CHAPTER 1

Introduction

The changing nature of the student population presents new challenges every day. This diversity enriches the lives of both teachers and students. It gives us the opportunity to be creative, to challenge old ways of thinking and to explore new ideas.

(Schreuder, 1999)

Aim of the study

This study examines university staff's and students' views about teaching and learning practices for diverse groups of students. Through placing the data gathered during this study within an emergent theoretical framework, it aims to show why catering for the learning needs of such students will be of benefit for all learners, providing a rationale based upon educational, not policy, imperatives.

This work focuses upon views about teaching and learning for diverse groups of students in higher education in Australia and the United Kingdom, in particular, in the period following the introduction of mass higher education in both countries in the early 1990s, and specifically over the five year period in which the research was conducted, from 1996 to 2000. It provides a 'snapshot' of these views, derived from a range of staff and students at the various Australian and United Kingdom universities involved in the research, and develops a discussion of the possible impacts of teaching and learning practices on the learning of diverse groups of students and the broader implications for the learning of all students.

Background to the study

This professional doctorate represents a personal and professional journey, exploring and discovering what is viewed by students and teachers in higher education contexts as 'good' teaching and learning practices for diverse groups of students. This journey was grounded in my experiences as a teacher and as an equity practitioner, and was influenced by the theoretical perspectives I brought to bear on the dynamics of the teaching and learning processes and their impacts, particularly for some groups of students.

This thesis brings together four separate research projects, undertaken at various times over the past five to six years as part of my professional work as an equity practitioner and researcher, at diverse universities in Australia and the United Kingdom. These projects represent a series of 'snapshots' of the views of students and teachers in higher education about 'good' teaching and learning practices for diverse groups of students, and comprised my professional equity research for those universities. Although the research projects had different terms of reference and purposes, a common theme running through them was the identification of 'good' teaching and learning practices for diverse groups of students, and this topic is the focus of this thesis.

These research projects were informed by my theoretical understandings and perspectives as a teacher and as an equity practitioner, but these were further developed through the course of undertaking the research. The formal professional doctorate program began after the completion of the first two research projects, and although the other two projects were undertaken during the doctoral program, they were each commissioned, as were the first two projects, by individual universities for particular purposes. This resulted in a broad picture of the issues and experiences identified by staff and students at those universities about what they regarded as the key issues in the area of 'good' teaching and learning practices for diverse groups of students, but it led me to the view that the educational basis for policies and programs aimed at widening

participation in higher education in these two countries had not been well developed or articulated. What also became apparent during the research and my professional practice in this field were the significant differences between how well university teachers perceive that teaching and learning practices meet the needs of diverse groups of higher education students and how well students within these groups believe that their learning needs are being met, and this raised questions about the educational implications of the teaching and learning practices of university teachers for such students. This prompted me to investigate theories of learning to determine whether there are in fact sound educational reasons for such policies, and subsequently, to form the view that although these theories of learning can at least partly explain the impacts on student learning of the marginalisation and exclusion identified in the research, these theories do not serve teachers well in their efforts to teach an increasingly diverse student body. This investigation is articulated in this thesis, in an attempt to explain the impacts of marginalisation and exclusion on student learning, and to propose a new, 'universalist', approach to teaching and learning that may better suit the learning contexts and needs of increasingly diverse university student populations and their teachers.

Focus of the study

The study focuses upon students with disabilities and international students, since the research projects were mainly commissioned to investigate the needs of these two groups of students. What became evident through the research was that the differences in the perceptions of how well their learning needs were being met compared with the perceptions of university teachers existed most evidently for these two groups. Although many of the experiences reported by these two groups of students were also sometimes reported by other groups of students (such as students from different cultural backgrounds or gay, lesbian and bisexual students), these students seemed to be the least satisfied with how well their learning needs were being met, and teachers expressed the most difficulties in being able to meet the needs of these two groups of students.

University staff had greater need for information about 'good' teaching and learning practices for these two groups of students, as evidenced by the decisions of the universities to commission research in these areas.

This thesis examines the marginalisation and exclusion often reported by these two groups of students, as identified in the research projects that comprise the portfolio for this program of research. Although of themselves these two groups appear to be disparate groups, as can be seen later in this thesis, there are similarities in the issues that influence their learning. These groups in many ways simply represent most obviously, and in sharper focus, the issues that pertain for other, diverse groups of students. This thesis considers possible root causes of these, including the issues of hegemony, power and identity raised by critical pedagogy, in terms of the implications of these for student learning.

In a number of the research projects, I have attempted to identify the gaps between staff and student perceptions, as well as both students' and staff's views, about what is 'good' teaching and learning practice for diverse groups of students in higher education, particularly in regard to students with disabilities and international students. These groups reported generally that not only did they believe that their teaching and learning needs were not being well met, but they also often reported feelings of marginalisation and exclusion. As previously stated, although such gaps were also apparent in regard to other groups of students (for example, some individual students such as gay, bisexual or lesbian students reported negative treatment by individual lecturers), and there were differences within these two groups (students with 'hidden disabilities', especially psychiatric disabilities, and students from particular countries reported larger gaps in how well they perceived that their needs were being met), these two groups *as a whole* appeared to have a lower concordance with their teachers' views on how well their learning needs were being catered for.

This thesis is based upon the results of the four research projects that have been undertaken prior to, and during, this program of study as well as an investigation of the literature in a number of related fields.

The research projects

The research projects which form the base of this program of study are:

1. *Equal opportunities in the curriculum: Good practice guide* – report of a research project commissioned by the Equal Opportunities Action Group at Oxford Brookes University (September, 1996);

2. *Supporting students with disabilities on small university campuses* – report of a research project commissioned jointly by Australian Catholic University and The University of Melbourne's Victorian College of Agriculture and Horticulture (April, 1997);

3. *A guide to supporting disabled students* – guide for general and academic staff, commissioned by Student Services, Oxford Brookes University (January, 2000); and

4. *A guide to teaching international students* – book commissioned and published by the Oxford Centre for Staff and Learning Development (July, 2000).

Each of the above research projects involves an investigation of what students and teaching staff perceive as good teaching and learning practices for diverse groups of students in higher education; identifies and discusses the various issues, debates, and tensions surrounding these; and gives examples of 'good' teaching and learning practices and strategies identified by students and staff. The first report - *Equal opportunities in the curriculum: Good practice guide* - provides 'good teaching and learning practice' examples from each of the

discipline areas of Oxford Brookes University in the United Kingdom. The second report - *Supporting students with disabilities on small university campuses* - developed a model of academic and general support for students with disabilities at small, rural or isolated Australian university campuses, based on research of students' needs, and 'good' practice across a number of other universities. The third report - *A guide to supporting disabled students* - identifies 'good' practice in supporting students with disabilities for all members of staff across a university (Oxford Brookes University), including academic staff. The fourth report - *A guide to teaching international students* - researched examples of 'good' teaching and learning practice for international students, identified by staff within a number of universities across the United Kingdom and in Australia.

Purpose of the study

The purpose of the professional doctorate program was to bring together and discuss the views and perceptions of a range of university staff and students about teaching and learning for diverse groups of students that were identified in the research projects, and to investigate ways that university teachers are responding to this diversity. Although many examples of 'good' teaching and learning practice were identified, overall, the research projects identified not only a gap between the views and perceptions of staff and particular groups of students, but also a gap between theory and practice in relation to government equity and participation policies and teaching and learning practices at the level of the university classroom. The research projects examined the impact of such policies on curriculum and pedagogy. This 'gap' has also been identified within the equity field in Australia, and in the United Kingdom, between the expectations outlined in government policies aimed at widening participation in universities, and teaching and learning practices within universities, that is, between rhetoric and practice. This thesis examines the issues of teaching and learning in the light of the expansion of higher education and the introduction of equity and widening participation policies, and discusses how well they meet the learning needs of some of these new groups of students.

From 'elitism' to 'inclusion'

In Australia, the Commonwealth Government introduced the Higher Education Equity Program (HEEP) in 1990, which identified six categories of students as being under-represented in higher education. The aim of this program was to change the composition of the student population to more closely reflect Australian society as a whole. The six categories were:

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people;
- People from non-English speaking backgrounds;
- People with a disability;
- People from lower socioeconomic backgrounds;
- People living in rural or remote areas; and
- Women in non-traditional areas of study.

This program had its genesis in the 1970s when the Commonwealth Government assumed funding responsibility for universities and introduced initiatives aimed at reducing the elitist nature of university student populations, such as the abolition of fees. The Karmel Committee in 1975 expressed the view that higher education should reflect the composition of Australian society (Beasley, 1997; Gale & McNamee, 1994) but by the late 1980s, there was little evidence of significant changes in the socioeconomic composition of higher education (Beasley, 1997; Gale & McNamee, 1994). There were subsequent calls for institutional-level responses to improve equity and access (Lingard, 1994) which eventually led to the introduction of the HEEP program.

A number of Australian government and university documents have reported on the success of the HEEP program (see DETYA's *Equity in higher education*, 1999a, and *Higher education equity plans for the 1999-2001 triennium*, 1999b). The program has had mixed results in terms of access, with people from rural, isolated, lower socioeconomic backgrounds and Aboriginal and Torres Strait

Islander people remaining under-represented (Clarke, Zimmer & Main, 1999; Collins, Kenway & McLeod, 2000; DETYA, 1999; Postle, Clarke, Skuja, Bull, Barorowicz & McCann, 1997).

