

Towards a Discursive Pedagogy in the Professional Training of Community Educators

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This thesis is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education. This thesis is my own work and has not been submitted in substantially the same form for the award of a higher degree elsewhere.

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In a process of enlightenment there can
only be participants.

Jurgen Habermas

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Abstract

The author's previous research into the learning experiences of mature, working-class students undertaking a professionally endorsed qualification in Community Education, was overly negative in its view of the students whilst underplaying the role of curriculum in their learning. Reinterpreting their undergraduate experience more positively leads to thinking about how their educational needs could be reconciled with the programme's aim to produce critically competent graduates. Four principles derived from the Habermasian concept of communicative action can inform thinking about an appropriate pedagogical approach. The first directs attention to the acts of reciprocity that underpin learning. The second focuses attention on how knowledge can be constructed through redeeming claims. The third signals the necessity of safeguarding participation and protecting rationality in argumentation, and the fourth points to the idea of competence as a constructive achievement. Taken together, the four principles express the ideal of a discursive pedagogy in which teachers and students socially construct knowledge appropriate to the subject area. Because it involves active participation based on a commitment to open communication and argumentative reasoning, approximating the ideal conditions of a discursive pedagogy could address the student's learning needs whilst meeting the programme's aim. Anticipating and considering the likely issues and challenges involved in attempts to realise these idealised conditions suggests ways in which a discursive pedagogy could be given practical form.

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Abbreviations

CeVe	Community Education Validation and Endorsement
CLD	Community Learning and Development
DfES	Department for Education and Science
GSI	Graduate Student Instructor Teaching and Resource Centre, University of California, Berkley
HEA	Higher Education Academy
HEFCE	Higher Education Funding Council for England
HESA	Higher Education Statistics Agency
HMIE	Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education
RAE	Research Assessment Exercise
SED	Scottish Education Department
SHEFC	Scottish Higher Education Funding Council
SOEID	Scottish Office Education and Industry Department
LTSN	Learning Teaching Support Network
WALT	Working and Learning Together

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Chapter One

Rethinking Professional Training in Community Education

Introduction

This thesis concerns the development of my thinking about pedagogy in relation to my own practice and area of work: the professional training of community educators. It starts from the findings of my earlier research into the learning experiences of mature, working-class BA in Community Education students at the University of Edinburgh. This earlier research found that students commonly experience four ‘crises’ as they engage with the learning requirements of this degree programme. The metaphor of crisis denotes a crucial or decisive turning point or situation in the sense of a keenly felt personal predicament requiring resolution. A crisis of this kind is often stressful and may be a more or less permanent feature of a student’s life at university unless it is overcome. In this thesis, the crises are re-examined in terms of their implications for teaching and learning processes. The thesis also takes a closer look at the aims of the featured degree programme in relation to community education as a field of practice. This new analysis reveals that there is a potentially fruitful correspondence between the educational needs of the students and the fundamental aims of the programme. In essence, this thesis considers how teaching and learning processes might maximise the educational potential inherent in this correspondence.

This first chapter introduces the key theoretical concepts, provides an overview of the thesis and indicates the issues addressed in subsequent chapters. It establishes that the learning experiences of the students need to be understood within the context of widening participation in HE. It introduces the BA in Community Education, the fact that there are debates about the meaning and purpose of community education as a field of practice, and the important issue of the programme’s relationship with this field. It signals the central issue of congruence between the programme’s learning objectives and its associated teaching and learning processes. The chapter also introduces and situates the world-renowned philosopher and sociologist Jurgen

Habermas, as a critical theorist in the tradition of the Frankfurt School. Because Freire's work is highly regarded and well known in the field of community education, it is instructive to locate the educational implications of Habermas's ideas in relation to Freire's critical pedagogy. The chapter concludes by stating that significant educational principles can be derived from Habermas's theory of communicative action. Taken together these principles form what I have termed a 'discursive pedagogy'.

Chapter Two sets out my reasons for undertaking this thesis. It explains why I have chosen not to pose current educational practice in the featured programme against one or more normative models and other nostrums of good practice. Such an approach could highlight strengths and weaknesses according to predetermined criteria but would fail to penetrate the inner processes at play in this particular situation. For the same reason, neither is it a simple matter of turning to the mainstream literature about teaching and learning (see for example Burns and Sinfield, 2004; Race, 2005; Hartley et al, 2005) to adopt or adapt this or that recommended method. The same point applies to up-to-date research of the sort available through the Higher Education Academy (see <http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/44.htm>). Instead, my intention has been to bring coherence to my partial and fragmented understanding of teaching and learning processes in my own area of work. To this end, the thesis has provided the opportunity to rethink systematically the professional training of community educators in the sense of 'taking a theory apart and putting it back together again in a new form in order to attain more fully the goal it has set for itself' (Habermas, 1979: 95). My need has been for a theoretical lens to bring into sharper focus the underlying *telos* of a programme of this kind, and in a way that enhances my thinking about the means by which its teaching and learning processes could realise the underlying aims more completely. The conceptual tools for this task are drawn from the two volumes of Habermas's great work: *The Theory of Communicative Action* (1986 and 1989).

Chapter Three takes up the central finding from my earlier research (Bamber et al, 1997; Bamber and Tett, 1999, 2000, 2001) that a two-way process of change and development is needed to secure a successful HE experience for the featured students. By ‘successful’ is meant a genuinely participative experience, one in which students do not simply acquire knowledge but play their part as active learners interacting with and ‘authoring’ knowledge (Lillis, 2001). For lecturers it means providing the necessary support and curriculum activities to secure the student’s engagement. For students it means changing their fundamental stance towards learning and to the prevailing academic culture in HE. Whilst my earlier research acknowledged that all elements of the curriculum are involved in securing a successful experience, the distinctive shift in this thesis is to focus much more deeply on the teaching and learning encounter.

The references in Chapter Three to a wider context highlight a number of generic issues inherent in working with non-traditional students such as those on the BA in Community Education programme. In many ways, the students could be seen as straightforward examples of widening access, were it not for their involvement in a particular type of programme in HE. This programme, which leads to a professionally endorsed qualification in community education, attracts students with a sense of vocation who bring particular understandings of the purpose of community education, even if they find it difficult to articulate their views clearly to begin with. In broad terms, however, they see the programme as the gateway to a profession that is concerned with addressing social inequality and disadvantage. According to the Scottish Executive (2004: 1):

Community learning and development contributes to strengthening social capital by improving the knowledge, skills, confidence, motivation, networks and resources that the individuals and groups in a community have. It is also concerned with tackling real issues in people’s lives, for example, better health, education and transport, more jobs and less crime, and in making sure that public services work with people in tackling these.

It is necessary to say something about the relationship between the terms ‘community learning and development’ (CLD) and ‘community education’ at the

outset, as both relate to the same field of practice. A more detailed explanation is provided in Chapter Four but here it may be briefly stated that Community Education Services were established in all local authorities in Scotland following the 1975 Alexander Report. These Services brought together youth and community work and adult education. In 1998 the Osler Report argued that community education was best understood as a process, a way of working with people using informal methods and social groupwork. Osler argued that it was more effective to encourage the development of this process in a wide range of services and agencies including, for example, schools, housing associations and libraries. The title Community Learning and Development was introduced more accurately to reflect this wider field. Osler was persuasive with the Scottish Executive and has led over time to the disappearance of discrete Community Education Services in Scotland. As explained in Chapter Four, the situation today is confusing as the main training agencies retain the term community education in their degree titles, and a body known as Community Education Validation and Endorsement still professionally endorses these programmes. Key policy documents also refer to CLD as a process in much the same way as they used to refer to community education. The following excerpt is from the Scottish Executive's (2004: 1) most recent guidance on community learning and development - *Working and Learning Together to Build Stronger Communities* (WALT):

Community learning and development is a way of listening and of working with people. We define this as informal learning and social development work with individuals and groups in their communities. The aim of this work is to strengthen communities by improving people's knowledge, skills and confidence, organisational ability and resources. Community learning and development makes an important contribution towards promoting lifelong learning, social inclusion and active citizenship.

Whilst acknowledging in Chapter Four that there is a debate in Scotland, the terms community education and community learning and development are used interchangeably. It would require another thesis fully to chart and comment on these complex developments and their associated arguments.

Reconciling educational aims and practice

Students do not come to higher education as ‘blank sheets’, or as ‘empty vessels’ waiting to be filled with predetermined knowledge, to put the same point in Freirian terms (Freire, 1972). On the contrary, as discussed in Chapter Three, students have particular experiences, ideas, assumptions and accumulated knowledge, which impact, for better or worse on their experience in HE. The concept of ‘presage’ (Trigwell and Ashwin, 2003) denotes the influence exercised by prior experience. At the same time, in order fully to understand the nature of teaching and learning encounters, it is necessary to take into account the particular ways of thinking and practising (WTP) in any given milieu (McCune and Hounsell, 2004). This means that BA in Community Education students have to learn these distinctive ways of thinking and practising in the subject area if they are to take full advantage of their educational opportunities. Chapter Four explains how these distinctive ways are shaped by the staff team within the context of the field of practice.

The argument in this thesis connects with wider concerns in the United Kingdom. In a study for the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE), Gibbs (2001: 6) notes that although widening access was a priority for 27 per cent of pre-1992 universities, methods to achieve this tended to focus on mechanisms to provide access, such as collaboration with nearby colleges, rather than any associated change in teaching and learning processes once the students had entered. A more recent HEFCE report, *Review of Widening Participation Research: Addressing the Barriers to Participation in Higher Education*, highlights how different discourses of widening participation inform different aspects of government policy and interventions. According to the report’s authors (Gorard et al, 2006: 121), these include:

- an access discourse, focusing on raising the aspirations of a few gifted and talented working-class students to enter the ‘top’ institutions
- a utilitarian discourse focusing on getting more people into HE to serve the needs of the economy by providing pre-entry support, supplementary study skills and vocationally relevant programmes
- a transformative discourse of widening participation through broader engagement and institutional change.

The report states that a ‘more explicit understanding of widening participation is required. This is likely to include who is to be targeted, whose responsibility it is, whether all institutions should play the same role, and whether it is institutions or individuals that are required to change’ (ibid: 121). The report’s major point is that widening participation policy and practice need to address not just access to HE – which has been the focus of much national and institutional policy-making in recent years – but also the experience these students have in higher education (ibid: 120).

This emphasis on experience is fuelled by the striking finding that amongst the one hundred and seventy four pieces of literature considered by the authors, few studies concern the approach that students take to learning in higher education (ibid: 59). Amongst those that do there are significant differences in focus including investigating online learning approaches, induction programmes, student experiences, adult versus undergraduate teaching and learning approaches, innovative approaches to learning and development in the workplace and its wider context, and engaging in university learning for students with prior industrial experience. According to the report further research is needed because it is important to get away from the prevailing deficit model in relation to non-traditional students, whilst at the same time appreciating that such students are not homogenous. In search of curriculum development practices that have the potential to benefit all students, the report recommends researchers consider discipline-specific teaching (and learning) strategies, which are adapted for the needs of a particular subject discipline rather than for the needs of a particular student group (ibid: 118).

This recent HEFCE report into widening access provides a significant and illuminating backdrop to this thesis, which seeks to contribute to the discourse about transformative educational approaches. Mezirow makes an important connection with critical reflection in describing transformation (1995: 45):

There are two different types of transformation which may be effected by reflection: everyday transformation of the meaning scheme, through reflection on content or process and, less

commonly, more profound transformation of the meaning perspectives through critical reflection on premise. All reflection is potentially transformative of our meaning structures. When critical reflection of premises involves self-reflection, major personal transformations can occur.

According to Kember (2001: 215), a transformative approach is also characterised by learners constructing knowledge as they make judgements about alternative theories based upon evidence and analysis. It may be contrasted with a reproductive approach in which knowledge is defined by authorities where knowledge and theories are right or wrong. Based on the findings of my earlier research, this thesis is premised on the idea that a transformative approach requires a two-way process of change and development between students, on the one hand, and institutions on the other. Furthermore, its focus is not on a general category of students but on the professional training of community education students in a particular setting. In examining the deep structures of teaching and learning processes in this one context, however, the research could also have relevance to a wider constituency.

The main achievement of the thesis is to set out the elements of a discursive pedagogy. This concept, as elaborated in Chapter Five, signals the educational potential inherent in processes of argumentation. A key point to emphasise is that this understanding of pedagogy is consistent with ways of thinking and practising in the subject area of community education. This is because the programme requires the active participation of students in such processes and developing the capacity for argumentation is a key aspect of the work of community educators as they engage with learners in the field of practice. Chapter Four examines how these ways are expressed in the programme. Whilst including distinctive elements due to its professional orientation, it is also typical of undergraduate programmes in HE in other respects, in particular in its pursuit of higher order learning objectives such as analysis, synthesis and evaluation (Bloom, 1956). According to the Programme Booklet (MHSE, 2005), for example, the learning objectives include the aim to ‘develop critical understanding of the nature and purpose of community education practice in a range of settings’, and to ‘cultivate the intellectual and other capacities that characterise the educated professional’.

It has been argued that teaching and learning processes are more effective when they are consistent with the specific aims of the programme within which they are set (Biggs 1999, 2002, 2003). In Chapter Three, this point about consistency is interpreted very broadly, in order to avoid a reductive, mechanistic approach to teaching and learning. Moreover, it is also argued that because the programme has a vocational element relating to a particular profession, the teaching and learning processes are more likely to be effective when they are consonant with the purposes, principles and practices that define this field of practice. In this case, academic and professional practices can act together to reinforce student learning. Of course, the stress is on the conditional in this last sentence because the ideal of mutual reinforcement is often difficult to achieve in reality. This is because actual programmes take their shape from a contextual mix of political pressures reflecting the steering intentions of academic institutions, wider policy imperatives, funding regimes, employers and endorsing bodies. Notwithstanding the effects of these influences, which may vary in kind and severity from institution to institution, and which have resulted in the increasingly complex and diffuse nature of the field, the analysis in this thesis is premised on the fact that lecturers make key pedagogical decisions about the purpose, content and delivery of the units (teaching sessions or classes), courses (which may be referred to as modules in other institutions) and programmes (which may be referred to as courses in other institutions) for which they are responsible.

It should be acknowledged that decisions about teaching and learning have political and philosophical dimensions, whether or not educators are aware of them. Freire (1994: 32) commented on this aspect of academic responsibility when he said:

It is not possible to think of education without thinking about power. I think this point is central to any consideration concerning the task of reproduction and the task of counter-attacking the reproductive task itself, (for) those whose political dream is the transformation of society and not the reproduction and preservation of bourgeois society.

Whereas some might take issue with Freire's political stance, this thesis examines teaching and learning in a programme that is the gateway to a profession promoting lifelong learning, social inclusion and active citizenship. According to WALT (Scottish Executive, 2004: 1), a community learning and development approach is based on a commitment to the following aims:

- Empowerment - increasing the ability of individuals and groups to influence community circumstances.
- Participation - supporting people to take part in decision-making.
- Inclusion, equal opportunity and anti-discrimination, recognising that some people have more restricted opportunities and influence so should be given particular attention.
- Self-determination - supporting the right of people to make their own choices.
- Partnership - recognising that many agencies can contribute to community learning and development, and should work together to make the most of the resources available and to be as effective as possible.

It will be argued in Chapter Four that the WALT statement is to some extent helpful in explaining that becoming a community educator means developing the knowledge, skills and values required to enact these aims. Moreover, the aims also shape understandings of the practice knowledge required in the field because in setting the parameters they influence the sorts of problems and issues that professional community educators identify and address. WALT is only partly helpful in explaining practice knowledge, however, because there are continuing debates surrounding ideas about the fundamental purpose of community education.

Tett (2002: 1-2), for example, argues that two contesting traditions emerged in the 19th Century. The first of these was the 'radical' tradition, '...committed to progressive social and political change, that tried to forge links between education and social action'. The second 'reformist or conformist' tradition was concerned to help people solve their problems but was not committed to challenging dominant ways of thinking. As elaborated in Chapter Four, the BA in Community Education presents a range of views about purposes but leans towards a critical approach to policy and practice that is more consistent with the radical tradition identified by

Tett. It can be broadly described as a social democratic perspective that points to the importance of citizens being able to question and scrutinise the decisions of experts as a fundamental prerequisite for a healthy democracy (Tett, 2002: 112):

What is essential is to engage the critical intellect of people in a way that creates more rounded human beings and enables people to engage with public issues. Community education is about the development of skills, human relationships and the engagement of people in understanding the wider social forces that impact both locally and globally.

Chapter Four considers the implications of this account of the educational and critical nature of community education for teaching and learning processes in the featured programme. As Freire (1994: 33) has argued:

These means, these practices, have to be related or turned into the strategy, to the dream; in other words, I cannot have a dream of liberation and use a means of domestication, not in my opinion. And it seems to me that this is one of the most serious problems that we have as intellectuals, not being consistent or coherent, frequently not living in coherence between discourse and practice; we make a speech in behalf of our dream, of an eminently revolutionary strategy, but our practice is reactionary.

The central issue is the coherence between the programme's educational aims and approaches to teaching and learning, when the relationship with the field of practice is crucial in informing such considerations.

It must be acknowledged at this early stage, however, that the field and HE are different contexts and that processes of learning in each are not identical. There are important differences, for example, in the content of learning where in HE it is often predetermined and conveyed through discrete course units with prescribed aims and objectives. The extent, role and purpose of summative assessment distinguishes HE and will be discussed in Chapter Six in terms of its impact on the relationship between lecturers and students, as does the emphasis on theoretical and propositional forms of knowledge. The differences, however, can be exaggerated. It is increasingly the case in adult education, for example, that community educators are delivering

programmes in community settings with prescribed curricula, built-in assessment and accreditation. Although the emphasis on learning from experience and developing the content of learning from peoples' own agendas and interests is characteristic of informal learning in community settings, similar processes play some part in training for professional qualification. In a report for the Learning and Skills Research Centre, Colley et al (2003) conclude that it is not possible to separate out informal from formal learning in any universally agreed way. Across the literature the terms are contradictory and contested. In the view of the authors (2003: executive summary):

Seeing informal and formal learning as fundamentally separate results in stereotyping and a tendency for the advocates of one to see only the weaknesses of the other. It is more sensible to see attributes of informality and formality as present in all learning situations.

The major point here is that if community education graduates are to enable the sorts of empowering, participative and inclusive processes set out by WALT (Scottish Executive, 2004), they must learn to do so in their studies. It means learning about and being committed to the underpinning values, understanding the theoretical basis for the associated educational tasks, and developing the technical skills to operate in such a way. It would be inept at best and self-defeating at worst, if the programme failed to develop practice competence appropriate to the field.

At this point, it is appropriate to turn to the potential contribution of Habermas's theory of communicative action to teaching and learning processes in the BA in Community Education. Situating Habermas as a critical social theorist is useful in terms of introducing the broad intentions of his work. Because Habermas is not known as an educational theorist, however, it is also informative to briefly compare his ideas with Freire's, whose work on critical pedagogy is widely known in the field of community education, especially in relation to adult education. Following this, the theory of communicative action is outlined to indicate the way in which it will be used in this thesis to inform my thinking about pedagogy.

Situating Habermas as a critical theorist

Jürgen Habermas is a noted European public intellectual who has been writing prolifically for around 50 years. He has achieved worldwide status and prestige as a leading sociologist and comments regularly on social affairs in his native Germany where he resides. He is a leading figure in the second generation of the Institute for Social Research based in Frankfurt. The institute consists of socialist philosophers, sociologists and social psychologists influenced by the dialectical philosophy of Marx and Hegel. These scholars, including most notably Horkheimer (1895 – 1973), Adorno (1903 – 1969), Marcuse (1898 – 1979), Fromm (1900 – 1980) and Benjamin (1892 – 1940), worked in the period before and after the Second World War and were concerned with the development of critical social theory. Because of their association with the Institute, they are known as the ‘Frankfurt School’. It should be noted that critical theory is, of course, not confined to this school, as a much broader constituency of theorists and philosophers share similar concerns and aims. Dunne (1993: 168), points to the reflexive intentions of the Frankfurt School theorists observing that, ‘they tried to show that the emancipatory ideals of the enlightenment could be vindicated only by a reason which had deepened Enlightenment reason’s suspicion of tradition into a suspicion of Enlightenment reason itself’. They criticised the development of scientific procedure that had made possible a new control over the material world based on predictive knowledge. Dunne (ibid: 169) sums up their position as follows:

The predictive knowledge of modern science did not, of itself, guarantee an enhancement of human life with respect to justice or to happiness, but that it was locked into a whole economic and psychological matrix which, on the contrary, made it an instrument of domination not only of nature but also of human being themselves.

All of the Frankfurt School theorists drew their ideas from Marx, although each developed and adapted him in their own ways. Fromm’s analysis, for example, combined Freud and Marx to develop a radical humanism entailing ‘the abolition of capitalist alienation and the creation of democratic socialism’ (Brookfield, 2005 152). Horkheimer, to take another example, argued that capitalist society could only

be transformed through democracy (Bohman: 2005). Following Horkheimer, Habermas, came to reject the idea of revolution as predictable and inevitable. Instead, the move from capitalism to communism could only come about through reason if at all. For Habermas, Marxism underestimated the role of learning and decision-making in social change, and the genuine advancements in social life brought about through democratic processes in western market economies. For Habermas, the best chance for progressive development would come through enhancing democratic processes based on reasoned consideration of issues.

Broadly, the Frankfurt School thinkers argued for a society based on socialist principles. With the rise of the National Socialists the Institute was forced to flee Germany and had to relocate to America. Once based in the United States their attention turned away from critiquing forms of fascism, to analysing the ways in which capitalism reinforced social divisions and prevented people from fully realising their creative capacities. They were particularly interested in revealing ways in which ostensibly neutral and 'objective' scientific reasoning could be used to shore up dominant ideas (ideologies) in ways that could mask the self-serving intentions and interests of ruling elites, and bring about unwitting subjugation and compliance as people became increasingly consumerist and enmeshed in capitalist forms of production.

Brookfield (2005) has highlighted the importance of such thinkers by analysing what he calls the learning tasks embedded in critical theory. These include the need to challenge ideology in terms of identifying and addressing the ways that certain ideas and beliefs may obscure and in so doing serve to legitimate the interests of elites. Part of this challenge involves countering hegemony as the process by which: 'People learn to embrace as commonsense wisdom certain beliefs and political conditions that work against their interests and serve those of the powerful' (ibid: 43). It follows that there is a need to unmask power, in terms of recognising its flow in people's lives but also how they might use their individual and collective resources in progressive and enlightened ways. According to Brookfield's analysis, learning in the forgoing areas could help people to overcome alienation in terms of

losing the fear of freedom to exercise responsibility for their own actions in a context where people are subject to ideological forces. Learning liberation from such forces can be aided by reclaiming reason, ‘as something to be applied to all spheres of life, particularly in deciding values by which we should live, not just in areas where technical decisions are called for’ (ibid: 56).

According to Morrow and Torres (2002: 2), critical social theory is a distinctive body of thought that ‘does not base knowledge claims on ‘laws of history’ (classical Marxism) or on direct ‘correspondence’ between theories and empirical reality (e.g. positivism)’. Finlayson (2005: 4) has summarised some salient aspects of critical social theory as follows:

The task of theory was practical, not just theoretical: that is, it should aim not just to bring about correct understanding, but to create social and political conditions more conducive to human flourishing than the present ones...The goal of the theory was not just to determine what was *wrong* with contemporary society at present, but, by identifying progressive aspects and tendencies within it, to help transform society for the better.

It is important to understand that critical social theorists are interested in the what, why and how of things. They want to make a difference. They analyse the wider socio-economic context and seek to reveal the ways in which aspects of that context enhance or hinder the conditions for human flourishing. The point about seeking out and acknowledging those factors that enhance flourishing is important in terms of developing a platform for progressive change. It has been reported that Adorno became so pessimistic about the overwhelming influence of the context that he came to believe that critical theory offered no hope (ibid: 8). Habermas departs from his intellectual forefather by acknowledging positive aspects of the social order and by pointing to the possibilities for human agency to change things for the better. Chapter Six argues that such understandings of critical social theory inform the notion of ‘practical theory’, which has particular relevance for the work, and therefore the training, of community educators.

In asking profound questions about the nature of modern society, Habermas provides complex answers that transcend disciplinary boundaries. It is most likely, therefore, that readers have only come into contact with one area of his work. At the same time, as Finlayson (ibid: preface) notes, ‘His major works are forbiddingly long and technical. He does not write for beginners, and reading his work for the first time can be a frustrating experience’. Pusey (1987: 10) makes a similar point, advising ‘faint hearted readers to give up at the start in order to avoid unnecessary bitterness’! Habermas is worth persevering with, however, not least because of the committed and impressive nature of his project. Pusey (ibid: 14) sums up the man by saying that:

For Habermas the intellectual life is not a game, or a career, or a cultivation of wit and taste, or even ‘learning for learning’s sake’. It is above all a vocation. The single purpose of the work is to anticipate and to justify a *better* world society - one that affords greater opportunities for happiness, peace, and community. Since Habermas is also a rationalist the *better society is the more rational society*, in short, a society that is geared to collective needs rather than to arbitrary power.

It is immensely helpful that Habermas has been subject to various commentaries and translations over the years and his work is also often reproduced in compilations where the intention is to represent the development of his ideas over time (see, for example, Pusey, 1987; Outhwaite, 2005; Finlayson, 2005).

In pursuit of his aims Habermas rejects notions of science in which ‘reason’ refers only ‘to a specific argument or inference properly framed in terms of the rules of evidence’ (Pusey, 1987: 15). Instead, as Pusey (1987: 16) informs us, he writes against the background of the German tradition with a generic concept of reason with a capital ‘R’. At its strongest this view sees Reason as the creative potentiality not of the single individual but of a collective history-making subject. This view runs counter to the notion of society as an aggregation of individuals pursuing their own personal benefit. Pusey (ibid: 17) explains that in the German tradition since Kant and Hegel, society ‘can be seen as a collective embodiment of knowledge, of reason, and of the identity of the people. Social institutions are more readily understood as

the achievements of a collective will and consciousness’, which stresses ‘the positive and rational potentialities of society and state...both of which enable individuals to...rationally transcend arbitrary limitations of individual and private life and together realise their larger purposes’.

This perspective on the role of the collective in developing and enhancing the capacity for reason informs the argument in this thesis in two ways. First, as argued in Chapter Three, reinterpreting the learning experiences of the students featured in my earlier research suggests that such students aspire to a particular kind of relationship around meaning making in HE, and that this relationship involves a more collective and collaborative approach to learning. Second, as elaborated in Chapter Four, it is clear from the programme’s aims that its graduates need to be able to engage people in the field of practice in essentially the same collective and collaborative processes of learning. The idea that the students want the experience of learning in this way, and the programme requires it, has important implications for curriculum design and for relationships between students and between students and teachers. As will be discussed in Chapter Five, for example, Habermas’s ideas about reciprocity in communicative speech acts are helpful in thinking through the reasons for working collaboratively, and in pointing to the educative potential in interactive and inter-subjective approaches to teaching and learning.

Habermas asks the question of how reliable knowledge is possible and answers that knowledge can only be said to be possible when science assumes its proper place as just one of the accomplishments of reason. This is not to reduce the place of science but to argue that it should be done better in a more philosophically knowing way, with tougher epistemological standards (Pusey, 1987: 17). In Pusey’s assessment, Habermas has sought to provide a critique of modern positivism by tracing ‘the gradual establishment of positivism and thus exhume the larger concept of reason that it has sought to bury’ (ibid: 20). In this larger concept of reason, knowledge is defined both by the objects of experience and by *a priori* categories and concepts that the knowing subject brings to every act of thought and perception. This means that ideas do not simply derive from experience but are constituents of it. Indeed,

‘the validity of scientific knowledge, of hermeneutic understanding, and of mundane knowledge always depends as much on its ‘subjective’, and inter-subjective, constituents as it does on any methodologically verifiable observation and experience of the object-world’ (ibid: 22). For Habermas (1973: 161) then, the power of reason is grounded in the process of reflection: ‘In other words, the terms that we bring from within ourselves to the process of inquiry - in any and every domain, including science - are amenable to a reflection that is rational for the very reason that it carries the potential for a more inclusive conceptualisation that is better tuned to the common interest of the human condition’. It will be argued in Chapters Six and Seven, that the capacity for this kind of reflection is key to the development of practice competence in community education.

Habermas’s depiction of reflection and reasoning is relevant because it speaks directly to what learners are required to do in the BA in Community Education. Chapter Four explains that it is a vocational degree in which students are challenged to develop a creative relationship between theory and practice. In the programme there is an explicit approach in which theory is meant to underpin activity and where, crucially, the results of activity are meant to feed back into the theorising process. This is because no one theory fits every given eventuality and practitioners have to interpret the possibilities suggested in broad concepts and frameworks in new and unpredictable situations. Chapter Five discusses how it is useful to understand this conception of reflection and reasoning in terms of enhancing the student’s capacity to develop ‘an attitude or disposition towards oneself, others and the object of inquiry that challenges and impels learners to reflect, understand and act in the milieu of potentiality’ (Curzon-Hobson, 2003: 201). The same chapter considers how Habermas’s ideas about communicative action provide a theoretical basis for the development of the practice knowledge and competence that are central to the featured programme’s aims. Having introduced Habermas as a critical theorist and indicated in broad terms the potential contribution of his ideas to aspects of teaching and learning in the featured programme, it is now appropriate to consider the implications of his ideas in pedagogical terms.

Habermas and critical pedagogy: comparisons with Freire

With respect to the nature of higher education programmes, Ares (2006: 1) makes helpful distinctions between perspectives on learning and teaching when she examines the fundamental social and political underpinnings of potentially transformative practice in a conventional classroom:

Researchers working with socio-cultural and situated learning theories have, until more recently, often avoided the political nature of teaching and learning. The focus has been on processes of, for example, community formation and evolution that can be seen, for example, in Lave and Wenger's work (1991; 1998). These approaches seek to change learning environments by engaging students in authentic practices of communities but the goals fall short of challenging structural and other sources of inequity, thereby limiting the impact of their important insights into the activities and relations through which transformative classrooms exist and develop.

Ares notes that 'while critical theory offers important insights and calls to action in teaching, the translation to practice can be difficult to negotiate for a variety of reasons, including structural, bureaucratic, and policy constraints' (ibid: 1). For these reasons, she argues that 'critical and socio-cultural theories each have weaknesses that hinder researchers' and practitioners' understanding of transformative classroom practices' (ibid: 3). Critical theorists can be criticised, for example, for focussing on social and political structures that appear to be somewhat distant from the actuality of relationships and interactions in the classroom (ibid: 6).

At first sight Habermas, whose work provides the core theoretical basis for this thesis, would appear to fit into this 'distant' category because there is no straight route from his ideas to educational practice. He is not usually regarded as an educational theorist (Morrow and Torres, 2002: 2), the implications of his theory for education are not explicit (Englund, 2006: 504) and he has paid little attention to education over the years, at least at the level of the classroom (Ewert, 1991: 346). More surprising, perhaps, is the fact that Habermas has had little influence on the critical pedagogy literature (Morrow and Torres, 2002: 4). Although 'the centrality of educational theory is not evident in the specialised literature on Habermas' (ibid: 5)

his ideas can be applied to professional training in community education. This is because teaching and learning processes rest on presuppositions about the nature of reason and rationality, and of knowledge and knowledge construction, all of which are of central concern to Habermas. Moreover, his work is entirely appropriate to teaching community education because he aims to support the development of the conditions under which the distorting influences of irrationality, domination, and oppression can be overcome and transformed through deliberative, collective action. In short, as will be clear from the discussion of the aims of the featured programme in Chapter Four, Habermas's project to enhance social justice resonates closely with the purposes of community education. Habermas has informed thinking about adult education to some degree (Welton, 2001; Brookfield, 2005), however, and adult education is a central aspect of community education. This means that connections have been made to the field if not explicitly to the more formal sphere of teaching community education in HE. Because Habermas does not directly address education as a social practice, however, there is work to be done in terms of translating and transposing his ideas into a specific context of the BA in Community Education programme.

It is helpful at this point to briefly refer to Paulo Freire's (1921-1997) work. Unlike Habermas, the latter has exercised considerable influence on the field of practice, particularly in relation to adult education. Although Freire drew eclectically from European theory, his pedagogy was developed in the specific context of working with illiterate Brazilian peasants in the early 1960s. Space precludes going into detail about his career and methodology but some fundamental concepts can be briefly highlighted here. In his seminal book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire (1972) posits an essentially dialogical process at the centre of a dynamic and creative relationship between educator and learner. This relationship is intended to be a bulwark against 'banking education', which is said to merely transmit existing knowledge from the expert teacher to the allegedly 'empty receptacle' of the unknowing learner. Instead, educator as teacher and learner as student (Freire uses the somewhat clumsy term 'teacher-student, student-teacher', to express this relationship) work together, through dialogue, to uncover and then challenge

oppressive aspects of the social order. In essence, it is about working with rather than on people. Although Freire draws from a Marxist tradition to inform his analysis of oppression, he goes beyond this by insisting on the primacy of respect and love (for the peasants and more generally as a guiding principle underpinning human interactions and pedagogy) in his approach. For Freire (1994: 70): ‘There is no revolution without love; the revolution is loving’. On the basis of love and respect, educators and learners engage in naming the world in order to change it, which, in Freirian terms, is a form of praxis (1972: 75):

As we attempt to analyse dialogue as a human phenomenon, we discover something, which is the essence of dialogue itself: the word. But the word is more than just an instrument that makes dialogue possible; accordingly we must seek its constitutive elements. Within the word we find two dimensions, reflection and action, in such radical interaction that if one is sacrificed – even in part – the other immediately suffers. There is no true word, that is not at the same time a praxis. Thus, to speak a true word is to transform the world.

