking them and leaving them open-mouthed (but passive) at the injustice of it all. At its best, the writing in this collection provides a model, and an inspiration, for teacher-writers in Australia to respond to their professional environment, to engage their colleagues in a focused professional dialogue about issues that matter to them and their students, and to advocate against the neoliberal shutting-down of critical debate.

My shuddering through all this was not just at the apparent injustice of it all – both for the US teaching profession and for the students affected – although these emotions remain with me now as I write this review. The influence of neoliberalism on many educational settings in America is deeply disturbing. The teacher-writers in this book evoke a political and educational culture that is about as far removed as it is possible to be from Habermas’s vision of democratic ‘public spheres’ or Wenger’s notion of inclusive ‘communities of practice’. Not for them a professional culture where different stakeholders can come together to improve teaching and learning through a commitment to open conversation, a concern for mutual understanding and a valuing of unforced consensus. Ah, but things are much better in Australia, right? Well … there are some
who would say we do not need to look far to see the cloud of neoliberal reform
darkening education policies and practices in Australia already. Taken as a whole, this
collection constructs a chilling, cautionary tale for anyone in the world who values
democracy and social justice in education.

Graham Parr
8 Feb 2006
APPENDIX XII: EXCERPT FROM TRANSCRIPT OF SESSION 6 OF THE INQUIRY GROUP (4 DEC 2003), SHOWING THE GROUNDED NATURE OF CONVERSATION LEADING UP TO THE EXCERPT OF TRANSCRIPT IN FIGURE 5.3

Jo
What I found interesting with my classes as they worked through the text [Girl with a pearl earring]… We read it at the beginning of the year, and then they came back to it of course for revision and that…. I suppose they developed and, in a sense, I sort of pushed them a lot as well … But first of all, yeah, they were taken in by the narrative. You know, you can read it as a simple romance genre blah blah blah. But I had to constantly keep reminding them about the point of view…. Whose point of view is it from? It’s always …. You know, there are always more things to be looked at… And the more sophisticated students towards the end were writing about that and getting that critical distance, and, you know, thinking a bit more about their part of the construction of the narrative as well. Which, I think, is something we need to give them too.

Sam
Well that’s what the article was talking about in a way wasn’t it? …. the way the text constructs the reader of the text.

Jan
There was a good quote I highlighted actually which says the whole concept of perspective can be seen as part of the desire to understand and even manipulate the gaze of the reader.

Graham
But the other thing which it says is …A lot of these ideas in the notion of the male gaze are constructed on notions of the text being all-powerful and the text acting on the reader. This leaves out … all of those sort of contextual problematics which we, which I think would be interesting to study.

Jo
I can’t remember. Does it say anything? I read the start… When I’ve done the male gaze before we um talk about our complicity in taking part in the gaze. I think I brought it up with the girls in class. It was just before the formal and we’d done the whole thing on the male gaze. And we had looked at the [notion of the] ‘new woman’ and the advertising and that sort of thing. And I said, “Well, look, what about your school formal coming up? You know, you’re going to be dressing up and you know you’re nervous about your clothes and … How do you feel about [your formal] now that you know about this? And they’re like ... ‘Yeah.’

Jan
But they always argue that ...

Jo
And they always say, ‘No, it’s just for us.’ … But that again leaves itself to ...

Jan
Of course it does. With whose eyes do we look at ourselves and each other?

Sam
...and why is there competition? ...

Jan
… and how invisible is it? And how is our subjectivity created in order that we see through a particular perspective? One of the things I think about Chevalier [ie. author of Girl with a pearl earring]….You know, you were saying, it doesn’t matter if she is in control of the narrative or whatever. But for me and this is where I am seduced by the way the writer - I am seduced by what the writer is doing which is not necessarily the narrative …. I think of Cat’s Eye and I am absolutely overwhelmed by how cleverly it’s put together, …how invisibly and yet cleverly the subterranean light of the text....
is working on us. And so I find that extremely satisfying. But that is because I have become absolutely seduced by Attwood’s powerful literary conceit and things like that, which is a little bit different from the narrative. And here, you know, I sort of like the narrative, but once I was looking beyond the narrative, for other things that wouldn’t thrill me I was at a loss and ...

**Sam**
Do you really think so?

**Graham**
There’s a question about invisibility …

**Jan**
I don’t know if she does it. I don’t think it’s invisible to her

**Sam**
But it’s not invisible to you either. You’re a sophisticated reader

**Jan**
Yes, I know. But when I’m caught up in the narrative, there are a whole lot of things that are invisible to me. So as I was saying to you before, the framing of that whole story [in *Cat’s Eye*] in the images of two young girls and two old women on the aeroplane at the end, I missed out that [in my first readings]. I mean now I’ve got a very - my whole reading of the text has altered because I have thought consciously about that framing and …. But I’ve probably read the text at least twice without thinking consciously about that framing.