In the United Kingdom, the expansion of the higher education system of the late 1980s/early 1990s also resulted in a recognition of the need for government and institutional policies and programs to meet the changing backgrounds and needs of the student population (Brown, 1999). The *National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education* (Dearing, 1997) emphasised the need for universities to respond to these changing needs in terms of students' different backgrounds and needs. There is now a broad range of programs and funding initiatives aimed at broadening the participation of previously under-represented groups in higher education, with a focus upon groups traditionally excluded due to social and economic factors (Brown, 1999; Layer, 1998; Thanki & Osborne, 2000; Woodrow, 1999), with 'funding premiums' introduced for groups such as students with disabilities and students from 'disadvantaged backgrounds'. A range of guidelines has been produced for universities such as the Committee of Vice Chancellors and Principals' publication *From elitism to inclusion* (Woodrow, 1999). Participation in higher education is now equal for men and women, but some marked inequalities remain for some groups (Pearl & Singh, 1999), such as students with disabilities.

Issues beyond access: 'distribution' versus 'content'

In Australia, university equity reports focus upon reporting outcomes in terms of the access that groups of students are achieving in relation to admission to universities, or on particular targeted programs or initiatives. They seldom turn their attention to impacts of these programs upon the curriculum of higher education courses, or on the influence the philosophies underpinning equity and access policies have had on teaching and learning practices. Rather than addressing attitudes, values, systems and structures that perpetuate and produce educational disadvantage, Connell (1993) sees this as addressing:

who gets how much of the familiar product…education is a social process in which the 'how much' cannot be separated from the 'what'. There is an inescapable link between distribution and content. (p. 18)

Ramsay (1994) noted that the equity program produced 'remarkable compliance at the level of programmatic activities in higher education institutions across Australia' and a 'flurry of equity-related activity' but 'the absence of any analytical or theoretical basis for the planning and prioritisation of equity initiatives' (p. 13). She also commented on the 'surprising lack of debate within institutions with respect to whether or why they are required' (p. 14).

Various Australian Government policies outlining equity principles and policies (such as *A fair chance for all*, 1990, and *Equality, diversity and excellence,* 1996), have clearly failed to have a major impact upon teaching and learning practices within universities. The 1996 report, however, did call on universities to focus upon curriculum and cultural change to bring about greater equity in higher education. This gap between policy and implementation, or theory and practice, has been noted by many within the equity field (Beasley, 1997; Clarke, Zimmer & Main, 1997; Gardner, 1995; Ramsay, 1994, 2000). As early as 1994, Ramsay commented that:

> The equity planning process currently in place avoids interrogation of these matters by discouraging analysis of the causes of the inequities and disadvantages which it aims to remedy. Its outcomes have been characterised as 'institutional arrangements that simply open the door a little wider (but) do little about what is done within its walls' (Gale & McNamee, 1993, p. 16). (Ramsay, 1994, p. 14)

Australian universities have also been criticised for their failure to examine the content of curriculum (Bowen, 1994; Connell, 1993; Gale & McNamee, 1994; Ramsay 1994) to ensure a commitment to equity in more than simply access terms. Copeland and Lewis (1998a, 1998b) for example call for a move beyond

university access programs that focus on the individual, towards a questioning of the cultures that underpin many university disciplines.

A similar situation can be seen in the United Kingdom (Powney, Hamilton & Weiner, 1997; Preece, 1999; Thanki & Osborne, 2000), where, according to Thanki and Osborne (2000), 'research on student access at the aggregate level has tended to concentrate on entrance figures while ignoring equal opportunities issues in relation to progression' (p. 88). Current United Kingdom government-sponsored initiatives are aimed at widening access and increasing participation for under-represented groups, especially for those from lower social class backgrounds and those with disabilities (Thanki & Osborne, 2000; Woodrow, 1999). Layer (1998) notes that this has not generally resulted in measures aimed at ensuring success beyond access, with some observers claiming that barriers to wider participation exist 'much further back in the educational chain' (Brown, 1999, p. 11), and that some marked inequalities remain (Pearl & Singh, 1999).

The failure of these policies to significantly influence academic practices could be seen to be due to the fact that these policies have not been explicitly supported by academic or theoretical agendas, or underpinned by sound educational theories, and this failure has continued to the present time (see Ramsay, 1999, 2000). The impetus behind equity and diversity policies has been perceived to be motivated by social or political agendas, and imposed from outside universities themselves, in a 'top-down' approach. According to Ernest (1994), 'Government driven curriculum reforms…assume that the central powers can simply transmit their plans and structures to teachers who will passively absorb them and then implement them in "delivering the curriculum"' (p. 2). This has resulted in little cultural academic change, and continuing tensions in the implementation of equity and diversity principles and policies at an organisational, systemic and individual practitioner level, with equity and participation debates largely occupying the margins rather than the mainstream of university cultures.

Further, in Australia, the original impetus behind government-driven equity and diversity policies has waned. Ramsay (1999) believes that achievements that have occurred are being threatened at the national policy level, and describes the state of equity policy (in 1999) as:

> characterised by changes in higher education funding and policy directions which threaten to dismantle what remains of the national framework for higher education equity and reverse what progress has been made in the two earlier periods [prior to the change of government in Australia in 1996] to achieve a fairer distribution across the community of the benefits of higher education. (pp. 1-2)

Ramsay (2000) however notes some progress in challenging the deficit view of equity group students at the institutional level of universities:

> my own personal sense is that there has been some movement away from a deficit model of students with equity characteristics, prompted both by some appreciation of the strengths which come from diversity but also by recognition that they represent an untapped market in the current competitive climate. However the extent to which this has impacted on teaching and learning is very unclear and may not be widespread or deep seated. (Personal email communication)

These continuing reported gaps and tensions have influenced the focus of this thesis. The research projects that form the base of this study, by working from the practices of those within academic cultures who value and implement equity and participation principles within their own teaching and learning work, seek to:

- Acknowledge the gaps and tensions that exist between policy and practice;
- Identify some strategies and practices for others to follow; and
- Provide guidance on how to operationalise equity and participation principles and practices in teaching and learning.

That is, these projects are attempts to work from a 'bottom up' approach[1] by investigating and identifying views and practices at the level of individual practices and classrooms. Similar policy and practice gaps exist in both Australia and the United Kingdom, and it was the recognition of these gaps by Oxford Brookes University that originally led to the commissioning of research projects now included within the portfolio. It should be noted that these research projects are not merely grounded in my professional equity and disability work, but constituted some of my professional work. The projects were all commissioned research funded by universities through internal or external sources, and all involved short-term contracts (usually 6 to 8 months) for these specific projects. Although they were all grounded in, and influenced by, extensive research, due to the nature of the project brief and the intended audience in each case, the final reports contained advice or guidelines for university staff, and were not solely research reports *per se*. The research is not a systematic, longitudinal study, but rather a 'snapshot' across different countries and different groups of students. These individual projects, however, gave me the opportunity to make some observations and draw some conclusions about teaching and learning practices for diverse groups of students, in two countries, at different types of universities, and enabled me to identify questions for examination about how to improve teaching and learning practices for all students in diverse university settings.

Overall, the findings of the research projects have shown that equity and diversity principles can be successfully incorporated into curriculum practices when these practices are seen to be developed by academic staff (teachers) themselves, when they are grounded in the context of the particular discipline, and where it can be demonstrated that these strategies will contribute to improved outcomes for students.

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[1] See Chapters 5 and 8 for a discussion of the differences between 'top down' and 'bottom up' approaches.

Other collaborative research projects in which I have been involved investigated related issues identified through my professional equity and disability practice and have provided further evidence that students from diverse groups do not feel that their teaching and learning needs are being well met, and that staff feel the need for further information, support and training in this area.[2]

This study seeks to address the relative lack of a theoretical educational foundation identified in equity literature by investigating research that identifies educational theory and principles that justify why teaching and learning practices should cater for diverse groups of higher education students, and how these can help to ensure better learning outcomes for all students.

Assumptions underpinning the study

My own personal assumptions that have underpinned, informed and been developed through the research and data collection processes, are:

- The move from elite to mass higher education is a good thing;
- This move has resulted in more diverse higher education student populations;
- This has caused some tensions within universities;
- Teaching and learning practices have not significantly changed in response to these changes;
- Teaching and learning practices can be 'disabling' for some groups of students;
- Equity and participation policies are largely perceived by higher education teaching staff to have been generated externally from social and political agendas and have not been supported by sound educational theories and principles;

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[2] See Al-Mahmood, McLean, Powell & Ryan (1998); McLean, Bardwell & Ryan (1998); McLean, Hartley, Ryan, Macdonald, McDonald & McInnis (1999); Struhs & Ryan (2002); Young & Ryan (1998).

- There are compelling educational reasons for good equity and diversity teaching and learning practices; and
- Higher education teachers need to understand the educational imperatives of such practices and learn how to meet the needs of unfamiliar groups of students.