According to Morrow and Torres (2002: 122), in seeking to develop ‘true words’, learners and educators engaged in a Freirian process work together in a ‘circle of investigation’, to analyse the social situation in a way that turns selected aspects of that reality into a problem in need of resolution. Insight into what is required is brought about through representing these aspects visually (with simple pictures and so on) and then exploring them verbally through ‘generative words’ that progressively uncover key elements of the situation; for example, in the way that oppressive power relations are present. The objective here is to begin an oral discourse and to initiate the practice of dialogue. Later these keywords, which represent distinct themes, are turned into written form. It is important in this connection to note, ‘that the generative words emerge from the field research and not from the educator’s personal inspiration’ (ibid: 122). Thus problem-posing education is at the heart of Freire’s literacy training and these problems are located in the lived experience of the learners. As Morrow and Torres (ibid: 121) point out: ‘The general principle involved here is active participation and not that teachers should never have expertise to communicate or that classroom interaction should always and

everywhere take the immediate form of a dialogue'. Having established the basis for dialogue, then selective use of more traditional techniques (for example, memorisation, skill learning through exercises) has a place (ibid: 121).

Freire's work has been, and continues to be, extremely influential in adult education. He is widely read and quoted, and he has inspired work with oppressed and disadvantaged people across the world. For example, Hope and Timmel (1995), based on their own work as educators with rural groups in Africa, have represented and made accessible his ideas in their widely known manual for progressive educational practice *Training for Transformation*. More locally, the Adult Learning Project (ALP, 2007) in Edinburgh is an example of a community-based agency providing educational programmes wedded to Freirian principles. In short, Freire's achievement is to have developed a detailed and robust approach to literacy that has provided the basis for pedagogical practice in many parts of the world. Towards the end of his life Freire began to consider how his ideas might be adapted and applied in different times and contexts. He was also concerned with the implications of his critical approach to pedagogy for teaching and learning in HE (Escobar et al., 1994).

In contrast, Habermas can be criticised for being a 'grand theorist', whose ideas and work lack the sort of concrete detail that would lend itself, for example, to informing practice in any specific way or make it amenable to real testing in practice. Because of his detailed attention to process and pedagogy, the same charge cannot be laid at Freire's door. Instead he has been criticised for being theoretically unsystematic in appropriating ideas, willy-nilly, from a disparate range of sources (Morrow and Torres, 2002: 13). For this reason, Morrow and Torres (2002: 14) argue that these two thinkers can complement each other's work:

The key to our comparative strategy is to locate Freire's work in the larger context of contemporary critical social theory and to identify the pedagogical implications of Habermas through Freire. Freire facilitates fleshing out the more abstract notion of a theory of communicative action in relation to a theory of dialogue and practical pedagogy.

Certainly, there is much overlap in their respective projects. Although addressing different contexts, Habermas and Freire are concerned with the malign effects of capitalism and its impact on the poor and disadvantaged, and both consider how knowledge might be developed in the service of emancipation - Freire through a critical pedagogy and Habermas through enhancing democratic processes. Both, therefore, see knowledge development as occurring through active attempts to change social conditions in favour of disadvantaged groups. Both see developing knowledge in terms of learning and both place dialogue at the centre of the learning process. They differ in that Freire has developed a clear and robust approach to pedagogy, whereas for Habermas pedagogical approaches are for the most part only implied by his general understanding of reflexive learning and the dialogical basis he imputes to ideal speech situations (ibid: 115). In developing an approach that is liberatory in intent, Freire has a clear vision of his work as a means by which the poor can challenge their subordination. As such, he is more conscious of social positioning, i.e. through class, as an overt factor in oppression, and therefore clearer about the need to confront power relations and their effects in social life. Furthermore, in arguing for the primacy of love and respect, Freire also advances a moral and affective underpinning for his theory that, once again, is relatively understated in Habermas's work (Dunne, 1993: 208).

Although my purpose is not to compare the two systematically, since this would demand another thesis, Freire can help to make concrete, as it were, the educative implications and potential in Habermas's theory of communicative action. This is because reference to Freire helps to point up some problematic areas in Habermas's work. I do not address these as substantive categories for attention in themselves but rather frame the issues more narrowly in terms of my attempt to derive principles for pedagogy from his theory of communicative action. For example, Freire's insistence on love and respect highlights the lack of similar clarity in Habermas's treatment of the ethical underpinnings of communicative practices. For this reason I refer, in Chapter Six, to Burbules's (1991) work on the importance of commitments to 'communicative virtues' in discursive educational practices. Acknowledging the

necessary virtues underpinning dialogue can supplement and correct Habermas's more rule bound and procedural focus.

In the same way, Freire's emphasis on liberation throws into relief the concrete relations of power that need to be brought into the open and addressed in teaching settings. The role of power can be usefully discussed in relation to the four principles for teaching and learning that I derive from Habermas's theory of communicative action. This discussion takes place in Chapter Six with reference to Lillis's (2001) work on the need for a more progressive and equal relationship between lecturers and students. Reference is also made to Moffat's (2006) analysis of the structural causes behind tensions between educator and student in HE. With regard to the influence of power, Habermas has been criticised from a feminist perspective for failing to properly acknowledge the way in which people have differential levels of access to participation in discursive activities (Pajnik, 2006). This issue is also considered in Chapter Six, with regard to Tisdell's (2001) work on 'positionality' and the concomitant need to surface and confront gendered and racialised, as well as class-based power relations in the classroom.

Broadly speaking, Freire's work on dialogue provides a conceptual framework for understanding the pedagogical implications of communicative action. In Chapter Five, for example, I propose that Habermas's notion of the ideal speech situation can be seen as the crucible of practice knowledge. In such situations, it is argued, essentially dialogical teaching and learning processes can enable lecturers and students to focus collectively and collaboratively on developing and refining actions and judgements in relation to real practice situations. Here it is instructive to consider the meaning and utility of Habermas's notion of the 'commons' or 'public sphere' for teaching and learning purposes. In relation to this argument it is instructive to read the following from Torres (in Escobar, 1994: 20).

(Freire) has always emphasised that the first commitment of an intellectual is a complete docility toward the reality that is to be studied, described, and explained in a particular theoretical and historical context. This docility is not a call for empiricism but, on the contrary, it is an invitation to listen to the multiple voices that

articulate and constitute the experience, knowledge, and consciousness of the oppressed, of those who hardly have had any systematic education to facilitate learning about their own experience. For Freire, this experience is the beginning of the construction of knowledge, which should be supplemented with the theoretical rigour of the social sciences in critical dialogue with the living experience of the people. That is the reason that in his early and insightful writings of the 60s, Freire called for an epistemological approach that facilitates the archaeology of consciousness - that is an approach through which learning to name the world helps people to change the world.

Having briefly situated Habermas as a critical theorist and in relation to one of the major thinkers associated with a critical approach to pedagogy, his theory of communicative action can now be introduced as a basis for rethinking pedagogy in the featured programme.

Communicative action as a basis for pedagogy

Habermas's theory of communicative action is the main theoretical source informing this thesis. According to Cooke (in Habermas, 2003b: 3), the theory is built on the idea that when people speak to one another in everyday acts of communication they are involved in a reciprocal process of making and justifying three types of validity claims: a claim to the truth of what is said or presupposed, a claim to the normative rightness of the speech act in the given context or of the underlying norm, and a claim to the truthfulness of the speaker. All three claims are raised simultaneously, although at any one time only one might be explicit with the other two remaining implicit. According to Habermas (ibid: 3), these three validity claims are 'universal' in the sense that they are raised with every instance of communicative action. From this perspective human communication is a medium of a rationally binding character. In other words, it has the capacity to function in an action-coordinating manner whereby agents' actions will depend on how they evaluate the statements of other people. Rationality 'proper' then is the ability to let action be guided by a common understanding of reality, the consensus established through linguistic dialogue (Eriksen and Weigard, 2004: 4). The theory of communicative action at the core of Habermas's project is 'to understand and set out the conditions necessary for people

to participate in full, free, and equal discourse...that would guide the operation of democracy' (Brookfield, 2005: 222).

Though its main focus is on the enhancement of democracy, Chapter Five argues that the theory of communicative action provides useful insights into what might be required of teaching and learning processes if these were to address the crises experienced by BA in Community Education students whilst meeting the aims of the programme. The essence of the argument is that increasing purposeful communication in a learning environment can enhance, individually and collectively, the capacity for rational thought and behaviour. This is because participants in communication are called upon to justify the validity claims inherent in their thoughts and actions, and justification involves giving convincing reasons in support of claims. In a situation where participants are seeking understanding, convincing others cannot mean coercing people into submission through threats or manipulation. Acceptance of the reasons depends on cooperative behaviour seeking agreement about what, in the end, constitutes the better argument. Cooperative activity does not eradicate disagreement, however, because in giving reasons to support claims people will often fail to agree. The point is that in order to resolve disagreements they must resort, in the end, to a more rigorous process of argumentation known as discourse. In discourse claims are 'redeemed' through a process of criticism. It is important, with respect to rethinking practice in the featured programme, to appreciate the value of criticism in developing practice knowledge as participants refine ideas and commitments through contesting what is or should be the case.

Chapters Five and Six refer to the fact that students develop practice knowledge in stages and over a period of time. In short, students can be expected to move from relative incompetence to competence where *competence* can be defined as the capacity to solve particular types of empirical-analytic or moral-practical problems (Habermas, 2003b: 33). Conceiving of learning as a process of development means that educators need to 'scaffold' interventions in a phased and incremental way, so as not to undermine student agency. In Habermas's view, this kind of practice knowledge is not a property of individual minds, or monological subjects, it is the

product of social interaction between communicating participants. As Brookfield (2005: 252) explains:

We learn in communities as social beings, and our development of knowledge depends on our ability to understand what others are telling and showing us. The ways I interpret my own experiences as an adult educator are not, therefore, idiosyncratic but rather draw on concepts and frameworks learned through conversation with other adult educators in person and through their writings.

A very important consequence flows from this understanding about the social construction of knowledge, as attention is drawn to observable phenomena in the teaching and learning situation. For example, the nature and quality of interactions can be observed, such as when someone is dominating a seminar discussion. In line with Entwistle's (1996: 104-105) observations that students vary their strategies considerably from task to task and that their approaches to learning are significantly affected by the perceived demands of lecturers and departments, Chapter Three argues that certain kinds of learning environment are more likely than others to help students to adopt more personally meaningful forms of learning. It is not just a matter of what activities people engage in, but more fundamentally of the underlying beliefs that guide those actions and relationships in the learning situation.

Communication leading to higher levels of understanding does not happen automatically. It requires educators, in the first instance, to shape the learning environment in support of communicative rationality. This includes apparently individual activities, such as writing essays through to collective experiences in lectures or more specific activities involving group tasks. Chapter Five explains how communicative rationality could be enhanced in the BA in Community Education by attempts to realise across the whole programme what I have termed a 'discursive pedagogy'. This concept signals an idealised state where learning and teaching environments are suffused with a generalised commitment to communicative action. For Habermas, discourse denotes a process of argumentation in which the rules implicit in ordinary speech are formalised. It is not to be associated with any one practice such as a discussion or debate. Instead, in a discursive pedagogy attempts to

approximate the ideal of discourse would pervade every aspect of the curriculum. Chapter Five explains how such attempts could be guided by four ‘ordering’ principles derived from the fundamental tenets of communicative action.

The first expresses the idea that learning occurs when people seek agreement through reciprocal acts of communication; the second that knowledge is constructed through redeeming truth claims concerning the objective world of nature, the social world of values and the subjective world of consciousness; the third that in processes of argumentation it is necessary to safeguard participation and protect rationality; and the fourth that over time constructing knowledge leads to competence. The focus on first principles is crucial for a theoretical study of this kind because attention is drawn to philosophical questions of purpose, in other words the ‘why’ of things, as well as signalling what is to be done practically, the ‘how’ of things.

From a Habermasian perspective learning can be equated with the process of knowledge creation, which he sees in terms of three universal ‘knowledge-constitutive-interests’ given *a priori* in our relation to the world (Pusey, 1987: 25-26). The first refers to the case of the natural sciences, which is concerned with the technical control of nature by establishing rules for the construction of theories and for their critical testing. It is a fundamentally ‘instrumental’ attitude. The second refers to our mutual understanding in the everyday conduct of life. This is not about the individual knower because the objectivity of experience derives from the fact that it is inter-subjectively shared. This is a ‘practical’ interest that underpins knowledge in the historical-hermeneutic sciences. The third refers to the everyday experience of the attempt to differentiate between power and truth, ‘to penetrate illusions that veil arbitrary power in society’ (ibid: 25). As such it is an ‘emancipatory’ interest.

This knowledge-constitutive schema is of interest because it helps to clarify that the programme is not concerned with the pursuit of understanding and exercising control over the natural world, as would be the case in the natural sciences. It is involved with the development of knowledge that is characteristic of the historical-hermeneutic sciences. It is ‘practical’ in the sense that it is concerned with what is

right and proper in the social world in pursuit of the social good. This kind of knowledge is pertinent to the locus and interests of a programme that is training practitioners for the field of community education. This point links to the third element of emancipatory knowledge. In pursuit of this form of knowledge: ‘The purpose of theorising about society is to understand the mechanisms and relations at play so that these can be altered to give greater opportunity for people to realise their creative potential’ (Brookfield, 2005: 224). It will be seen in Chapter Five how the concept of a discursive pedagogy is consistent with the aims of the featured programme to develop practical and emancipatory forms of knowledge.

Attempts to develop a discursive pedagogy would have a number of important implications and challenges for teaching and learning processes. There would be an equal focus, for example, on the creation as well as the transmission of knowledge. Chapter Six explains that focussing on the part played by a student’s *a priori* beliefs in the creation of knowledge, is likely to surface and challenge ‘the deep-seated, pre-reflective, taken-for-granted background knowledge of the lifeworld that...forms the indispensable context for the communicative use of language’ (Habermas, 2003b: 16). There are other challenges centring chiefly on the educational influence of unequal power relations between educators and learners. Chapter Six draws from a number of educational commentators in considering ways that these and other challenges can be addressed.

There are suggestions, for example, about the need to counter the influence of negative theories that non-traditional students can hold about themselves as learners (Yorke and Knight, 2004). This would require students and lecturers to look again at fundamental and deeply held beliefs about the whole process of teaching and learning, shifting these towards a facilitative/transformative perspective in which students become active and self-directed participants (Kember, 2001). Pedagogical practices would be subject to scrutiny and this could mean, for example, giving greater emphasis to groupwork. Lillis (2001) has argued that pursuing a different kind of relationship around meaning making in HE would involve greater use of formative rather than summative methods of assessment. Concerning assignments it

can be expected that the curriculum would seek to exploit the educational potential of tasks involving live problems and real issues of interest to students (Birgerstam, 2002). There would also be significant implications for the nature of the relationship between students, between students and lecturers and between lecturers. Tisdell (2001) alerts us to differences in power in the classroom based on social factors such as race or gender, and status based on position. In principle, a discursive pedagogy would confront such differentials by, for example, subjecting the existence of competitive relationships between students and hierarchical relationships between lecturers and students to rational scrutiny.

Having addressed the problems and challenges associated with a discursive pedagogy in Chapter Six, the argument is drawn together in Chapter Seven by pointing to possible ways in which the teaching and learning processes in the featured programme could be informed by the four constituting principles of a discursive pedagogy. This final chapter, therefore, sets out the ideal of a discursive pedagogy in the form of a framework for thinking about approaches to teaching and learning. As an ideal the framework has analytic and suggestive functions: it can act as a standard against which to judge practice and it can point to ways of constructing appropriate teaching and learning processes.

Before closing this introductory chapter it is necessary to acknowledge at the outset that attempts to promote a discursive pedagogy would be likely to reveal 'the relations of power surreptitiously incorporated in the symbolic structures of speech and action' (Habermas, 1973: 12). The concept of power signals the fact that all education takes place within particular contexts. The disruptive potential of power sits alongside other contextual issues such as the effect on teaching of commitments to the Research Assessment Exercise in the UK and the imperatives associated with increasing student numbers. The importance of context lies in the extent to which such developments enhance or counter communicative educational practices. Increasing numbers can lead, for example, to a reliance on lectures (seen as labour saving), and the reduction of small group seminars (seen as labour intensive), where the net effect is to reduce the potential for communicative capacity. It is appropriate

to speak of potential in such cases, because a seminar is not automatically a discursive environment just as lectures are not necessarily devoid of interaction amongst participants. Nevertheless, the smaller group affords more opportunities for intensive and sustained discursive activity. These and other macro factors present serious challenges to the ideal of a discursive pedagogy. Issues stemming from policy-led commitments to widening access are examined in this thesis by asking the fundamental question; access to what?

The contribution of this thesis

The contribution of this thesis is to define the conceptual parameters of a discursive pedagogy in the form of four guiding principles. Elaborating the inferences for pedagogy signified in the four principles surfaces ideas that I have held implicitly and used intuitively with regard to teaching and learning processes. In conducting a systematic enquiry into what it might mean to reconcile the educational needs of the students and the aims of the programme, it is hoped that the ideas considered will provide a robust platform for my own practice whilst being of value to those with responsibility for the BA in Community Education. They may also be relevant to the concerns of educators in the thirty-five universities and colleges of higher education currently offering related awards in the UK. More broadly still, the ideas should resonate with the interests of those concerned with widening access in HE. Indeed, this thesis can be read to a limited extent as a particular kind of response to Preece et al's (1998: 7) call for further research into how curriculum content and teaching and learning styles can sustain and widen participation in mainstream HE. It is hoped that it will also contribute in some small way to the literature in an area of work that continues to attract interest amongst writers concerned with reflective and critical forms of pedagogy in HE. It is of some significance, for example, that in 2007, Brockbank and McGill have produced a second edition of their 1998 book, *Facilitating Reflective Learning in Higher Education*, whilst at the same time Brookfield and Preskill have reissued their 1999 book, *Discussion as a Way of Teaching*.

There is no suggestion that a discursive pedagogy could or should displace existing patterns of provision in the featured programme, or that, more generally, the concept implies a crude criticism of usual patterns of provision in HE featuring, for example, reliance on standard modes of lecture delivery and assessment through essay writing. As Brown and Manogue (2001: 231) have argued when writing about teaching undergraduates in the healthcare professions, the use of this or that method is not as important as how the method is used by the teacher. They (ibid: 232) note that:

Although lectures can induce passivity...they are not necessarily passive modes of learning or authoritarian modes of teaching...passivity and authoritarianism are not dependent on the teaching method so much as on how that method is used by the lecturer.

Their conclusion is that ‘a rich diversity of teaching methods is necessary for a domain as complex as the health of human beings and their communities’ (ibid: 231). The same point can be made, *mutatis mutandis*, for a domain as complex as community education. There is, therefore, no automatic route from principle to method although some strategies would appear to have potential and can be reasonably put forward. Neither is the aim to construct and propose an allegedly superior, or more radical form of education. My intention, with reference to one context, is to consider what could be gained by looking at existing practices from the ideal perspective of a discursive pedagogy. From this viewpoint, the aim is to recognise different logics and ways of seeing things. Eisenhart’s (1998: 393-394) metaphor of a frozen groundswell rising up to disrupt and topple a wall, revealing what was previously underneath or hidden, conveys something of the intention to ask fresh questions about teaching and learning in this one context.

Conclusion

It is useful to explore how teaching and learning processes could address the sorts of crises experienced by the students whilst simultaneously meeting the programme’s aim. Four principles derived from the Habermasian concept of communicative action can systematically inform thinking about an appropriate pedagogy. The first directs

attention to the acts of reciprocity that underpin learning. The second focuses attention on how knowledge can be constructed through redeeming claims. The third signals the need to safeguard participation and protect rationality, and the fourth points to the idea of competence as a constructive achievement. Taken together the four principles express the ideal of a discursive pedagogy in which teachers and students socially construct the forms of knowledge that characterise ways of thinking and practising in the subject area of community education. In principle, a discursive pedagogy could promote a deeper form of learning whilst meeting the programme's aim. Considering the issues and challenges that can be foreseen in attempts to realise this ideal, helps to identify a number of strategies for teaching and learning. These can be expressed in a conceptual framework to assist thinking about how the ideal could be given practical form.

Chapter Two

Approach to the Thesis

Introduction

If Chapter One provides an overview of the main themes, issues and problems addressed, this chapter explains my reasons for writing this thesis, and the approach I have taken to this task of writing. It discusses in some detail how my current concerns with pedagogical issues arose out of my earlier research into the learning experiences of BA in Community Education students at the University of Edinburgh. To begin with this earlier research investigated aspects of a teaching programme to which I contributed and later shifted to the students' experience of one course that I had designed, and for which I was the only tutor. The fact that this thesis concerns my own work, as well as my own place of work, reflects an abiding personal and professional interest in trying to understand and seek improvement in the subject area. Whilst such an interest generates high levels of motivation and provides ready access to research data and the key actors involved, there are implications in terms of the need for self-reflexivity as a researcher. The theoretical approach adopted responds to this need for reflexivity by seeking to gain some critical distance from the topic. Achieving critical distance means, amongst other things, examining basic premises and being prepared to engage with ideas at philosophical levels. As Pring (2000: 89) argues:

Without the explicit formulation of the philosophical background – with implications for verification, explanation, and knowledge of reality – researchers may remain innocently unaware of the deeper meaning and commitments of what they say or of how they conduct their research.

The intention, in part, is to account for my own relationship to this one context, in the sense of establishing a more theoretically sound platform for practice. Inevitably, this means reflecting on my own values and role and how these can be informed by asking some fresh questions about teaching and learning in the featured programme.

Asking fresh questions about teaching and learning

Prior to starting this thesis I had completed two qualitative studies and published the results in a range of journals and conference proceedings. In relation to the first study the publications included: Bamber et al (1997), Bamber et al (2000), Bamber and Tett (2000, 2001), and Bamber (2001a, 2001b, 2002). With respect to the second study the written products included: Bamber (2003, 2004, 2005) and Bamber et al (2006). Throughout the thesis it is this body of work that is referred to as ‘my earlier research’. Both studies were concerned with ways in which the participation of non-traditional students could be advanced or discouraged. As a teacher of such students since beginning work as a lecturer in community education at the University of Edinburgh in 1993, this issue has been and continues to be at the centre of my own practice. A combined total of just over forty students took part in the studies.

The rationale for the focus on non-traditional students was that their experience tends to be marginalised within HE institutions and the earlier research provided an opportunity for their voices to be heard. Moreover, as Lillis (2001: 36) has stated, the accounts of non-traditional students are important in that they are often the participants who experience dissonance with prevailing academic practice and are more likely to problematise its ‘given’ status. Participants in both studies were defined as working class by their own self-report and by the UK Registrar General’s classification (socio-economic groups IV and V). Like me, all were the first person in their family to participate in HE. Few had the standard entry qualifications and where this was the case these had been obtained many years ago. The students were mostly white British, mainly coming from Scottish manual working-class backgrounds. The data in both studies was obtained from semi-structured, individual and group interviews.

The first study between 1996 and 2000 involved two groups of students. The first group featured eighteen former community activists (six males and twelve females) who took their degree through a part-time accelerated route called the Lothian Apprenticeship Scheme Trust (LAST). LAST was set up in 1995 to enable academically unqualified activists from working class communities, disabled people,

and minority ethnic groups, to gain the BA in Community Education. The Trust obtained development funding so that two full-time tutors could be employed to support the students who also had access to a dedicated resource base housing such things as books and computers. The second group consisted of ten full time students (four males and six females) without any special support. Both groups were admitted on an individual basis through entry procedures that privileged experience over qualifications.

Participants from both groups were interviewed individually and in small focus groups to ascertain their experience of and attitudes towards education, their degree programme and the University, and the impact of their participation in the University on themselves, families and their communities. The interviews and focus groups took place three months after they had started their degree studies, after eighteen months and again after thirty months. The transcribed interviews and comments from the focus groups were analysed and the following key themes were identified: motivation to stay on the course; the role of their practical experience in a course that provided professional training as well as an academic qualification; their changing attitudes to HE and the resulting impact on their families and communities. Interviewees were provided with copies of the transcripts and encouraged to reflect on issues they had raised.

The results from the first study revealed that ensuring genuine or full participation in HE, in the sense of an integrative and positive learning experience (Jennings, 1995: 17-18) requires a mutual process of change and development from students and institutions. In such a process, the contribution of the student is acknowledged, understood and built upon, whilst the institution seeks to address the malign effects of structural factors by 'creating inclusive admissions policies and practices while making provision available...at convenient times and places, with the support (for students) to be engaged successfully in completing the qualifications which they need...to move ahead with...careers...and with their lives' (Peinovich: 1996: 63). It was also found that the featured students typically experienced four 'crises' as they engaged with the requirements of study. The metaphor of crisis refers to keenly felt

personal predicaments requiring resolution. To some degree the crises, as explained in further detail in Chapter Three, had roots in aspects of the student's background and revolved around:

- feeling unentitled to participate in HE
- a disinclination towards academic study
- a simplistic understanding of the theory-practice nexus
- an instrumental attitude to gaining a professional qualification.

The results of the first study were also valuable in terms of identifying the sorts of specific educational practices that could support non-traditional students in their studies. In terms of teaching, it was found that non-traditional students needed introductory level courses featuring, for example, learning to think sociologically, politically or critically. They benefited from intensive practice and tutoring in writing, comprehension and basic study skills and from extensive verbal and written feedback on draft work by tutors, and from coaching as to how to improve work prior to submission. They favoured interactive rather than didactic teaching styles, especially when coupled with opportunities to work collectively in small groups. Course materials that had not been set at an appropriate intellectual level in the initial stages could seriously undermine their confidence, with further consequences for future performance. In particular, texts that seemed inaccessible to all but the most able academically could set back, rather than enhance, intellectual development. At the same time, however, there needed to be an emphasis on critical thinking to open up and re-examine experience. The emphasis on critical thinking could be an emotionally challenging and threatening process; hence the need for a supportive course environment, especially in terms of the relationship with tutors.

Working supportively with non-traditional students, therefore, was seen to be a teacher intensive business but absolutely necessary if HE was to become truly inclusive. The requirement was significantly greater in terms, for example, of face-to-face contact with individual students, marking, personal tutoring and coaching. Given their lack of free time, course materials needed to be plentiful and to hand. They had less time for research in the usual sense, which meant that freely available literature sources were highly valued. The fact that a number of students on the

LAST scheme needed and were able to gain paid educational leave indicated the levels of situational support required outside the course environment. Group support in the form of learning clusters, tutorial groups, and encouragement to co-operate over the composition of assignments, was also deemed to be beneficial. These types of specific support were considered to be essential by the sampled students in order to make the kind of personal development required by the course.

The first study signalled a number of areas for development in provision for non-traditional students. Before going into these it is worth stating here how hard and sometimes painful the experience was for both staff and students. For staff like me, committed to principles of inclusion and social justice, the desire to be supportive came up against the need to maintain academic standards. For students the desire for success came up against the harsh realities of the inherent difficulty of the nature of the task before them. It became clear to me and the other staff involved in the programmes, for example, that failure was a likely outcome given the risky nature of taking on non-traditional, unqualified students. It was accepted that although the element of risk could be minimised, it could not be eliminated. In addition to the specific measures outlined above, it was thought that making pre-course assessment more effective through recruitment and admissions procedures could reduce risk. In fact recruitment processes were restructured so that candidates were assessed on their ability to demonstrate the capacity to learn from previous experience in ways that meant that they had to change personally. More specifically, candidates were subject to more careful scrutiny of their ability to write up to a certain standard. The intention was not to exclude but to more carefully assess whether someone might benefit, for example, from a preparatory access year at a further education institution.

A consistent finding was that those who chose not to use these support systems were those most likely to need them. By the same token, those who did use the systems were more likely to succeed. This would suggest that the student's attitude toward study was a factor in success. The first study also raised the issue of guidance, and how better guidance might help to avoid what would otherwise appear to be putting some people into a position where failure is the likely outcome. It was thought that

pre-course guidance could help lead to the recognition that not all is lost even where students do fail to progress through all aspects of a course in HE. Some success would have been achieved, for example some improvement in the ability to write and think to a higher level. Attention then moved to the question of how to recognise and acknowledge the gains that had been made. What such students might then go on to become a central concern. In short it was felt that a more careful recruitment process, whilst still being inclusive, could limit the potential number of failures. In summary, the first study highlighted the need to move beyond the either/or privileging of one set of factors and to recognise the multiple ways in which learning takes place. My desire to seek a better understanding of how best to work with non-traditional students was fuelled by the experience of pain and difficulty that was attested to in this first study.

The second study took place in 2003-4 and involved twelve mature, part time work-based students who had to satisfy similar entry requirements to the students in the first study and also be working in a community education setting. It should be noted that I had established the part-time route to the BA in Community Education, as one way in which the programme could respond to the levels of domestic and work commitments that are often associated with mature, working class learners. This second study examined the relationship between teaching and the learning experiences in one course that I had developed with their needs and characteristics in mind (referred to in other institutions as a module or unit, the course was one of 9 that made up the degree programme). The course, called Work-based Learning 1: Professional Development (WBL1), was divided into four sections to cover such topics as Professional Practice, Personal Practice, Reflective Practice and Collaborative Practice. One major assumption behind the development of this course was that by focussing on work these non-traditional students would be able to cope with the demands of HE more readily because they would clearly see the relevance of the subject matter to their own professional development. Another assumption was that the course materials, which could be downloaded onto computers at home or at work from a CD, would enable them to learn at a place, pace and time of their own

choosing; a matter of some importance to non-traditional students with pressing work and/or domestic commitments.

Six students (two males and four females) volunteered for interviews using open-ended questions to focus on previous learning and initial experiences with the course. The responses were transcribed and decoded to ascertain key ideas and themes. The initial findings helped to determine a list of questions circulated to the whole cohort examining the extent to which the course addressed their learning needs. The full cohort of twenty-two part-time students was then invited to a meeting some two weeks later to air and discuss the responses from the initial interviews. Twelve members attended (including three from the individual interviews) and a summary of the discussion was produced to capture the 'sense' of the meeting. The summary was circulated to the twelve attendees and their comments changed or were added to the record. The summary was then reworked and refined into a short paper and circulated once more to the whole cohort for comments. The cohort was then invited to a final meeting to go through the paper in detail. Seven students came to this final meeting, including two who had not been interviewed or attended the previous meeting.

The results of this second study pointed to ways in which the curriculum supported or failed to support the student's learning and what lessons might be gleaned for educators. Beset initially by technological problems, a motivational turning point appeared to come for the students in the Personal Practice section of the course when they could see the relevance of time management and action planning exercises. The key point here was that the exercises helped the students to take increasing control of their own work situations. Interestingly the lessons learned appeared to spread into other aspects of their domestic, social and academic lives. This more positive orientation to the course was enhanced in the Reflective Practice section through their engagement in small groups with experiential and action learning exercises.

In summary the findings from the first study confirmed the importance of specific forms of support including study skills and increased contact with tutors for feedback

purposes. The first study also signalled my need for a more holistic view taking into account the range of factors that influenced learning and the relationships between these factors. The second study added to my understanding in suggesting that non-traditional students benefited from 'a different kind of relationship around meaning-making in academia' (Lillis, 2001: 54). The clue was in the way the students seemed to be experiencing a deeper form of learning as they developed what Lillis refers to as an 'internally persuasive discourse' (ibid: 49). In this deeper form they were active participants interacting and collaborating with each other to receive and 'author' knowledge, as they wrestled with real-life, workplace related, personally meaningful situations. This finding alerted me to the need to consider the relationship between deeper forms of learning, in which learners actively and collaboratively seek to develop knowledge that is personally or professionally meaningful, and a genuinely participative experience in HE.

Entwistle's (1984, 1996, 1998), and Entwistle et al's (2003) work, which is examined in Chapter Three, is instructive in terms of explaining the difference between deep and surface approaches to study. Put simply, when adopting a deep approach students start with the intention of understanding the subject matter whereas with a surface approach they may simply seek to repeat faithfully what they have been told. It was clear that the featured students had a tendency to adopt the latter. From my earlier research and working experience it was also clear to me that the students could not be expected to make the transition from a surface to a deep approach by themselves. At the same time, as the earlier research suggested, the provision of support in the form of study skills, though needed and helpful, could not by itself support the kinds of change necessary. Something much more fundamental was needed and led to my interest in a more holistic approach. The second study signalled the need to further consider the deep structures of learning involving the student's fundamental constructions of themselves as learners and of the educational process itself. It pointed to the need to focus on the capacity of teaching and learning processes to support a deeper experience of study.

A starting point was to appreciate the force of Eriksen and Weigard's (2004: 200) observation that institutions have rules that frame and limit actors' behaviour by, for example, stating what is to be done and how. They impose duties on individuals, establish rights and introduce prohibition through the allocation of roles, which state what actors need to or must do. In doing so, one practical consequence is that individuals are normally exempt from the need to justify their actions in terms of accounting for the premises underpinning their action choices. Rules are necessary for ensuring compliance but they also facilitate people achieving relevant objectives. But institutions also depend on support from individuals in order to survive and they have norms based on a common value base, which commit the members. As Eriksen and Weigard argue, 'the norms in question say something about the institution's constitutive foundation, about its identity, function and status' (ibid: 200). In other words, activity in a given situation is rule bound and norm guided. Actors also contribute to the rules and norms that are operative to a greater or lesser extent in the identity, function and status of people in those institutions.

This insight suggested that it would be useful for me to reflect on the ways in which rules and norms could be constitutive of the structures and procedures at play in my own practice and work situation. To put this more specifically, it would be interesting for me to explore how they could facilitate or repress the learning of non-traditional students undertaking the BA in Community Education. In short, I needed to know more about the identity and role that was being ascribed to the students and the teachers, and in what ways this ascription was a function of prevailing notions of teaching and learning in the programme. More than this, however, I needed a perspective that would reveal these depths whilst also pointing to different logics and possibilities in the encounter between learner and educator. With these sorts of issues in mind, it seemed appropriate for me to use the opportunity provided by the thesis to extend and deepen the line of inquiry taken in the first two studies.