**Sam**
But a text like that [ie. *Cat’s Eye*] and like this [*Girl with a pearl earring*] is not going to reveal itself to you all at once is it.

**Jan**
No, but that’s what I mean about being invisible. I don’t mean that it’s actually invisible but what I mean is that it’s slowly it only slowly becomes visible to me.

**Sam**
Whereas with Chevalier I found she uses the symbolism but she kind of shouted it out, so it was a little bit clunky in parts.

**Graham**
It seems to me …. There’s the man outside with the pole, thrusting into the water and then we ...

**Sam**
I missed that! [laughter]

**Jan**
Graham, I never read that!

**Graham**
Sorry … at least I … [laughing] … Oh dear. [more laughter]

**Jo**
Yeah, I think I missed that too.

**Jan**
But you see I find …

**Sam**
I’m glad I missed that. [laughter]

**Jo**
… and the blood under the finger nails.

**Graham**
But that’s a cheap shot on my part. There were a couple of those things which are very very clear. The visibility of some of those things isn’t a strong part of the text yet in other ways … its a different sort of visibility…
**Handout 1: Professional Learning Design Principles**

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<tr>
<td><strong>1.</strong> Focuses on needs of students and what they need to learn</td>
<td>Core of Common elements that describe effective development as: 1. Experiential, engaging teachers in concrete tasks of teaching, assessment and observation. 2. Grounded in participants’ questions, inquiry, and experimentation as well as research on effective practice. 3. Collaborative, involving sharing of knowledge among educators. 4. Connected to and derived from teachers’ work with their students as well as connected to examination of subject matter and teaching methods 5. Sustained, intensive and supported by follow-up activities. 6. Connected to other aspects of school improvement in a coherent manner.</td>
<td>Synthesis of current literature suggests that effective professional learning is: Focussed – on what students are to learn and integral to daily practices and operations. Evidence driven – based upon student learning outcomes, sound theory and research. Empowering – teachers contribute to the identification of professional learning needs and experiences within a focussed framework. Learner-centred – experiential and grounded in participants’ questions Collaborative – involving individual reflection and collective inquiry. Challenging- sharing knowledge and skills underlying current theory and research. Evaluated – using multiple sources of information about student outcomes and teaching strategies. Sustained and supported – involving follow-up and opportunities for further learning. Connected – to comprehensive change processes requiring organisational commitment. Valued – through recognition and celebration.</td>
<td>Principles that are key to effective Professional development for teachers: 1. Decisions about professional development should be made within schools rather than at the district level. 2. Professional development must be focused on instruction and student learning. 3. Professional initiatives must take place over an extended period of time. 4. Professional development activities should model effective pedagogy. 5. Professional development workshops must be supported by modelling and coaching in order to attain a higher degree of effectiveness. 6. Professional development should focus on communities of practice rather than on individual teachers. Effective professional development requires that continuous inquiry be embedded in the daily life of the school. 7. Principals and other school leaders must provide proactive support for professional development and the initiatives upon which it is focused.</td>
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<td><strong>2.</strong> Driven by analyses of the goals of student learning and how this relates to student performance</td>
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<td><strong>3.</strong> Involves teachers in identifying what they need to learn</td>
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<td><strong>4.</strong> Is mostly school-based and centred around the operations of the school</td>
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<td><strong>5.</strong> Provides for individual needs within collaborative problem-solving</td>
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<td><strong>6.</strong> Is continuous and on-going with both internal and external support</td>
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<td><strong>7.</strong> Should be evaluated for its effectiveness in improving student outcomes</td>
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<td><strong>8.</strong> Must include opportunities to develop theoretical understandings of knowledge and skills to be taught.</td>
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Appendix XIV: A selected bibliography of readings and other resources for English / literature teachers who may be interested in learning more about literary theory

Books

Literary theory and background


**Literary theory and the classroom**


VIDEOS


Moving Pictures as Text: an introduction to the language of film and television, Video Education Australasia.
Minerva Access is the Institutional Repository of The University of Melbourne

Author/s: 
PARR, GRAHAM BRUCE

Title: 
Inquiry-based professional learning of English-literature teachers: negotiating dialogic potential

Date: 
2007-04

Citation: 

Publication Status: 
Unpublished

Persistent Link: 
http://hdl.handle.net/11343/39358

File Description: 
Inquiry-based professional learning of English-literature teachers: Negotiating dialogic potential

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