The meaning of 'diverse'

In this study, 'diverse' groups of students is used as the key reference term to describe students rather than 'equity' or 'disadvantaged' groups. The study has moved beyond the equity defined groups of students, since they are no longer particularly useful for examining the most marginalised groups (Rimmer, 1995) and only apply within the Australian context. In the United Kingdom, the term 'disadvantaged' groups has been used, but these are not rigidly defined. Instead, this study uses a broader definition of *diverse groups* within the curriculum by including groups within universities that can be marginalised by teaching and the curriculum, such as international students.

Terminology used in this area is problematic, and has made research in this area difficult. The relative newness of this area has led to a set of neologisms often resulting in limited, or unclear, shared understandings (Gore, 2001) and often reflecting contested social constructions of meanings[3].

Different countries tend to use different definitions of diversity and focus upon different groups of students. In Australia, the term generally used is 'equity' and refers to the six designated 'under-represented' groups of students, although the terms 'non-traditional' and 'unfamiliar' students are also used. In the United Kingdom, the term 'equity' is not used, instead university access initiatives refer to 'widening participation' or combating 'social exclusion' of groups from higher education, and curriculum initiatives usually refer to student 'diversity' or 'equal opportunities in the curriculum', whereas in Australia, the term 'equal opportunity'

tends to refer to equal rights or equal employment opportunity and is not a term generally associated with student learning. As the term 'diversity' of students is found in both countries, this is the term generally used in this study.

'Diversity' is also used to cover a broader range of fields. The term 'managing diversity' has come to be used in the business arena as a way to capitalise on the diverse backgrounds and talents of employees, and also more recently within the Australian Technical and Further Education (TAFE) sector. The term 'cultural diversity' is increasingly being used within Australian universities to move beyond the description of the equity designated groups to include all of the different groups within the student body (with 'cultural' having a broader meaning to include race, ethnicity, language, religion, value and belief systems, disability, class, sexuality, gender, age and educational background – see, for example, The University of Melbourne's *Cultural diversity policy*, 1998).

Terms used to describe different groups of students also differ. In regard to disability, in the United Kingdom the term used is 'disabled students' but in Australia this term would be considered unacceptable since the principle is 'person first, disability second' and the accepted term is 'student with a disability'. These different terms reflect different ideological and political debates, since in the United Kingdom the disability community insists on the use of the word 'disabled' since they argue that they are disabled by society because of its negative attitudes, and 'disabled people' gives a stronger sense of identity. Similarly, the definitions of international students also vary by country of origin of the literature.[4]

A newer term being used is 'inclusive' education (Ainscow, 1999; Slee, 2001). This has its roots in the literature on students with disabilities in schools, and is aimed at moving away from deficit views of individuals to problematising

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[3] For a more detailed discussion of problems with terminology, see Chapter 2.
[4] For a detailed discussion of the definitions in this area, see the Critical Annotated Bibliography of sources on international students, included in the portfolio. This bibliography demonstrates the types of debates occurring within higher education generally about changing student populations.

educational institutions as a whole. This term is increasingly being used to refer to the marginalisation of students from a range of different groups, although much of the literature still takes disability as its core focus, and meanings of the term are contested[5]. In addition, the term 'teacher' has been generally used rather than lecturer since much of the discussion about teaching and learning centres around the act of teaching regardless of its location.

More important than a lack of common understandings of equity and diversity, is a lack of understanding about how to effectively respond to changes in student populations, in terms of curriculum and teaching practices (Gore, 2001; Heard, 1999). This study seeks to improve understanding in this area, through focusing upon the teaching and learning practices of university teachers and the implications of these for the learning of their students, by examining the effects of marginalisation and disempowerment and the impacts on identity of operating in alien learning environments.

Outline of thesis

This chapter outlines the impetus and context for the research projects and the overall program of study. Chapter 2 reviews research and previous studies that are related to the research, and attempts to map the various levels of responses to the increasing diversity within universities in Australia and the United Kingdom. Chapter 3 gives a summary of the methods and outcomes of the research projects. Chapter 4 describes the theoretical framework which informed and emerged from the research, beginning with critical theory and critical pedagogy, and introduces the 'universalist' view of human diversity. Chapter 5 examines the issues raised by critical theorists of power, hegemony and identity and how these various 'lenses' can be used to make sense of the views and experiences reported by staff and students during the research. Chapter 6 explores the educational implications of these issues, in terms of examining the impacts of marginalisation and exclusion on learning. It examines a range of theories of

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[5] See Chapter 2.

learning to investigate whether they explain the marginalisation and exclusion reported by some groups of students, and the possible consequences of these for student learning. Chapter 7 attempts to extend this investigation by discussing and putting forward alternative ideas for developing pedagogies and views of teaching and learning that better serve not only diverse groups of students, but all students within diverse university settings. It proposes a new, 'universalist', approach to teaching and learning. Chapter 8 concludes by outlining the implications of the findings of the research, and of the proposed new 'universalist' view, for universities and university teachers.

CHAPTER 2

Review of relevant research and previous studies

[P]edagogy is a major site in which to attempt educational and societal change, to attempt to enact visions of different worlds. (Gore, 1993, p. xii)

Introduction

This chapter reviews recent literature surrounding the area of teaching and learning for diverse groups of students in higher education, and examines responses to the changing nature of university student populations in Australia and the United Kingdom, at different levels.

These responses are examined at the levels of:

- Government and institutional responses in terms of equity and participation policies and programs;
- Institutional responses to changing student characteristics and expectations;
- Responses at the level of teaching and learning practices through the development of 'good practice' for diversity, broader descriptions of 'good teaching', the shift in the focus to 'good learning', the recognition of different styles of learning, and how concepts of curriculum and pedagogy are constructed;
- Attitudinal level responses to diverse groups of students including challenges to deficit views of students, especially international students and students with disabilities; and moves towards inclusive views of education;

- Institutional and individual level reactions to the <u>tensions and backlash</u> caused by changing student populations; and
- The <u>lack of cohesiveness of research responses and approaches</u>.

Equity policies and programs

As discussed in Chapter 1, there is now a growing body of work highlighting the lack of impact of equity and participation policies in terms of curriculum and pedagogy, and the lack of attitudinal, systematic and structural changes, but a paucity of critical literature in this field about the root causes of this lack of change. The absence of a theoretical educational basis has meant that equity and participation debates have not been aimed at encouraging fundamental shifts in thinking about the nature of teaching and learning in universities, but rather at issues of access to universities. That is, the debates have focused on opening the doors but not the curriculum. Clarke, Zimmer and Main (1999) see little prospect of improvement without a 'significant shift in attitudes and practice within the sector' (p. 53).

Ramsay (1994) is critical of the lack of debate around structural and systemic issues in universities in Australia, and the 'deficit' approach that has resulted from many equity policies and programs. These programs problematise the particular groups of students themselves, with:

> the majority of equity plans and programs giving little or no attention to the role of higher education itself in constructing or reproducing the privilege of some groups and the disadvantage of others, instead problematising their unequal access to it as the focus for equity attention and remedial or compensatory action' (Ramsay, 1994, p. 16).

Beasley (1997) also comments on the lack of success of equity policies and programs noting the lack of attitudinal change amongst university academic staff. Although all the staff he interviewed claimed to be in favour of equity and access

to higher education, their actions appeared opposed to such an outcome. 'In fact, oppositional forces were very significant.' (Beasley, 1997, p. 240) He notes that those who are discriminated against 'tend to blame themselves and their own perceived inadequacies for any denial of educational opportunities which they experience' (p. 240).

Pearl and Singh (1999) note that moves in the United Kingdom towards improving the quality of experience of students from diverse groups, such as international students, are often motivated by economic and commercial imperatives rather than educational ones.

Changing student characteristics and expectations

Changes in the profile of the student populations in Australian and United Kingdom universities following the introduction of mass education have provided a challenge to hegemony and power relationships and views about students' identities.

Despite these changes, there has been little examination by universities of the changing backgrounds, needs and expectations of these students in terms of curriculum and pedagogy.

The Dearing Report in the United Kingdom (Dearing, 1997) highlighted the need for universities to better respond to the changing needs and experiences of students. Van Dyke (1999) notes, however, that 'while universities have diversified their student bodies in the past ten years, course provision has not necessarily been adapted to reflect the needs, experiences and expectations of these new groups' (p. 62).

McInnis (1998) reports mixed responses by Australian universities in terms of whether these new groups of students are integrated into mainstream practices of academic programs, or whether they continue to exist 'at the margins through

ancillary programs' (p. 29). McInnis (1998) argues that there is still little evidence of an examination of the role that mainstream approaches to teaching and learning have on the experiences and outcomes of students from diverse backgrounds, with academic responses typically focused upon 'incremental adjustments to curriculum and teaching' (p. 30), although he notes some positive developments:

> The diversity made possible by the rapid expansion of student numbers and the broadening of access has been made possible by the recognition of a wide variety of educational experiences as appropriate for university study. The impact of these variations on universities has been compounded by shifts in student attitudes, expectations and circumstances. Whereas, until recently, activity for students with special needs was located on the organisational periphery in the form of student support programmes, universities are now under pressure to formulate and finance responsive structures and processes across the full spectrum of academic and administrative activities. (McInnis, 1998, p. 30)

Recent government-funded initiatives in the United Kingdom are also targeted at encouraging a range of academic and administrative activities to improve teaching and learning for diverse groups of students (Davies, Taylor & Woodrow, 1999) but United Kingdom universities are still largely characterised by a lack of monitoring of student participation and progression across these groups (Pearl & Singh, 1999; Van Dyke, 1999). The changing dynamics of the classroom as a result of the changing backgrounds and experiences have also not been fully recognised (Turner, 1999), nor the need for university teachers to adapt their curriculum and pedagogy (Talbot, 1999).