There were two main thrusts in the new direction. One was to revisit and reinterpret the students' experiences in a more positive light. This resulted in a new understanding of the student's experience as both need and desire for a deeper

experience of learning. I was anxious to avoid the trap that ‘widening participation initiatives tend to focus on raising the aspirations of the working class rather than changing educational cultures’ (Tett, 2004: 257). To put Tett’s point another way, there is an implied deficit model in such a view where the student is deemed inadequate and must be helped to gain access to, and thereafter fulfil the requirements of, the ‘unproblematic’ institution. Shifting to a socio-cultural perspective meant that I could take into account ‘the role of the educational institution itself in creating and perpetuating inequalities’ (Archer, in Tett, 2004: 258). With this warning in mind, the thesis afforded the opportunity to also consider the nature of the curriculum and its role in relation to the student’s experience. As explained more fully in Chapter Four, this new focus for my continuing investigations into my own work with non-traditional students revealed a potentially fruitful correspondence between the student’s needs, for example in their desire for the curriculum to be ‘relevant’ to their own concerns and interests, and the programme’s aim to produce critical community education practitioners. This insight about correspondence eventually led me to consider what it could mean pedagogically to address the student’s needs whilst simultaneously meeting the programme’s aim.

A step forward was taken when I realised that it was possible to sharpen up on these generalised notions of teaching and learning processes. After my second study I had begun to consider deeper forms of learning but had found it difficult to bring coherence to the plethora of associated concepts and sometimes tenuously related ideas and principles. In some of my writing emanating from this second study (for example, Bamber 2003 and 2005), I had argued that Torbert’s (in Reason and Rowan, 1995: 49-50) notion of ‘valid knowledge’ was useful in relation to the content and the process of deeper learning and provided the beginnings of a conceptual framework for interpreting the student experience at a more fundamental level. The concept of valid knowledge does not refer to individual elements of learning, for example the acquisition of particular skills or the mastery of specific curriculum content. For students it means learning about and changing fundamental conceptions of themselves, education and their world. Often the conceptions are

unconscious, tacit and taken-for-granted and brought into awareness by the process of learning itself. This kind of deeper and more comprehensive reflection is a form of meta-learning.

In what can be taken as an attempt to define meta-learning, Meyer (2003) drew from Torbert's work to suggest that individuals require valid knowledge of four 'territories' of human experience involving:

- *purposes* in terms of an intuitive or spiritual knowledge of aspirations, goals and objects worthy of attention, and how these might change over time
- *strategy* in terms of the intellectual or cognitive knowledge of the theories underpinning choices
- *behavioural choices* that are open and which depend on awareness of self and the skills possessed
- knowledge of the *outside world* and of the consequences of behaviour.

Valid knowledge in this conception consists of a special kind of attention drawing together and uniting the four territories, seeing, embracing and correcting any incongruities among them (Torbert in Reason and Rowan, 1995: 50). The notion of 'special attention' advanced my thinking still further by pointing to a peculiar quality of consciousness or discipline in which action and reflection interpenetrate and are simultaneous (Bamber, 2004). Special attention is thought to involve a moment-to-moment consciousness, which heightens the possibilities and potential inherent in situations. It signals the centrality of a unified consciousness in individuals that both construes and interprets events in the act of deciding for example, how features in the presenting situation are related, what is important and what is to be pursued. As Pusey puts it: 'In thought and action we simultaneously both create and discover the world; and knowledge crystallises in this generative relation of the subject to the world' (1987: 24). In Chapter Five it is argued that this capacity to construe and interpret is centrally involved in the development of practice competence in community education. I found it difficult to take enquiry about valid knowledge further, however, because discussion about Torbert's concept was hard to trace in the literature. Torbert himself has not really progressed the notion as direct contact

through correspondence with the author has confirmed. In brief, Torbert's work was useful but ultimately lacking for my purposes because of its focus on the individual learner.

An important conceptual breakthrough came for me after reading McCune and Hounsell's (2004) work on ways of thinking and practising (WTP) in HE. Their research gave a concrete and specific focus to my attempts to get to the fundamentals of what it is that students are meant to learn. The main tenets of WTP are explained in Chapter Three but in essence the proposition is that students come into particular discipline areas in HE and not simply into HE in a more general sense. In short, students have to learn the ways of thinking and practising in particular disciplines and subject areas. This insight meant that I could turn away from the generalised notion of meta-learning to the specifics of the learning outcomes in the BA in Community Education. It also meant that it could be productive to focus on my own programme as a cross-section of institutional life with its embedded rules and norms reflected in teaching community education. From here it was a short step to the further insight that the student's experience of HE was inextricably connected to learning the ways of thinking and practising inscribed in the programme. At this point the focus of my concerns had crystallised into the problem of how to reconcile the student's educational needs with the programme's aim to produce critically competent community educators. Although concentrating on my own programme could be seen as narrow, such concerns are widespread. They can be clearly seen, for example, in the curriculum issues highlighted in the HEFCE report *Analysis of Strategies for Learning and Teaching* (Gibbs, 2001), and in the HEFCE *Review of Widening Participation Research* (Gorard et al, 2006). Having accounted for the genesis of the research focus, the rest of this chapter now explains my approach to understanding and responding to the problem.

The need for a theoretical study

After settling on the need to examine further the learning experiences of non-traditional students, I decided not to continue with small-scale, qualitative research

for two reasons. First, the findings from my earlier research already provided a good starting point. In a broad sense my focus was already established in terms of the sampled students' crises. Moreover, it seemed difficult to go any further with empirical research until I had teased out and clarified at least some of the key conceptual problems at the heart of the matter. For the same reason, neither did it seem productive to undertake more small-scale qualitative research focussing on the experiences of the educators involved in the programme. Research at the specific level of the educators would be valuable at a later date but I reasoned that this would be better informed by a prior theoretical study setting out what was meant by key terms such as learning and knowledge at the level of first principles.

Second, I was sensitive to the criticism levelled by Gorard et al (2006: 115), that a typical piece of research in the field of widening participation involves a small number of interviews with a group of existing participants, usually from the same institution as the researcher. In other words, a study like my own! In their view such a study cannot uncover a causal model and is difficult to generalise from because the link between the evidence presented and the conclusions drawn from it are tenuous. Typically, they argue, such studies lack controlled interventions to test what works and comparators even in co-relational and observational designs (ibid: 115). The kind of positivistic approach to research implied in the authors' comments makes no distinction between physical and social reality; both can and should be studied scientifically. In other words, 'a theoretical picture can be built up which relates types (of behaviour) to social structure...which could be said to cause that kind of behaviour' (Pring, 2000: 93). Thus the expectations and behaviour of individuals within educational situations can be explained by reference to the social structures within a particular society that determine the functions of institutions and social understandings.

From a different perspective, Pring (2000: 94) has argued that a major weakness of positivistic approaches lies in the failure to account for the capacity of people to transcend the social structures of which they are a part. In the extreme, human beings are regarded deterministically as products of the environment (Burrell and Morgan,

in Cohen et al, 2000: 6). Against this deterministic conception is the view that humans make sense of their world and to some extent it is ‘a *construction* of those interpretations’ (Pring, 2000: 95) and this construction is the proper subject for research (Guba and Lincoln, 1989: 266). Pring (2000: 103), however, warns that researchers should not confuse ‘meaning’, ‘in the sense of the state of mind of the agent with ‘meaning’ in terms of the agreed rules of social behaviour and of language’. To do so would be to ‘enter a solipsistic world which makes even our gestures unintelligible’. In a way that resonates with Eriksen and Weigard’s observations referred to earlier in this chapter, Pring argues that understanding how people construct meanings requires a grasp of the social rules in the wider society or social groupings within which they act (ibid: 103). Intentional explanations must at some point, therefore, make reference to a ‘wider explanatory scheme of things’ (ibid: 98). In effect, social enquiry is the attempt to reveal the wider scheme of things.

In trying to understand the wider explanatory scheme of things in my own subject area and situation, I have taken the view that the ‘paradigm wars’ between positivist and relativist accounts of social enquiry are over (Teddlie and Tashakkori, 2003: 5). The end of these ‘wars’, which have dominated the recent history of educational research, means that pragmatists who wish to explore the nature, context and goals of social enquiry can draw selectively from both approaches (Pawson and Tilley, 1997: 158; Greene et al, 2001: 28). Moreover, it should be noted that any binary depiction of research grossly oversimplifies the range and complexity of approaches. Rowan (1995: 96), for example, lists some nineteen different traditions and Cohen et al (2000: 23) cite a number of authors in referring to the ‘many variants of qualitative, naturalistic approaches’. Still others have fundamentally questioned what should count as research. Eisner, for example, suggests that the social scientific approach itself is but one among several legitimate forms of enquiry in education and argues for a broader view to include ‘reflective efforts to study the world and to create ways to share what we have learned about it’ (1997: 8). The theoretical approach that I have adopted in this thesis is just such an example of a reflective approach.

Dealing with validity threats

As Newman et al (2003: 167) attest, however, ‘establishing validity is even more consequential as methodological choices expand’. Maxwell (1992) contributes to our understanding of such choices by proffering a number of broad categories including descriptive, interpretive, theoretical and generalizable types of validity in qualitative research. Of the four categories presented, the descriptive and interpretative methodologies have particular relevance to my earlier research, whilst the theoretical and generalisable categories are pertinent to this thesis.

Descriptive validity concerns the factual accuracy of the account and is the foundation upon which the others are dependent. The implication is that the study must truthfully convey the ‘acts’ rather than the ‘actions’ of the actors; the physical and behavioural events rather than the meanings attached to them. The acts refer to specific situations and no issue of generalizability is involved (ibid: 286). Interpretive validity concerns what these events and behaviours mean to the actors involved including, for instance, intention, cognition, affect, and belief (ibid: 287). The implication here is the need to faithfully capture the participant’s perspective. This, according to Maxwell (ibid: 289) ‘is because, while accounts of physical and behavioural phenomena can be constructed from a variety of perspectives, accounts of meaning must be based initially on the conceptual framework of the people whose meaning is in question’. In my earlier research, for example, accounts were checked with the participants and the research attempted to accurately reflect the understandings that they brought to their experience of study in HE.

The third category goes beyond the previous two in pointing to the theoretical constructions that researchers bring to study (ibid: 291), and refers to how accounts function as explanations. The issue is about the application of a given theory or concept to established facts. An important implication of this third category is the need to make explicit those constructs that are brought to the research. In essence, this requirement to make the constructs explicit is the reason that I have taken a theoretical approach. This thesis provided the opportunity to analyse and to think through the basic premises of my own understandings of the student experience, as

well as the teaching and learning processes involved in the programme. Not previously having a 'given theory' effectively meant seeking to interpret reality without any explicit frame of reference. In other words, the mix of understandings that I brought to the research was not highly developed and this left me unduly open to the influence of tacit and taken-for-granted presuppositions. Maxwell's fourth category of generalizability is based on the assumption that, 'theory may be useful in making sense of similar persons or situations, rather than on an explicit sampling process and the drawing of conclusions about a specified population through statistical inference' (1992: 293). This last category resonates with the approach in this thesis because, in essence, it is about using theory to make sense of social reality.

My approach to the thesis, therefore, has been premised on the idea that constructing a credible response to the crises experienced by the students in my earlier research would require the development of appropriate concepts through which to better understand and interpret the issues involved. I was not persuaded that this development could be achieved in a positivistic way, for example by posing current practice in the programme against one or more existing normative models. Instead, in hypothetically deconstructing and reconstructing the teaching and learning processes it would be necessary to tease out and consider fundamental theoretical and philosophical issues. These issues are ontological in the sense that they relate to the very basic conceptions of what it means to be a student and a teacher and the essence of the relationship between the two. Here I was concerned to clarify and make an argument for my own values and intuitions that there could and should be a closer and more cooperative relationship based on mutual respect. The issues are also epistemological in that any rigorous analysis of learning and teaching processes concerns the nature of knowledge, and how knowledge is both created and passed on. Here I was anxious to substantiate my belief developed through my experience as a lecturer, that autonomous learning could be significantly enhanced by active participation in collective and collaborative processes of learning. The intellectual work of developing concepts through which to better understand and interpret the issues identified in my earlier research has been underpinned by recourse to Habermas's theory of communicative action.

As explained in Chapter One, although this famous philosopher and sociologist is not noted for contributions to thinking about educational practices, his theory of communicative action is entirely relevant to my purposes. It was also explained in Chapter One, that Habermas is centrally concerned with the nature of reason, processes of reasoning and rationality, and with the nature of knowledge and knowledge construction. The profundity of his conceptualisations in these areas could inform my thinking about the deep structures of learning in this one educational setting. Engaging with his theory could help to make explicit the values and ideas that I had adopted but were now implicit and used intuitively with regard to teaching and learning processes. Moreover, his work can be seen as entirely appropriate to the philosophical and ideological direction of the work undertaken in the BA in Community Education programme because he aims to develop the conditions under which the distorting influences of irrationality, domination and oppression can be overcome and transformed through deliberative, collective action. This aim resonates closely with what I take to be a fundamental part of my own work as an educator.

I acknowledge that validity threats, in the sense of challenges to the reliability of data and the credibility of the research findings, are still operative even with respect to a theoretical approach. These can still be dealt with, however, ‘by seeking evidence that would allow them to be ruled out’ and ‘*after* (author’s emphasis) a tentative account has been developed, rather than...through prior features of the research design (such as randomisation and controls)’ (Maxwell, 1992: 296). The notion that the research can be validated in a *post hoc* fashion means that testing in an empirical sense can be postponed. Theoretical research could be taken up at the level of the proposed principles for pedagogy, the worth and meaning of the concepts associated with the theory of communicative action, or at the level of the suggested operational inferences for practice. Empirical research could be taken up with the featured programme, or any other, to establish whether or in what ways the principles or proposed implications for teaching and learning processes conflict with existing views, or forms of action research could be undertaken to develop operational inferences. The research could be taken beyond this one context and might involve,

for example, a comparative study between similar programmes, or between different subject areas. How far, for instance, could a discursive pedagogy be taken in subjects such as mathematics? What difference might there be in the application of the suggested ordering principles between vocational and non-vocational programmes?

Ultimately the value of the ideas in this thesis will depend on the scrutiny of ‘a critical community’ (Pring, 1997: 8). Such a community, for example, could comprise my immediate colleagues in the first instance through engaging with them about the possible significance of my work for our programme. It would also be possible to check the extent to which the findings or considerations chime with those engaged in similar research activities. In Pring’s (2000: 115) words:

Basically one should believe only that which has been thoroughly corroborated through further experiments and through critical examination by others. In this way one can build up bodies of knowledge, however tentative these may be. What is important is that they have survived critical scrutiny. They are constantly put to the test. They contain the best theories we have, in that they explain a lot, they do a better explanatory job than rival theories and they have survived criticism.

In an attempt to build up knowledge my work could be subject to the processes of peer-review in journals, books and conferences.

Conclusion

This chapter has discussed the genesis of the research problem and the reasons for my interest in this topic, and for the theoretical approach taken to its possible resolution. It is now clear that the main purpose of the thesis is to furnish the opportunity for me to rethink professional training in community education in a way that was consistent with my own values as an educator, in this one context. There are five steps in this process (after Eriksen and Weigard, 2004: 202), which can be elaborated in terms of the need to:

1. Establish the nature of the problem.
2. Set out the ideal requirements for the proposed development.
3. Deduce principles of curriculum design from these ideal requirements.
4. Acknowledge the limitations of this approach.
5. Apply the principles of curriculum design to teaching and learning processes - establishing norms for group activity, which will enforce a change of roles and which aim at enhancing teaching and learning processes.

Broadly these five steps form the main body of the thesis. Step 1 corresponds to Chapters Three and Four, which establish the focus of the research in terms of the need to address the student's experience of crisis in relation to the BA in Community Education's aim to produce critical community educators. Chapter Five corresponds to Steps 2 and 3 in establishing the notion of a discursive pedagogy as an ideal standard based on four constituting principles for learning and teaching. Chapter Six equates to Step 4 in considering pedagogical challenges that would be entailed in attempts to instantiate a discursive pedagogy. Chapter Seven corresponds to Step 5 in discussing and setting out a number of possible ways in which the ideal of a discursive pedagogy could inform teaching and learning practices. Having established the research focus, and my approach to the thesis and its structure, it is now possible to begin the argument in the next chapter by providing a more comprehensive account of the findings from my earlier research.

Chapter Three

Reconstructing Learning Experiences

Introduction

Having set out the scope of the thesis in Chapter One, and the genesis of my topic in Chapter Two, the discussion now opens with a clarification of the term ‘non-traditional’ within the broad context of widening participation activities. Following this, it is explained how the non-traditional students featured in my earlier research appeared to negotiate four attitudinal ‘crises’ as they came to terms with the requirements of academe. Crisis in this sense refers to a keenly felt personal predicament requiring resolution. The four crises were said to revolve around a feeling of not being entitled to participate in HE, disinclination towards academic study, having a simplistic understanding of the theory-practice nexus and an instrumental attitude to gaining a professional qualification. It is necessary to move away from individualised and deficit models of such students, however, by thinking about their experience in terms of a deeper experience of learning. This concept of depth can be usefully considered with reference to Entwistle’s (1996) work on the differences between deep and surface approaches to learning. It needs to be stressed that students do not simply become deep learners by themselves, however, and attention must be given to the role of the curriculum in this process. In effect, as McCune and Hounsell (2004) argue, depth occurs when students understand and can actively engage with the ways of thinking and practising in a subject area.

This chapter argues that securing active engagement would mean responding to the four crises by recognising the student’s commitment to gaining a professional qualification and acknowledging that they have something of value to contribute individually and collectively to the teaching and learning process. It would also mean establishing the relevance of the subject matter to issues arising for students as they seek to resolve practice problems. Consequently, it would mean rendering academic language comprehensible. At the heart of securing active engagement would be the need for the students to understand how theory is developed, and not simply

acquired, and this means an emphasis on developing the capacity for reflexive and reflective thinking. It can be seen that this capacity is central to the development of appropriate practice knowledge and competence in community education.

‘Non-traditional’ students in HE

The generic term ‘non-traditional’ is useful shorthand for describing different groups of people all of whom have the common characteristic of being in some way under-represented in Higher Education. The term needs to be scrutinised, however, if it is not to obscure important distinctions between groups of people and the issues associated with such differences. At undergraduate level in the ‘ancient’ universities a person may be non-traditional simply because they are older, for example, whilst in all other respects the same person could be from a privileged background in terms of wealth and cultural attributes. Non-traditional may be used interchangeably with ‘under-represented’ but this expression can also lack the bite of a more loaded term such as ‘disadvantaged’. This latter term at least begins to suggest that some are advantaged whilst others are not. Even with this conceptual move, however, disadvantage could still be seen as a function of individual or group deficiency. A step change in register is needed to fully reflect the idea that some groups are actively discriminated against in a social system that has historically favoured some over others. Concepts such as discrimination and oppression more accurately capture the endemic and structural nature of injustice and inequality. Throughout what follows the term non-traditional should be understood in this more comprehensive sense as referring to groups of people who are systemically disadvantaged in terms of access to HE.

It should be further acknowledged that discrimination is multi-faceted and a full analysis would include considerations, for example, of gender, race, and disability. Having said this, a shared socio-economic background is the most salient factor characterising the students undertaking the BA in Community Education. The students are mainly from NS-SEC classes 4 to 7 (Office for National Statistics, 2005):

1. Higher managerial and professional occupations.
2. Lower managerial and professional occupations.
3. Intermediate occupations.
4. Small employers and own account workers.
5. Lower supervisory and technical occupations.
6. Semi-routine occupations.
7. Routine occupations.

Being from classes 4 to 7 is not the only important dimension, however, as a further distinguishing feature is age. As mature students they carry a complex range of work commitments and responsibilities and often come with life experiences that profoundly affect their capacity to engage fully with traditional forms of provision in HE.

University educators around the world need to understand the requirements of non-traditional students because widening access to HE has become a global phenomenon (Schuetze and Wolter, 2000). In the United Kingdom there has been a mounting interest in developing educational opportunities (Steedman and Green, 1996; Tuckett, 1997) leading up to the White Paper on the Future of Higher Education (DfES, 2003). The 1997 Dearing Report on HE devoted a chapter to the issue of widening participation and its terms of reference included the requirement to consider 'maximum participation' and a 'growing diversity of students'. The report's authors expressly stated that they wished to see participation widened and the differentials between groups reduced significantly over the coming years (Para 7.20). A Scottish Committee met as an adjunct to Dearing between July 1996 and June 1997 to address the distinctive Scottish context of HE. Their report noted, for example, that Scotland had more students from lower occupational groups in HE than England. This was largely due to the fact that forty per cent of Scottish higher education provision involves sub-degree level qualifications compared to a figure of around 25 per cent for the rest of the country (Para 2.8). There was, therefore, no room for complacency in Scotland.

Since Dearing, widening participation has become embedded in the UK Funding Councils' priorities (e.g. HEFCE, 1999a; SHEFC, 1999) and has achieved high political status in Scotland (Clark et al, 1997; Paterson, 1997) where the Scottish

Executive (2000: 1) has deemed widening access to further and higher education to be 'the real need' through 'removing all barriers to individuals'. Two documents: *The Lifelong Learning Strategy for Scotland* (Scottish Executive, 2003a) and the *Framework for Higher Education in Scotland* (Scottish Executive, 2003b) require all universities to respond to the needs of the more heterogeneous student population. Significantly, given the focus of this thesis, the *Framework* document emphasises the need to design teaching strategies and provision which account for the different types of students now entering university and their learning needs (Scottish Executive, 2003b: 28).

The figures for the United Kingdom as a whole are dramatic and illustrative; from a base of around 800,000 in 1987 the total numbers of students in higher education had risen to just over two million by 2004 (HEFCE 2004). A report from Universities UK/SCOP, *From the Margins to the Mainstream*, however, shows that although overall rates of participation in higher education in the UK have increased dramatically, equality of participation by students from lower socio-economic groups remains a challenge (Thomas et al, 2005: 1). The report (ibid: Table 7.1) reveals an improving and evolving situation at the time of writing in a number of areas including targeting, admissions, institutional strategies and resources. Nevertheless, in important respects the recent changes have altered the shape of, rather than eradicated, privilege and disadvantage. The trend is still upwards although the rate has slowed down. In Scotland, for example, from around 238,000 students in HE in 1997 there are just over 276,000 in 2006 (Scottish Executive, 2006: Table 1).

Although the rapid expansion of student numbers amounts to a transformation of the sector from an elite to a mass system, it is clear that the change has been achieved by differential enrolment from the social classes with socio-economic groups NS-SEC classes 4 to 7 still seriously under-represented in HE. In 2004 the figures for those under 21 in classes 4 to 7 were 28.8 per cent and 27.5 per cent for England and Scotland respectively (HESA, 2006: Table 1a). Although the situation varies slightly in different parts of the United Kingdom, broadly those who do participate from the lower socio-economic groups and minority ethnic communities are concentrated in

former polytechnics (HEFCE, 2004). Table 1 illustrates the point by contrasting participation rates between Edinburgh and Napier Universities as examples of ‘old’ and ‘new’ institutions respectively. The distinction relates to those universities that received their charters before or after the Further and Higher Education (Scotland) Act 1992, which removed the so-called ‘binary divide’ between universities and polytechnics. It was the same act that established funding councils for FE and HE in Scotland. For contextual purposes the figures, which are the latest available at the time of writing, are also given for all universities in Scotland. On each count we see a clear distinction between the socio-economic backgrounds of the people attending the two universities.

Table 1: Enrolments at Edinburgh and Napier Universities in 2004-5

Institutions	Edinburgh		Napier		Scotland	
	%	No's	%	No's	%	No's
Total (first degree) entrants	100	3840	100	1820	100	29875
Young (under 21)	88.4	3395	60.6	1100	78.5	23445
Young from state schools/colleges	66.7	2240	93	945	86.3	18700
Young social class NS-SEC 4,5,6 and 7	17.1	525	36.5	325	26.7	5255
Young low-participation neighbourhoods	8.2	255	23.3	225	18.6	3960
Mature entrants (over 21)	11.6	445	39.4	715	21.5	6425

Source: 2006 HESA Performance Indicators in HE - Tables 1a and 2a

In the current policy and market-driven context it is significant to note, according to a recent HESA report (2006: TableT3a), that those universities that have done the most to widen access are those with the highest dropout rates. The figures are a matter of public knowledge and from time to time a focus of intense political concern. The Scotsman (22.9.2005), for example, reported that one in ten Scottish students drop out of university and college in the first year. According to the 2006 HESA report, the four UK higher education institutions with the highest dropout rates in 2003-4 were all Scottish. At Bell College, 38.5 per cent, at Abertay University 21.2 per cent, at Napier University 21 per cent, and at Paisley University 20.9 per cent of new entrants were no longer studying a year later. This finding about retention rates is hardly surprising given that widening access will inevitably increase the numbers of students likely to experience difficulty. The rates may indicate

nothing more than that Scotland has led the way in terms of increasing the numbers of non-traditional students in HE.

A range of theoretical and empirical studies, conducted over the last twenty years, has examined this kind of differentiated participation by working-class students (for example Archer et al, 2003; McGivney, 1990; Reay et al, 2001). These studies have considered how racialised and gendered class identities, and the structural inequalities that frame these social positions, interact to constrain and affect participation in multiple, varying ways. Research has revealed, for example, that choice for middle-class students 'is presented as natural, orderly, clear-cut, almost beyond question, unlike the chancy uncertain process that many working-class students are caught up in' (Maguire et al, 1999: 5). The point is that for middle class students, passing through HE can be a relatively smooth, integrative process that involves confirmation of what they already know and hold to be true. This is not to deny that such students have to work hard to gain their degrees. Jennings (1995:17-18) puts the point in the following way:

Adults who have moved in and out of formal learning contexts throughout their lives, and who experience little discontinuity in the assumptions and expectations about learning operating across these various situations, can feel a sense of integration upon entry and in their overall experience of subsequent comparable learning environments. What they achieve in that situation is tied in with other kinds of influence within that context and within themselves.

In contrast, the characteristics associated with non-traditional students mean that the passage is more likely to involve risk and uncertainty, resulting in the need to examine and change some of the assumptions on which their lives have been built (Tett, 2004). Examples of this would be the assumptions underlying the four crises referred to in my earlier research. As Ball et al (2000) have explained, working-class people usually position themselves 'outside' HE (in other words, they construct HE as an alien place). Even those who do make their way into HE may do so on the basis that they are potentially able to take advantage of the benefits it can offer, but not as 'owners' of it.

Acknowledging such issues and responding to them positively is a necessity, not an option - a point made by Dearing (DfES, 1997: 101):

Widening participation must be accompanied by the objective of reducing the disparities in participation in higher education between groups and ensuring that higher education is responsive to the aspirations and distinctive abilities of individuals.

In addition to the personal qualities indicated by the individualistic language of ‘aspirations and distinctive abilities’, HE should also be responsive to the limiting circumstances of non-traditional students stemming from structural socio-economic disadvantage. Longden and Yorke’s recent study (see Yorke, 2007) on behalf of the Higher Education Academy, confirms that in contrast to the typical 18 to 21 year old students that predominate at pre 1992 universities, mature working-class students are more likely to have family responsibilities and work in low paid jobs to sustain themselves and their families whilst studying ‘full-time’ at university. Factors such as these have an obvious and detrimental impact on the time, resources and energies available for study. Given such conditions, struggling for a degree is a hard road to follow, as the following quote from a participant in my earlier research demonstrates (Bamber et al, 1997: 20):

Just not having enough time for things is the major drawback. I don’t have time to potter about in the library and go down different avenues, which gives you a kind of tunnel vision in that you have to focus on the actual work rather than being able to look at wider issues.

A recent HEFCE report (Gorard et al, 2006: 119), however, has called for a shift away from prevailing deficit models of non-traditional students in HE. It emphasises the need for studies to reflect the fact that such students are not homogenous and to explore ways in which difference and diversity intersect. This thesis is an attempt to move away from a deficit model by reconstructing the experiences of one group of non-traditional students in more positive terms. The argument begins by reinterpreting the student experience of crisis put forward in my earlier research.

Four crises in learning

A key finding from my earlier research is that a two-way process of change and development is required if non-traditional students are to enjoy a successful, integrative experience in HE. By successful and integrative is meant an experience in which students do not simply acquire knowledge but play their part as active learners interacting with and ‘authoring’ knowledge (Lillis, 2001). For the students it means learning to deal with the prevailing academic culture in HE. For the institution it means recognising and responding to the social circumstances and background of non-traditional entrants by providing teacher-intensive and sustained support throughout the course. As previously indicated in Chapters One and Two, for the sampled students the difference between an integrative and a disjunctive experience appeared to depend upon successfully negotiating a group of crises (Bamber et al 1997; and Bamber and Tett, 1999, 2000 and 2001). Crisis is meant here as a predicament involving a crucial or decisive turning point or situation, which may be accompanied by emotional stress, involving the need and the desire to resolve the tensions involved. A crisis in this sense may be a more or less permanent feature of a student’s life at university unless it is overcome. In the earlier research, the four crises were said to revolve around:

- feeling unentitled to participate in HE
- being disinclined towards academic study
- having a simplistic understanding of the theory-practice nexus
- having an instrumental attitude to gaining a professional qualification.

It is not suggested that all the students negotiated their way through the crises in a linear, pre-ordained order, at the same rate or with the same level of engagement. Having said this, there was a tendency for each crisis to figure more prominently at certain points - the first one, for example, being more marked at the beginning of their studies. It is widely known that initial perceptions affect students’ subsequent engagement with the learning environment (Gorard et al, 2006: 76). The finding also resonates with Kasworm’s (2003: 96) contention that ‘patterns of learning engagement are, in part, reflective of adults’ epistemological beliefs’. Whilst the first two could be typical of mature working-class students in general, the points made below in relation to the last two do not translate in the same way across HE as a

whole. This is because these particular crises are provoked by study in vocational and professional programmes.

The crisis of entitlement derived from the interplay between external experience and internalised feelings. Many of the students came from backgrounds with negative experiences of formal schooling and little, if any, previous experience of HE. This kind of experience amongst working-class people is documented extensively in the literature (e.g. Williams, 1997; Woodrow, 1996) where such experiences can result in non-traditional students feeling that 'No, HE is not for us'. The situation could be compounded by negative attitudes on the part of friends and partners. Deep-rooted feelings could therefore set up significant psychological barriers to students engaging fully and openly with learning in HE. On the other hand, some of the featured students also had a counter-balancing and equally deep-seated commitment to showing that it could be done. In learning terms, this motivation to succeed needed to be turned into a 'Yes, HE is for me' attitude. This development was also important in terms of the second crisis, which was reflected in negative attitudes towards academic study. The 'No, HE is not for me' attitude could cast such study as irrelevant to the 'real' world of practice as construed by the students themselves.

The concern in the previous research was with where the antipathy seemed to come from a prior and unquestioned assumption by the students, and one, moreover, based ultimately on a negative perception of their own status in the social order. In learning terms, the requirement was for students to turn towards the academic culture if they were to progress and begin to use newly acquired information and concepts to better understand and redress social injustice. Some students reported that engaging with literature, having to produce formal essays and comply with all the other aspects of academic literacy, often seemed like unnecessary hoop-jumping. This kind of thinking is also frequently reported on in the literature (Murphy and Fleming, 2000; Lillis, 2001). In addition, students were carrying expectations from their communities that were often ambiguous. For example, failure was seen as highly possible, even likely, when at the same time the students were viewed as role models to be admired.

The third crisis concerned the relationship between theory and practice. There were two issues here. The first issue was that students often came from backgrounds where argument was based on assertion rather than a more distanced and nuanced consideration of issues. The following quote from a student who was a community activist illustrates this point (Bamber et al, 1997: 23):

One of the key skills of being an activist was being focused on the strong points of your community's arguments and ignoring the other things. You're aware that they are going to put arguments back to you but, in the main, you're not looking at trying to have a reasoned and balanced discussion, you're fighting for a particular sector...So there's a distinct difference between being a community education student and a community activist.

The second issue was that when theory was perceived as alien in its expression it was unlikely to inform practice behaviour in any positive sense. This attitude was often compounded by a common misconception, which cast theory as merely 'technical' or 'instrumental' in nature. In other words, theory was seen simplistically as a set of instructions for the resolution of practice problems. Students often expressed disappointment with theory when it did not meet this latter expectation. The following quote illustrates the point (Bamber and Tett, 2000: 71):

I think that it's about having a respect for someone that does it in practice rather than just sits there telling you what it should be. If somebody sits there and tells you 'this is what you should do' or 'this is a radical perspective', you think 'well you don't go out there and do it every day' and you kind of lose respect for someone. If it was more a case of 'when I do it, these are the problems that I find and this is how I overcome them', it's getting the balance between being too theoretical but also about not telling people how to do the practice. So I think that someone that has a grasp, not just an understanding from reading about it from 20 years ago, must have relevant and recent experience of what they're teaching.

The crisis of having a simplistic understanding of the relationship between theory and practice is resolved in two ways. First, it is to see theory's place in filling out the wider picture within which the specifics of practice occur. As noted above, this crisis

may well have parallels in other professionally oriented programmes in HE but will not resonate with non-vocational subject areas. Second, it is to understand that whilst theoretical analysis initially renders practice situations more complex, it could also lead to an increase in the options available in any given situation. In this latter case, the idea is that theory is not simply received through instruction but also developed through reflective and reflexive processes as learners struggle to think through issues and resolve practice problems.

The crises depicted in this earlier research find some parallels in Kasworm's (2003) delineation of five belief structures called 'knowledge voices' from her interviews with 90 adult students. These are: the entry voice, the outside voice, the cynical voice, the straddling voice and the inclusion voice. Each of these five knowledge voices suggests a particular construction of the adult student learning world, perceptions of knowledge, and understandings of relationships between the collegiate classroom and the adult learners' worlds of work, family, self, and community. The 'entry' voice, for example, is concerned with how to be a successful student as judged solely by grades, the 'outside' voice with reinforcing existing knowledge based on the student's 'real' world expertise, and the 'cynical' voice is sceptical about the value of academic knowledge, with participation being seen as a necessary step to gain credentials. All three echo the instrumental and surface approaches (discussed in some depth in the next section) that would appear to underpin the sampled students experience of crisis.