McInnis (1998) argues that minor adjustments to academic programs will no longer be sufficient and that more fundamental changes to mainstream teaching programs are required in order to prevent increased attrition rates.

Others have commented on the increased risk of early attrition as a possible consequence of the introduction of mass education[6]. In a related research project, McLean, Hartley, Ryan, Macdonald, McDonald and McInnis (1999) reported on the factors that influence the retention of equity group students, finding that factors arising from their 'equity' status, such as personal issues, issues associated with the course of study, and lack of support are more likely to influence attrition amongst equity group students than amongst other students.

Johnston (2001) argues that the recent focus in higher education on retention and transition issues has in turn pointed attention to the ways that student learning occurs and the effects of teaching on the learning process. 'The focus on retention and transition has been reflected in a recognition that an emphasis on how students learn and the complex interactions that take place in the learning process are as important as the traditional focus on teaching methods' (p. 169).

There have been some efforts to examine ways that students are marginalised in universities. There have been attempts to challenge hegemonic 'cultures' of academic discipline areas by examining how these can act to exclude and marginalise certain groups of students. Within Science and Engineering, for example, there has been a concentrated effort to address the under-representation of women (Copeland & Lewis, 1998a, 1998b; James, 1995; McLean et al., 1997; Moxham & Roberts, 1995; University of Queensland, 1999). Copeland and Lewis (1998a) argue that the lack of progress in attracting more women into Engineering is because the social construction of Engineering culture has not been questioned (James, 1995; McLean, Lewis, Copeland, Lintern & O'Neill, 1997). The University of Queensland (1999) concluded that 'very few [universities] had developed strategies to modify the dominant culture in engineering schools to make them more inclusive' (p. 2). In the United Kingdom, James's (1995) work examined the gender bias inherent within Engineering curricula that acts to exclude and alienate female students. Bechner (1981)

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[6] See McLean et al. (1999) in the portfolio for a list of Australian, United Kingdom, United States of America and European references that discuss this issue.

reminds us that academic disciplines are not neutral, but are 'cultures' with their own ways of perceiving the world. The culture of nursing, for example, assumes certain identities of nurses which embody strong notions of 'ablebodiedness' and an antagonism to disability[7].

The needs of particular groups of Australian students have also received some attention, such as low socio-economic background students (Ramsay et al., 1998), non-English speaking background students (Moore, 1999; Shaddock, 1996), Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students (Christensen & Lilley, 1997; Hughes & More, 1997), rural students (Cunningham, Abbott-Chapman & Hughes, 1992), gay students (Epstein, O'Flynn & Telford, 2001) and in relation to gender (Gore, 1995). In the United Kingdom, for example, Modood and Acland (1998) have looked at ethnic minorities students, Wright (1998) has highlighted the learning needs of students with disabilities, Van Dyke (1999) has reported on inequalities of outcomes based on gender and ethnicity, and Woodward (1999) has written about gay and lesbian students.

Although this literature advocates cultural change within specific discipline areas or for particular groups of students, it often does not generally extend to advocating cultural change at the level of the classroom, in terms of pedagogy and curriculum issues, that is, in terms of *operationalising* equity and participation policies and programs or of recognising multiple identities or experiences. Gore (1995, 2001) argues that there is still a lack of detailed research into the impacts at the level of personal experience, represented at the 'micro-levels of curriculum, pedagogy and assessment…The consistent message of the more qualitative research is that teaching practices contribute to different and unequal experiences for different groups of university students' (p. 100). Gore (1995), Clarke, Zimmer and Main (2000) and Young and Ryan (1998) report that these impacts compound when there are multiple layers of disadvantage.

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[7] For a detailed discussion of this issue, see the related research project included in the portfolio on nursing and disability (Struhs & Ryan, 2002).

Development of 'good practice' for diversity

There have been some recent examples however of initiatives which seek to change academic cultures or practice at a broad level, such as The University of Melbourne's *Cultural diversity policy* (1998), *Towards a culturally inclusive university environment* (2000a), *Cultural diversity in publications: Guidelines for good practice* (2000b), and *Cultural diversity in teaching and learning: A Guide to self-audit for good practice* (2000c), The University of Western Australia's *Achieving diversity and inclusivity in teaching and learning at The University of Western Australia* (1999), the University of South Australia's *Code of good practice: University teaching* (2001) and Victoria University of Technology's *Inclusive Curriculum Project* (Hutchinson, Morrigan & Mappin, 1997).

In the United Kingdom, there is the work of Ruth Van Dyke at South Bank University, London (*Equal opportunities guidelines for teaching materials*, 1991), Lewis and Habeshaw's (1995) work, *53 Interesting ways to promote equal opportunities in education,* and Christine Talbot's work at Leeds University, *Equal opportunities in the curriculum* (1999).

Some examples also exist in Northern America although again at a fairly broad level, such as, in the US, Ahlquist's (1992) work on developing curriculum diversity guidelines for teaching students, McClintock's (1995) work on diverse student populations, Harvard University's Derek Bok Center for Teaching and Learning's guidelines on *Encouraging students in a racially diverse classroom* (1997), and guidelines produced by the University of British Columbia's Centre for Teaching and Academic Growth (1999).

Much of the literature however looks at the broader issues of the curriculum, or systemic or structural issues. Until recently, very little attention has been given to challenging teaching and learning practices and attitudes at the classroom level through equity and diversity principles and the fundamental issues that these principles embody, such as power, hegemony and identity.

Many of the broad guidelines and strategies that have been developed, as their authors state, have advantages for all groups of students, and are often statements about good teaching generally (Race, 1991). This area then clearly has links with, and has drawn from, the broader area of good teaching and learning practice at universities.

'Good teaching'

As McInnis (1998), McLean et al. (1999) and Johnston (2001) note, the expansion or 'massification' of higher education, with its concomitant focus upon retention issues, has highlighted the role of curriculum and teaching practices, with Hopkins and Harris (2000) arguing that good teaching and learning practices lessen the impact of disadvantage. Ramsden (1995) believes that the answer to the problems raised by the increasing pressures on university teachers because of the changing student population lies in 'quality' or 'good' teaching and learning practices. He calls for improvements to curriculum, pedagogy and assessment practices that not only recognise student diversity but also result in improved teaching.

There is now a large literature on what is considered to constitute 'good' or 'quality' teaching practice in universities, some of it stemming from the work of phenomenographers, and much arising in Australia (Biggs, 1979, 1987, 1989, 1999; Candy, 1991, on lifelong learning; Hopkins & Harris, 2000; Ramsden, 1992, 1995). In the United Kingdom, there has been considerable work done within universities on improving student learning, especially in a context of much larger student numbers (see Brookfield, 1998; Gibbs, 1992; Lewis & Habeshaw, 1995; Rust, 1998).

This work often uses terms such as 'good' or 'quality' teaching without defining what this means or how it is conceptualised. More recently the term 'interesting' practice has been used (Healey, 2001). The description of what constitutes 'good'

teaching and learning practice is clearly contestable. In the research projects for this study, the term reflected what staff and students perceived and described as effective or exemplary practices.

Webb (1997) argues, however, that 'the truth concerning what comprises "good teaching" or "good learning" can never be asserted separately from a discourse/practice' (p. 209) and is critical of much of this literature, arguing that it puts a focus on teaching, rather than underlying systems and structures. Avis (1997) points to the problems involved in describing particular examples of 'good teaching practices', and argues that this act in itself can exclude as it implies that those examples not collected, or not designated as good practice, are therefore implied to not be good practice. He sounds a note of caution in defining 'good teaching practice', saying,

> After all the notion of educative research positions both teacher and researcher in particular ways, and carries with it a construction of the 'good' teacher and what constitutes good practice within the classroom and research… However, such regimes of truth whilst celebrating a particular construction implicitly universalise such a model so that all become positioned in a similar manner. Such a discourse serves to create its own other – those teachers who fall outside this model of good practice. (Avis, 1997, p. 12)

Terry (1995) argues that this literature also fails to properly address student learning in terms of the conditions that can influence the effective participation of different groups of students. Brookfield (1998) believes that changing teaching techniques at a superficial level will not achieve major changes for disadvantaged groups of students.

> Just putting students in a circle will not change the flow of power in the room…for students who are shy, aware of their different skin colour, physical appearance or form of dress, unused to intellectual discourse, intimidation by disciplinary jargon or the culture of academe, or conscious of their lack of education, the circle can be a painful and humiliating experience. (pp. 19-20)

Others argue that teachers need to examine the assumptions that underpin their teaching and the cultural assumptions that constitute and determine their academic values and practices (Boud, Cohen & Walker, 1993; Bowd, 1990; Martens, 1993, Shah, 2000) to see the 'conceptual baggage' that they carry with them (Boud, Cohen & Walker, 1993, p. 14).