My observation about the difference between received and developed theory accords with Kasworm's (2003) fourth, 'straddling' voice, which values both academic and real world knowledge and the creation of applications and connections between the two worlds. Some retained a distrust of academic language, however, and struggled to master it throughout the length of the course. As one said (Bamber and Tett, 2000: 67):

Instead of sitting for an hour and a half in lectures with someone babbling on at you, especially when they aren't relating it to any realistic circumstances, I think that smaller group discussions were better. They were more interesting to do, you got more information out of it, and you had the opportunity to discuss something if you

didn't quite understand. It's very academic and I'm sure that with most subjects at some point the tutors could bring in some real practical examples. The jargon is another language.

Coming to terms with a more sophisticated appreciation of the relationship between theory and practice was a pre-requisite for moving through the fourth crisis, which equates to Kasworm's 'cynical' voice, as the sampled students regarded study as the means to obtain the qualification that permitted entry to higher status and better paid job, and the ability to undertake certain prescribed tasks. The implied resolution is in the distinction between having a qualification and being professional. *Being* professional means appreciating the big picture, gaining some distance from those being served, using theory, theorising, arguing a case, and exercising the authority inherent in a given role whilst acting on the basis of principles. McFarlane (2004: 2) points to the importance of the development of professional virtues because 'ethics involves engagement with complex situations and making hard choices. This reality does not sit comfortably with formulaic solutions'. Ultimately, professionalism is more about a fundamental approach to work than about status. As Smith (1994: 133) notes, this approach needs to be incorporated and internalised so that it becomes a way of being professional, entailing a continuous commitment to development through reflective and reflexive learning processes.

Reinterpreting the student experience

The four crises were characterised by generalised feelings of conflict, discomfort or confusion, which, unless resolved, could undermine or delay the student's successful participation in the programme. It can be seen, however, that to focus only on the experience of difficulty is to portray the student experience in an unduly negative way. It is not that the research failed to capture important dimensions of their experience. It is rather that in focussing on the problematic aspects some elements were highlighted when others had equal claims to attention. For example, the sheer commitment of the students was undervalued as an asset for teaching and learning processes. The following comment gives an indication of the levels of motivation required (Bamber and Tett, 1999: 471):

It's a constant struggle between looking after the kids, work and study. I sometimes have to do my college work from eleven at night till four thirty in the morning. Then I have a quick sleep, then breakfast, get the kid's to school and then off to work. That's what a day's like for me. It's hard but you've got to do it.

My own experience of interviewing such students for selection indicates that underpinning this level of motivation is a belief about the importance of community education, and that they have something to contribute to the work. Indeed, it is a requirement for entry to the programme that the candidates have recent and relevant experience, and many continue to work in the field during their studies. Shifting perspective means that the rejection of HE culture as elitist could also be seen as a principled position rather than a failure of some kind. Implied in the rejection is the notion that learning should be relevant to the student's concerns and situations as they draw on their own experience of practice, especially in a vocationally oriented programme. From this position it is not that students fail to make connections between the taught programme and the world of practice. It is rather that the earlier research erred in over-emphasising the role of the student in this task whilst failing to consider fully that of the educator in establishing the relevance of subject matter to issues and the resolution of practice problems.

This latter point is related to the issue about the student's difficulties with understanding theory when couched in academic terms. Probing the roots of this crisis in a more self-critical way as an educator would be to acknowledge the need to engage more directly in discursive practices that allow time and space to unpack terminology and to establish the appropriateness of the language in ways that make sense to all participants. The requirement to 'make sense' raises fundamental epistemological questions about how claims concerning the worth of this or that perspective are justified. The earlier research did not place enough emphasis on the possibility that educators might have to engage more rigorously with students in processes of justification. This point relates to the second aspect of the crisis of understanding theory in relation to reflective and reflexive processes. In simple terms, the earlier research focussed on the difficulty students had with understanding

the notion that theory is developed as well as received. It might have paid more attention to how educators demonstrate this capacity for development in their own work and how they engage with the students in such processes.

Finally, the earlier research failed fully to appreciate the difficulty of the concept of professionalism for students coming from backgrounds with little or no tradition of professional activity. More than this, however, it did not explore the significance of the concept of competence that lies at the root of this issue. In effect there are competing claims to competence behind views of what it means to be professional and the research could have focussed more on the adequacy of the way that this central topic is addressed in the programme. The central questions that need to be explored concern the meaning and nature of practice knowledge and competence and how this is developed.

It is also worth stating that some students achieved a level of development that seemed to involve a profound change in the conception of self. The kind of development can be seen from the following comment (Bamber et al, 1997: 22):

There are lots of different things that I like about the course, like actually getting through the first year and getting the grades that I've been getting as well which has definitely motivated me. But that's not what it's all about. You can get good grades but not feel that you deserve it. So, it's more than just getting good grades, it's about the learning that you go through to get them. I enjoy the learning, the reading and the lectures, the becoming critical about things. I want more.

The opposite also held true, however, in that failure to develop in this way meant, even if they still obtained the degree, that the full potential of the learning process would not have been fulfilled. Students in this position would function at a barely adequate level and continue to have profound doubts about their professional capacity.

As stated at the end of Chapter One, this thesis should not be taken as a crude criticism of the existing programme. It is clear that the programme is successful in that retention rates are high and with very few exceptions most qualify. Moreover, on

completion the range of marks stands comparison with any other programme across the University. Rather the thesis is an opportunity to explore how the programme might enhance its capacity to achieve its own aims more completely. Reinterpreting the student experience is an essential foundation for such an exploration. It means moving away from a deficit model of non-traditional students and calls for change along the lines set out in a Joseph Rowntree Foundation report. According to the report's authors the challenge is to (Quin et al, 2005):

- provide an appropriate curriculum for working-class students that reflects and affirms their background
- develop a pedagogy that supports student integration
- integrate learning support within the curriculum.

Reconstructing the student's learning experience is a first step in seeking to meet the above requirements. It would mean recognising and responding to their concerns in four ways. First, would be to recognise and value the student's commitment and that they have valuable experience to contribute individually and collectively to teaching and learning processes. Second, would require concerted attempts to render language comprehensible in the process of establishing the relevance of the subject matter to issues arising for students as they seek to resolve practice problems. Third, would be to clarify how theory is developed, as well as received, through reflexive and reflective processes. Fourth, would mean a greater focus on explicating the nature and development of competence. Taking these concerns as a whole, means that it is possible more positively to reinterpret their experience in terms of a requirement for teaching and learning processes to secure their full and productive engagement with the programme.

As the rest of the chapter goes on to argue, thinking along these lines means moving beyond the kind of individualised, psychological perspective associated with Entwistle's (1996) work on 'deep', 'surface' and 'strategic' approaches to learning. This movement embraces a more socio-cultural focus on the impact of curriculum that can be usefully discussed with reference to McCune and Hounsell's (2004) work on ways of thinking and practising in discipline areas. Their work can be seen as a

step towards a more socio-political perspective, which attempts to take into account and challenge the negative effects of social and institutional factors on teaching and learning processes. This latter perspective is elaborated in Chapters Five and Six in relation to Habermas's theory of communicative action, after a detailed consideration of the aims and objectives of the BA in Community Education in Chapter Four.

Beyond a deep approach to learning

Entwistle (1996: 73) notes the somewhat paradoxical truth that whilst it is common enough for students to find the intellectual authority embedded in universities challenging and intimidating, it is still the case that 'lecturers expect them to adopt a relativistic stance, to interpret evidence, to compare theories critically, and to reach their own balanced conclusion'. He finds that although many students face an identity crisis in resolving the need to make judgements between alternative explanations, most come to see its positive advantages and to recognise that the demand for relativistic reasoning is a necessary part of developing the ability to think critically and analytically (ibid: 73). The experience of the students featured in my earlier research appears to support this finding although they may take longer to come to the required understanding. Drawing on Marton and Säljö's (1976) study, Entwistle (ibid: 77) ascribes the differences between students in their orientations to learning in psychological terms as the difference between deep compared with strategic and surface level processing.

According to Entwistle's theory, when adopting a deep approach, students start with the intention of understanding the meaning of an article, for example, and relate this back to previous knowledge and to personal experience. They may also try to determine the extent to which an author's conclusions are justified by appropriate evidence, and are likely to find material interesting, which usually goes with the willingness to work harder. Those adopting a surface approach may try to memorise part of an article in relation to the questions they think they may be asked to answer afterwards. The focus is often limited to specific facts or pieces of disconnected information, often rote learned. Covering books in this fashion is a tedious and

unrewarding activity, which means they may do less work and so do less well in assignments. In a strategic approach students are able to perform well in assignments because they have correctly calculated what is required to be successful. In this position the material need not be personally meaningful. These differences are set out in Table 2.

Table 2: Student approaches to studying and learning

Orientation	Value	Motive	Strategy
Personal meaning 'deep'	Personal development as overall goal of education	Intrinsic - interest in what is being learned	Work satisfying only if personal meaning established by relating new information to existing knowledge
Reproducing 'surface'	Vocational preparation as main purpose of university	Extrinsic - need for qualifications or fear of failure	Limit activities to those demanded (syllabus-bound) Learn by rote
Achieving 'strategic'	University is a game providing competition and opportunities to show excellence	Achievement - need for success	Structuring, organizing work, meet deadlines, play the game (to win)

(After Entwistle, 1996: 102)

Whilst a strategic approach may have advantages for those able to adopt it selectively, for instance when personal circumstances require it, the strategic option is not considered from this point onwards, as there was little evidence of it from my previous research with the non-traditional students. It may well be the case that such students do not have the option of being strategic because they lack the requisite kinds of 'cultural capital', including self-confidence, to treat study as an opportunity to 'play the game to win'.

Bourdieu's (1993: 88) concept of 'habitus' provides some insight into the lack of such an option for non-traditional students in relation to this notion of cultural capital. Habitus refers to a way of understanding individuals as a complex amalgam of their past and present; an amalgam that is always in the process of completion and so open to change. It emphasises the socially acquired, embodied systems of dispositions and/or predispositions that form the basis of outlooks and opinions. It operates at the sub-conscious level and so is beyond the reach of introspective scrutiny or control by the will. Bourdieu argues, however, that it 'is no more fixed

than the practices which it helps to structure' (1984: 466). This concept is a helpful way of understanding the experiences of working class students and seeing the role that schools and other educational institutions play in both changing and reproducing social and cultural inequalities from one generation to the next. Education could be 'the royal road to the democratisation of culture if it did not consecrate the initial cultural inequalities by ignoring them' (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1979: 21).

The experiences of many of the students undertaking the BA in Community Education, for example, support a view of schools as trading posts to which students bring different sorts of cultural capital. As one said: 'I was selected out of school by the teachers. The teacher was only interested in the five or six clever, well-behaved ones who might pass the bursary exams. My mother expected me to come home from school and look after my brothers and sisters and get the housework done' (Bamber et al, 1997: 25). That such an experience can have lasting consequences is clearly evidenced in one former student's statement (Bamber and Tett, 1999: 469): 'I was expelled from secondary school when I was fourteen years old. I never really went back into the system after that. That was me finished with it'. Only some kinds of knowledge, dispositions, linguistic codes, problem-solving skills, attitudes, and tastes get rewarded or valued by schools so those with the 'right' (i.e. legitimated) cultural capital fare the best. This positioning is reflected in the ways students make sense of past 'failures', in the way that they experience education, and in their educational aspirations.

Consideration of habitus connects well with Salmon's (1989: 231) metaphor of 'stance', which denotes fundamental orientations to the world based on our previous learning and experience:

How we place ourselves, within any learning context, whether formal or informal, is fundamental. This is not just a matter of 'attitude', in so far as it defines our own engagement with the material; it represents the very stuff of learning itself...how we position ourselves towards [each other] in any educational setting...is what governs the limits and possibilities of our engagement together,

what shapes and defines the material we construct out of that engagement.

Providing it is kept in view that individual stance is influenced in complex ways by structural factors such as class, race and gender, the notion of stance is useful in interpreting the way that the students dealt with the four inter-related crises provoked by their engagement with the BA in Community Education programme. As outlined in Table 3 below, the four positions can be related to the deep-surface model on a spectrum of required changes in understanding.

Table 3: Required changes to stance

Aspects of stance	Required changes in understanding	
Entitlement	From 'No'	to 'Yes, HE is for us!'
Inclination	From against	to towards academic study
Theory-Practice	From instrumental	to critical practice
Professionalism	From skill acquisition	to a way of 'being'
Approach to learning	Surface	Deep
Outcome	Unsuccessful	Successful

Although the positions on the left of the spectrum may be deeply entrenched, they equate to surface attitudes in relation to learning because they limit the possibilities for meaningful engagement in the learning encounter. The positions to the right may be considered deep because they have the opposite effect in terms of facilitating personally meaningful engagement with the requirements of academic study.

Even a cursory consideration of the issue would indicate that students cannot reasonably be expected to alter their stance and develop the capacity for deep learning simply of their own accord. Such a change would be an example of transformational learning that involves a fundamental reassessment of the deep structures of beliefs, convictions, ideas and feelings (Mezirow, 1995: 45). In this regard, although the capacity to adopt a deep approach requires an appropriate level of intelligence as a prerequisite it also requires sufficient prior knowledge in order to be able to interpret and make sense, for example, of an author's arguments and evidence. Entwistle's point about prior knowledge is significant as it can be assumed,

in a general sense, that there will be gaps in the academic background of non-traditional students. This gap not only relates to content knowledge but also to ways of operating in an academic environment. This relationship with the environment is a crucial factor; as the rest of this section goes on to argue.

It is interesting that Entwistle (1996) reports that students vary their strategies considerably from task to task because this would appear to challenge assumptions about the existence of consistent individual characteristics among students. However, 'it is possible to accept that there can be both consistency and variability in students approaches to learning. The tendency to adopt a certain approach, or to prefer a certain style of learning, may be a useful way of describing differences between students. But a more complete explanation would also involve recognition of the way an individual student's strategy may vary from task to task' (ibid: 105). This finding is important for my purposes because it shows that we are not dealing with fixed traits or personality types, although they may be relatively stable, and that variations in the task produce different reactions from students. Entwistle also notes that students' approaches to learning are significantly affected by the perceived demands of lecturers and departments (ibid: 104). Assessment procedures seem to have the greatest effect on students' study strategies but the attitudes and enthusiasms of the staff are also significant. It is important to note that this insight can be extended to the influence of the overall culture in any particular environment. In short, the points just discussed suggest that teaching and learning methods, staff expectations and behaviour and the general culture in an academic environment play a significant role in eliciting particular sorts of responses from students.

Given that there appears to be a strong correlation between a deep approach and a successful experience of learning in HE (Richardson and Edmunds, 2007: 9), it is important to consider how to encourage the kind of personal commitment and interest in the subject that is associated with such an approach. Here there is a connection to the discursive processes that characterise the Habermasian notion of the 'ideal speech situation'. In the ideal speech situation, participants are required to justify their own ideas and actions, and in doing so to expose, analyse and defend the

premises and basic suppositions that underpin their commitments. Pedagogy based on such an understanding would be consonant with perspectives that acknowledge the significance of deep-seated dispositional factors for learning. The fundamental difference, however, is that in the Habermasian conception, learning occurs through inter-subjective processes as people contest their respective validity claims. The point, as will be argued in Chapter Five, is that it is instructive for educators to shift to a socio-cultural perspective focussing on enhancing these communicative processes, and away from psychological conceptions of learning as something that takes place in the individual's mind. This understanding prepares the way for a consideration of the influence of the educational milieu in student learning.

The importance of milieu

The significance of milieu can be elaborated with reference to the work of McCune and Hounsell (2004), who explore ways of strengthening undergraduate teaching-learning environments so as to improve student engagement and promote high quality learning. Because it builds on Entwistle's work on deep and surface approaches to study, such as looking for patterns and underlying principles, it is helpful in constructing a view of teaching and learning that gives due emphasis to the pivotal role of curriculum. The phrase 'ways of thinking and practicing' (WTP) in a subject area is used to describe the 'richness, depth and breadth of what students might learn through engagement with a given subject area in a specific context' (ibid: 257). Instead of constructing taxonomies for particular contexts, they identify key themes and issues to enhance understanding of high quality learning as understood and experienced by staff and students. Their work moves well beyond the more circumscribed concept of 'constructive alignment' (CA). According to Biggs (2003: 1):

CA has two aspects. The 'constructive' aspect refers to what the learner does, which is to *construct meaning* through relevant learning activities. The 'alignment' aspect refers to what the teacher does, which is to set up a learning environment that supports the learning activities appropriate to achieving the learning outcomes. The key is that the components in the teaching system, especially the

teaching methods used and the assessment tasks are *aligned* to the learning activities assumed in the intended outcomes. The learner is in a sense ‘trapped’, and finds it difficult to escape without learning what is intended should be learned.

The importance of Bigg’s work for my purposes is to establish that there needs to be consistency between the aims of a programme, including content and desired learning outcomes, and the means by which the programme is delivered. As I discuss in Chapter Four, if the development of the capacity for critical thinking is a stated outcome, then some processes are more rather than less likely to help students to achieve this aim. If taken literally and interpreted narrowly, however, the danger in Bigg’s view of curriculum is that it can result in a rigid and mechanistic approach, with too much emphasis on securing predetermined behavioural outcomes. In this case, insufficient attention is paid to the first part of the equation, which is the capacity of the learner to actively construct meaning. Moreover, as I argue in Chapter Six in relation to Habermas’s notion of ‘epistemic authority’, an emphasis on predetermined objectives cannot meet the need for graduates to be able to produce new knowledge in novel situations for which where there is no ready-made answer. As Barnett (2004) has argued, in considering the requirements of ‘learning for the future’:

The very act of knowing - knowledge having become a process of active knowing - now produces epistemological gaps: our very epistemological interventions in turn disturb the world, so bringing a new world before us. No matter how creative and imaginative our knowledge designs, it always eludes our epistemological attempts to capture it. This is a Mode 3 knowing, therefore, which is a knowing-in-and-with-uncertainty. The knowing produces further uncertainty.

I am interested in the developing the capacity of students to produce the practice knowledge that is required in complex situations where the answer is not obvious, in part because the aims of the featured programme require it but primarily because it is inherent in what I mean by critical competence. As explained in Chapters Five and Six, developing this kind of competence is not possible without active participation, which means that downplaying the constructive contribution of the student is a serious weakness.

In arguing that conceptions of the educational encounter need to be expanded beyond teaching, learning and assessment activities to include learning support, course organization and management, and the provision of feedback, McCune and Hounsell also signal the limitations of CA. They put forward the idea of ‘congruence’ because alignment or ‘single line of sight’ implies a linear and less flexible or creative process than that which actually occurs (ibid: 259). In this regard, it is instructive to note that good teaching is said to be a function of the following factors (ibid: 272):

- congruence or ‘goodness-of-fit’ of the teaching and assessment approaches adopted
- encouragement given to high quality learning
- degree of integration of teaching and learning materials
- extent to which curriculum aims are clear and teaching units well-organised
- degree to which assessment is geared to understanding
- effectiveness of feedback
- extent to which the course unit is perceived to be interesting, enjoyable and relevant
- supportiveness shown by staff and student peers.

Their research points to the importance of how these various aspects of alignment operate within specific departmental and course settings, and in staff and student behaviour. It also provides a valuable insight into student perspectives on teaching and learning, which are said to include (ibid: 264 – 271):

- understanding how knowledge is generated in their subject area(s) and how they might develop their own views and interpretations
- valuing the contribution of practical activities and placement experience in developing knowledge and understanding
- doubting that they are in a position (as undergraduates) to develop their own views or to be critical of established sources
- the importance of the ability and readiness to refine ongoing work and to learn from colleagues through informal discussion (in addition to and as distinct from formal learning and teaching methods such as essays and presentations)
- the benefits of discussing things in groups and working collaboratively to solve problems.

- knowing how to engage with primary literature and experimental data in terms of finding appropriate sources of information and to select what is relevant

It is appropriate to note that the desire to understand how knowledge is generated, valuing the contribution of practical activities, doubting their ability to criticise, and to learn through discussion and collaboration, echo closely my representation of the BA students articulated earlier in this chapter. The significance of these points will be taken up in Chapters Five and Six, where Habermas's theory of communicative action is discussed in terms of the idea that learning involves the kinds of reciprocal, inter-subjective and collaborative acts of enquiry noted by McCune and Hounsell. In this regard, McCune and Hounsell's observation about the role of informal discussion in facilitating 'intrinsic feedback' is interesting. This kind of feedback does not occur in response to a formally assigned task completed in the student's own time, but is embedded in day-to-day teaching and learning activities, arising spontaneously and integrally in student-tutor exchanges. The researchers detect 'intrinsic feedback' in problem-solving sessions, which enable students to gain repeated practice in tackling problems grounded in authentic data, and to check out answers with one another and with teaching staff. In this latter case, the idea is that theory is not so much received as developed through the processes of analysis, synthesis and evaluation. The thinking and reflecting process of the student in the practice situation comes to the fore; an understanding which was clearly apparent in the following student's statement (Bamber and Tett, 2000: 73):

I was also able to recognise some of the theory at work and it has aided my work, it has made me think further than the end of my nose. To think through thoroughly why I'm actually doing a piece of work and I can actually put a proposal in at work now and argue my case.

Discussion about the relationship between intrinsic feedback, thinking and reflecting processes, and engaging with live issues and problems, can be usefully extended in relation to the Habermasian conception of 'epistemic authority'. As explained in Chapter Five, this concept denotes the capacity of learners to assume responsibility for the nature and direction of their own learning. As previously noted in this section,

this kind of learning is enhanced through participation in discursive practices with peers and lecturers. Adopting a Habermasian position would mean placing these discursive practices at the very centre of the teaching and learning process. It means ensuring that productive processes of argumentation and contestation take place, rather than simply allowing for them to arise spontaneously, although this should also happen. Essentially, it involves creating an ethos in which a discursive pedagogy explicitly infuses and informs all aspects of the curriculum.

Conclusion

The discussion of deep and surface approaches to learning and of ways of thinking and practicing has been useful in connection with positively reconstructing learning experiences in two different ways. From Entwistle's more psychological perspective it is possible to understand the experience of crisis amongst the featured students in terms of a deeper approach to learning. Moving beyond this, however, McCune and Hounsell's analysis is useful in shifting the focus of attention from the internal world of the student to the objective world of the curriculum. In focussing on the issue of 'congruence' they produce insights into the student perception of learning in terms of what is needed from the curriculum and from the teachers. On the basis of these insights it is possible to see that fully addressing the educational needs of the students would mean responding to their concerns in the following ways:

- acknowledging the student's commitment and that they have something of value to contribute individually and collectively to teaching and learning processes
- establishing the relevance of the subject matter to issues arising for students as they seek to resolve practice problems
- rendering language comprehensible
- clarifying how theory is developed, and not simply received, in relation to reflexive and reflective processes
- focusing on the nature and development of competence.

Articulating these concerns and responses helps to clarify what could constitute a deeper and more personally satisfying experience of learning for these students. In essence, attempting to meet these concerns would enhance their ability to adopt the

ways of thinking and practising in the subject area. The next chapter takes up this idea with respect to the BA in Community Education. It will argue that there is a potentially fruitful correspondence between the needs of the students and the aim of the programme to produce critically competent practitioners. Exploring and articulating this correspondence will assist in outlining what a discursive approach to pedagogy would involve in the context of this programme.

Chapter Four

Linking Teaching with Learning Outcomes

Introduction

Following on from the previous chapter, the discussion now considers the educational needs of the students in terms of the ability to understand and adopt appropriate ways of thinking and practising (WTP) in the subject area. Adopting WTP cannot be left to chance, however, especially in the case of mature working-class students whose previous experiences of formal education may lead to difficulties in engaging with teaching and learning processes in higher education. Students will have to ‘find’, ‘discover’, ‘absorb’ or ‘divine’ these ways unless they are made explicit through teaching processes and reinforced in the way that people go about their activities (Railton and Watson, 2005). In other words, they are likely to remain part of a ‘hidden curriculum’. Perhaps the most significant expectation, as Railton and Watson (*ibid*: 182) state, is that students ‘will be expected to function as autonomous learners from the outset of their time at university’. The point is that appropriate ways of thinking and practising need to be overt in teaching and learning processes. With reference to McCune and Hounsell’s (2004) work, this means that teaching and learning approaches in the BA in Community Education need to be congruent with the programme’s aim to produce critically competent practitioners. The aims, learning objectives and teaching strategies in the BA in Community Education, however, need to be understood in relation to a developing field of practice

The field of community education

In 1975 the Alexander Report amalgamated Adult Education with the numerically stronger Youth and Community Service and all local authorities established Community Education Services in Scotland. The Scottish Community Education Council (SCEC) was created as the lead body for the new field. It was to be a graduate profession with the three training institutions (now the Universities of

Edinburgh, Strathclyde and Dundee) providing a generic training programme covering youth work, adult education and community work. Initially Services were relatively free to determine their own priorities within a broad agenda set by the Scottish Office. Changes to the lead body, however, reflected a growing tendency over time towards a top down and centrally determined policy agenda. In 1999 SCEC was superseded by Community Learning Scotland, which was dismantled in 2002 when its functions were separated into professional areas. Youth work came under the aegis of YouthLink, a national voluntary organisation, and the responsibility for Adult Education went to the Scottish Adult Learning Partnership, another national voluntary organisation. The rest of Community Learning Scotland's functions were subsumed under a sub-section of the Scottish Executive agency Communities Scotland called Learning Connections. Communities Scotland focussed largely on housing issues but was revamped in 2002 to drive forward a regeneration agenda.

This regeneration agenda is today pervasive and implemented through robust funding and accountability mechanisms. Planning to secure predetermined priorities is central to a political project in which local authority services and voluntary agencies are largely responsible for implementation. The somewhat paradoxical result is that although community participation is now a statutory requirement and ostensibly high on the list of political priorities, there are fewer and fewer spaces for unmediated access to planning and decision-making processes or for communities to freely or spontaneously determine and pursue their own interests. According to Bamber (2000), whilst there is some fluidity in the emergent socio-political terrain, the effects of these developments can be seen in terms of:

- more responsibilities with decreasing resources
- centralised, top-down decision-making
- emphasis on planning and evaluation
- short term and targeted funding
- 'performativity' and the contract culture
- incorporation of the voluntary sector.

These developments mean that ideas about the nature of the work have been contested and have changed over time.

The field is defined by a succession of recent reports and memoranda emanating from the Scottish Executive over the past decade. Perhaps the most important of these has been the 1998 Scottish Office Report, *Communities: Change Through Learning*, commonly known as the Osler Report after the name of its chairperson. This report effectively led to the dismantlement of the Services created by Alexander, arguing that community education was a process rather than a discrete service. This process, it argued, could be found in the operations of a range of agencies such as schools, libraries or housing associations. The thrust of Osler was to encourage and support such agencies in their adoption and use of the process by making the skills of community educators more widely available. The former community education services were to be seen as one part of a wider field constituted by this range of public and voluntary sector agencies to be known as community learning and development (CLD). The 1999 SOEID Circular 4/99 required all local authorities to develop Community Learning Plans to bring the respective strengths and resources of the various agencies together in a more concerted attempt to address problems jointly. These agencies were themselves subject to a range of policy directives such as the 2003 *Local Government in Scotland Act – Community Planning Partnerships*, which meant an increasing emphasis on community participation in Service direction and evaluation of delivery.

The Scottish Executive ensured that development would be monitored through its standards and regulatory machinery. In 2002, for example, HM Inspectorate of Education produced two documents: *Towards Community Learning Plans - Progress with the development and implementation of community learning plans in Scotland* and *How Good is Our Community Learning and Development?* The implications of these developments for initial training were set out in the 2003 Scottish Executive Report, *Empowered to Practice - The Future of Community Learning and Development Training in Scotland*. One such document, *Working and Learning*

Together to Build Stronger Communities - Scottish Executive Guidance for Community Learning and Development (Scottish Executive, 2003), states that:

Community learning and development is about enabling people to make changes in their lives through community action and community-based learning. It uses programmes and activities that are developed with participants.

The same document states that community learning and development:

- respects the individual and the right to self-determination
- respects and values pluralism
- values equality and develops anti-discriminatory practice
- encourages collective action and collaborative working relationships
- promotes learning as a lifelong process
- encourages a participating democracy.

In its guidelines, Community Education Validation and Endorsement (CeVe, 1995) Scotland, a sub-committee of Learning Connections, notes that these values should themselves be reflected ‘at the level of the operating principles’ of community education practice. It is interesting and somewhat anomalous, given the shifts in the field just described, to note that these guidelines are still current and refer to community education rather than community learning and development. In the view of this professional body, community education providers should, for example, encourage equality of opportunity, positive action and open access particularly for disadvantaged learners, place emphasis on learning as well as teaching and seek to match the content and manner of delivery to the needs of the people concerned. To some extent, these injunctions mirror the call made by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (Quin et al, 2005), referred to in the previous chapter, for HE institutions to provide an appropriate curriculum for working-class students that reflects and affirms their background and to develop pedagogy that supports student integration and learning.

The 1995 CeVe guidelines mean that students can graduate with an Ordinary Degree of BA in Community Education on completion of the specified requirements. In the featured programme a fourth year is also offered partly in order to enable students to

achieve an award that may facilitate progression to advanced study. Professional endorsement by CeVe requires between 40 and 50 per cent of the curriculum to be practice related, which largely means placement activities. The programme admits about 25 students each year with a small number, usually less than ten, undertaking the fourth year. The programme prepares graduates to work in a wide range of educational settings and contexts.

Particular views of professionalism are embedded in the policy developments discussed above. There is, for example, an increased emphasis on worker involvement in community planning, reporting and evaluation, partnership working across a range of agencies, management, managing funds and fund-raising. To some extent this is captured in the CeVe competence framework that currently governs professional endorsement for initial qualifying programmes in the field. Professional community educators are said to be able to:

- engage with the community
- develop relevant learning and educational opportunities
- empower the participants
- organise and manage resources
- practise community education within different settings
- use evaluative data to assess and implement appropriate changes.

The framework has been criticised by two members of the academic staff responsible for the BA in Community Education, McCulloch and Martin (1997), for being too reliant on an instrumental view of competence (the ability to do/perform), when there is an equal need to include critical understanding (the capacity to make sense of relevant ideas and concepts) and contextual awareness (sensitivity to the issues raised in relation to the wider context). Their more expansive view of competence signifies the propensity of the staff team to take a critical perspective on developments in the field. The thrust of these developments is noted but the programme continues to emphasise the educational role of the worker.

Ways of thinking and practising in the subject area

Members of the staff team have worked together for over ten years to develop the current BA in Community Education (Appendix 1). During this time they have also written extensively about how practice in the field is subject to different and competing interpretations (e.g. Shaw 1997; Tett, 2002; Crowther et al, 2005; Martin, 2006; McCulloch, 2007). The titles from a selection of these publications indicate a range of interests. Respectively they are:

Community work: towards a radical paradigm for practice (Shaw)
Community Education, Lifelong Learning and Social Inclusion
(Tett)
Radicalising intellectual work (Crowther et al)
In whose interests? Interrogating the metamorphosis of adult
education (Martin)
Democratic Participation or Surveillance? Structures and practices
for young people's decision-making (McCulloch)

Although team members hold differing views, there is a measure of agreement around the fundamental purpose of community education that underpins the programme. In broad terms this may be described as supporting a Scottish social democratic tradition that emphasises the active involvement of citizens in decision-making in their social, economic and cultural life. Tett (2002: 96) has described this as:

...promoting their free and equal participation, in both defining the problems to be addressed and the solutions to be used, in ways that mitigate economic and social inequalities. It requires a public space in which different groups can come together to air their differences and build solidarity around common interests.

This social democratic perspective inevitably informs the way in which the staff team have constructed the programme's content. The notion of public space to which Tett refers has a particular significance for the argument in this thesis that is taken up in Chapter Six in relation to the notion of the 'public sphere'. Put briefly here; if community educators are to create such public spaces in practice they need first to have learned during their course of study why this is important and how to do it. This fundamental point has ramifications for teaching and learning processes and these, it

is argued, can be usefully informed by recourse to the theory of communicative action discussed in the next chapter.

Whilst acknowledging the professional view for training purposes, the programme goes beyond this to engage with ideological and theoretical questions about the role of community education and of the community educator. Policy is not taken as a given but something to be critiqued within a particular historical and political context. The move to community learning and development, for example, has been consistently scrutinised in terms of perceived threats to the ways of working formerly enshrined in core community education approaches. There is an emphasis on critical thinking in relation to social policy, the social order and developments in the field of practice that runs throughout the programme. This point can be illustrated with reference to the following excerpts from first, second and third year course booklets:

The course aims to provide a brief introduction to the history and contemporary development of community education. Understanding the significance and contested nature of ‘community’ helps us think about the purposes of community education and their different ideological origins and implications. The content will include a review of important historical developments, an introduction to key figures and their influence on community education, and an analysis of contemporary issues and debates.

(Introduction to Community Education, First Year Course)

This course focuses on the changing nature of the state and of community education. It reflects the diversity of community education as currently practised, using the 3-strand conceptualisation of community education (adult education, community development and youth work) as a starting point for analysis and for exploration of the development of different traditions and approaches...The teaching programme will be built around the proposition that the three ‘strands’ of community education have emerged from diverse and contradictory roots which have influenced the development of contemporary practice. Second, that the contested and contestable reality of community education is a legitimate aspect of professional concern and development. Third, that community education is not automatically good or bad, but the nature of educational interventions has to be assessed in their specific contexts.