> It has been said that we are all prisoners of our own culture. However, the teachers who understand the culture of their students and change their own behaviour are the teachers who will help their students learn more effectively. (Bowd, 1990, p. 125)

Brookfield (1998) also argues for the need to listen to students about their experiences of teaching and learning. According to Ramsden (1995), 'it is the students' perception of what we are doing and how we assess them that influences the quality of their learning' (p. 5). Van Manen (1999) points out that teachers and researchers rarely interview their students about their experience. A notable exception is Terry's (1995) interviews with staff and students about what constitutes 'social justice' in university education. Terry (1995) argues that further research is needed to investigate the ways that students experience educational disadvantage and into effective teaching and learning practices for these students. He argues that while these practices are concerned with addressing the needs of marginalised groups, they have the potential to enhance the educational experience of all students.

'Good learning': Shifting the focus to the student and the student experience

Much recent literature, especially that discussing approaches to learning and learning styles, has attempted to shift the focus away from teaching and towards learning, recognising the student's experience of teaching and learning as pivotal for learning, and the importance of the impact of their perceptions of teaching and assessment on learning outcomes. It seeks to recognise multiple and diverse student identities and as a consequence redress in part uneven power

relationships between teachers and students. This body of research holds much future potential for better recognising and meeting the needs of a diverse student population, and is providing a strong and developing foundation for understanding the critical need for teachers to respond to students' needs and experiences.

The approaches to learning research movement, pioneered by Marton and Säljö (1976a, 1976b), and now known more broadly as phenomenography[8], has had a fundamental impact on the ways that researchers and teachers in higher education regard the learning process, by shifting the focus away from what teachers do, to what learners do (Biggs, 1987, 1989; Biggs, Cannon & Newble, 2000; Entwistle, 1997; Laurillard, 1979; Marton, Hounsell & Entwistle, 1997, Ramsden, 1979, 1992, 1995). Marton and Säljö (1976a, 1976b) found that learning approaches are diverse and are influenced by a range of factors:

> A highly significant aspect of learning is, in our opinion, the variation in what is learned, i.e., the diversity of ways in which the same phenomenon, concept or principle is approached by different students. (Marton & Säljö, 1976a, p. 10)

Phenomenographic research has helped to move the focus away from placing the source of students' problems with learning within individuals and towards features of teaching, 'fundamentally challenging traditional views and stereotypes that prevail about students and learning in higher education' (Cannon & Newble, 2000, p. 1). It has shown that many teaching approaches, curriculum structures and assessment methods in higher education encourage surface or strategic approaches to learning, rather than deeper approaches, and do not account for individual differences and students' previous learning experiences (Cannon & Newble, 2000; Morgan & Beaty, 1997). This research is based upon students' own qualitative descriptions of their learning processes, a departure from the conventional approaches of describing learning in cognitive psychology (Entwistle & Waterston, 1988).

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[8] See Chapter 4 for a discussion of the phenomenographic approach to research.

Ramsden (1992) argues that students' experiences of teaching and learning determine what is actually learnt, rather than what is intended by teachers:

> The educational environment or context of learning is created through our students' experience of our curricula, teaching methods, and assessment procedures… Students respond to the situation *they* perceive, and it is not necessarily the same situation that we have defined. It is imperative to be aware of this routine divergence between intention and actuality in higher education teaching. (p. 63)

Phenomenographers also point to the role of previous experiences of learning for determining learning outcomes, and the need to take account of these so that deeper learning occurs and there are fewer 'gaps' in students' knowledge (Bilbow, 1989; Ramsden, 1992, 1995). Perry (1970) also makes this point, arguing that personal experience and interpretation lies at the heart of advanced intellectual and cognitive development. He concludes that advanced and sophisticated learning occurs at the later stages of students' intellectual development, when they were able to make a personal interpretation derived from relevant evidence, and where personal interpretations lead to differing conclusions for individuals.

Work in the field of phenomenography recognises the strong links between students' prior experiences of education and their current approaches to learning[9], which are 'an interaction between their prior experiences of teaching and learning and the teaching and learning context itself' (Trigwell & Prosser, 1997, p. 241). Van Manen (1999) argues for the primacy of the student and their experience (their 'lifeworlds') to be recognised as well as the importance of the teacher-student relationship. Others argue that previous experiences need not only to be accounted for in learning, but actively used to contribute to new knowledge, of the student and of others (O'Neill, 1995).

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[9] See also Chapter 6 for a discussion of the factors that influence the learning of individuals.

The literature on approaches to learning has enabled an examination of factors that may influence learning, including the diverse backgrounds of students, and has therefore provided an impetus for examining issues of curriculum and pedagogy in relation to diverse groups of learners, where the equity and diversity debates in Australia and the United Kingdom have not had the same level of success.

Different styles of learning

Recognition of the fact that students learn differently has also come through the work done to identify different styles of learning (Biggs, 1970; Entwistle, 1981; Harrison & Gramson, 1977; Kolb, 1984; Pask & Scott, 1972). This has included the impact of social class (Tuckman, 1991), gender (Gilligan, 1982; Peters, 1998; Talbot, 1999), and cultural background, such as the work of Craven and Mooney (2000) and Christensen and Lilley (1997) on Australian aboriginal learning styles. This work has demonstrated that not only do a number of external factors (environment, background, culture) impact on the learning that occurs, but also, there are different innate patterns that determine ways that we learn. Not only is information taken in and experienced in different ways, the ways that it is processed, understood and demonstrated (or the ways that it is transformed) are diverse. This work has also shown that learners can use their various senses in different ways to help them learn, which is useful in examining the ways that students with disabilities learn, especially students with learning disabilities or sensory disabilities. Research into different ways of viewing 'intelligence' (Cole, 1985; Gardner, 1993; Sternberg, 1985) has also led to increased interest in and recognition of the diverse ways that learners learn.

What is seldom discussed, however, is the impact of cultural factors on learning styles (Francis, 1981) and 'intelligences', although Gardner (1993) recognised that intelligence can be defined differently by different cultures. Kolb (1984) argues that cultural experience plays a major role in the development and expression of cognitive functioning and learning styles.

Francis (1981) argues that although there is now a recognition, and consequent valuing, of different learning styles of students, this does not extend to the valuing of cultural differences:

> [T]his established logic of our classroom pedagogy breaks down when it comes to differences which are cultural, differences of race, language, customs and religion…In the case of the culturally different the difference is to be removed, not taught to. We will take hold of these 'disadvantaged' children and teach them with an ethnocentric view to compensating them for failure to be listed among the 'advantaged'. Our aim, sadly enough, has been the removal of difference rather than the implementation of a philosophy of teaching to that difference. (p. 5)

Cheng (1995, 2001) argues that learning styles and approaches can be influenced by the different factors to which cultures attribute academic success, arguing that Asian cultures are more likely to attribute success to effort than innate ability.

Gibbs, Morgan and Taylor (1984) examined not only students' perceptions of learning, but also lecturers' perceptions of students' learning. They found that students and teachers in higher education can have very different understandings of the learning process and believe that many lecturers are unaware of these different orientations, blaming students for 'laziness' or lack of motivation.

In the vein of Piaget, Vygotsky and theorists in the social constructivist and sociocultural traditions[10], researchers in this area highlight the importance of the complex and often unpredictable interplay and relationships between individual learners and their social and cultural contexts, and of the need to take both of these spheres into account when seeking to improve teaching and learning.

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[10] See Chapter 6 for a broader discussion of theories of learning, and the impacts of social and cultural contexts.

The construction of 'curriculum' and 'pedagogy'

Underpinning teaching and learning practices are the deeper influences on the construction of curriculum and pedagogy, through the agencies of hegemony, power and identity. There is a vast literature on the social construction and cultural embeddedness of curriculum and pedagogy (Apple, 1993, 1998; Aronowitz & Giroux, 1991; Bourdieu, 1984, 1993; Cheng, 1995, 2001; Giroux, 1988, 1992; Goodson, 1991; McLaren, 1998; Nunan et al., 2001).

The Australian Curriculum Studies Association (1992) recognises the various forces and values that act to construct a curriculum, and defines the 'curriculum' as 'the product of social, historical, political and economic forces…the selection, interpretation, representation and assessment of culturally based knowledge, skills and values' (p. 1).

The curriculum (as 'process' rather than as 'product', Goodson, 1991; as 'intention' rather than 'actuality' or 'experience', Ramsden, 1992) reflects hegemony and power in their most obvious manifestations, embodying and reflecting what is considered to be of cultural value. The very act of inclusion implies a tacit legitimacy and authenticity (Goodson, 1991), privileging some values and views over others, representing a 'particular paradigm of knowing and a consequent depowering of other approaches' (Copeland & Lewis, 1998b). 'As a cultural artefact it is a symbol of power and what is left out of a curriculum says much about the values held by those who have less power.' (Nunan et al., 2001) It is a reflection of thought and value systems (Goodson, 1991) at particular places and times. 'The history of all subjects which children learn at school is a trial of abandoned beliefs, all of which seemed perfectly obvious to those who believed them at the time.' (Clark, 1988, p. 343) Students, especially those with different views and experiences, may be unaware of the extent of these pre-existing paradigms and the extent to which they are judged against them.

The view of curriculum as 'product' (Goodson, 1991) includes a recognition that curriculum outcomes are different from stated intentions and are determined by the diversity of students' perspectives and experiences. It recognises that students can respond to and transform information in different and multiple ways (Bilbow, 1989; Habeshaw, 1995; LaBoskey, 1997; Preece, 1999; Ramsden, 1992; Webb, 1997).

> The content of the curriculum cannot be seen as innocent nor unrelated to the specificities of the classroom: who exactly is in the classroom, where they come from, their gender, class, ethnicity, sexuality, expectations, etc. are all part of the cultural politics of pedagogy. (Durie & Taylor, 1997)

The views and values embodied within curricula are often self-defining and unexamined, often only serving to impose certain sets of 'correct' theories rather than encouraging students to theorise for themselves, from their own perspectives (McLaren, 1995). Preece (1999) argues that concepts such as 'critical', 'inquiry' and 'critical thinking' are used as 'self-defining norms', and that 'critical thinking' takes place:

> in a context which allows only certain view points, approved through certain texts. New knowledge is allowed but only if it is derived in certain, approved ways – approved by those from within the system (primarily people who are white, male, able bodied and middle class). The contesting of knowledge…is consequently self-defining as it can only be done from within established frameworks and through the use of peer authorised texts. Knowledge therefore is narrowly defined by, and according to, the social and cultural milieu of those who already create it. (p. 5)

Classroom and assessment practices are also shaped by cultural and social values, advantaging some students (those with more 'cultural capital', Bourdieu, 1984) and disadvantaging others, determining 'acceptable' classroom behaviours and what is considered of academic value and ability (Boud, Cohen & Walker, 1993; Bourdieu, 1984, 1993; Butler, 1995; Nunan et al., 2001). Van Manen (1999) argues that even the term 'pedagogy' is not universal and is a cultural

construct, embodying a certain view of children and the nature of the relationship between teachers and students.

Deficit views of students: 'labelled, otherized persons'

Despite the advances in research on impacts on learning of various factors and experiences, and despite the recognition of hegemonic influences in the construction of curriculum and pedagogy and the consequent marginalisation of certain groups of students, the literature about particular groups of students within the curriculum continues to be generally characterised by a deficit view. As Ramsay (1994) and McInnis (1998) have both noted, responses to equity policies and programs have been largely characterised by a deficit approach, aimed at compensating for or remediating perceived inadequacies of various groups of students, and this view is also found in the literature about these particular groups. Cumming (2001) argues that attempts at 'compensating' minority students have not been successful because they have not altered the relationships between teachers and students, and have not empowered students so that they can become successful.

A pervasive discourse of deficit generally characterises much of the literature on disadvantaged groups of students (Comber, 1997; Gilligan, 1993; Preece, 1999). Difference is equated with 'deficit', being 'deprived', and even 'deviance' (Foucault, 1979, 1980; Gee, 1996, 2001; Smith, 1999; Rizvi & Lingard, 1996; Richariya-Leahy, 2000). This discourse acts to disempower and marginalise such students, and constructs 'deficient' or 'deviant' identities for them. This is particularly the case for certain groups of students, as was reflected in the comments of students in the first project, most notably by students with psychiatric disabilities, international students from cultures most different from the host country, and gay, lesbian and bisexual students. Those who seek to challenge such views, in the vein of Habermas (1987) and Foucault (1973, 1979, 1980), see difference as not something residing in the 'other' but a 'marker of the human condition rather than as a problem to be solved…One problem in talking

about difference and the consequent theorizing of "difference" lies in the readiness with which difference becomes deviance and deviance becomes sin in a society preoccupied with normality' (Gilligan, 1993, p. xviii).

The literature on international students and students with disabilities in particular takes a deficit approach and tends to look at issues considered specific to those groups, rather than viewing these issues as potentially common to diverse groups or all groups that might be considered marginalised by the curriculum. Particular characteristics of such groups are treated as problematic and forms of remediation are advocated such as extra tuition or provision of specialist support (see, for example, Ballard & Clanchy, 1997; Good & Brophy, 2000).

From the mid 1990s, the beginnings of a philosophical shift away from the deficit view of the representation of equity or 'disadvantaged' groups in higher education can be seen, as well as a change in focus towards effecting cultural change at all levels of university activities, away from problematising individuals to problematising the university and its culture, and specifically, teaching practices. Epstein, O'Flynn and Telford (2001) for example, in looking at the experiences of gay students, argue for an examination of heteronormative assumptions that marginalise gay students and call for 'developing curricula and pedagogical strategies that are more inclusive of "othersexual" youth' in universities (p. 155). The extent of this shift is still minimal, however, and has not yet been embedded within academic cultures (Gore, 2001).

Students with disabilities and international students continue to be generally the most negatively viewed and described of all of the 'different' groups of students in higher education in terms of their abilities, and interestingly, as the research projects have found, also report the least positive experiences of university and the least satisfaction with how well their learning needs are met.

International students

Much of the literature surrounding the teaching and learning of international students[11] takes a deficit view about the characteristics that they are perceived as lacking, rather than the strengths they bring (Hellmundt, 2001), focusing upon ways that they can be assisted to better adapt to the requirements of universities. There is now also a body of research, however, that is challenging this view and demonstrates that stereotypical views of international students are inaccurate and misleading (Biggs, 1999; Chalmers & Fuller, 1995; Chan & Drover, 1997; Hellmundt, 2001; McNamara & Harris, 1997; Ninnes et al., 1999; Richardson, 1994; Volet & Ang, 1998)[12]. Ninnes et al. (1999), describing the stereotyping of international students and their treatment as a homogeneous group, argue that rather than seeing international students as 'problems' needing to be fixed by remedial programs, teachers need to re-examine their own teaching practice for ways that might be problematic for international students, and be more inclusive of all learners in their classrooms (Cortaizzi & Jin, 1997; Hellmundt, Rifkin & Fox, 1998; Wright, 1997). Some argue that a patronising view of cultural diversity has led to it being viewed as 'exotic', and classroom practices that look for 'exotic' differences can lead to tokenistic approaches in classroom practices (Bowd, 1990; Dooley, Herschell & Singh, 1997; Gilligan, 1993; Martens, 1993; Shah, 2000).

The competing agendas which see 'diversity' as a threat to 'standards' can also be seen most clearly in the current debates about international students. These debates are essentially polarised between those who view international students as deficient in Western academic skills and in need of 'remediation', and those who more recently are beginning to argue for the development of cross-cultural

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[11] See the Critical Annotated Bibliography included in the research portfolio for a detailed discussion of the literature in this area and a discussion of deficit views of international students.
[12] A detailed discussion of different cultural views of learning can be found in the project report, *A Guide to Teaching International Students* (Ryan, 2000).

skills and values in higher education curricula and the recognition of international students as positive resources within the classroom [13].

In recent years, there has been a proliferation of information in the form of general advice and guidelines on how to better meet the learning needs of culturally diverse students, in Australia (HERDSA, 2000; Sinclair & Britton Wilson, 1999; The University of Melbourne, 1999, 2000a, 2000b, 2000c; The University of Western Australia, 1999; the University of South Australia, 2001, University of Technology, 1999; Victorian Department of Education, Employment and Training, 2001), in the United Kingdom (Davies, Taylor & Woodrow, 1999; Powney, Hamilton & Weiner, 1997; South Bank University, 2000; Woodrow, 1999), and in North America (Alliance for Equity in Higher Education, 2000; Association of American Colleges and Universities, 1999; Derek Bok Center, 1997; Iowa State University, 2000; REACH, 2000; University of Michigan, 1999; Wallis, 1999;)).

There are some examples in Australia where teachers have attempted to adapt the curriculum to cater for culturally diverse students (Butorac, 1997; Gough, 2001; Hellmundt, 2001; IDP Australia, 1995; McMurray, 2000; Shaddock, 1996; Sinclair & Britton Wilson, 1999). In the United Kingdom, there has been some work done to draw attention to the different understandings and knowledge that international students have of the academic context (Carroll, 1999; Errey, 1994; Ledwith, Lee, Manfredi & Wildish, 1998; McNamara & Harris, 1997; Talbot, 1999). There is little research, however, about the impact of the increasing international profile of university students on the curricula of universities, or how international students' cultural identities and academic interests can be included in teaching practice (Hellmundt, 2001). Jones, Robertson and Line (2000) found a mismatch between the expectations of international students and their teachers in Australia, and report that staff feel inadequately trained to meet the learning needs of their international students.

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[13] The attached Critical Annotated Bibliography provides an illustration of these types of debates, and the two competing and polarised positions that exist within this area.

Students with disabilities

A deficit view of students is also strongly reflected in much of the literature about students with disabilities who are viewed as intrinsically problematic, as 'deviant' from the 'norm' and in need of 'remediation'. Slee (1998) argues that most of this literature 'pathologises individuals and eschews the complex politics of disabling forms of education' (p. 267), with teachers advised how to 'fix aberrant students' (p. 266). There is now a growing literature that challenges this view of people with disabilities (Bickenbach, 1996a, 1996b; Campbell & Oliver, 1996; Christensen & Rizvi, 1996; Crewe & Zola, 1983; Hales, 1996; Oliver, 1990, 1996; Rioux & Bach, 1994; Slee, 2001; Smith, 1999; Zola, 1983a, 1983b, 1994).