(Community Education 2, Second Year Course)

This course consolidates and extends previous work on the historical development and theoretical analysis of community-based education and community learning. The curriculum is built around the hypothesis that ‘community’ may be understood as an intermediate, or ‘meso’, level of social reality at which the dialectical relationship between structure and agency is, collectively, confronted in people’s lived experience. The educational implications of this argument are examined with particular reference to issues of citizenship and democratic participation, current debates in social and cultural theory, the contemporary policy context, the process of globalisation, and the prospect and problems of ‘democratic renewal’ in Scotland today. Throughout the course particular attention is paid to the importance of the major social divisions of power in terms of class, gender and ‘race’. At the same time, a sustained attempt is made to couple a modernist rigour with a post-modern sensibility. The argument is developed in such a way that it can be applied to students’ specialised interests in adult education, community work and youth work.

(Re-theorising Community Education, Third Year Course)

The way in which the programme is constructed means that there is a pronounced emphasis on the development of intellectual capacities. So much is evident in the following excerpt about the nature of third year studies (MHSE, 2005: 5):

The third year programme is designed to enable students to develop the capacity to make *competent, confident and defensible judgments* and to undertake the gradual transition into the field of professional practice. It will enable them to operate at a relatively *sophisticated level* of professional activity and *intellectual understanding*. Both the taught and practice elements will provide the opportunity to work with an increasing degree of *critical autonomy*. A focus on *policy analysis* will enable students to assess the possibilities and constraints of particular contexts of practice. Overall, the programme should prepare them for the task of *selecting, justifying* and deploying appropriate *theoretical arguments* and educational methods. (my emphasis)

Although higher order learning objectives such as critical thinking, synthesis and evaluation are emphasized, theory and practice are not separated but linked together dynamically in the curriculum. This linking is clearly evident in the highlighted

elements of the following explanation of the role of the final placement in third year (MHSE, 2005: 8-9):

The final placement is designed to give students the opportunity *to operate* at a relatively sophisticated level of *activity* as a pre-professional colleague. This means they require the opportunity *to work* with an increasing degree of autonomy. They should be able to *contextualise* the work of the agency and to *make judgements* about constraints and possibilities. They should be able *to develop* and articulate a conceptual framework within which to plan, *implement* and evaluate particular practice. They should be able to select, justify and *deploy* appropriate methods of intervention.

In terms of methods in the taught curriculum, one first and one second year course focus on how groups of learners may be helped to develop their capacity to think and act critically, and to support one another to develop strategies, tactics and practices in relation to desired change. The content in the second year course, Community Education Methods and Approaches 2 - Developing Dialogue, for example, is described in the following way:

A consideration of how groups of learners may be helped to develop their capacity to think and act critically, and to support one another to develop strategies, tactics and practices in relation to desired change. We will explore the extent to which this process of becoming critical involves creating appropriate conditions for dialogue. A range of key concepts and models will be covered including 'dialogue', 'critical social science', the idea of the group as a 'social microcosm', and 'social action'. Participants will also be required to develop appropriate teaching and learning techniques designed to foster dialogue and action.

In overall terms, the nature and purpose of the programme is succinctly expressed in its stated learning objectives, which are to (MHSE, 2005: 5):

1. develop the student's *critical understanding* of the nature and purpose of community education practice in a range of settings
2. enable students to *locate* their work as educators in the *context* of community, policy and society
3. enable students to engage effectively with individuals, groups and communities and to *select, justify and develop* appropriate learning and educational opportunities

4. enable students to be *self-monitoring* in the sense that they adopt a *critical approach* to their own professional performance and to that of the agency or organisation in which they practice
5. enable students to become professionals capable of *co-operating* with colleagues and across professional boundaries
6. cultivate the *intellectual* and other *capacities* that characterise the educated professional
7. foster in students a commitment to their *continuing intellectual* and professional development.

In effect, the above statement of learning objectives goes some considerable way to describing the ways of thinking and practising in the subject area. In brief, as already noted, these ways are premised upon a social democratic tradition and underpinned by a critical approach to theory, policy and practice. According to Boud (in Weil and McGill, 1989: 42), being critical means:

Allowing one's ideas to be criticized by others, exploring one's appreciation of the limitations placed on one's consciousness by historical and social circumstances, and being prepared to change one's approach as such awareness creates a new framework within which to act.

It is about reflecting inwardly, as part of a total reaction to making sense of a situation where learning involves delving into one's own starting points and *a priori* assumptions. This inward focus is important because the insidious nature of social forces, as argued by Carr and Kemmis (1986: 135–139), can mean that peoples' ideas are distorted and shaped without them being aware that this has happened. Cognitive activity alone, however, does not fully account for the ways of thinking and practicing in the subject area because there are also emotional, behavioural and existential aspects. How people practice, in other words, depends to a crucial degree on the kind of people they are in terms, for example, of their beliefs, values, preferences, predilections and habitual ways of responding to problems (Usher and Bryant, 1989: 76).

As Anyon (1994) has argued in terms of the concept of 'socially useful theory', critical forms of practice are not simply derived from reference to other theories but also from the dialogue between values, vision or goals and current activities. Such

understandings are neither totalising nor seamless in attempting to be the whole ‘answer’ or explanation for a situation. Nor are they ad hoc and only applicable to one locale or one situation; having no relevance for anyone else. They seek to connect local activity to wider societal constraints in such a way that people, instead of being overwhelmed by the idea of trying to change society can see a way forward. Those trying to work in this way identify the direct action to be taken and the primary goal of this activity goes beyond the refinement of concepts to successful action.

This understanding of ways of thinking and practising in the subject area implies a more expansive notion of competence than that proposed by CeVe. It can be seen instead that the combination of intellectual, practical and personal elements connotes the concept of the critically competent community educator. This view will be returned to in the next chapter in the discussion about the meaning and nature of competence in this field. A range of teaching and learning strategies is employed to achieve the programme’s aim to produce critically competent practitioners but it is notable that any intention to involve students as active learners remains largely implicit. A word search, for instance, reveals that there are no instances of phrases such as ‘active learners’, ‘participation’ or ‘deep approaches’ in the programme documentation or course booklets, which might otherwise indicate commitments to such ideas. Having acknowledged this, the two methods oriented courses do cover experiential and exploratory ways of learning although these are conceived of in terms of learners in the field of practice. It is to the nature of the programme’s teaching and learning activities that the discussion now turns.

Foregrounding teaching and learning processes

A short passage is devoted to teaching and learning in Section 11 of the Programme Specification (MHSE, 2003):

A variety of approaches are used in the programme-specific courses ranging from teacher-led and directed activity of a fairly traditional kind to more student-led activity. Due to the professional focus a

high value is placed on exploratory and experiential modes of learning and on the acquisition of specific skills in groupwork, work with individuals and in the preparation and design of educational programmes and activities.

Some details are provided in the booklets for the twelve core courses and analysis confirms a variety of methods. All courses have some level of tutor input ranging from standard lectures in two-hour units, which allows for questions with opportunities for small group discussion being more prominent in some courses than others. It is the case that a few are more activity oriented with students being invited to engage with small-scale case studies or problem-solving activities. Assessment, however, is mainly by written assignments, with 2500 word essays being the norm. Individual and group presentations also feature to a limited extent. Students have to pass three placements during the programme, one in each year. A fieldwork supervisor awards the pass against criteria related to the CeVe competence framework. Most courses have accompanying readers with selected readings for each session and there is increasing use of websites for background information. Students are allocated a Director of Studies with a mainly pastoral role, although a limited amount of academic support may be provided. With the exception of one course in the fourth year, there are no seminars in the formal arrangements for teaching.

In listing the courses and means of assessment it is striking that the Programme Booklet contains no reference to teaching and learning strategies in terms of enabling students to develop a critical stance. It is also a fact that students are not engaged directly and explicitly in analysis of their own approaches to learning, with the exception of study skills sessions dedicated mainly to academic writing in the first year. The following statement captures the prevailing ethos of the programme (Community Education Team, 2003: 14):

The course team is...strongly committed to developing traditional academic virtues in students, and the requirement for high standards of academic writing remains a salient feature of the programme.

One way of understanding the curriculum issues at play is to appreciate the influence of the ethos underpinning particular programmes. It was explained in Chapter One

and again in this chapter that the programme team seeks to promote the kind of criticality that is consistent with a tradition in Scotland that is committed to progressive social and political change through linking education and social action. Ares (2006: 7) notes that there is a tendency in critical pedagogies to foreground the political whilst situated and socio-cultural learning theories emphasise the process. She (ibid) observes that:

In critical theories, transformative practice refers to a stance regarding the *aims* of teaching and learning, specifically the political, social, and economic empowerment of oppressed peoples (whereas) a socio-cultural perspective typically refers to a particular stance regarding the *nature* of learning, as transformation of participation. Learning is a consequence of acting with and within a community of practice, as individuals' knowledge, skills, and identity as members of the community change.

Bringing these critical and socio-cultural perspectives together can help educators better to understand the processes by which transformative practice can be fulfilled in classrooms, and to develop ways of incorporating students' diverse cultures and languages as resources for teaching and learning. McCune and Hounsell's (2004) work, referred to in the previous chapter, is helpful in thinking about approaches to teaching community education as it suggests that the meaning of criticality must be understood in terms of the ways of thinking and practising in this particular subject area. The issue, however, is not simply about 'what' constitutes criticality but also 'how' students are socialised into being critical. As has been stated, there is relatively little in the programme documentation concerning the means by which this fundamental aspect of learning is to be supported and achieved. In short, there is no explicit philosophy underpinning the approach to teaching and learning consistent with the underpinning intentions of the programme. The danger of this position is that 'without a foundational theory of learning, teachers lack an anchoring framework for translating thought into action' (Ares, 2006: 4). The default position is then taken by the conventional I-R-E pattern involving teacher initiation, student response and teacher evaluation.

In this thesis, it is argued that the issue of congruence between the programme's aims and its teaching and learning processes can be usefully considered with reference to a transformative approach based on social constructivist theories and the mutual pursuit of understanding. This means focussing attention on the interactive and inter-subjective relations between students and between students and teachers. It means moving away from a paradigm that is consistent with psychological theories and their attendant focus on individual students, and the transmission and acquisition of knowledge.

Theorising the issue of congruence

According to Thanasoulas (2002), constructivists take an interdisciplinary perspective by drawing upon a diversity of psychological, sociological, philosophical and critical educational theories. The aim is to construct 'an overarching theory that attempts to reconstruct past and present teaching and learning theories, trying to shed light on the learner as an important agent in the learning process, rather than in wresting the power from the teacher' (ibid). In drawing from a range of theoretical perspectives social constructivists understand learning primarily as a social process in which learners are motivated partly by the rewards provided by the knowledge community (GSI, 2006). Because learners actively construct knowledge, learning also depends to a significant extent on the drive to understand and to engage with the learning process. For social constructivists, therefore, the motivation to learn is both extrinsic and intrinsic.

In terms of the process of learning it is useful to acknowledge Vygotsky's (1896 – 1934) well-known distinction between actual and potential development. The first is the level that the learner has already reached and at which he or she is able to solve problems independently. The level of potential development, or 'zone of proximal development', is a higher level that involves nascent cognitive structures that can only mature under the guidance of teachers or in collaboration with others. The nature or structure of this guidance, however, is crucial in terms of securing a transformational learning outcome. Bencze (2005) takes up this point about guidance

in noting that students ‘see what they want to see’, which means that it is more than likely that they will ‘discover’ what is apparent to them as distinct from what would be apparent to an expert in a particular field. Neither can they change their thinking on their own even if they wanted to because they lack understanding of the relevant laws or theories that are available to them. Because experience alone is not enough, he argues that students need to receive different ‘lenses’ embedded in different laws and theories, through which to view objects and events, to design tests or to interpret data. Moreover, it is disadvantaged students who are least likely to ‘discover’ important ideas and so on from enquiry or discovery because they may lack the required skills or experience of this form of learning. The implication is that educators need to carefully present and structure learning situations so that students engage with the required ideas or skills.

These social constructivist ideas can usefully inform thinking about the sorts of teaching and learning processes that could reconcile the educational needs of students on the one hand and the learning objectives of the programme on the other. The conditional nature of this last statement is a reminder, however, of the position outlined in Chapter One about not simply adopting existing models and ideas in rethinking teaching community education. There is a need for a rigorous theoretical analysis to make sense of and justify the suggested activity in relation to this particular programme. The student’s need to feel that they have something valuable to contribute, for example, corresponds to those aspects of the curriculum that require students to bring their own life or work experience to bear on topics covered in classroom discussions. To fully meet this need however, it would be necessary to convey the message that those experiences are essential to learning in this programme. Ultimately, as will be argued in the next chapter, this means consistent involvement in collective and collaborative forms of learning. A theory of collaborative activity in teaching and learning processes would assist understanding in this respect.

Being disinclined towards academic study on the basis that it seems unrelated to a student’s own perception of the ‘real world’ of practice, to take another example,

raises questions about the need for learning that is relevant to the student's concerns, questions and interests concerning community education. The need for relevance is matched by the programme's aims that the students should be able to select and deploy appropriate intellectual arguments and methods in the resolution of practice problems. Thinking through the sorts of issues that would be involved in factoring the criterion of relevance into teaching and learning processes, would be assisted by a theory of knowledge as the product of argumentation in which students participate in a mutual process of constructing and defending their own positions.

Similarly, the simplistic understanding of the theory-practice nexus foregrounds the issue of what it means to develop as well as to acquire theory. There is a correspondence here to the programme's aim to produce critical practitioners and the requirement in terms of teaching and learning processes is to develop the capacity for critical thinkers overtly and actively. A theory of discourse, understood as a means of questioning ideas and actions at the level of fundamental premises, could support thinking in relation to this task. By the same token, having an instrumental attitude to gaining a professional qualification signals the need to consider the competence required of practitioners, which, in turn, connects with the programme's concept of professionalism as a way of being. Here the requirement is that the programme's teaching and learning processes actively develop the attributes of competence that are central to being professional. Thinking about this requirement would be facilitated by a more expansive theory of competence that synthesizes the necessary professional and academic knowledge, skills and attitudes, together with a more explicit focus on how competence is developed through reflective and reflexive processes.

The relationship between the crises, their implicit resolution, learning objectives, corollaries for teaching and learning and the need for a rigorous theoretical analysis, can be summarized and set out schematically below in Table 4. In listing the active participation of students in learning, demonstrating the relevance of study to the student's concerns, actively developing the capacity for critical practice and the attributes of professionalism, the third column indicates important areas for teaching

and learning processes in terms of achieving the programme’s learning objectives. The elements of a theoretical underpinning that could support such objectives are set out in the fifth column.

Table 4: Constructing a theoretical response to the student experience of crisis

Experience of ‘crisis’	Educational needs	Programme aims	Teaching and learning requirement	Theoretical rationale
Feeling unentitled to participate in HE	To feel that they have something to contribute from their own experience	Use of life and work experience in teaching situations	The active participation of students in learning	A theory of collaboration
Disinclined towards academic study	For subject matter to be relevant to their issues, concerns and interests	Students should be able to select and deploy appropriate intellectual arguments and methods	Demonstrating the relevance of study to the student’s concerns, questions and interests about community education	A theory of knowledge construction
Having a simplistic understanding of the theory-practice nexus	To develop their own ideas and understanding as well as to receive theory	To produce critically competent practitioners	Overtly and actively developing the capacity for critical practice	A theory of discourse (as a process of argumentation leading to critical practice)
Having an instrumental attitude to gaining a professional qualification	To develop competence appropriate to the field of practice	The concept of professionalism as a way of being	Actively developing the capacity for reflection and reflexivity	A theory of competence (implying a need for a theory of competence development)

Conclusion

Reconstructing the learning experiences of the featured students, and establishing a correspondence between these and the programme’s aims, leads to thinking about the issue of congruence between the two. It was noted, however, that there is no overt philosophy underpinning the approach to teaching and learning that is commensurate with the overall intentions of the programme. It was suggested that a social constructivist perspective could usefully inform development in this direction. Habermas (2003a: 34) has built on the social constructivist tradition by taking from Piaget (1896 – 1980) and Kohlberg (1927 – 1987) the understanding that knowledge construction can be analysed as a product of learning processes, that learning can be

seen as a process of problem-solving in which the learning subject is active, and that the learning process is guided by the insights of those who are directly involved. From Vygotsky (1896 – 1934) he has also understood the importance of the peer group in learning and the role played by the group in helping individuals to move beyond the limits of what they are capable of doing or understanding alone. He has incorporated these understandings into his theory of communicative action and the next chapter considers how this work can assist thinking about a critical approach to teaching and learning in community education by providing a coherent theory of collaboration, knowledge development, criticality and competence.

Chapter Five

The Concept of a Discursive Pedagogy

Introduction

This chapter considers how thinking about reconciling educational needs with the aim of the programme could be underpinned by four ordering principles derived from the theory of communicative action. The student's desire to contribute from their own experience, for subject matter to be relevant to their issues and concerns, to develop their own ideas and to become competent, could respectively be addressed by teaching and learning processes based on the following principles: learning through reciprocity, developing knowledge through redeeming claims, safeguarding participation and protecting rationality, and understanding competence as a constructive achievement. This relationship between the educational needs of the students and the ordering principles can be set out schematically below in Table 5.

Table 5: Relating educational needs and ordering principle

Educational needs	Principle
To feel that they have something to contribute from their own experience	Learning through reciprocity
For subject matter to be relevant to issues arising for students as they seek to resolve practice problems	Developing knowledge through redeeming claims
To develop their own ideas and understanding as well as to receive theory	Safeguarding participation and protecting rationality
To develop competence appropriate to the field of practice	Understanding competence as a constructive achievement

The principles are complementary and mutually reinforcing; each one resting on and developing the one that precedes it with the first one acting as the foundation for the others. It can be anticipated, however, that attempts to base teaching and learning on reciprocity will pose educational challenges arising from the status differentials between students and lecturers and from power struggles between students. The next three principles address these fundamental issues in different ways whilst presenting difficulties of their own.

The principle that knowledge can be developed through redeeming claims entails a scrutiny of practice, ideas and values that could be threatening to participants. As a result they may withdraw from the process of learning. A response to this challenge is implied in the next principle, which seeks to establish supportive rules to safeguard participation and protect rationality. A further challenge stemming from open forms of enquiry would be created, however, involving the need to extend the concept of academic freedom to students. This kind of freedom could result in a lack of focus and development and this is met by the fourth principle, which directs attention to the gradual and purposeful accumulation of knowledge that underpins practice competence. The challenges arising from the principles are touched upon in this chapter as a prelude to a more comprehensive discussion in Chapter Six. To some extent the challenges resonate with the issues noted in Chapter One in the brief discussion of Freire's work.

Taken together the ordering principles constitute what I have termed a 'discursive pedagogy'. The concept of a discursive pedagogy responds to the requirement expressed in the previous chapter for a coherent theory of collaboration, knowledge development, criticality and competence. It would extend a social constructivist approach to teaching and learning by incorporating 'teaching strategies sensitive to the effects of relations of power based on race, class, gender, ethnicity and so forth' and which position 'vulnerable social subjects as the frame of reference for questions about learning' (Morrow and Torres, 2002: 1). The concept of a discursive pedagogy, therefore, addresses the underlying intentions of the featured programme to develop what Habermas (Pusey, 1987: 25-26) has described as practical and emancipatory forms of knowledge.

Learning as an act of reciprocity

The principle of learning through reciprocity is derived from Habermas's view that action oriented toward reaching understanding is the fundamental type of social action. For Habermas, reaching understanding is the inherent *telos* of language itself (Fultner in Habermas, 2003c: ix). Communicative action, therefore, rests on the

presupposition that everyday language has an inbuilt connection with validity. When people speak to one another in everyday processes of communication they are involved in a *reciprocal process* of making statements about, for example, proper conduct in social relations. These 'validity claims' entail giving reasons and a justification in support of what is said. Because speakers can be called upon to justify their claims, 'the burden of justification and the possibility of critique are built into the very structure of language and communication' (Fultner, in Habermas, 2003c: xv). For Habermas (2003a: 19) reciprocity provides the only real alternative to exerting influence on one another in coercive ways. Indeed, other forms of interaction, such as 'strategic' action in which parties seek to influence others by threat or the prospect of gratification to achieve their own ends, are said to be parasitic on this fundamental form of communicative action.

The public and reciprocal nature of the interactions envisaged have been explained by McCarthy (in Habermas, 2003a: viii-ix) as follows:

Habermas's discourse model, by requiring that perspective taking be general and reciprocal, builds the moment of empathy into the procedure of coming to a reasoned agreement: each must put him or herself into the place of everyone else in discussing whether a proposed norm is fair to all. And this must be done publicly; arguments played out in the individual consciousness or in the theoretician's mind are no substitute for real discourse.

Indeed, one of the aims of 'communicative reason' is to 'displace subjectivist accounts of society that cling to Cartesian conceptions of monological selfhood' (Fultner in Habermas, 2003c: vi). The point is that there is no knower without culture - all knowledge is mediated by social experience. Instead of the individual being privileged as the basic unit of society and set over against all others in some atomistic way, the 'egocentric perspective is treated not as primary but as derivative; autonomy is conceptualised in relation to embeddedness in shared forms of life' (McCarthy in Habermas, 2003a: ix). Rather than focusing introspectively on consciousness, then, this point of view looks 'outside' at objectifications of language, reason and action.

Pusey (1987: 23) provides a clue as to the significance of learning through reciprocity when he states that:

The distinctive feature of Habermas's work is that processes of knowing and understanding are grounded, not in philosophically dubious notions of a transcendental ego, but rather in the patterns of ordinary language usage that we share in everyday communicative interaction.

'Processes of knowing and understanding' can be taken as a proxy for learning. Seen in this way, the objectifying perspective provides a significant alternative to the idea that learning takes place only in the minds of individual students. It is a commonplace, of course, that learning is affected by environmental factors such as the way that a teacher presents materials and the influence of the peer group. These and other factors may be seen primarily, however, in terms of the way that they assist or hinder the individual learning that is considered to take place in the mind. In contrast, the theory of communicative action foregrounds the fundamental orientation toward reaching understanding in reciprocal and co-operative speech acts. Brockbank and McGill (2007: 5), grasp the importance of this point in arguing that 'relationship' should be central to learning:

If the purpose of institutions of higher education is to encourage the move beyond the transmissional to the informative, then it should be a fundamental condition of the student's experience – whether diplomate, undergraduate or postgraduate, full or part-time – that relationship is crucial to learning. By the term relationship we mean situations are created where teachers and learners (and learners together) can actively reflect upon the issues and materials before them, for example in seminars and tutorials. The substance of the relationship, which is created, is one of dialogue between teacher and learners. Through dialogue with others, which is reflective we create the conditions for critical reflective learning.

Being critically reflective can be taken as an indication of a deeper approach to learning in HE, and from this perspective a student can be seen as a more or less active participant in communication, 'on the basis of an inter-subjective relation established through symbols with other individuals, even if she is in fact alone with a book, a document, or a work of art' (Habermas, 2003b: 29).

Putting dialogue (used here in the sense of discussing areas of disagreement frankly in order to resolve them) at the centre, changes conceptions of HE in quite fundamental ways. HE is no longer about isolated individuals proving their worth according to predetermined notions of what counts as knowledge in a competitive and hierarchical environment. Emphasising reciprocity would focus attention on the knowledge that students develop through processes of communication in classroom and practice situations. These processes are observable and involve the reasons that students give in support of their ideas and the way in which they express themselves through speech and behaviour. Encouraging reciprocity would be consistent with the programme's aim to achieve the active involvement of students in learning.

If reciprocity was central to the educational project, however, it would entail teaching and learning processes far deeper than those referred to in Chapter Two; including, for instance, attempts to improve the student experience through training in study skills. This is because adopting the principle of reciprocity in an educational context presupposes adherence to certain communicative virtues that help to make dialogue possible and sustainable over time. According to Burbules and Rice (1991: 411):

These virtues include tolerance, patience, respect for differences, a willingness to listen, the inclination to admit that one may be mistaken, the ability to reinterpret or translate one's own concerns in a way that makes them comprehensible to others, the self imposition of restraint in order that others may have a turn to speak, and the disposition to express oneself honestly and sincerely. The possession of these virtues influences one's capacities both to express one's own beliefs, values and feelings accurately, and to listen to and hear those of others.

It is clear from this account of requisite virtues that fundamental personal qualities and commitments are central to teaching and learning activities stemming from the principle of reciprocity.

This idea of requisite virtues can be further explained with reference to the Freirian (1974) concept of 'invasion'. Invasion is a process where we feel threatened or

attacked by the emotional, bodily or intellectual communications of others. One person seems to treat the other as an object or container to be filled up with words, information, feelings or demands and little account is taken of who or what they are. It could be fruitful to explore with students where they feel that their ideas, or even their sense of self, are being violated or invaded in the process of the educational encounter. The point is not to artificially avoid such experiences since they are inevitable, and in some senses desirable in educative processes designed to challenge habitual ways of thinking. The main point here, as the following paragraphs go on to show, is that challenge is fostered rather than diminished in dialogical relationships.

In contrast to invasion, dialogue is basically a genuine two-way communication, which takes account of ideas, feelings and total situations. The relation of the subjects is that of a spiralling interaction in which all can change. As with invasion, dialogue can be a bodily, intellectual or emotional process. According to this line of thinking it would be important to identify ways that privilege and position in the featured programme undermine communication aimed at reaching understanding. The key point is that it is necessary to secure the spaces, to use Lillis's term, in which participants can develop the competence required in the particular discipline area. The discussion later in this chapter about the 'ideal speech situation' considers how these seemingly personal virtues need to be established at the impersonal level of rules and procedures in order to safeguard participation and rational communication. So fundamental are these virtues that learning as an act of reciprocity is best understood as the foundation for the other three principles involved in establishing a discursive pedagogy.

There are issues with this notion of reciprocity, however, concerning the student-teacher relationship in the BA in Community Education. At the centre of these difficulties is an inbuilt tension, 'between the aspiration to encourage and motivate students to learn and the responsibility to sit in judgment on their performance...this tension is especially acute given the impact assessment decisions can have on the career prospects of individual students' (MacFarlane, 2004: 31). In the next chapter this theme of tension will be taken up with specific reference to the practice of

grading student work (Moffat, 2006). For now it is important to appreciate that because dialogue is key to learning as a reciprocal act, it would be inconsistent to regard students as objects to be filled up with knowledge, as isolated individuals and competitors in a race for the best marks, or as people seeking to defeat each other in argument for their own emotional and psychological satisfaction. Instead, the challenge is to understand how knowledge can be developed through interactive, collective and collaborative ways of working as distinct from psychological processes occurring in the minds of individual students. Particularly significant in this context is the prospects for collaboration between educators and students that is directed towards the resolution of real and complex problems deriving from the practice experience of the learner. Freire (1994: 128) has highlighted the epistemological issue at stake here as follows:

I believe that a professor loses his or her role when he or she leaves the role of teaching and its content up to the students. However, I am convinced of something: in a course students should have much to show from their experience and social practice. And this has a lot to do with the scientific task. If professors are not able to find in the students' practice and experience something that has to do with our scientific discipline we will not be qualified to hold two or three days of dialogue with the students about experiences outside the university and from that create some programmatic content that would extend the curriculum needed in their studies. In fact, if we are not able to do this - that is, if we are not able to talk about their common experience, turning it into philosophy - then we do not know what to do with our science. (Freire, 1994: 128)

The educative potential of accessing and utilising the student's experience in a discursive process can be usefully considered in relation to the development of knowledge through redeeming validity claims.

Developing knowledge through redeeming claims

If learning through reciprocity foregrounds interactive and inter-subjective communicative processes, the second principle is based on the idea that knowledge can be constructed through 'redeeming' claims. This is because in communicative action one person tries rationally to motivate another to act or think in certain ways

based on the implicit understanding that the speaker will, if necessary, produce reasons to back up their claims (Habermas, 2003b: 59). Speakers raise three types of validity claims involving:

- the truth of what is said or presupposed
- the normative rightness of the speech act in the given context
- the truthfulness of the speaker.

All three claims are raised simultaneously although one might be explicit with the other two remaining implicit. Interpreting Habermas's theory in simple terms, the claims deal respectively with the empirical world of objective reality, the social world of shared norms and values, and the inner world of subjective attitudes. Speech acts can be accepted or rejected in relation to each of the three worlds in terms of rightness, truth and truthfulness.

To take a crude example for the sake of illustration, in a classroom discussion a student may claim that there is bad management practice in a particular community organisation and that this will lead to staff problems. If the student asserts that there is a better way of dealing with the situation, agreement depends on whether the discussants, including lecturers present, accept the alternative scenario presented or the proposed action as accurate or appropriate. If the student is going to intervene personally to address the alleged problem, they must subsequently behave in ways that would be consistent with their understanding of 'good' management practice. If the discussants reject the student's speech act they are in effect saying that the claim it contains does not correspond to the actual state of affairs, does not accord with understandings about what is right or appropriate in the particular context of the organisation, or does not reflect what the speaker really believes or is committed to. This simplified account of the relationship between validity claims and the basis for agreement or disagreement is represented below in Table 6.

Table 6: Claims and the basis for agreement or disagreement

Claims	Examples	Basis for agreement	Basis for disagreement
Empirical	Student makes a statement, gives an explanation, or predicts something	Recognition of the truth claim by peers or colleagues	Differing view about the actual state of affairs taken by peers or colleagues
Normative	Student proposes a better way doing something to be carried out by self or others	Acceptance of the action or proposed course of action as right by peers or colleagues	Does not conform to principles or values as understood and accepted by peers or colleagues
Subjective	Student discloses, reveals or confesses something, gives an undertaking or makes a promise	Recognition of the claim to truthfulness by peers or colleagues	Disbelief regarding the student's claim about their subjective experience

Habermas (ibid: 119) points to the empirical reality that people can intuitively distinguish between seeking to influence others and trying to come to an understanding with them and they know when their attempts at reaching understanding have failed. Making explicit the standards on which the speakers base these implicit distinctions means that it is possible to explain the concept of reaching understanding. Making sense of what it means to ‘understand’ is important in terms of students developing their own ideas and understanding, with the explicit requirement for it expressed in the programme’s learning outcomes. An unthinking agreement, what Habermas terms collective like-mindedness, does not satisfy the conditions for the type of agreement that obtains when attempts at reaching understanding are successful. Nor can this type of agreement be imposed through an outside influence because it has to be accepted as valid by the participants. As Habermas (ibid: 120) explains:

Processes of reaching understanding aim at an agreement that meets the conditions of rationally motivated assent to the content of an utterance. A communicatively achieved agreement has a rational basis; it cannot be imposed by either party, whether instrumentally through intervention in this situation directly, or strategically through exerting influence on the decisions of one party on the basis of calculation of success. Agreement can indeed objectively be obtained by force; but what comes to pass *manifestly* through outside influence or the use of violence cannot subjectively count as agreement. The agreement rests on common *convictions*. The speech act of one person succeeds only if the other accepts the offer contained in it by taking (however implicitly) a ‘yes’ or ‘no’ position on a validity claim that is in principle criticisable. Both Ego, who

raises a validity claim with his utterance, and Alter, who recognises or rejects it, base their decisions on potential reasons.

Habermas is fully aware that communication is often characterised by lack of understanding and misunderstanding, intentional and involuntary untruthfulness, concealed and open discord, and, on the other hand, apparent ‘consensus’ or ‘consensus’ for the sake of avoiding open conflict (ibid: 23). It is important to emphasise, therefore, that the term communicative action in relation to teaching and learning in community education would be reserved only for those speech acts in which the speaker makes criticisable validity claims. When the speaker is simply seeking to influence the hearer in ways in which the hearer can take no position at all or cannot take a grounded position, for example in relation to imperatives, the potential for the binding and bonding relationship motivated by insight into reasons is not fulfilled (ibid: 140). The stark lesson here for educators is that understanding cannot be imposed, and there is no escape from the necessity of purposeful and active involvement of the learner if understanding is the required outcome. As Habermas succinctly puts it, ‘in a process of enlightenment there can only be participants’ (1994: 101).

Habermas (2003a: 27) acknowledges that in everyday life, ‘we agree (or disagree) more frequently about the rightness of actions and norms, the appropriateness of evaluations and standards, and the authenticity or sincerity of self-presentations than about the truth of propositions. A major stumbling block, however, is the question of how symbolic expressions can be measured as reliably as physical phenomena’. In other words, it is a mistake to think that normative statements can be true or false in the same way that descriptive statements can be true or false, such as ‘this table is yellow’ (Ibid: 52). He provides the example of indignation or resentment to illustrate the underlying normative expectation that is valid for all members of the social group. Emotional responses directed against individuals would be devoid of moral character were they not connected to some perceived breach of a generalised norm or behavioural expectation. It is only their claim to *general* validity that gives an interest, or volition, or a norm the dignity of moral authority (Ibid: 49). There is a connection between the existence of norms and the anticipated justifiability of the

corresponding 'ought' statements. That justifiability appears to depend on whether the claim is in conformity with a rule applying to everyone. In principle everyone could assent to the rule (Ibid: 65). Such norms claim that they exist by right and if necessary that they can be *shown* to exist by right. In the last analysis this means that indignation and reproaches directed against the violation of a norm must be based on a cognitive foundation. 'To say that I *ought* to do something means that I *have good reasons* for doing it' (Ibid: 49). Recognition of the 'good reasons' involved in normative claims to validity, derives from a complex mixture of rational insight and force. But ensuring acceptance of a norm also depends, within a given tradition, on the basis that the reasons for obedience can be mobilised to the extent that it appears justified in the eyes of those concerned.