Smith (1999) argues that people with disabilities are 'labelled, otherized persons' by what he refers to as 'cultural cartography' where borders are drawn around culturally and socially constructed views of 'normality'. The socio-political view of disability, and other differences, sees such differences as social constructs rather than as fixed features of the person (Bickenbach, 1993, 1996; Rioux & Bach, 1994; Zola, 1994), where people are disabled or handicapped by society. Instead of measuring individuals for disability, they argue, we should measure resources, attitudes and 'disabling' environments. Minority groups of students have been 'minoritized' by hegemonic, culturally reproductive practices (Moore, 1999) and people with disabilities have become a 'marginalised non-ethnic minority group' (Bickenbach, 1996b, p. 12). By contrast, in his 'universalist' approach to disability, and like Gilligan (1993), Bickenbach (1996a) sees disability as part of the continuum of human characteristics and essential human frailty, and a normal part of the human condition[14].

Christensen and Rizvi (1994) argue that people with disabilities have been marginalised and excluded in ways that would not be tolerated by any other social group, and that current policies in higher education focus on the individual and not on the educational system that 'perpetuates and sometimes produces

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[14] See Chapter 4 for a fuller explanation of Bickenbach's 'universalist' approach.

disadvantage' (p. 3). They are critical of Rawls's (1973) distributive notion of social justice arguing that it fails to recognise the power relationships which shape and sustain injustice (Christensen & Rizvi, 1994).

Upretty (1997) draws parallels between the types of oppression and marginalisation of people with disabilities and colonised peoples, and the similarities with how they are described in literature as generally being 'incompetent' and 'inferior'. Bickenbach (1996b) draws similar parallels:

> The demands of people with disabilities are…similar to those of other isolated, disadvantaged, and marginalised groups in society. Moreover, the social-psychological, political, and legal dynamics of all forms of difference – be they racial, sexual, religious, age-based, or disablement-based, are probably parallel, although it can be argued that people with disabilities confront a range of disadvantageous attitudes that have stigmatised them in unique ways. All of these insights may well contribute to a general theory of difference, of which disablement is but one manifestation. (Bickenbach, 1996b, p. 19)

Inclusive views of education

Recent years have seen the rise of a new body of literature, now known as inclusive education, or inclusivity, arising out of the special needs and disability area, that has challenged deficit views of students (Ainscow, 1999; Ashman & Elkins, 2002; Bauer & Shea, 1999; Blamires, 1999; Corbett, 2001; Dei, James, Karumachery, James-Wilson & Zine, 2000; Fields, 2000; Leeman & Volman, 2001). This work deliberately aims to shift the focus away from the problems of individual students, to examining how teaching and curriculum practices might be problematic for some students (Ainscow, 1999; Bauer & Shea, 1999). This literature has sought to describe good teaching and learning practices, primarily in the schooling area, stemming from a re-conceptualisation of 'special', individual, student needs to a view of curriculum and teaching that includes all learners. This work takes as its guiding principle the notion that good teaching practices eliminate the need for focusing upon 'special' individual needs, as

attention to the needs of all individual learners with some form of special need will have benefits for all (Ainscow, 1999), by using the principles of universal design of the curriculum (Kame'enui & Simmons, 1999) to provide 'cognitive access' rather than simply 'physical access'. Definitions of what is meant by 'inclusive' practice are contested however (Hegarty, 2001; Knight, 2000; Slee, 2001).

By problematising educational institutions rather than individuals, this work provides a challenge to hegemony and power relationships, and works towards redressing marginalisation, empowering students, and moving from a position of 'exclusion' to 'inclusion' (Ainscow, 1999). 'Inclusive education is about responding to diversity: it is about listening to unfamiliar voices, being open, empowering all members and about celebrating "difference" in dignified ways.' (Barton, 1997, p. 233)

The inclusive education literature challenges the marginalisation and exclusion of learners who are 'different' in some way, or who have some kind of 'special need', instead viewing all learners as having special or individual needs. Originally focused upon the area of disability in schools, it now also includes cultural and linguistic diversity, different abilities, gifted or talented learners, 'at risk' students, and students with emotional or behavioural difficulties (UNESCO, 1994). In higher education, it is coming to refer to any group that is marginalised by teaching and curriculum practices (Nunan et al., 2001), usually including students with disabilities and international students (also the focus of this research). Its influence is only just beginning to be felt in universities, for example, the University of Western Australia has initiated a project looking at how staff perceptions and traditional methods of course delivery act as barriers for students with disabilities (Edwards & Thompson, 2001; see also The University of Western Australia, 1999).

This literature interestingly makes links between disability and cultural diversity, recognising that similar processes are at work that have acted to marginalise groups within the curriculum. It also recognises the increasing differences

between students (Leeman & Volman, 2001), and validates the joint focus of this research program on students with disabilities and international students.

The appeal of this new area is that it rejects notions of 'deficit', or even of 'differences', but seeks a transformation of educational attitudes, environments and structures. It views difference as not residing within the 'other' but within all of us, rejecting the normative 'gaze' (Foucault, 1973). It works from a position of difference, seeing this as offering benefits for all students and it uses a 'language of possibility' (Avis, 1997; McLaren, 1995). This new area of research has much to offer universities, since it not only provides a relevant and useful basis for examining teaching and learning practices, but also addresses practical teaching and learning issues. The research projects within this study explored ways that such approaches can be adopted in the higher education sector as well.

Tensions and backlash

Despite much research into the various areas associated with the learning of students from diverse backgrounds, significant barriers continue to exist to putting the results of this work into effect[15].

Much of the literature reporting responses of universities to the massification of higher education in Australia and the United Kingdom (Beasley, 1997; McInnis, 1998; Moodie, 1995; Pearl & Singh, 1999; Thanki & Osborne, 2000; Van Dyke, 1999) has described tensions and mixed or negative reactions amongst academic staff. Many have commented that teachers need to respond to the increasing diversity of their students (Biggs, 1996a, 1996b; Darling-Hammond, 2000; Ramsden, 1992, 1995; Talbot, 1999) but are not trained to do so (Carroll, 1999; Jones, Robertson & Line, 2000; Pearl & Singh, 1999). Many researchers have commented upon the tensions inherent in the contemporary work of academics, arguing that increased performance and accountability measures

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[15] See Chapter 5 for a discussion of the views of staff interviewed in the research projects which reflected these views.

have not only placed increased pressures on academics, but that these have occurred simultaneously with increased pressures for better teaching and learning practices, and changes in student characteristics and expectations (McInnis, 1998). Ramsden (1992) states that teachers are expected to deal with 'an unprecedently broad spectrum of student ability and background' (p. 2) and this has created tensions and stress (Farrell, 2000; Fields, 1993; Forlin, 1997) for teachers.

One tension comes from the view that encouraging student diversity will lead to a lowering of 'standards' (Bradley, 1995; Moodie, 1995; Nunan et al., 2001; Ramsay, 1999; Slee, 1998; Terry, 1995). An opposing view equates diversity with quality, arguing that diversity brings educational benefits for all students (Oxford Brookes University, 1995; Pearl & Ryan, 1999; Schreuder, 1999). In the United Kingdom, quality and equity are linked through quality assurance mechanisms (Brown, 1999; Powney, Hamilton & Weiner, 1997; Pearl & Singh, 1999) and the new quality assurance mechanisms in Australia are also facilitating positive responses to student diversity (McInnis, 1998).

Another tension comes from the perceptions of competing university agendas and policies, where equity policies appear to be contradictory or in competition with more market-driven imperatives (Apple, 1998; Gardner, 1995; Nunan et al., 2001; Pearl & Singh, 1999; Slee, 1998; Yeatman, 1994), and have resulted from the 'marketisation', 'corporatisation' or 'commodification' (Nunan et al., 2001) of higher education. Academics report being torn between the fundamentally competing roles of universities of serving the 'market' or serving 'society' (Nunan et al., 2001), and the tension between university equity policies that encourage diversity of the student population while still within a selective system (Gardner, 1995).

Some (Ramsay, 1999; Slee, 1998) note the watering down of, and even a 'backlash' against, equity and diversity policies, arising from economic rationalist views of higher education (Apple, 1998; James, 1995; McLaren, 1995; McLean et

al., 1997; Slee, 1998). According to Slee (1998) this means that 'the politics of identity and difference are relegated to the status of minor agenda items in the new order of higher education management' (p. 255). In the schooling area, some argue that the shift towards a focus on literacy standards has been at the expense of equity policies (Taylor & Henry, 2000) and 'has become a kind of equity surrogate' (Henry, Lingard, Rizvi & Taylor, 1999). Work in the literacy area, however, has resulted in the recognition of multiple student perspectives, in the recognition of 'multi-literacies' (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000; The New London Group, 1996) and the significance of cultural and linguistic diversity. Fields (2000) argues that diversity is still a major concern of teachers and reports on research which has shown that the need to cater for the diverse range of students' needs is ranked by school teachers in New South Wales and Victoria as their most pressing concern ahead of issues such as violence and discipline.