In the field of community education, judgements are based on assessments of the specific characteristics of particular situations. Assessment in this case, however, is informed by a complex mix of understandings of the purpose and nature of the work such as those encoded in the five WALT principles outlined in Chapter Four. Established guidelines such as the WALT principles are the outcome over time of collective and political processes of decision-making involving professional bodies, theorists and influential agents such as HMI, associated with the field. In a sense, they are the 'received wisdom' of the field and have the authority that comes from being inscribed in government policy. Although these may set the parameters for normative judgements, and even command 'general agreement' in relation to the domain of practice, in reality they do not and cannot prescribe activity. This is because different and shifting perspectives, based on the interests and ideological positions of agents and agencies in the field, inform understandings of the overriding purpose of the work and influence the ways in which the principles are taken up and interpreted. In other words, purpose is continuously contested. Even the CeVe (1995) competence framework, which provides a functional analysis of professional work in this field, does not amount to a blueprint for activity because no one set of ideas or instructions can fit every given eventuality. In reality, practitioners have to interpret the possibilities suggested in the different understandings of purpose, broad concepts and frameworks in new and unpredictable situations.

In seeking to develop this capacity for interpretation and action in students, individualised models of learning would focus on influencing the internal thinking and decision-making processes of actors. Teaching and learning based on the principle of reciprocity, however, would concentrate on how the understandings and commitments of actors can be refined and developed through contesting what is or is not the case, or what should or should not be done, with peers, colleagues, lecturers and placement supervisors. In her work on what it takes to become a resourceful practitioner, Leadbetter's (2005: 175) use of the concept of 'relational agency' helps to clarify what is involved in reciprocity, and its educational value:

In brief, what is valued in a culture is not only incorporated into the new mental functions but is found in the ways in which the functions are formed, transformed and brought into use. Put simply, minds are shaped by the ways of thinking and concepts in use that are available in particular social worlds and ways of thinking are externalised and revealed in actions...The understanding of others that is involved in aligning actions with those of others is not a matter of getting inside their heads. Rather it is a found in a capacity for engaging in the micro-negotiations, which elicit understandings, reveal one's own interpretations and allow for alignment of action to accomplish the transformation of the object that is being worked on.

It will be argued in the section on competence later in this chapter that the process of contestation, in other words the act of redeeming claims in discourse, could over time contribute significantly to helping students construct ever more dependable, in the sense of justifiable and tested, normative structures to underpin their work.

As will be argued more carefully below in relation to the principle of safeguarding participation and protecting rationality, this issue of obtaining agreement is highly significant in terms of the development of knowledge. This is because the process of redeeming claims through contestation eventually ends up in agreement, even if this is always provisional, about what is valid. According to Habermas (2003b: 170), over time this process of validating claims about the empirical, social and subjective worlds results in the development of knowledge in relation to four types of action: teleological, normative, dramaturgical and constative. *Teleological action* embodies technically and strategically usable knowledge through rules of action. This kind of

action can be improved through feedback about effectiveness. In relation to community education it applies, for instance, to being able to engage effectively with individuals, groups and communities or to develop appropriate learning and educational opportunities. Examples of methodologies in community education would be social action (DMU, 2007) or person-centred planning (Circles Network, 2007) approaches. This form of practice knowledge is stored in the form of technologies and strategies. *Normatively regulated action* embodies moral-practical knowledge and like claims to truth. This would apply to actions undertaken in specific situations with moral and practical elements, for instance, being able to evaluate professional interventions and modify practice in the light of evaluation findings. One example would be attempts to ensure balanced discussions in charged areas such as sexuality or politics. This kind of practice knowledge is passed on in terms of ideas about what is right and proper in given situations based on values and principles that over time have become respected and established in relation to the field of practice.

Dramaturgical action embodies knowledge of the actor's own subjectivity. This would apply to actions requiring self-awareness and emotional intelligence such as being able to adopt a critical approach to personal professional performance. An example would be in recognising the need for oneself and others to calm down in a given situation. This kind of practice knowledge finds expression in the personal values that underlie interpretations of needs, and of aspirations and emotional attitudes. *Constative speech acts* embody knowledge and explicitly represent it in order to make conversations possible. This would apply to the capacity to engage in discussion involving conceptual exploration of meanings such as being able to draw on a broad base of social scientific understanding including sociological, psychological, social policy and political science perspectives on educational purposes and practices. An example here would be being able to refer to traditions within community education. This kind of practice knowledge is stored in the form of theories.

This discussion about the active development of knowledge provokes thinking about how the practice knowledge, that is knowledge appropriate to the field of practice, is construed and represented to students in the featured programme, and about the ways in which they are socialised into the processes of knowledge construction. In Chapter Three it was indicated that when the students felt disinclined towards academic study it was, in part, because they could not readily make connections between their existing knowledge, experience and questions concerning community education practice and their studies. It was argued that in order to resolve this crisis they would need to understand how the knowledge encountered in their studies met the requirement for relevance. This line of thinking is valuable in two ways.

First, having to justify their own claims in a reciprocal process of establishing what is true, right and truthful inescapably means that developing understanding is connected to the student's own concerns and issues. Significantly, building on what students bring to learning in this way runs counter to the notion discussed in Chapter Three that they are lacking the right kinds of cultural capital. Second, Habermas's four areas of knowledge can be slightly reworked usefully to express the technical, moral-practical, personal and theoretical types of practice knowledge required in community education. Table 7 below shows these reworked categories in relation to the programme's learning objectives (MHSE, 2005: 5).

Categorising the learning objectives in this way could help students to be clearer about how these relate to their current understanding. The emphasis on action in relation to knowledge development is of interest here, because this is familiar to students who have previously learned through doing, and it is highly relevant to a vocationally oriented subject area such as community education. As will be shown later in this chapter, the categorisation is also useful in terms of developing a theory of competence as a constructive achievement.

Table 7: Four types of practice knowledge in community education

Knowledge Area	Explanation	Relation to learning objectives
Technical	Embodies technically and strategically usable knowledge through rules of action. This would apply to methodologies in use in the field.	Being able to engage effectively with individuals, groups and communities and to develop appropriate learning and educational opportunities. Example: in social action or person-centred planning approaches
Moral-practical	Embodies moral-practical knowledge and like claims to truth. This would apply to actions undertaken in specific situations with moral and practical elements.	Being able to evaluate professional interventions and modify practice in the light of evaluation findings. Example: in ensuring balanced discussions in charged areas such as sexuality or politics
Personal	Embodies a knowledge of the actor's own subjectivity. This would apply to actions requiring self-awareness and emotional intelligence.	Being able to adopt a critical approach to personal professional performance. Example: in recognising the need for oneself and others to calm down in a given situation.
Theoretical	Embodies knowledge and explicitly represents it and makes conversations possible. This would apply to the capacity to engage in discussion involving conceptual exploration of meanings.	Being able to draw on a broad base of social scientific understanding including sociological, psychological, social policy and political science perspectives on educational purposes and practices. Example: in referring to theoretical models of community education.

My earlier research (e.g. Bamber, 2002) confirms that mature working-class students on the BA programme have to some extent developed knowledge through their work and life experience, although they may not have consciously construed their experience as a process of learning and knowledge development. Nevertheless, their experience of life and work has involved a continuous process of producing forms of practice knowledge such as those identified in the above table. Understandably this experience is more likely to have favoured technical, moral-practical and personal forms, and less likely to have involved the theoretical knowledge development associated most clearly with HE. The experience of producing knowledge through systematic processes of argumentation and reasoning may also have been lacking. It cannot simply be assumed, on the other hand, that such processes are an automatic feature of life in academia.

One consequence of committing to learning through reciprocity and developing knowledge through redeeming claims is that all participants in discourse would appear to share the same rights to contribute and have the same burden in terms of validating claims. In such a situation dialogue roles are universally interchangeable and there is an equality of opportunity to take on these roles. The 'real' world, however, almost always means that this ideal is prejudiced in terms of arranging opportunities according to privileged positions based on power differentials. At the same time, because speakers can be called upon to justify their claims, processes of criticism would necessitate engagement with the ideas and beliefs of the students that form their 'lifeworld'.

According to Brookfield (2005: 240), the concept of the lifeworld can be understood as:

The background rules, assumptions, and commonsense understandings that structure how we perceive the world and how we communicate that perception to those around us. This kind of primordial, pre-reflective knowledge hovers on the periphery of consciousness, a shadowy frame to all we think and do.

The lifeworld has both individual and collective dimensions, which will produce similarity and difference between students in terms of their experiences, ideas, values and beliefs. In the (likely) event of disagreement arising from the acknowledgment of difference, the task of mutual interpretation is to achieve a new definition of the situation that all participants can share. If this attempt fails, 'one is basically confronted with the alternatives of switching to strategic action, breaking off communication altogether, or recommend seeing action oriented toward reaching understanding at a different level, the level of argumentative speech' (Habermas, 2003b: 24). Some pedagogical issues raised by engagement with the lifeworld will be taken up in the next chapter as they present a significant challenge to the possibility of developing practice knowledge through redeeming claims. It is, therefore, important to identify and address impediments to the development of knowledge in collective and collaborative processes of learning. Essentially this means

safeguarding participation and protecting rationality as students engage in mutual criticism.

Safeguarding participation and protecting rationality

The preceding discussion about knowledge construction leads to a consideration of criticism in learning and teaching processes. Criticism is central to the development of knowledge in HE, as can be seen, for example, in the custom of subjecting research findings to peer review. Seen through a Habermasian lens, the question for the featured programme concerns the extent to which this defining feature of academe is reflected in pedagogical practices. It can be seen, for example, in the requirement to present different views amongst texts and writers. It is an important aspect of academic essay writing, even though the requirement to compare and contrast ideas, to disagree with views or to place views in relation to one another may remain as a general expectation rather than a specific requirement.

Being explicit about the role of criticism in the BA programme highlights the place and contribution, for example, of discussion, debate, contestation and argumentation in the construction of practice knowledge. It foregrounds the need for schooling in the differences between these types and forms of communication, and the need for students to develop the underpinning communicative virtues referred to earlier in the chapter, such as tolerance, patience, and respect for differences (Burbules and Rice (1991: 411). In turn, this focuses attention on the need to acquire the necessary skills through sustained opportunities for practise and constructive feedback on actual behaviour and performance. The substantive point is that if disagreement and difference were explicit and central in relation to learning and the development of practice knowledge, an inescapable corollary would be the requirement to participate in discursive activities. In the theory of communicative action this means fully participating in the ‘ideal speech situation’.

Habermas uses the concept of the ‘ideal speech situation’ as a shorthand term encompassing rules for the governance of discussion and debate. The suggestion is

that it is productive to think about how these rules can be incorporated into teaching and learning processes to promote and safeguard communication, which in turn will serve the interests of learning. It is important to stress that the ideal speech situation is not treated in this thesis simplistically as a singular, set-piece event arising inevitably from an experience structured according to particular sorts of rules. Instead, it is understood as a quality of communicative interaction that occurs when participants are cooperating optimally in the development of knowledge and where agreement is based solely on the force of the better argument. This kind of optimal communication can occur in a variety of situations, such as lectures or seminars, so long as participants are abiding by the rules for discussion and debate. As argued at the beginning of this chapter, rule bound behaviour is not a sufficient condition and participants must be committed to the principle of reciprocity in order to make dialogue possible and sustainable over time

Engaging in the kind of discourse envisaged is essential in relation to the practical and emancipatory goals of community education first discussed in Chapter One. This is because, as already indicated in the previous section in this chapter, claims in these areas mediate a mutual dependence on language and the social world that does not exist for the relation of language to the objective world. This characteristic is connected to the ambiguous nature of normative validity. Whereas claims about the material world can be decided empirically through scientific processes of falsification and verification, claims about rightness in a normative sense cannot be subject to proof in the same way. To put this in another way, the fact that norms exist says nothing about whether the norms are valid in terms of their worthiness to be recognised. The example of 'bad' management referred to earlier in this chapter can be used to illustrate this point. In making a claim that there is something wrong with the management practice in a particular organisation it is clear that normative understandings of what constitutes good or bad are already at play. Engaging in discourse would mean that the student's understandings and any generalised claims to 'good' practice in, for example, a literary source, would be held up to scrutiny. It would be clear that coming to an agreement about what would be right or wrong in this kind of social situation is not a matter of scientific proof.

For Habermas, normative validity is linked to the idea of a discursively achieved consensus (Cooke in Habermas, 2003b: 13). Indeed, Habermas (ibid: 118-119) reserves the expression ‘communicative action’ for those acts of communication that aim to achieve mutual understanding. He (ibid: 23) explains his position about consensus by stating that:

The aim of reaching understanding (*Verständigung*) is to bring about an agreement (*Einverständnis*) that terminates in the inter-subjective mutuality of reciprocal comprehension, shared knowledge, mutual trust, and accord with one another. Agreement is based on recognition of the four corresponding validity claims: comprehensibility, truth, truthfulness, and rightness. We can see that the word ‘verständigung’ is ambiguous. In its narrowest meaning it indicates that two subjects understand the linguistic expression in the same way; in its broadest meaning it indicates that an accord exists between two subjects concerning the rightness of an utterance in relation to a mutually recognised normative background.

For Habermas, the teleological aim of communication is ‘*einverständnis*’ or mutual understanding although, in reality, there will be confusion, conflict and disagreement. Where people are operating in what Habermas calls a strategic manner, that is seeking to gain advantage over the other, they are, in his terms, engaging in a parasitic form of communication. Even this form is dependent in the first place on people understanding one another at some level. Habermas’s point is that parties who are committed to communication must assume that they can convince others of the rightness of their claims, through giving reasons, if the communication goes on long enough. Of course, the parties must be open to the possibility that they are wrong and that the other could be right, and that ultimately only the unforced force of the better argument will prevail. In other words, in principle, eventually they could come to an agreement about what is true or right.

For the purposes of this thesis it is not necessary to prove the claim that all communicative activity ultimately seeks a consensus between the parties involved. It is sufficient to argue that there is a requirement to achieve mutual understanding between parties in the featured programme. From this perspective the point of communication in an educational context such as the featured programme is not to

treat others strategically as opponents in some sort of competition for prestige, or to gain personal psychological advantage, but to get at the truth of the matter through a rational process of investigation, discussion and debate. This point about the role of debate and discussion is consistent with the position taken by Brookfield and Preskill (2007: 3), who are very clear about its educational value in HE:

Discussion is one of the best ways to nurture growth because it is premised on the idea that only through collaboration and cooperation with others can we be exposed to new points of view. This exposure increases our understanding and renews our motivation to continue learning. In the process, our democratic instincts are confirmed: by giving the floor to as many different participants as possible, a collective wisdom emerges that would have been impossible for any one of the participants to achieve on their own.

Getting at the truth, Habermas argues, ultimately anticipates a rational consensus concerning claims between parties. This raises the question of how it is possible to achieve and to distinguish a true consensus from a false one. Habermas's answer to this, is the ideal speech situation in which he is trying to 'capture for his model the formal ideal of a situation in which disagreements and conflicts are rationally resolved through a mode of communication which is completely free of compulsion in which only the force of the better argument may prevail' (Pusey, 1987: 73). Communicative competence means the capacity to bring about the conditions necessary to establish such an ideal speech situation. Habermas (2003c: 97-98) states that a speech situation can be called ideal if:

...communication is impeded neither by external contingent forces, or, more importantly, by constraints arising from the structure of communication itself. The ideal speech situation excludes systematic distortion of communication. Only then is the sole prevailing force the characteristic unforced force of the better argument, which allows assertions to be methodically verified in an expert manner and decisions about practical issues to be rationally motivated.

Some basic presuppositions or 'rules' in argumentation can be elaborated as follows (Habermas, 2003a: 89):

- every subject with a competence to speak and act is allowed to take part in a discourse
- everyone is allowed to question any assertion whatever
- everyone is allowed to introduce any assertion whatever into the discourse
- everyone is allowed to express his or her attitudes, aspirations, and needs
- no speaker may be prevented, by internal or external coercion, from exercising his rights as laid down above.

Cooke (in Habermas, 2003b: 5) adds the following to the above list:

- participants share the common aim of reaching agreement with regard to the disputed claim
- no force except that of the better argument exerted is admissible
- no relevant argument is knowingly suppressed
- participants use the same linguistic expressions in the same way.

For Habermas, these rules are not mere conventions but inescapable presuppositions, and participants in argumentation must assume these conditions to be approximately realised. According to Habermas (2003c: 98), there are no constraints in communication when there is a symmetrical distribution of the opportunities for all possible participants to choose and perform speech acts. In such a situation, dialogue roles are universally interchangeable and there is an equality of opportunity to take on these roles. Discourses take place in particular social contexts such as the featured programme, however, where there are power differentials between participants and limitations of time and space. The challenge, therefore, is that ‘the conduct of discussions must be arranged and institutional measures are needed to sufficiently neutralise empirical limitations and avoidable internal and external interference so that the presupposed idealised conditions can at least be approximated’ (Habermas, 2003a: 92).

The presuppositions involved in argumentation give meaning to ideas of truth, but this is not to say that truth is seen as synonymous with an idealised rational consensus. The idealising suppositions guide the process of rational argumentation without guaranteeing, as it were, the truth as an outcome (ibid: 14). In short, the

model can be seen as a standard in identifying deviations from the ideal of rational consensus (Fultner in Habermas, 2003c: xvi). In Habermas's own words (ibid: 87):

My thesis is that only the anticipation...of an ideal speech situation warrants attaching to any consensus that is in fact attained, the claim that it is a rational consensus. At the same time, this anticipation is a critical standard that can also be used to call into question any factually attained consensus and to examine whether it is a sufficient indicator of real mutual understanding.

According to Habermas (2003b: 14), the idea of 'truth' arrived at in discourse draws its power as a regulative ideal in as much as:

A claim, if true, could withstand all attempts to refute it under ideal discursive conditions. The idea of truth has a 'de-centring' function that serves to remind us that what is currently regarded as rationally acceptable may conceivably be called into question in the future, as the limitations of our current understanding of argumentation become apparent.

In other words, the validity of reasons can never be decided once and for all. In principle they must be regarded as provisional, as always subject to revision in the light of new arguments based on new evidence and insights (ibid: 186). There is no access to truth that can be separated from the concept of validity explicated in terms of an idealised practice of argumentation (ibid: 15). Claims, therefore, are provisionally vindicated in discourse if rational consensus is reached concerning their validity.

This extended discussion about the ideal speech situation connects with the observation in Chapter Three about problems arising for the featured students from simplistic notions of the relationship between theory and practice. It addresses the need to develop their own ideas and understanding as well as to acquire theory, because knowledge is understood as something that is socially constructed and developed through processes of argumentation, as opposed to simply being transmitted as a set of correct ideas or instructions from experts. With respect to the featured programme, a commitment to establishing and abiding by the most

favourable conditions for argumentation would mean engaging with others in a mutual process of justification and critique. This inter-subjective, dialogical approach to the development of practice knowledge goes beyond the well-known individualised conceptions embedded in notions of learning through reflection on experience (Schon, 1983; Kolb, 1984).

In the context of a vocationally oriented programme such as the BA in Community Education, the ideal speech situation can perhaps best be understood in terms of its potential role in the development of practice knowledge. This is because of its contribution to the resolution of normative claims to validity. In attempts to achieve ideal speech situations, learners would be encouraged to bring into the open and exchange claims about the social world of practice, their own intentions and activity in this world, and their own inner world of beliefs, values, predilections, hopes and fears. In plain language, the focus would be on why a student makes this or that claim about something and on how they say it. The why concerns what they really think and feel about an issue or proposed course of action. To what extent are the reasons given supported by evidence, by experience, by logic and how do the reasons they give connect with their own experience and what does this say about that experience? How well are these ideas and propositions thought out when assessed, for example, against key conceptual understandings to be found in relevant theories, or nostrums of good practice located in policy documents? At the same time, contributors to a collective learning process need to appreciate the nature and impact of their speech acts on collaborators. The way that something is said, for example engagingly or aggressively, is as important as what is said as this, *inter alia*, performs the crucial function of facilitating or negating the possibilities for a positive response. Here a positive response means engaging in argumentation with the intention of developing knowledge and understanding. In contrast, for example, a negative response would be to seek psychological retribution for a perceived slight.

The key point is that approximating the conditions of an ideal speech situation, which means attempting to abide by the 'rules' of argumentation described above, connects strongly with the need for students to develop their own ideas and

understanding. Through such engagement students might be expected to develop the practice knowledge that they need to become critically competent community educators. It is to the idea of competence that the chapter now turns because the point of a discursive pedagogy in relation to the aims of the featured programme would be to support the development of critical community education practitioners. Becoming competent is not a single or once and for all event, however, and cannot occur without the active engagement of the student with the taught and practice elements of the programme. The challenge is to understand how and why such development occurs over time, which is addressed by understanding competence as a constructive achievement.

Understanding competence as a constructive achievement

The fourth ordering principle, developing competence as a constructive achievement, derives in part from appreciating the connection between the social constructivist notion of learning in Habermas's work and models of stage theory such as Perry's (1999). In Perry's schema, students eventually come to the understanding that all knowledge is provisional, that each person partly determines his or her own fate, and the recognition that their 'commitments', that is what they have come to believe for themselves, are constantly evolving. Perry's ultimate stage of 'commitment' can be compared to Habermas's (2003a: 19) idea of 'epistemic authority' in which subjects actively develop, rather than simply acquire, understanding through argumentation and discourse. The notion of development implied here is one where new understandings supersede previous judgements and beliefs deemed to be inadequate, less coherent, or less justifiable, and where learning is understood as a constructive achievement on the part of the learner. The development of knowledge must be understood in individual and collective terms. As a result of participating in the development of knowledge collectively individuals will construct personally meaningful knowledge. To put the same point in the programme's language of learning objectives, students will learn to make intellectually defensible judgements.

The idea of stages raises questions about what provides the impetus to make a transition from an earlier to a later stage. The theory of communicative action suggests that abstract reflection alone is insufficient to realise the full potential of learning. On this point, the emerging cognitive structures are said not to be primarily the result of environmental influences, for which we might read teaching, or the innate maturation processes involved in psychological processes, but rather the outcome of the creative reorganisation of existing knowledge, which is perceived to be inadequate in terms of dealing with certain persistent problems (ibid: 125). The idea of 'dealing' suggests active engagement with the resolution of practice problems although it will involve changes in the intellectual appreciation of the situation. Indeed, the persistent problem may be conceptual. Over time it may be expected that the learner constructs ever more dependable, in the sense of justifiable and tested, forms of practice knowledge. In other words, they become increasingly competent.

A central issue concerns the point at which students become aware that this or that concept or proposal for action deserves to be recognised. It is perhaps worth noting that this process of justification takes place internally as much as it does externally. In other words, an essential prerequisite is the internal capacity to debate and to reflect in this argumentative way by adopting a 'de-centred' hypothetical attitude to controvertible validity claims. Learning through discourse then is linked to cognitive and moral development. In this regard, Habermas (ibid: 33-34) draws a parallel between Piaget's 4-stage theory of cognitive development and Kohlberg's 6-stage theory of moral development. In his view, both are trying to explain *competence*, which can be defined in Habermasian terms as the capacity to solve particular types of empirical-analytic or moral-practical problems. The problem solving is measured objectively in terms of the truth claims of descriptive statements, including explanations and predictions, and in terms of the rightness of normative statements, including justifications of actions and the norms governing them (ibid: 33).

Habermas (ibid: 125) understands transition from the lowest (Obedience and Punishment) to highest of the 6 stages in Kohlberg's schema (Principled Conscience), as a process of learning consisting of reorganising existing

understandings that prove to be inadequate in addressing pressing problems. The constructive achievements depend on the increasing capacity for decentred thought, which attempts to justify norms according to criticisable and publicly debated criteria. Habermas (ibid: 125-126) states that:

In argumentation, claims to validity that heretofore served actors as unquestioned points of orientation in their everyday communication are thematised and made problematic. When this happens, the participants in argumentation adopt a hypothetical attitude to controversial validity claims. The validity of a contested norm is put in abeyance when practical discourse begins. The issue is then whether or not the norm *deserves* to be recognised, and that issue will be decided by a contest between proponents and opponents of the norm. The attitude change accompanying the passage from communicative action to discourse is no different for issues of justice than for issues of truth.

The essence of Habermas's view of development is that it involves a transition from norm-guided action to norm-testing discourse (ibid: 127), in which participation in argument aimed at the resolution of real empirical-analytic and moral-practical problems, leads to knowledge development. The import of this idea of transition is that it provides a useful way of understanding the development of practice competence in the featured programme.

This understanding subsumes the higher order learning objectives such as critical thinking involving analysis, synthesis and evaluation, which feature highly in the BA in Community Education. It also encompasses the key elements set out in the CeVe (1995) competence framework. It adds to both of these by highlighting the agency of the individual and the role of the collective in developing knowledge. It also includes attitudinal qualities that are mainly implicit in the featured programme and in the CeVe framework, such as ethical commitments to fairness and impartiality and to doing one's best. The broader notion of competence suggested by the theory of communicative action eschews the artificial separation of skill and knowledge based ultimately on mind-body dichotomies. It is a dynamic and active concept in that it necessitates learning through justifying one's ideas, actions and commitments. In relation to the featured programme, this means redeeming claims through mutual

processes of justification and critique with one's peers, lecturers, colleagues and placement supervisors.

The competence that arises out of this discursive activity is set out below in Table 8 in relation to six dimensions of practice knowledge: technical, theoretical, moral-practical, personal, discursive and communicative.

Table 8: Six dimensions of practice competence in community education

Dimensions of Practice Competence	Practice competence can be defined as the capacity to construct knowledge leading to the resolution of particular types of empirical-analytic or moral-practical problems.
Technical	The ability to produce and use technical and strategic knowledge through rules of action; ranging, for example, from organising a structured learning experience one evening in a youth club to setting up a community planning process.
Theoretical	The ability to produce and explicitly represent knowledge in impersonal, abstract and general terms. For example, being able to justify activity conceptually, refer to theoretical sources, to argue a principled case for or against policy initiatives, to debate meanings and to contest understandings of purpose in CLD.
Moral-Practical	The ability to produce knowledge concerning values and principled behaviour and to act appropriately in relation to professional standards and a given norm. Being able to distinguish, for example, between personal and professional belief systems.
Personal	The ability to produce knowledge relevant to the exercise of critical insight into one's own subjectivity and behaviour. For example, the ability to question one's own motives and to analyse the effects of one's interventions on others.
Discursive	The ability to produce knowledge required to engage in reciprocal and co-operative speech acts involving the redemption of validity claims and the achievement of rational consensus through discourse. Being able, for example, to justify a course of action within a team or, on a larger scale, to develop understanding within and across the community of practice.
Communicative	The ability to produce knowledge required to interpret expressions correctly within a given linguistic system – use of language, written and oral. For example, being able effectively to communicate with colleagues and others in decision-making processes.

The first four dimensions of practice knowledge correspond to the areas set out previously in Table 7. To these it is necessary to add two that are implied in the first four and are prerequisites for professional practice. The fifth then is the ability to engage in discourse with one's colleagues and peers in order to continue developing one's own competence at the same time as contributing to the development of

knowledge across the profession. The sixth is the ability to read, write and converse to a given standard so that they can communicate effectively with peers, colleagues, other professionals and stakeholders in community education such as users, funders and policy makers. This more complex understanding addresses the requirement for students to develop the competence appropriate to the field of community education, because the centrality of construction can be contrasted with merely acquiring predetermined knowledge so characteristic of the surface approach to learning discussed in Chapter Three.

It is important to appreciate that whilst these areas of competence might be prioritised differently in the academy and in the field of practice, all apply in reality in both settings. This notion of practice competence is consistent with the ways of thinking and practising in the subject area of community education as expressed in the programme's stated learning objectives listed in Chapter Four. The contribution of this formulation of practice competence, however, is to make explicit what would otherwise remain tacit in the programme's stated learning objectives: that students construct knowledge through active engagement in the teaching and learning processes.

At this juncture it is worth making a connection back to the concepts of valid knowledge and special attention first introduced in Chapter Two. This is because the notion of special attention adds an important dimension to the description of practice competence set out in Table 8, by highlighting the internal decision-making of agents. The achievement of de-centred thought is, paradoxically, akin to a consciousness that connects the various aspects of thinking and activity involved in the exercise of competence. At this level of activity we encounter directed thought as agents pursue their agendas and react strategically to the results of their efforts. This is a meta-competence with the peculiar quality of steering proactive and reflective learning activities whilst at the same developing as a result of these activities.

The nature of this kind of meta-competence means that it is not amenable to educational interventions in any direct sense. It is a highly personal quality that can,

however, be nurtured through participation in interactive and inter-subjective communicative activities. These activities can develop awareness of deeply held attitudes and emotional commitments through subjecting them to critical scrutiny whilst providing the kind of atmosphere in which participants are more likely to engage at these deeper levels of discourse. Establishing the conditions that approximate a discursive pedagogy, therefore, may be expected to help participants develop this meta-competence. This is because it would enhance the role of ‘intrinsic feedback’ (McCune and Hounsell, 2004: 272), referred to in Chapter Four. This kind of feedback is not contained in response to a formally assigned task but pervades day-to-day teaching-learning activities, arising spontaneously and integrally in student-student and student-teacher exchanges.

Enhancing intrinsic feedback is of particular significance in a professionally oriented programme such as the BA in Community Education because improvement of performance, in other words the development of practice competence, is crucially dependent on criticism and feedback. As Eraut (2000: 19) has argued, ‘explicitness concerning performance establishes a link between actions and outcomes, which is necessary if a person is to take responsibility for their actions’. The challenge resulting from the principle of understanding competence as a constructive achievement comes from acknowledging that whilst abstract reflection is necessary it is not sufficient to develop the six dimensions of practice competence set out above (Table 8). A key issue, which will be addressed in the next chapter, concerns how coherently to develop this kind of practice competence in a programme with taught and placement elements.

Conclusion

It should be clear from the discussion throughout this chapter, that the four constituting principles of a discursive pedagogy have major implications for teaching and learning in the featured programme. It has been argued that redeeming validity claims, through participating in attempts to realise the conditions of an ideal speech situation, could contribute to the development of four types of knowledge: technical,

theoretical, moral-practical and personal. In the context of community education these four types can be usefully related to the knowledge required by practitioners in resolving particular types of empirical-analytic or moral-practical problems. Furthermore, it was suggested that two further types of knowledge, discursive and communicative, were also required for practitioners to participate effectively in developing knowledge collaboratively and collectively with colleagues. Taken together, the six types of knowledge signal what it means to be a critically competent practitioner.

At the same time, in the context of the featured programme they contribute to explaining the ways of thinking and practising in the subject area of community education first discussed in Chapter Four. This understanding about practice knowledge spanning the field and the programme can bring focus and clarity to questions of course content, learning outcomes and teaching and learning processes. From a Habermasian perspective it is necessary to avoid privileging one form of practice knowledge to the extent that it undermines the others. It would seem especially important in professionally related programmes to honour this point about the balance between forms of knowledge. In such programmes graduates must hold certain values, for example, and possess the skills relevant to the field of practice.

A key message for teaching and learning processes in the featured programme is that in order to engage in discourse in the Habermasian sense, students must be able to use language in a way that makes distinctions between subjective, inter-subjective and objective domains of reference. Since conflict and disagreements are inevitable aspects of human experience, it is important to be able to recognise the points of dispute and to be able to resolve disagreements at a critically reflective level through argumentation. The point is that such interactions stand to flourish where attempts are made to promote a discursive pedagogy, in which participants would be encouraged to learn through acts of reciprocity, to develop knowledge relevant to their discipline area through redeeming claims, and to learn how to engage in discourse. In essence, it means participating as equals in the process of developing practice knowledge. The problematic aspects and the implications for teaching and

learning processes of this idealised concept of a discursive pedagogy are taken up in the next chapter.

Chapter Six

Problematic Principles and Discursive Strategies

Introduction

Eriksen and Weigard (2004: 10) have warned that social theory can oversimplify reality and that theoretical concepts can be precise in a way that empirical reality is not. The danger is that the results of analyses may say more about the internal relation between the presuppositions of the theories than they do about empirical reality. There is a need, therefore, for concepts at a lower level of abstraction that are, at the very least, suggestive of discursive strategies for teaching and learning processes. It is useful in this regard more carefully to consider the challenges to the four principles first indicated in Chapter Five.

Learning as an act of reciprocity, for example, would require educators in the BA in Community Education to act in ways that facilitate mutual forms of open communication. Encouraging such communication is essential in an academic environment that is premised on certain sorts of commitments, for example, finding out the truth through rational processes of enquiry. Working against this requirement could, therefore, involve educators in a ‘performative contradiction’, which occurs when someone says or does something contrary to a necessary or irreducible reality (Habermas, 2003a: 81). Involving students in redeeming claims through having to justify their ideas and actions is likely to expose deep-seated values and commitments. There would, therefore, be a need to ‘embrace’ the lifeworld from which these commitments derive. This means being prepared to utilise the material from the lifeworld in a positive way as part of the learning process. Disputation could expose relations of power in the classroom and bring up strong feelings, which necessitate safeguarding participation and protecting rationality. Being committed to open forms of enquiry is consistent with the notion of academic freedom and the challenge here would be to deal with the implications of extending such freedom to students. Finally, the notion of competence as a constructive achievement means that educators need to encourage the students to take responsibility for their own learning.

The challenge here would be to enhance those learning and teaching processes that facilitate the kind of ‘epistemic authority’ in which subjects actively develop understanding through argumentation and discourse (Habermas, 2003a: 19).

A number of writers have addressed the issues associated with such challenges from their own educational concerns and perspectives. Referring to their work is helpful, therefore, in indicating possible ways in which educators and students in the featured programme could strategically address the related problems and in so doing work towards the ideal of a discursive pedagogy. The relationship between the principles and their associated discursive strategies can be set out schematically as follows:

Table 9: Discursive strategies for pedagogy

Principles for Pedagogy	Discursive Strategies
Learning through reciprocity	Avoiding performative contradiction
Developing knowledge through redeeming claims	Embracing the Lifeworld
Safeguarding participation and protecting rationality	Extending academic freedom
Competence as a constructive achievement	Pursuing epistemic authority

Avoiding performative contradiction

The principle of learning as an act of reciprocity would mean establishing a particular kind of relationship around meaning making in the featured programme. This relationship would involve lecturers and students in interactive, collective and collaborative ways of developing understanding. It would address the need for their contribution to the learning process to be recognised and valued. It is important to emphasise the notion of collaboration here. Ribes (in Freire, 1994: 104) has put the point quite precisely:

I think that the democratisation of practice in front of the student does not mean asking the students what they want us to teach them. If they can tell us that, then there is no reason for them to be in the university. There is an obvious difference in level, simply because some of us got there before are others - it is a problem of time and not of any other kind. But it is a problem to work out the dilemma

jointly in order to start learning and modifying the process of knowledge - its transmission as well as its production.

Major structural problems for the envisaged relations, however, stems from the fact that universities set their own examinations, and award their own degrees, which means that there is a tension between lecturers acting as teachers and assessors of their own students. Moffat (2006) takes up this theme of tension with specific reference to the practice of grading student work: 'The professor makes judgements about the student's processes of aspiration by means of grades, so the student's relationship to meaning ultimately becomes a relationship to the abstract, quantifiable methodology of grading systems'. Grading, he argues, is a measure of relative worth which produces tables of separations. A limited number of students will be successful, which means that the success of some students is based on a perception of *lacking* in others. Whilst inducing this experience of lacking might not be the intention in the featured programme, it may be difficult to avoid because educators in general appear to be caught in a bind (ibid):

This *lacking* at the centre of our classroom culture might explain why the student seeking success might become suspicious of me as a professor. No matter how much I endeavour to construct my relationship with her as one based on good will and trust, I am also the manipulator of grades and the person who encodes her aspiration. The student needs to be distrustful of me, since it is I who watch her express her productivity and then make a judgement as to whether she is illiterate or literate, failing or passing. In fact, it is not surprising to note that a student once asked me whether professors meet in clinical consultation to discuss the students' ability to appropriately express commitment, concern, and aspiration.

Addressing the situation that Moffat identifies would appear to represent a significant challenge to the principle of reciprocity derived from the theory of communicative action. It means rethinking the student-teacher relationship, in which it is probably safe to start from the assumption that as a general rule lecturers are deemed to be authorities. The tendency is not to challenge this position, at least openly. Failing to open up status to questioning, however, may involve lecturers in a 'performative contradiction' (Habermas, 2003a: 81). This condition occurs when someone says something contrary to a necessary or irreducible reality. For example, someone can

say 'I don't exist' but this statement itself contains the assumption of existence. According to Habermas (2003c: 98) there are no constraints in communication when there is a symmetrical distribution of the opportunities for all possible participants to choose and perform speech acts. It was argued in the previous chapter that adherence to the principle of learning as an act of reciprocity, would presuppose such a distribution of opportunities. In such a situation dialogue roles are universally interchangeable and there is an equality of opportunity to take on these roles. It was also argued that in the 'real' world of HE, however, that this ideal is almost always prejudiced in terms of arranging opportunities according to privileged positions based on power differentials.

There is an argument that some differentials are themselves rational, for example where expertise is present and where those who have it are accorded appropriate status. Lecturers in the featured programme are appointed on the basis of their experience and expertise. They select and train future practitioners and, in effect, act as the gateway to the profession. Through their work as educators they have the important function of mediating the accumulated practice knowledge that characterises and distinguishes the profession, whilst at the same time actively participating in the development of this knowledge through research and other activities. They make this knowledge and their expertise available and accessible to successive generations of students. As educators they support students in learning through engaging with and acquiring this knowledge. In doing so they ensure that it does not have to be constantly rediscovered. On this basis, it is right to recognise and respect the expertise of the lecturers in the featured programme.

Recognising expertise, however, should not be taken to the extent that it effectively shuts down enquiry and contributions from others who are at a different stage in their development. As Freire (1992: 79) so succinctly puts it, 'the moment the educator's directivity interferes with the creative, formulative, investigative capacity...the necessary directivity is transformed into manipulation'. If this transformation happened it would involve lecturers in closing down spaces for discourse which, normatively speaking, they should be opening up. In the extreme, failure to do so

would mean placing themselves in a performative contradiction, and there are negative consequences for learning when this happens. The means by which this problem might be addressed can be usefully considered in relation to Lillis's (2001) ideas about creating particular kinds of relationships around meaning making in HE.

Lillis considers the teacher-student relationship in the context of non-traditional students, such as those featured in my earlier research, struggling with academic writing practices, and offers some useful insights in relation to this issue. Her focus on writing is particularly apt because essay writing in HE in general is central to the student-teacher encounter, to processes of learning and to the judgements made about student performance. As noted in Chapter Four, for example, the requirement for high standards of academic writing is a salient feature of the BA in Community Education. In critiquing what she takes to be the dominant approach to writing in academe, she argues that 'essayist literacy' is ideologically inscribed in two ways: it excludes certain groups, and it regulates what writers can mean and who they can be. In arguing for a different paradigm based on the understanding that writing is a social practice, she contrasts two concepts of 'talking space' and how it is shared and occupied (ibid: 9).

The first space is the 'space for telling' inscribed in the conventional teacher-student roles, where the teacher is deemed the knowledgeable insider and the powerful participant. In words that echo the notion of surface approaches to learning discussed in Chapter Three, she explains that in this space students are anxious to write what they think their tutors are looking for. Its fundamental character is monological so that the tutor's voice (real or imagined) is overwhelmingly dominant and is of central importance to the student (ibid: 74-75). The second space, the 'talk-back space', requires listening and is characterised by the use of open-ended questions to help to shift the focus to the student's experience and ideas. In the talk-back space, as a minimum, a student can be schooled by tutors in essayist literacy practice, rather like an apprenticeship or being drawn into a community of practice. They can be enabled to 'populate' the texts with their own intentions and meanings and helped to identify the diverse voices in the text, for example through surfacing distinctions between

established views and what the student really wants to say. Language can be made visible by challenging the student's statements and encouraging them to reflect on the complexity of their own thoughts in relation to issues. Meaning making is tied up with identity and understood as an evolving process because it involves becoming aware of tacit understandings. This latter point will be taken up again in this chapter with reference to Eraut's (2000) ideas about the need to surface 'theories-in-use'. It is important, Lillis argues, to recognise the partial and gradual impact of such dialogue and to see the text as an unfolding and unfinished process of meaning making.

For Lillis, a talk-back space provokes questions about the relationships between language, social identity and institutional practices to be explored, covering such aspects as sentence structure, grammar and syntax, using new wordings, writing about somebody else's work, and the student's ideas. A talkback space allows students to challenge dominant conventions and privileged meanings (ibid: 154-5), enabling students to capture in writing ideas that they can verbalise in more subtle and complex ways. The author suggests that over time this becomes part of a 'long conversation' between student and teacher. It provides a better chance for students to learn essayist conventions and gain greater control over their own writing. The argument is that it is important to master such conventions whilst leaving open the possibility of different forms of writing.

Clearly writing with rather than for people in their meaning-making attempts requires more contact. Lillis acknowledges that this is a resource issue but asserts that it must be addressed if the aim is to widen access. Resource questions are obviously central to any sensible consideration of what is possible in teaching and learning processes but such concerns, in my view, intensify rather than obviate the need to think deeply about pedagogy in terms of its purposes and practices. In this case the stakes are high. As Lillis (ibid: 76) concludes: 'What is at stake is the students' participation in higher education'. Here we should understand participation in psychological as well as sociological terms because the meaning of participation is diminished when students can only engage superficially with the teaching and learning processes on

offer. Enhancing participation would address the feeling of not being entitled to participate in HE that characterised the experience of the students featured in my earlier research, and would be consistent with the principle of learning as an act of reciprocity. This is because in the talk-back space meaning comes into being between participants and students and tutors in the construction of texts. It also points to ways in which to avoid performative contradiction because establishing a 'long conversation' means opening up the channels of communication between educators and students. Opening up spaces for discourse is not straightforward; because the sorts of argumentative processes envisaged need to be handled carefully if they are not to be counterproductive.

Embracing the lifeworld

The principle of developing knowledge through redeeming claims relies on criticism but this must be conducted in an appropriate way because argumentation will necessitate engagement with the ideas and beliefs of the students that form their 'lifeworld'. The challenge presented here is to meet the desire for subject matter to be relevant to the student's concerns and issues whilst understanding the influence of the lifeworld on the way that students develop knowledge. In Habermas's thought the lifeworld is contrasted with the 'systems world' in which the steering power of capital and the state is exercised through economic and bureaucratic mechanisms respectively. Both capital and the state have legitimate roles although often their interests conflict with the achievement of equality and the promotion of democracy. The lifeworld is associated with civil society, which may struggle to resist the steering power of the systems world in its own pursuit of the social good. Universities like many other institutions are also caught in this struggle between the two worlds as can be seen in two contrasting visions of the widening participation agenda.

One suggests that HE serves the economy and so access is about the most efficient and cost-effective way of organising expansion by drawing on all the pools of talent

available through a meritocratic system. This economic vision is becoming the dominant one throughout the 'developed' world, as Reich (1991:3) anticipated:

We are living through a transformation that will rearrange the politics and economics of the coming century...Each nation's primary assets will be its citizens' skills and insights. Each nation's primary political task will be to cope with the centrifugal forces of the global economy, which tear up the ties binding citizens together - bestowing even greater wealth on the most skilled and insightful, whilst consigning the less skilled to a declining standard of living.

This view is also reflected in the National Committee of Enquiry into Higher Education, (DfES, 1997:4) which stated:

In the next century, the economically successful nations will be those, which will become learning societies: all are committed, through effective education and training, to lifelong learning. So to be a successful nation in a competitive world, and to maintain a cohesive society and a rich culture, we must invest in education to develop our greatest resource - our people.

In the UK, for example, this economic emphasis is pronounced in the Government's Leitch Review of Skills, *Prosperity for All in the Global Economy – World Class Skills*, which urged the education and training sector to play its part in the UK becoming a world leader in skills by 2020 (HMSO, 2006: 3).

The other view is that academics have a moral duty to share their knowledge and expertise with the widest community, which means that access should be widened, not primarily for reasons of economic efficiency but for reasons of social justice. One problem with respect to the featured students is that they may see the university as part of the alien systems world rather than one serving the interests of social justice. In this ambivalent situation, the danger is that confronting the student's lifeworld inappropriately is experienced as an act of 'invasion' (Freire, 1974) and runs the risk of activating defence mechanisms that are inimical to the learning process.

Speakers generally have only tacit knowledge of the lifeworld but it provides the basis of taken-for-granted interpretations on which each can draw to understand the other. When claims are challenged they need to be redeemed in discourse where elements that are implicit in the lifeworld can be made explicit. As Habermas (2003b: 172-3) states:

Communicative action takes place within a lifeworld that remains at the backs of participants in communication. It is present to them only in the pre-reflective form of taken-for-granted background assumptions and naively mastered skills. It is an *implicit* knowledge that cannot be represented in a finite number of propositions; it is a *holistically structured knowledge*, the basic elements of which define one another; and it is a knowledge that *does not stand at our disposal*, to the extent that we cannot make it conscious and place it in doubt as we please.

The lifeworld provides the basis for our understanding at the same time as limiting it. In communicating with each other, participants in communication do so against the background of this lifeworld in which there are implicit shared understandings and other unacknowledged ways of seeing things. Although the lifeworld is difficult to penetrate and to comprehend as a whole, it is possible to become aware of aspects of its contents.

According to Brookfield (2005: 243), the lifeworld has three key functions. One of these is to secure a continuity of tradition and a coherence of knowledge sufficient to the needs for consensus in everyday practice. It means that newly arising situations can be connected to what is already known in ways that can help people to make the most appropriate decisions. Another function is to help to coordinate actions by means of the 'legitimately regulated interpersonal relationships' in which we learn the habitual ways our group solves problems, sets goals and resolves disputes. The third enables individuals to make the connection between their life histories and the collective histories of which they are a part. In this way identity is associated with allegiances to groups, communities and nation states.

It is instructive at this point to consider the student's desire for subject matter to be 'relevant' in terms of these three functions of the lifeworld. Securing a continuity of tradition and a coherency of knowledge, for example, is problematic when it is not possible, or it is extremely difficult, to connect what is emerging to what is already known. Relying on tacit knowledge to make decisions may not be helpful for students with no previous knowledge of HE. Coordinating actions by means of the habitual ways our group solves problems, sets goals, and so on, is also difficult when new ways of problem-solving are required that are outside of the group's experience. Similarly connections between life histories and the collective histories, of which the students are a part, are ruptured when the imperative is to form allegiances to new groups and communities. It would be important to identify and address those aspects of the lifeworld that may be inimical and those that are conducive to the development of a discursive pedagogy in the featured programme.

In relation to the BA in Community Education, probing the lifeworld can be usefully discussed with reference to Kember et al (2001), who examined the attitudes of part-time students in HE about the whole process of teaching and learning. They found that the students had a consistent cluster of beliefs concerning the nature of knowledge, a conception of learning and how teaching should take place (ibid: 210):

Our analysis suggests that a significant problem for many is that their set of beliefs about learning, teaching and knowledge are not compatible with the requirements of tertiary study. Furthermore, the difficulties posed by the incompatible beliefs can be related to other problems such as inadequate study skills.

As explained in Chapter Three, such beliefs underlie the crises experienced by the students featured in my earlier research. Being disinclined towards academic study is an example of this tendency. They are, as argued with reference to Salmon's (1989) concept of stance in Chapter Three, a major factor in the extent to which students are able to deal successfully with the requirements of higher education. Kember and his colleagues argue that students need to move from a didactic/reproductive understanding of knowledge, teaching and learning, to a facilitative/transformational

approach. These two conceptions of knowledge, teaching and learning are set out schematically in Table 10.

Table 10: Two contrasting belief sets

	Didactic/Reproductive	Facilitative/Transformative
Knowledge	Defined by an authority Knowledge and theories are right or wrong	Transformed or constructed by the individual Judgements have to be made about alternative theories based upon evidence and analysis
Teaching	A didactic process of transmitting knowledge The teacher is responsible for ensuring that learning takes place	Teaching is a process of facilitating learning The student learns independently with guidance from the teacher
Learning	The role of the student is to absorb the material defined by the teacher Outcomes are judged by the student's ability to reproduce material	The role of the student is to reach an understanding of relevant concepts The outcome is the student transforming knowledge for own purposes and context

Kember et al (2001)

The point is that students need to move from a position where knowledge and theories are deemed simply to be either right or wrong, to one in which finer judgements have to be made about alternative theories based upon evidence and analysis. This understanding about the need for such movement is consistent with Perry's (1999) stage theory, and Entwistle's (1984, 1996, 1998, 2003) work on deep and surface approaches to learning, whilst going beyond both of these. According to Kember et al (ibid: 215) it is important to appreciate that these orientations change over time. Transition, however, is not a quick or easy process and the stronger the belief the more difficult it is to change. In an observation that reinforces Lillis's findings, and those from my earlier research discussed in Chapter Two, they argue that offering short courses on study skills, for example, is not sufficient to bring about the necessary shift (ibid: 18):

To cause a developmental shift in beliefs, it does appear necessary to confront students with the incompatibility of their current beliefs. They cannot come to appreciate a facilitative/transformative model of the teaching and learning process unless exposed to teaching based upon these premises. They will not develop towards higher order epistemological beliefs if teaching and assignments reflect factual material verified by an authority.

An important insight from their study, however obvious it seems when plainly stated, is that the teaching approach is the easiest element for the teacher to influence. It would seem logical, in this case, to attempt to alter the belief set by exposing students holding didactic/reproductive beliefs to forms of teaching and learning inconsistent with these beliefs. In other words, transformational learning requires transformational pedagogy. The corollary is for forms of teaching requiring active engagement, involving students in discovering content for themselves and presenting what has been learnt to others in the class. In this way they can come to see that the teacher is not the only source of knowledge. An active learning process would involve students exploring more than one theory or model, so that they are exposed to the idea that knowledge is not black and white. Such a teaching process will inevitably conflict with less sophisticated epistemological beliefs that may be present in the student's lifeworld. The authors acknowledge that there are many types of teaching methods consistent with these requirements such as individual and group projects, peer teaching, discovery learning and problem-based learning, whilst concluding that there is a need for the future development of, and research on, such methods (ibid: 220). It is interesting to note that in terms of the formal curriculum, only small group projects from this list feature in the BA in Community Education.

Yorke and Knight (2004) add to our understanding with the idea that the theories that students hold about themselves are a crucial element in the learning process. They argue that students with a 'fixed' self-theory are likely to adopt instrumental and surface approaches to study, whilst those whose theories are 'malleable' are more likely to adopt deep approaches where study is more personally meaningful. For example, the students featured in my earlier research were unlikely to see themselves as developing professionals. Instead they saw the goal of training as the acquisition of certain types of skills and as a necessary 'passport' to a particular kind of job. The import of these ideas about self-theories is that teachers would be required to (ibid: 229):

- appreciate the significance of self-theories for student learning
- be able to infer whether students are inclined towards fixedness or malleability

- possess strategies for encouraging 'fixed' students to move towards malleability.

The authors note that the relationship between student and teacher views is also important. If both have a malleable view about student development the teacher will provide constructive feedback, which, in turn, will be used positively by the student. They argue that (2004: 33):

It is a necessary condition for maximizing student learning that the teacher's beliefs about students lie towards the malleability end of the spectrum...it is not a sufficient condition, since there is a need for appropriate pedagogic skill and for coherent curricular structures that contain spaces for risk-taking and slow learning.

The trick, in their view, is not to provide too much support, which can give students a false idea about their abilities. Support should be reduced over time. In words that resonate with the proposals made by Lillis (2001) and Kember et al (2001), they suggest that frequent steps involving forms of assessment providing feedback can help to provide incremental evidence of achievement and support a cumulative process of development. Considerations here would turn on what is meant by frequent. In the featured programme, for example, assessment largely consists of essays completed at the end of semesters and may be too infrequent for the kind of feedback envisaged. A further implication for course designers is a requirement for the level of challenge to increase as students proceed. This, it is argued, would increase the likelihood of students moving from fixed to malleable views about their own capacity for learning.

To some extent, this increasing challenge is a feature of the BA in Community Education where first and second year programmes are pitched at the Scottish Credit and Qualification Level 8 and third and fourth year courses at Level 10. It is a fact, however, that it has taken the staff team until the academic year 2007/8 to produce a statement explaining these levels for community education courses. Significantly, in terms of teaching and learning practices, there are no mechanisms for explaining to the students what is meant by these levels or to explain the change between them. This is an important matter as the levels influence understandings of assessment and

more broadly ways of thinking and practising in the subject area. Arguably, messages about the meaning of a level are communicated through such practices as written feedback on essay work. It has already been noted above, however, that confining feedback to sometime after the completion of an assignment, it can be up to six weeks after, is unlikely to help with understanding levels. The absence of explicit ways of dealing with this issue means that it is an example of an area of academic practice that students must somehow come to understand for themselves.

Extending academic freedom

Surfacing the kind of taken-for-granted knowledge embedded in the lifeworld, is more likely when academic freedom is extended and it is useful to consider this issue in relation to safeguarding participation and protecting rationality. A commitment by all parties to establishing and abiding by the most favourable conditions for argumentation would extend teaching and learning processes beyond supporting the capacity of individuals to think because it would require students and lecturers to engage with each other in a mutual process of justification and critique. Focused on first principles, such a process can be understood as a method of inquiry involving a systematic procedure for questioning and explanation. According to Webb (2003: 55), this kind of communication does not remove disputation. It puts it to use in the pursuit of shared understanding.

The pursuit of shared understanding through disputation is consistent with the idea of academic freedom, which is defined for academics in section 202(2a) of the UK Education Reform Act of 1988: 'Freedom within the law to question and test received wisdom and to put forward new ideas and controversial and unpopular opinions, without placing themselves in jeopardy of losing their jobs'. The problem, according to MacFarlane (2004: 3), is that academic freedom tends to be associated, self-regardingly, with academic staff rather than students. He argues that lecturers should also protect the academic freedoms of students in university education with a focus on evaluation of learning rather than student acquisition of knowledge (ibid: 32). Defining the idea more inclusively means that the principle extends to students

who should also have the right to say what they believe is relevant to the subject at hand. Barnett (in Macfarlane, 2004: 23), identifies voluntary participation and the 'intellectual space' to evaluate prevailing theories, as important rights of students. Macfarlane (ibid: 24) concurs with this position by stating that: 'It is important that the actions of academic staff in their close association with particular theories, creeds, philosophies and attitudes do not unintentionally undermine student freedom of expression'. Were they to do so, to return to an earlier point, they would commit a performative contradiction.

One significant implication for educators in this regard can be usefully discussed with reference to Habermas's distinction between 'interpreters' and 'observers' (2003a: 26):

Interpreters relinquish the superiority that observers have by virtue of their privileged position, in that they themselves are drawn, at least potentially, into negotiations about the meaning and validity of utterances. By taking part in communicative action, they are accepting in principle the same status as those whose utterances they are trying to understand.

Moreover (ibid: 30):

For reasons to be sound and for them to be considered sound are not the same things, whether we are talking about norms and values, or asserting facts, or expressing feelings. Interpreters can't simply look out for or understand such reasons without at least implicitly passing judgement on them, in other words without taking a positive or negative position on them.

What could and would it mean for lecturers in the featured programme to 'relinquish superiority', and would this be at all desirable? In vocationally oriented subjects, especially those concerned with the professions, it is difficult to argue that lecturers could simply occupy the role of observer since they are inevitably drawn into making normative judgements or offering advice in relation to the field of practice. At the same time, engagement with student learning entails passing judgements on student views about practice. Adopting a Habermasian stance regarding the logic of the

interpreter role would mean, in principle, accepting the same status as the students as participants in discourse. By the same token, taking on the role of observer would imply adopting a 'superior' position. To observe in this case should not be confused with adopting a critical and distanced stance towards practice, which is a necessary and legitimate position from the point of view of communicative action. Observation, in Habermasian terms, means not being involved and not having any responsibility for what takes place.

Whilst the metaphor of the interpreter has profound implications for the fundamental nature of the relationship with students, it also has limitations. As argued in the previous section, lecturers are more than interpreters because they have a significant place in the development of practice given their central role in the training and education of practitioners. Yet their role is not simply to deliver workers into a given field of practice. It is a legitimate function of higher education to offer constructive criticism of developments in the field, to participate in the development and improvement of practice, to improve standards, to be involved in the development of policy, to interpret policy and to stimulate debate about purposes.

The importance of these interpretive and developmental functions can be further considered with reference to Habermas's concept of the 'public sphere', first discussed in the previous chapter. According to Brookfield (2005: 231), the public sphere can be understood as 'the civic space or 'commons' in which adults come together to debate and decide their response to shared issues and problems'. It is useful for my purposes to consider the relevance of the concept of the 'commons' or public sphere to the featured programme. What form or forms might it assume and what would be its uses? A key dimension is the collective nature of activity implied by the idea, which is highly significant in terms of the argument in this thesis for a shift of focus from the individual student to the social construction of learning. Another point is the requirement in the public sphere to engender debate, not just to transmit ideas. What are the implications here for academic freedom and more specifically, for the way classes are run or for assessment? Putting the two questions together suggests activity with some, if not all, of the features of debate. This is more

than audience participation in seminar activities or even in talks or mini-conferences with outside speakers that might occasionally augment the normal curriculum. It implies participants taking up oppositional positions and seeking to expose weaknesses in arguments and propositions.

Thinking in this direction is not to undermine the role of the lecturer. On the contrary, as Brookfield (2005: 235) avers, the diminution of the public sphere can neutralise intellectual challenges to dominant orders:

When intellectuals act as social critics to reveal and uncover the existence of social inequities, they need a public to receive, consider, and then sometimes act on such critiques. With no public to debate the arguments and evidence they offer, no commons in which their analyses can be heard, intellectuals are impotent.

The public sphere needs safeguards and mechanisms to ensure and enable the free expression of critical opinion. As Brookfield (2005: 237-8) notes, ‘there is little point in joining a tenant’s group or showing up at a neighbourhood meeting if all we are able to do is choose between options shaped and presented to us by political or business interests’. Whilst acknowledging differences in the two environments, a similar argument can be made, *mutatis mutandis*, with respect to teaching in HE. There is little point, to paraphrase Brookfield, in educators hoping that students will develop the capacity for critical thinking that characterises a deep approach to learning, if all they are required to do is to choose between the views presented by lecturers. This notion of the public sphere has particular significance for the training of community educators as it resonates closely with Tett’s (2002: 96) statement, referred to in Chapter Four, about the work of these professionals in providing a public space, ‘in which different groups can come together to air their differences and build solidarity around common interests’. It is essential that they learn how to participate in and to create such spaces in their studies.

The kinds of communication that can occur in a public sphere can support the extension of academic freedom by playing its part in developing the capacity for critical reasoning. For Habermas (1973: 12), critical reason is a species-survival

need, as is the aspiration for emancipation and freedom - in other words, the deep-seated aspiration to question, challenge and eradicate those conditions and relations, which are oppressive and repressive. With respect to the situation in HE, and more specifically in the featured programme, the development of the equivalent of a public sphere could enhance freedom of expression, which, in turn, is more likely to support the development of the capacity for critical reasoning. The central point, according to Brookfield (2005: 213), is that the greater the freedom of expression, 'the higher the chance that critical reason - reason employed to create a just, humane democracy - will emerge'. The important aspect of Brookfield's point in relation to the students featured in my earlier research is the relationship between having a simplistic understanding of the theory-practice nexus, freedom of expression and the development of the capacity for critical thought.

The creation of a commons would rest on the rules of governance for debate and discussion that underlie the ideal speech situation, such as:

- all participants have the opportunity to ask questions and to respond to questions
- all have equal opportunities to offer interpretations, explanations, assertions and justifications and to establish or refute their claims to validity.

Whilst these two conditions provide the basis on which no prejudice or unexamined belief will remain exempt from scrutiny and critique, they are not sufficient to ensure unrestricted discussion. Participants could be involved in a coercive discussion even if they believed that this was not the case. It has to be assumed in addition that speakers are not deceiving themselves or others about their intentions. Speakers have to be transparent to themselves and others in what they actually do and believe and if necessary be able to translate their non-verbal expressions into linguistic utterances. To this reciprocity of unimpaired self-representation there corresponds a complementary reciprocity of expectations about behaviour, which rules out privileges in the sense of norms of action that are only unilaterally binding. This symmetry of entitlements and obligations is guaranteed if actors have equal opportunities, for example to command and resist, to allow and forbid, to make and

extract promises, and to answer for one's actions and demand that others do so. Given that seminar activity would be an obvious space in which to explore the limits and possibilities in this idea of a commons, it is problematic that there are no seminars in the featured programme until the fourth year.

The sorts of pedagogical practices inferred by the entitlements and obligations entailed here can be explored further with reference to Tisdell's (2001) more specific reflections on the possibilities and limitations of the higher education classroom as a site of resistance and social justice. She is concerned with the ways in which aspects of identity, for example race, gender or class, affect how people are positioned in relation to the dominant culture. The latter category of class, as explained in Chapter Three, has particular resonance for the working-class students featured in my earlier research, because it fuels the feeling of not being entitled to participate in HE, which is seen as a preserve of the middle classes. She acknowledges that teaching in this territory, where the focus is on dealing with power relations, will involve conflict and emotion in the classroom. It is necessary to discuss relations of power in society but also to activate in the group a sense of agency, which involves the ability to act on their own and others' behalf to change the world (ibid: 150). Members of groups can exercise power by speaking or influencing the group by remaining silent and there is a relationship between what she terms 'positionality' and a willingness to be vulnerable in classes. It is likely that those with the lowest status are more willing to be open about their vulnerability. According to Tisdell (ibid: 152), the success of classes dealing with issues of social justice turns on 'the extent to which teachers and students honestly deal with *how* the positionality of participants is operative in teaching and learning'.

To clarify what it means to extend academic freedom by promoting student agency, Tisdell (ibid: 153-4) describes a course addressing power issues based on the politics of positionality. In her case study, the work of people of colour, women and members of other marginalised groups was foregrounded in the curriculum. They tried to critique how power relations were present in the classroom. For example, one of the members pointed out how silence can be a way of hanging on to privilege. In

recognition of the fact that such groups will give rise to conflict and emotion, they structured in activities including the use of film, and of writing and sharing each other's cultural stories, in order to access people's emotions early in the course. They also required members to be in teaching roles, which facilitated ownership of the course. It revealed how participants were constructing knowledge but also created a platform for people to express their own ideas as well as their affect and passion.

In arguing that integrating emotion, intellect and action leads to new ways of constructing knowledge, she acknowledges that those in power in the academy have determined that valid knowledge is based on rationality (ibid: 155), which is often expressed in essayist writing. But, she argues that it is also important 'to create a more inclusive curriculum that is representative of people of colour and other marginalised groups and to conduct classes in a way that takes into account the myriad ways people construct knowledge' (ibid: 156). She argues that the over-reliance on rationality reifies a particular way of knowing, which, in effect, can be seen as a way of curtailing academic freedom. Her approach is not to reject the critical analysis that is typical of rationality in higher education but to place alongside this the affective and experiential dimension. As she puts it (ibid: 160):

If institutions of higher education are serious about teaching for social justice and developing and disseminating culturally relevant knowledge, they need to be concerned about moving beyond the acceptable (rational) forms of knowledge; not all forms of cultural knowledge can be captured by rationality. Furthermore, transforming our understanding and creating new knowledge that can facilitate the challenge of power relations between dominant and oppressed groups require more than just critical analysis; they require the transformation of the heart.

In a way that is consistent with the argument of this thesis, she does not believe that it is possible to have a transformational experience by merely 'critically reflecting'. In her view affective involvement and expression are also a necessary condition for transformational learning to happen (ibid: 160). She argues that we need to bring our

whole selves into the learning environment and examine how we engage with our educational practice. In this quest she acknowledges that (ibid: 162):

There are no easy solutions, and there are limitations to what can be done in higher education. But higher education has a responsibility to do its part in teaching for social change. Creating a community of practice can be powerful if students have power to practise their own understanding of engaged pedagogy and to examine the politics of positionality. We can hope that doing so leads to social transformation.

An example from my own experience, which relates to Tisdell's argument, involved a group project undertaken by three female students in their fourth year of the BA in Community Education. The project required practical work over two semesters during which time the students had to work with members of the community and then write an essay about it. The students had chosen to engage in a developmental piece of work with a group of ten young women. In a presentation to the rest of class the students gave a detailed, informative and critical account of their work. Some of the young women were also present to give their stories and they told how much they had enjoyed and learned from the activity. It was clear from what was said that the students had clearly understood the purpose of the work and applied formal and informal methods appropriately to achieve important educational outcomes. In what now appears to me as a very clear example of a non-aligned curriculum, the assessment for this work was a written essay for which the students eventually received an average mark. They were, rightly, aggrieved at the fact that the mark did not reflect the true worth of their work or the extent of their knowledge and understanding. This is an example of what Tisdell means by favouring certain forms of knowledge production over others. In this case the theoretical and the written was privileged at the expense of the experiential and the practical.

Having discussed some key issues concerning the extension of the concept of academic freedom to include students, the final part of this chapter turns to the intended outcome of such a process, which is for students to exercise epistemic authority as a precondition to developing practice competence.

Pursuing epistemic authority

As discussed in Chapter Four, the phrase ‘ways of thinking and practising’ in a subject area is used by McCune and Hounsell (2004: 5) to describe the ‘richness, depth and breadth of what students might learn through engagement with a given subject area in a specific context’. One of their examples concerned three final year biology courses in terms of two main themes: engagement with the primary research literature and experimental data; and the students’ growing mastery of the requirements and conventions of written and oral scientific discourse. In the BA in Community Education the parallel would be the primary literature, and mastery of the conventions of written and oral discourse concerning the theory and practice of community education. Engagement and mastery, would address the requirement to develop competence appropriate to the field of community education. They are also essential to the programme’s overriding intention to develop critically competent practitioners. Engagement and mastery are implicit in the notion of epistemic authority, which occurs when participants take full control over their learning and exercise responsibility for ensuring its development. The challenge is to develop this capacity through maximising the educational potential in discourse, where discourse is understood as argumentation leading to the resolution of practice problems.

This understanding of discourse regards theory and practice as indivisible when reflection on the results of face-to-face practice is a necessary and essential part of the learning process. The contention is that theorising about community education depends indirectly on confirmation from practice whilst acknowledging that the latter, in turn, is built on theoretical assumptions. Seen from this perspective, theory and practice are conditions for each other. The import of this understanding is that whilst abstract reflection is necessary it is not sufficient to develop the six dimensions of practice competence elaborated in Chapter 5 (Table 8). As indicated in the previous chapter, the question is how can this kind of practice competence be developed in a programme with taught and placement elements?

In the featured programme, lecturers concentrate on the taught elements, whilst fieldwork supervisors support student development on placement. Some existing

mechanisms for mediation between the two aspects of the curriculum are helpful. Tutors prepare students for the practice experience, for example, by helping them to think through the kind of placement that would be suitable for their development needs, by visiting the allotted agency to discuss progress, and by assessing the student's placement related essays. The major problem is that in the featured programme, lecturers do not follow, as it were, students into the field of practice during placement and do not engage with individual students in in-depth, one-to-one analysis and discussion of their placement experience afterwards. Instead, and at the most, a review day would typically be held with the whole class (around 30 students) at the end of placement inviting students to reflect on their experience and learning. For their part, fieldwork supervisors do engage in in-depth analysis with students, for example in weekly supervision meetings (usually for around one hour) but can often lack familiarity with the taught elements of the student's programme of studies. Having said this, it is also the case that some supervisors will be former students and have some relevant knowledge.

Notwithstanding the positive aspects already mentioned, in such a division of responsibilities there is scope for reinforcing rather than bridging the gap between theory and practice because, amongst other things, lecturers are seldom in a position to engage in the kind of intensive dialogue to support the development of understanding at the level required to attain practice competence. The process of learning envisaged can be considered on two levels. On one level the focus would be on the specifics of this or that claim made by students in relation to the six dimensions of practice competence (Table 8). For example, a student might make a technical claim about the efficacy of this or that exercise in working with a group of adults involved in a literacy programme. At a deeper level, and over time, personal development might occur in relation to the fundamental ways in which students construe, for example, their own habitual ways of approaching situations, or theoretical development might come about in fundamentally reconsidering the purpose of their work. According to Mezirow (1995: 46), reflection is key to the process of development:

Reflection, as it is used here, is a process by which we attempt to justify our beliefs, either by rationally examining assumptions, often in response to intuitively becoming aware that something is wrong with the result of our thought, or challenging its validity through discourse with others of differing viewpoint and arriving at the best informed judgment. The result is a transformation in meaning structures. Reflection is the apperceptive process by which we change our minds, literally and figuratively. It is the process of turning our attention to the justification for what we know, feel, believe, and act upon. We reflect by critically reassessing the assumptions we have taken for granted which prop up the way we think and feel. We sometimes identify these assumptions and look critically at how we acquired them and their consequences in action or in our feelings.

This kind of reflection is an active and intentional process. Moreover: ‘The kind of reflection which includes and relates the circumstances of their origin with their nature and consequences can be understood as *critical reflection*’ (Mezirow, 1995: 45).

The importance of critical reflection in the pursuit of epistemic authority can be further discussed with reference to Eraut’s (2000) views on the need to surface tacit or implicit knowledge in professional education. He distinguishes between explicit and implicit levels with the example of the professional who on one level appears to be consulting and informing clients or keeping colleagues aware of actions, whilst on another the implicit or underlying function is to keep clients happy whilst asserting the professional role or to maintain good relations with colleagues whilst ensuring freedom from their influence. The result is that (ibid: 19):

In general, discourse in many settings helps to provide a defensible account rather than a description of a professional’s actions and to create an impression of professional control over situations, which inspires confidence in them as persons. It may seek to disguise rather than share experiences of uncertainty and risk taking.

There is a relationship here to Schon’s (1983) now familiar distinction between ‘espoused’ and ‘theories-in-use’. Practitioners are committed to espoused theories, which describe the world as they would like it to be, but which do not necessarily accurately reflect their own actions. Instead they are more likely to see what they

want to see and to self-confirm their own actions. This can result in people developing false theories of actions. 'Double loop' learning involves providing genuine feedback on the outcomes of actions, which can help to correct misconceptions. Feedback should be understood comprehensively in this context to overcome the mismatch between espoused and theories-in-use. Eraut's ideas add an important 'reflexive' element to the student's thinking and learning process because they are taking into account the effects of their own activity in any given situation. It is not, therefore, simply a process of reflecting on what and why something has happened but also on the part one's own thoughts, feelings and behaviour have played in the situation.

Eraut (2000: 20) argues that the mismatch between theory and practice is a consequence of a dualistic approach to professional education where there is a concentration on espoused theories and their comprehension is rewarded by the assessment system. In contrast theories-in-use are developed to cope with the requirements of practice and are unlikely to be revealed in public, although they may, to return to the specifics of the featured programme for a moment, be revealed when a supervisor questions the assumptions behind a student's practice during placement. If theories-in-use are addressed in one context but not in another, a possible undesirable outcome is that (ibid: 20):

Apart from preserving the often mourned but rarely narrowed theory-practice gap in many professions, espoused theories provide professionals with a 'professional conscience' which encourages them to judge their work according to a form of idealised practice which is unachievable. Over time this leads either to scepticism or to frustration and burn out when they become professional educators and perpetuate the cycle.

So it is important to surface theories-in-use in any comprehensive attempt to treat learning and knowledge development holistically. But, according to Eraut (ibid: 29):

It would be unwise to expect the sudden revelations, which some authors have glibly predicted. They have to accept and understand the large role played by tacit knowledge in all parts of our lives and avoid the delusion of hyper-rational interpretations of professional

action. If people's tacit personal knowledge and implicit learning are devalued, their confidence will diminish and their use of, and interest in, more formal knowledge will also suffer.

Formal knowledge in the form, for example, of courses or serious reading plays an important role in helping people to become more aware of tacit knowledge. It adds an important dimension to their ability to think in the work situation by providing a vocabulary for talking about aspects of experience which had been previously difficult to discuss, and concepts and theories which help to make sense of experience and understand issues and alternative perspectives more clearly (ibid: 18). Having acknowledged as much, however, it is important to consider carefully how teaching and learning processes could support the development of practice competence by surfacing tacit knowledge.

Ultimately, it is important that graduates can work with high levels of autonomy and handle novel problems. Being able to work in these ways could be taken as a proxy for the students having attained epistemic authority; taken full control over their learning and exercising responsibility for ensuring its development. The sorts of pedagogical practices involved in the promotion of epistemic authority can be usefully considered with particular reference to Birgerstam's (2002) work on how knowledge can be developed from complex goals and ambiguous situations. This work is highly significant for my purposes because it concerns a programme with similar students to the BA in Community Education and also in its vocational orientation. His theories were tested on thirty part-time undergraduate students studying psychology who were given the opportunity to 'divine the essentials in complex or chaotic situations and by so doing to construct meaningful unities' (ibid: 433). This was achieved by dispensing with the usual format and processes for course delivery. There were, for example, no traditional lectures although students were provided with full course materials, including topics and extensive readings. Students were asked to work in pairs to select for themselves what they thought to be the important features of the subject, and to run a two-hour teaching session for other members of the cohort, based on their conclusions.

The test was designed to explore the balance between intuitive and rational approaches to knowing because ‘rationality without intuition results in linearly well-arranged fragments, whereas rationality in the service of intuition contributes to deeper perspicuity’ (ibid: 433). Problematising is a key notion (ibid: 435):

The idea behind problematising is to twist and turn things from every possible direction, discover what is divergent and special, bring out aspects that have not been seen before, break up clear connections, find new questions, let the thoughts flow freely, fantasise over what might be and effect reorganisations in the huge quantity of information. Problematising is a first step towards living knowledge, where active curiosity turns the attention towards (hitherto) hidden aspects of what can be known. Problematising, which is largely intuitive, uncovers the complexity of a phenomenon. What is well known becomes multifaceted, composite and often rationally contradictory.

In words that resonate closely with the notion of an ideal speech situation described in Chapter Five, he points to the importance of a ‘trustful atmosphere’ in which students are open to each other’s interpretations and in which they encourage each other to ask fresh questions about the subject. In so doing, students take on the mantle of researchers. The aim is not to find fault or expose limitations but to ‘catch a glimpse’ of other possible interpretations that might add to their own. Seminar activity, as an example, was supplemented with the ‘war game’ where students had to attack and defend propositions by finding more convincing arguments.

The final aspect of the course was a practical task based upon reality – these part-time students had to write a psychological personality report based on various sources including interview, observation and questionnaire. The practical live element meant that students had to adapt their approach to fit the given circumstance. This is because no one theory fits every eventuality and practitioners have to interpret the possibilities suggested in broad concepts and frameworks in new and unpredictable situations. Birgerstam talks about this kind of process in terms of the development of ‘practical theory’ (ibid: 440):

The knowledge which is needed in a specific concrete situation has to bring out the most significant features for just that situation among an evasive flow of multifaceted and voluminous information...Then a *practical* theory...that cannot be found in any single general theory, will come into existence, one which is limited in its compass but which is able to elucidate a multifaceted content by meaning.

Constructing practical theory is a deliberative process that is central to developing practice knowledge in subject areas such as community education. According to Eraut (2000: 24), this kind of practical theorising occurs where:

- there is some uncertainty about outcomes
- guidance from theory is only partially helpful
- contextual knowledge is relevant but insufficient
- pressure on time reduces opportunities for deliberation
- there is a strong tendency to follow customary patterns of thinking
- there is an opportunity or perhaps the requirement to consult or involve other people.

A deliberative approach works best when the practitioner has some evidence that comes from experience, is willing to reflect and consult and have some sense of what is possible in the circumstances (ibid: 24). A deliberative process is also enhanced by participation in conditions approximating the ideal speech situation because improvement of performance is crucially dependent on challenge and feedback when clarity and specificity of feedback is key to learning and development. Explicitness concerning performance is also about accountability because some link between actions and outcomes is necessary if a person is to take responsibility for their actions. Acknowledging the social nature of this kind of learning runs counter to the conventional idea that learning from experience is an individual activity, where others are part of the experience rather than the learning. Individualised conceptions of learning emphasise reflection as a means to extract explicit learning or generalised understandings by bringing together past and present experience, whereas, as Eraut suggests, other people bring their own prior experience and implicit knowledge to situations and they know things that we do not know (ibid: 24).

This discussion about practical theory and constructive processes of learning connects strongly to the discussion in Chapter Five about developing the normative knowledge that plays a particularly important role in programmes preparing community education graduates for work in a field where decisions have to be made about appropriate courses of action in social and ethically charged situations and where the ‘answer’ is not obvious and cannot be predetermined. Developing what I have here called epistemic authority is consistent with Barnett’s (2004: 259) view that students now require the personal resources to be willing and able to deal with uncertainty in a ‘super-complex’ world:

Learning for an unknown future cannot be accomplished by the acquisition of either knowledge or skills. There is always an epistemological gap between what is known and the exigencies of the moment as it invites responses, and this is particularly so in a changing world. Analogously, skills cannot be expected to carry one far in a changing environment: there can be no assurance that skills - even generic skills - appropriate to situations of the past or even the present will help one to engage with the future world in a meaningful way. Indeed, in a changing world, it may be that nonengagement is a proper stance, at least in some situations. A more positive term, to encapsulate right relationships between persons and the changing world in which they are placed, might be ‘wisdom’.

Conclusion

This chapter has raised a number of significant challenges to the ideal of a discursive pedagogy. It has done so by considering how some educational commentators have addressed the associated issues and problems. Referring to their work foregrounds and brings into sharper focus the kinds of teaching and learning strategies through which non-traditional students, such as those featured in my earlier research, could be more deeply engaged in the development of practice knowledge appropriate to the field of community education. These strategies were considered in terms of the need to avoid performative contradiction, to embrace the lifeworld, to extend academic freedom and to pursue epistemic authority. Basing pedagogy on such strategies, it

was argued, could enable students to contribute individually and collectively to teaching and learning processes, for the subject matter to be relevant to their own concerns and issues, for academic language to be comprehensible, to understand how theory is developed and not simply acquired, and to develop competence appropriate to the field of practice. At the same time, the discussion of strategies indicated ways in which teaching and learning processes could support the programme in achieving its aim to produce critically competent community educators. The final chapter will now bring the thesis to a close by reiterating the elements that could constitute the ideal of a discursive pedagogy as a basis for teaching and learning in the BA in Community Education.

Chapter Seven

Towards a Discursive Pedagogy

Introduction

This final chapter points to possible ways in which teaching and learning processes in the BA in Community Education could be informed by the four constituting principles of a discursive pedagogy. It follows on from Chapter Six in moving the discussion beyond the mainly principle-oriented theorising of Chapter Five. Although there is merit in the idea that critical pedagogical theories should remain vague in terms of implementation, in order to allow local and fresh interpretations to emerge, there is a counterbalancing argument: ‘Without a foundational theory of learning, teachers lack an anchoring framework for translating thought into action’ (Ares, 2006: 4). As Guevara-Niebla (in Freire, 1994: 44) has stated, to develop such a framework it is necessary to address a number of fundamental pedagogical questions:

The possibility of a revolutionary education is not confined to the boundaries of a non-formal education; it is possible to elaborate an intervention programme to change (and counter attack) the fundamental tendencies in formal education institutions toward the reproduction of the structures of domination...and yet, what is the program? What are the methods, the techniques, the procedures, by means of which the socialist or revolutionary forces, those who militate in the institutions of education to bring about a revolutionary change in society, can carry out their work within these institutions?

The aim in this concluding chapter, therefore, is to set out the elements of an ‘anchoring framework’ for teaching and learning that is designed to ‘ensure that each individual takes a stand by listening, deliberating, seeking arguments, and evaluating, while at the same time there is a collective effort to find values and norms on which everyone can agree’ (Englund, 2006: 503).

There is no single technique, method or strategy that embodies a discursive pedagogy. The idea is to promote discourse in every aspect of a programme that aims

to develop in its students the appropriate practice knowledge required by professional community educators. In keeping with the philosophy of discourse pedagogy, what is appropriate in a specific situation would always be subject to judgement, discussion and justification within the programme team or those responsible for a particular course. Establishing a framework for pedagogy illustrates how the ideal of a discursive pedagogy could function analytically as a standard against which to make judgments about teaching and learning processes. As an ideal type it is also suggestive of ways in which appropriate processes could be understood and constructed. The framework should be regarded as an initial formulation that is open to change and development depending, for example, on feedback from attempts to implement the ideas.

A framework for pedagogy

Chapter Three explained that the mature, non-traditional students featured in my earlier research commonly experienced four crises as they engaged with the learning requirements of the BA in Community Education. The crises were articulated in terms of the students:

- feeling unentitled to participate in HE
- being disinclined towards academic study
- having a simplistic understanding of the theory-practice nexus
- having an instrumental attitude to gaining a professional qualification.

Whilst accurate in some respects, this way of representing their experience was overly negative in failing to appreciate the strength of their commitment to learning whilst simultaneously underplaying the contribution of the curriculum to the situation. The crises can be reinterpreted more positively as a signal to educators to consider how teaching and learning processes support changes in the student's underlying stance (Salmon, 1989), so that they feel entitled to a place in HE, inclined towards academic study, committed to the development of critical practice and appreciative of professionalism as a 'way of being' involving reflective and reflexive processes. It means adopting a deeper approach to study in which the students make

connections between their own experience and patterns and principles in the subject matter (Entwistle, 1996).

Shifting the focus means valorising their commitment and desire for success, and acknowledging the educational potential inherent in utilising the student's experience in teaching and learning processes. Similarly, difficulties with academic language indicates the need for subject matter to be relevant to their own concerns and issues in a vocationally oriented programme, and educators to engage more rigorously with students in processes of justification. The difficulties with the concept of professionalism highlight a need to focus more on the central issue concerning the meaning and nature of competence and how it is developed. The crisis associated with a simplistic understanding of the theory-practice nexus signals a need for learners to develop their own ideas and for educators to demonstrate how theory is developed as well as acquired. Making explicit the ways of thinking and practising in the subject area (McCune and Hounsell, 2004), can support the necessary transformational change in stance.

Chapter Four took up the argument with respect to these ways of thinking and practising in the BA in Community Education. From analysis of the programme documentation it is possible to see a potentially fruitful correspondence between the student's needs and the programme's clearly expressed learning objectives to produce critically competent practitioners. It is not as clear, however, how the teaching and learning processes are aligned or congruent with this aim. In these circumstances, the burden of learning the underpinning ways of thinking and practising in the subject area rests with students. Rethinking the problem of consistency between aims and teaching and learning processes could be supported by the development of a theoretical rationale, which can be achieved by linking particular learning objectives and methods to the student's educational needs

The idea of contributing to the learning process is matched by the programme's requirement for participants to utilize their own experience for teaching and learning purposes. The corollary of such a requirement is an emphasis on participative

approaches to learning, which, in turn, presupposes a theory of collaboration. The need for learning relevant to the student's concerns connects with the programme's aims that they should be able to select and deploy appropriate intellectual arguments. This requires an emphasis in teaching and learning on the active development of knowledge, which necessitates a theory of knowledge construction. The concept of the need to develop their own ideas and to better understand the theory-practice relationship is met by the programme's aim to produce critical practitioners, and a concomitant need to concentrate on developing critical capacities. This implies a theory of discourse as a means of promoting learning through developing and justifying one's ideas and actions. Finally, the need to achieve the competence appropriate to the field of practice corresponds to the programme's concept of professionalism as a way of being. The requirement is for teaching and learning processes to develop the attributes of professionalism explicitly, which entails a theory of competence synthesizing academic and professional understandings in terms of the necessary knowledge, skills and attitudes. Because it requires interaction between learners, any theoretical underpinning could usefully incorporate ideas from a social constructivist perspective.

Chapter Five argued that the requirement for a theoretical rationale as a basis for connecting aims and teaching and learning processes could be assisted by turning to Habermas's *Theory of Communicative Action*. The analysis resulted in the articulation of four principles for pedagogy expressing the related ideas that learning depends upon acts of reciprocity, that knowledge can be developed through redeeming claims, that it is necessary to safeguard participation and protect rationality as participants engage in discourse, and that competence is a constructive achievement. Respectively, these principles address the requirement for a theory of collaboration, knowledge construction, discourse and competence, and taken together constitute the concept of a discursive pedagogy. The active involvement in collective and collaborative processes of argumentation and justification implied in a discursive pedagogy could support a deeper experience of learning.

Simultaneously, those same processes could also help to fulfil the programme's intention to produce critically competent practitioners. This is because the ideal of a discursive pedagogy rests on the fundamental Habermasian notion that human communication is a medium of a rationally binding character. In other words, it has the capacity to function in an action-coordinating manner whereby agents' actions will depend on how they evaluate the statements of other people. In educational terms this means that learning occurs through justifying one's ideas and actions to others. Justification is achieved through discourse in which claims are provisionally 'redeemed' through rational processes of argumentation. The essential prerequisite is the capacity to debate and to reflect by adopting a 'de-centred' hypothetical attitude to controvertible validity claims. The point is that involvement in this kind of discourse could help students to develop that peculiar quality of consciousness or discipline in which action and reflection interpenetrate and are simultaneous. This kind of consciousness heightens the possibilities and potential inherent in situations. It both construes and interprets events in the act of deciding how features in the presenting situation are related, what is important and what is to be done.

This capacity to construe and interpret is centrally involved in the development of practice competence required in the field of community education. The five WALT principles outlined in Chapter Four, set the parameters for the sorts of problems that characterise the domain of practice. They do not do this in a final way so that the details of any problems can be predetermined in advance. Even the CeVe (1995) competence framework, which provides a functional analysis of professional work in this field, does not provide a blueprint for activity. Rather the very nature of the 'practical' work in community education, with reference to Habermas's knowledge-constitutive-schema in Chapter One, means making judgements about interventions designed to promote human flourishing based on an assessment of the specific characteristics of that situation. In turn, the assessment itself is based on contested understandings of the purpose of the work.

In Habermasian terms, competence can be understood as the ability to make appropriate interventions to support human flourishing. This means developing the

capacity to produce knowledge leading to the resolution of empirical-analytic and moral-practical problems arising in the field. The problem solving is measured objectively in terms of the truth claims of descriptive statements, including explanations and predictions, and in terms of the rightness of normative statements, including justifications of actions and the norms governing them (Habermas, 2003a: 33). Competence is developed as participants refine and develop ideas and behavioural commitments through contesting what is or should be the case. Over time, learners construct ever more dependable, in the sense of justifiable and tested, normative structures to underpin their work. In this notion of competence development, theory and practice are conditions for each other in that theory informs activity and the results of activity feed back into the theorising process. No one theory fits every given eventuality and practitioners have to interpret the possibilities suggested in broad concepts and frameworks in new and unpredictable situations. Understanding is further developed as the concept is applied and reapplied as the situation develops. According to Eraut (2000: 27), trying to apply knowledge and operate effectively in such a way involves:

- understanding the situation, which itself may require appropriate use of some prior knowledge
- recognising that a concept or idea is relevant
- changing it into a form appropriate for the situation
- integrating that knowledge with other knowledge in the planning and implementation of action.

When they are actively doing this, practitioners are developing competence in relation to the six dimensions of practice knowledge outlined in Chapter Five. The dimensions build on Habermas's ideas about the construction of knowledge (2003b: 170) and the development of competence (2003a: 33-34), to define the technical, theoretical, moral-practical, personal, discursive and communicative knowledge required for the resolution of problems that characterise the field of community education. To the extent that students are being supported in developing practice competence, teaching and learning processes can be said to be responding to and addressing the crises experienced by the students featured in my earlier research.

The line of argument was developed in Chapter Six where a number of significant criticisms of Habermas's theory of communicative action were noted, and considered in terms of the challenges to the concept of a discursive pedagogy. Working against the requirement to act in ways that facilitate mutual forms of open communication, for example, could involve educators in a 'performative contradiction'. Open communication could expose deep-seated values and commitments, which means being prepared to 'embrace the lifeworld' and positively use this material as part of the learning process. Disputation could expose relations of power in the classroom and bring up strong feelings, which necessitate safeguarding participation and protecting rationality. Open forms of enquiry would mean dealing with the implications of 'extending academic freedom' to students. The understanding of competence as a constructive achievement would mean the need to develop learning and teaching processes in which subjects actively 'pursue epistemic authority' by developing understanding through argumentation and discourse (Habermas, 2003a: 19).

Given these challenges and issues it is clear that there is no single or straight line from the principles to specific forms of teaching and learning. There is still a need, however, to explore strategies that could enhance the possibilities for fulfilling the programme's aims. Considering the challenges to the principles helps to identify the sorts of issues and problems that such strategies need to address. Lillis's (2001) work suggests that in relation to avoiding performative contradiction, educators in the featured programme could usefully consider what it might mean to create 'talk-back' spaces, to commit to 'long conversations', to critique the student-teacher status differential, prioritise dialogue in the student-teacher relationship and to support 'risk-taking' and 'slow learning' in a cumulative process of development. An indicative example of teaching and learning consistent with such objectives would be tutors schooling students in essayist literacy practice. This would involve using open-ended questions to focus on the student's experience and ideas, challenging the student's statements and encouraging reflection on the complexity of their own thoughts in relation to issues. It would also mean allowing students to challenge dominant conventions and privileged meanings, including those favoured by the

tutors themselves, and enabling students to capture in writing ideas that they can verbalise in more subtle and complex ways.

With respect to the principle that knowledge can be constructed through redeeming claims and the associated need to embrace the lifeworld, a lead could be taken from Kember et al (2001), in working with students to explore beliefs about teaching and learning, and to valorise a facilitative/transformative approach requiring active student engagement in learning. This could be usefully supplemented by examining the influence of malleable and fixed self-theories (Yorke and Knight, 2004) on approaches to learning. An indicative example of teaching and learning that would be congruent with such objectives would involve tutors supporting students in a cumulative process of development. This would mean initially confronting students with the incompatibility of their current beliefs. It would necessitate teachers modelling reflection and reflexivity and openly accounting for their own learning. It would involve students in discovering content and presenting their learning to the class, utilising methods such as individual and group projects, peer teaching, discovery learning and problem-based learning. Tutors would be required to assess students more frequently, making use of formative assessment particularly, to provide feedback and incremental evidence of achievement. Equal status would be afforded to theoretical and practical work.

Some key elements of the proposed teaching and learning processes can be illustrated in connection with Community Education Work Based Learning 1: Professional Development. As explained in Chapter Two, my earlier research into the student experience of this course provided a number of useful insights into teaching and learning processes. The defining feature of the associated tasks was the focus on real and live problems or issues of interest to and relevance to the students. Relating to the specifics of their work, students had the opportunity to test developing ideas in real situations and, in turn, to bring the results of action back into the learning process. In the final section, as task groups were established and reported back to one another, the participants began to grasp the educative potential of a collective learning process and started to construct knowledge in new ways. The

students shared and debated differing views within and between the learning clusters and attempted to bring the ideas together. This final section required the students to synthesise their ideas as each task group had to represent the essence of their learning to the other groups. Here there was evidence of the students becoming aware of fundamental attitudes, views and beliefs held about themselves and which influenced their engagement with the world, including approaches to work and education. Quick feedback was provided to students through short email communication as they progressed through the eight exercises and related assessments.

In relation to the challenge of extending academic freedom (McFarlane, 2004), consideration could be given to engaging students in systematic and open forms of enquiry and emphasising their right to say what they believe is relevant to the subject at hand. Importantly it would mean encouraging students to question those ideas and beliefs held by their lecturers. This proposal can be linked to the need for emphasis on the role of 'interpreter' in lecturing. Interpreters relinquish the superiority that observers have by virtue of their privileged position, in that they themselves are drawn, at least potentially, into negotiations about the meaning and validity of utterances. By taking part in communicative action, they are accepting in principle the same status as those whose utterances they are trying to understand. This could be further considered by thinking through what it might mean to establish a 'commons' or 'public sphere' in the programme (Brookfield, 2005).

A public sphere would involve, as far as possible in this particular HE context, symmetrical obligations and entitlements between educators and students and students themselves. These would be important in countering the negative effects of 'positionality' in an attempt to balance rational, affective and experiential modes of learning (Tisdell, 2001). In the first instance, educators would need to provide appropriate training in the obligations and entitlements of discourse, such as turn taking in speech acts. It would mean involving students in debates with the intention of exposing weaknesses in arguments and propositions. Seminars might be established along the lines of the 'war game' advocated by Birgerstam (2002), for example, or mini-conferences could be held featuring oppositional speakers.

Evocative methods such as film, drama, artwork, and creative writing, would be used to access emotions and imagination.

Concerning the pursuit of epistemic authority, it would be necessary to encourage intentional reflection and reflexivity as an individual and social activity, to surface tacit knowledge, and to enable students to distinguish between espoused and theories-in-use (Eraut, 2000). From Birgerstam's (2002) research it would seem important to enable students to learn from and teach each other, and for educators to find ways of constructing tasks based upon the resolution of complex and ambiguous problems, as a way of striking a balance between rational and intuitive approaches to knowing. An indicative example of teaching and learning complementary to such objectives would be experimenting with the format and processes for course delivery, for example, not having traditional lectures, providing full course materials, topics and extensive readings, and using practical tasks based upon reality. The arrangements for Community Education Work Based Learning 1: Professional Development mentioned in Chapter Two and above in this chapter, could serve as an example here. It would also mean providing feedback on thoughts and actions in taught and practice components.

All of the elements discussed above can now be brought together below in Table 11. This takes the form of a conceptual framework consisting of the four ordering principles, strategies for teaching and learning stemming from these, key elements in the strategies and indicative examples of specific practices. Essentially, the framework could assist educators in creating the necessary 'spaces' for discourse. The notion of space needs to be understood in physical, temporal and psychosocial terms. Concretely there are key questions of place and time in terms of where and when discourse takes place. On one level, this concerns apparently mundane things such as the location and the numbers involved in teaching and learning situations and other material resources providing the opportunities for engagement. At the same time, it is more difficult to engage hundreds in a discussion, as might be the situation in some large lecture groups, and easier to involve a small tutor group in an extended discussion around a focussed issue. At the level of teaching, the notion of space

refers to the 'how' of discourse including, for example, recourse to the use of small task groups with a remit to research and justify their findings to a larger group of peers. On a psychosocial level the term signals a generalised commitment to entering into social interaction in order to develop knowledge through processes of argumentation between reciprocally accountable subjects. Such processes are necessarily mediated through specific practices such as a discussion group but they are not reducible to such practices.

It is important to lay stress on the notion of working towards the ideal. The aim in this chapter has not been to put forward a utopian view of pedagogy, but the more modest one of indicating possible teaching and learning strategies with respect to the BA in Community Education. This is the opposite of providing a quick fix to a perceived problem. Rather it is to present a framework that could support an evolving process of critical pedagogical practice. The elements in the framework should be seen as generative rather than authoritative. In other words educators could consider the principles, and suggested examples of practice consistent with those principles, against current forms of teaching and learning. In no particular order, some examples of generative questions can be given: What in concrete terms does this suggested practice mean? Is it feasible given resources available or even desirable? To what extent is current practice behind, in line with or in advance of the suggestion? What is missing in this framework and how might it be extended? What in this or that specific case would the principle mean?

Table 11: Framework for a discursive pedagogy

Principles	Strategies	Key Elements in a Discursive Pedagogy	Indicative Examples
Learning through reciprocity	Avoiding performative contradiction	Creating ‘talk-back’ spaces and committing to ‘long conversations’ Critiquing student-teacher status differentials Prioritising dialogue in the student-teacher relationship Supporting ‘risk-taking’ and ‘slow learning’ in a cumulative process of development Meaning making and identity as an evolving process; becoming aware of tacit understandings	Schooling in essayist literacy practice Open-ended questions to focus on the student’s experience and ideas Challenging the student’s statements, encouraging reflection on complexity of own thoughts in relation to issues Allowing students to challenge dominant conventions and privileged meanings, enabling students to capture in writing ideas that they can verbalise in more subtle and complex ways
Developing knowledge through redeeming claims	Embracing the Lifeworld	Exploring beliefs about teaching and learning Examining the influence of malleable and fixed self-theories Valorising a facilitative/transformational approach requiring active student engagement Supporting a cumulative process of development	Confronting students with the incompatibility of their current beliefs Teachers modelling reflection and reflexivity – accounting for own learning Involving students in discovering content and presenting learning to class Using individual and group projects, peer teaching, discovery learning and problem-based learning Assessing frequently to provide feedback and incremental evidence of achievement
Safeguarding participation and protecting rationality	Extending academic freedom	Ensuring academic freedom for all members of the academic community Acknowledging the role of ‘interpreter’ in lecturing Establishing a ‘public sphere’ Countering the negative effects of ‘positionality’ Balancing rational, affective and experiential modes of learning Giving equal status to theoretical and practical work	Training in obligations and entitlements of discourse Exposing weaknesses in arguments and propositions Establishing seminars as a public sphere Establishing a symmetry of obligations and entitlements in discourse Holding mini-conferences with oppositional speakers Using evocative methods: film, drama, artwork, creative writing - to access emotions
Practice competence as a constructive achievement	Pursuing epistemic authority	Supporting intentional reflection as an individual and social activity Surfacing tacit knowledge Distinguishing between espoused and theories-in-use Striking a balance between rational and intuitive approaches to knowing Enabling students to learn from and teach each other	Providing feedback on actions in taught and practice components Setting tasks based upon the resolution of complex and ambiguous problems Using practical tasks based upon reality Experimenting with format and processes for course delivery: e.g. no traditional lectures, providing full course materials, topics and extensive readings

Conclusion

This thesis has argued that a discursive pedagogy could support teaching and learning processes that are focussed on developing the practice knowledge required by the critically competent community education practitioner. The kind of knowledge envisaged comes about as students attempt to understand ideas through collaborative and collective forms of engagement with the taught curriculum or to deal with real issues and problems in practice situations. The point at which one's ideas and commitments to act in certain ways are tested against those of lecturers, peers and work colleagues provokes the kind of reflection that can lead to new insights and behaviours. Constant repetition of such testing over time leads to the development of the knowledge, skills and attitudes that characterise practice competence in community education. The central point is that this process of development could be enhanced by participation in discursive activities based explicitly on argumentation and reasoning. These constructive activities are essentially social and call for cooperative behaviour as participants seek to refine their knowledge by testing it against that of others. This kind of practice knowledge would be personally meaningful and lead to epistemic authority because participants would inexorably be implicated in a process of developing and defending their own ideas and behaviours.

This thesis has made no attempt to furnish proof about what 'works'. Its purpose has been to address issues and concerns that have arisen out of my work with non-traditional students. I short I have used the opportunity to develop my own thinking and practice by theorising the pursuit of a transformational and critical approach to pedagogy in the case of this one undergraduate programme. As discussed in Chapter Four, this kind of pedagogy would be consistent with a social constructivist approach to teaching and learning. It would go beyond this, however, in two ways. First, by placing vulnerable social subjects as the frame of reference for questions about learning; in this particular case by focussing on the situation of non-traditional students in HE. Second, by seeking consistency between teaching and learning processes and the content of a programme that is explicitly concerned with challenging structural and other sources of inequity. The main outcome is a way of

thinking, rather than a blueprint for action. It points towards the kind of critical classroom community described by Tisdell (2001: 161), in which teaching and learning processes would:

- integrate affective and experiential knowledge with theoretical concepts
- pay attention to the politics of positionality inherent in knowledge production and among participants in the class
- acknowledge the power disparity between teachers and students
- involve team teaching with someone who is positioned differently relative to the dominant culture
- require students to be in teaching roles
- consider how curricula choices implicitly or explicitly contribute to challenging structured power relations
- be conscious of the ways in which unconscious behaviour contributes to challenging or reproducing unequal power relations.

Although, the thinking process enabled by undertaking the thesis has been primarily to develop my own understanding and practice as an educator with respect, in the first instance, to this particular programme, a secondary outcome can be anticipated as the ideas developed here are shared and debated with colleagues from the BA in Community Education. As argued in Chapter Two, this kind of discussion will be important for me in terms of validating, or not, these ideas. Beyond my own programme the ideas may also connect with the concerns of educators in the thirty-five universities and colleges of higher education currently offering related awards in the UK. To the extent that the crises identified in Chapter Three are representative of non-traditional students in HE, the considerations developed throughout this thesis will be helpful to any educators seeking better to understand the needs of such students and how to make appropriate responses at the level of teaching and learning processes.

With respect to educators across a range of disciplines, however, perhaps the most important feature of this thesis is not the specifics of the content but the process of thinking involved. Starting from a concern with the student experience, the focus of attention moved from a psychological perspective foregrounding the inner world of the student, to a sociological understanding of the impact of curriculum in shaping

learning. What advantage would such a shift in perspective bring to educators in other subject areas? This thesis has sought a theoretical underpinning for teaching and learning appropriate to the ways of thinking and practising in community education. In this particular case the theory of communicative action seems to be especially apt but could well have less to offer other subject areas. The exercise of thinking through approaches to teaching and learning at philosophical and theoretical levels, however, would be productive in any discipline area.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: BA in Community Education Courses

Core Courses

Year One:

Introduction to Community Education
Introduction to Social Theory
Community Education Methods and Approaches 1
Welfare, Ideology and the State: Continuity and Change
Community Education Professional Practice 1

Year Two:

Community Education 2
Community Education Methods and Approaches 2: Developing Dialogue
Community Education Professional Practice 2

Year Three:

Community Education Professional Practice 3
Re-theorising Community: Implications for Democratic Citizenship
Community Education Methods and Approaches 3: Building and Managing Organisations

Year Four:

Community Education Honours Seminar in Social and Educational Theory
Community Education Honours Dissertation

Elective Courses –Years Three and Four:

Adult Education
Community Work
Working with Young People
Globalisation and Communities
Health Issues in the Community
Independent Study Project (Community Education)
Partnerships: Purposes and Problems
The Social Sciences and Education