Lack of cohesive research approaches

The disparity and disconnectedness of much of the literature associated with students' equity and diversity issues, as demonstrated by the broad range of fields within which it is placed, has not only proved difficult for research, but clearly demonstrates that this lack of cohesion has acted to inhibit cross-fertilisation of ideas and conceptual understandings. For example, research in the areas of approaches to learning and learning styles has not significantly influenced continuing deficit views of some groups of students. This situation, however, provides much scope for a quantum leap in understanding in this area.

The literature in the areas of international students and students with disabilities is usually based upon different theoretical approaches, for example, research about international students often uses postcolonial or intercultural theory, and the area of students with disabilities often uses a critical approach (although Hellmundt, 2001, has taken an innovative approach in linking critical theory and intercultural theory). This literature, however, is usually directed at specific groups and generally fails to make connections between similar root causes and

attitudes. Students with disabilities and international students, for example, report similar experiences of marginalisation and alienation, stemming from often common aspects of curriculum, pedagogy and assessment. Although superficially they may appear to have very different needs, they can be seen to be merely more obvious manifestations of the failure of higher education to meet the needs of diverse students.

As noted in Chapter 1, it is clear that a number of fields of literature, broadly dealing with themes around the issues and topics researched in this study, use different terminologies and neologisms. For example, various terms used within the literature to describe similar or related topics are: multicultural education; cultural diversity; inclusive education; inclusivity; equity; diversity or equal opportunities in the curriculum; or refer to students who are different, diverse, disadvantaged, marginalised, excluded or alienated, or more neutral terms are used such as under-represented, non-traditional, or unfamiliar. Various literatures refer to teachers and learners in different ways, and teaching practices and systems in universities are generally referred to as teaching and learning, but in schools as pedagogy, although this term is commonly also used by those involved in education studies within universities.

The published location of research and journal articles in these areas also varies enormously. In Australia, equity literature appears in a wide range of forums and journals, from those concerned with institutional administration to ones that deal with offshoots of pedagogy and curriculum studies. The lack of common language and understandings, and lack of common positioning of literature, appears to have a negative effect on the effectiveness of these areas of concern. That is, equity has not found its 'place', or claimed its own ground, in the literature and this appears to inhibit broader, common understandings and progress. There is little evidence, for example, of cross-fertilisation of theories, ideas and concepts although, as has been shown, there is an abundance of research and materials available. Areas of thought and research are not informing one another,

thereby reducing their potential for impact and growth, but also reflecting perhaps the contested nature of many of the concepts involved.

This lack of clarity of definitions not only provides for difficulties in researching these topics, especially across different countries, but also has hindered the development of a cohesive research movement (Gore, 2001; Grant & Millar, 1992; Habeshaw, 1995; McNamee, 1997), and this has perhaps contributed to the area being largely ignored by the mainstream culture of universities. Grant and Millar (1992) comment that the lack of an acceptable definition of 'multicultural' education, for example, has allowed critics 'to either ignore multicultural education or view it as an idea without meaning or structure' (p. 8). McNamee (1993) argues that the contestation of meanings and definitions has sometimes reflected contests over ideological positions, particularly reflected in changing Government equity policies in Australia, 'ranging from whether "equal access" refers to participation and outcomes or merely "putative opportunities"' (p. 32). By contrast, Taylor, Rizvi, Lingard and Henry (1997) argue that the durability of the Disadvantaged Schools Program, which addresses poverty issues in schools, has been due to its original sound analysis of problems of educational disadvantage and the cohesive commitment to the programs by those involved.

Issues arising from the literature

The various bodies of literature reviewed have pointed to a number of outstanding issues that need recognition. These are:

- The tensions created by changes in higher education student populations;
- The lack of training for teaching staff to respond to these changes;
- The need for teachers to examine the cultural basis for their teaching and learning practices;
- The need to take greater account of cultural and other background influences on learning;

- The existence of negative views of students with disabilities and international students;
- The need to change the focus to problematising educational practices and institutions, not individuals;
- The need to adapt the principles developing in the area of inclusive education in schools to universities; and
- The need for more research into students' learning experiences.

The research projects of this study aim to address some of the issues identified in the literature by, in particular, examining and describing:

- The experiences of teaching and learning by diverse groups of students;
- Students' and staff's views of 'good' teaching and learning practices;
- Ways that teaching and learning practices can be problematic for some students; and
- Ways that some teachers have operationalised inclusive practices in curriculum, pedagogy and assessment and in ways that address issues of hegemony, power and identity for diverse groups of students.

In addition, this thesis examines theories of learning to explain the educational effects of the marginalisation and exclusion reported by students in many of the research projects.

CHAPTER 3

The research projects – methods and outcomes

> The long journey we are embarking upon arises out of an awareness on our part that, at every point in our research – in our observing, our interpreting, our reporting, and everything else we do as researchers – we inject a host of assumptions. These are assumptions about human knowledge and assumptions about realities encountered in our human world. Such assumptions shape for us the meaning of research questions, the purposiveness of research methodologies, and the interpretability of research findings. (Crotty, 1998, p. 17)

Introduction

The aim of the professional doctorate program is to investigate student and staff views and perceptions of teaching and learning for diverse groups of students in higher education in Australia and the United Kingdom, based on research conducted over a five year period (1996 to 2000). The various research projects had broader aims than a focus on teaching and learning, but these are not reported on or brought together in this thesis. Details of these can be found within the individual research projects reports. The aim of the professional doctorate program is to focus on investigating ways in which teachers are responding to the increased diversity of the higher education student population, and the views of students about how well these responses are meeting their needs.

This chapter describes each of the research projects in terms of the methods and procedures followed and the following chapter describes the overall methodological approach taken, placing the research within broader phenomenological and phenomenographical approaches, and theoretical frameworks.

The research does not attempt to describe or quantify isolated student characteristics or features of teaching, but focuses upon the reported viewpoints of students and staff about, and experiences of, teaching and learning environments within which they were immediately situated. It sought qualitative descriptions of experiences and views, and has therefore drawn largely from interviews and discussions with staff and students, since these methods would most likely yield rich and detailed descriptions of personal experiences.

All of the topics of the research projects (as well as related research projects also included in the portfolio) and the forms that they took were influenced by my work as a *practitioner*. That is, the questions and issues investigated in the research projects arose from problems that I had identified through my work as a teacher and later an equity and disability practitioner, even though the topics for investigation were determined by the institutions that commissioned the research projects. I brought the practical and theoretical understandings I had developed, and continued to develop, through my professional work to bear on the ways that the research projects were conducted and on their outcomes. In addition, the form of the projects and their final reports were also influenced by practice-based considerations, and were aimed specifically at practitioners (teachers and others) with practically-oriented outcomes. The projects were based on real-life, experience-based problems that required resolution.

See **Table 1** for a list of the projects and their aims and data collection processes.

The research projects – data collection

Four research projects comprise the research data for this study. Each of these projects was separately commissioned by a university in response to a perceived need for information and training for staff on the needs of particular groups of students, and I was employed as the sole researcher of the projects and author of the resultant research project reports. Methods and procedures followed in

each project depended on the nature of each of the projects and the research task and question involved, but generally speaking sought qualitative, detailed data about personal experiences and views. Although the topic of the research in each case was determined by the individual university commissioning the research, I was largely able to determine the development and outcomes of the projects. In each case, following the publication of the first report, I was appointed to undertake the research on the basis of the projects I had previously completed. In each case, the project brief required the identification of 'good' practice models[16]. A summary of these follows.

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[16] See Chapter 2 for a discussion of the problems in defining 'good' practice.

TABLE 1   Research projects aims and processes

Title	Aim	Process
1. Equal opportunities in the curriculum: Good practice guide	researched examples of 'good' teaching and learning for diverse groups of students	through a questionnaire, interviews and observations.
2. Supporting students with disabilities on small university campuses	researched a model for mainstreaming support for students with disabilities on small campuses in Australian universities	through a questionnaire and interviews.
3. A guide to supporting disabled students	researched good practice for supporting students with disabilities across a United Kingdom university	through interviews.
4. A guide to teaching international students	researched examples of 'good' teaching and learning practices for international students in Australia and the United Kingdom	through interviews and case studies.

Project 1: Equal Opportunities in the Curriculum: Good Practice Guide

The first project, *Equal opportunities in the curriculum: Good practice guide* (1996)*,* was commissioned by the Equal Opportunities Action Group (EOAG) at Oxford Brookes University[17] in the United Kingdom in 1996. Its purpose was to research and disseminate examples of 'good' teaching and learning practices for diverse groups of students at the university, as identified by students from those groups and by teaching staff.

The EOAG's charter was to advise the University on all issues relating to equal opportunities at the University. The University's mission statement included a commitment 'to create a diverse learning environment within which individual characteristics, such as gender, age, nationality, disability and ethnic origin are valued' and pledged to 'integrate equal opportunities policies and implement best practice' (Oxford Brookes University, 1995).

The EOAG had identified that although there had been considerable work done at the University in relation to raising awareness of the issues associated with equal opportunities generally, and official policies on equal opportunities had been adopted across the University, there was a clear perception that staff were unaware of how to incorporate these principles into their professional practice, particularly in the teaching area. The project was commissioned to research examples of 'good equal opportunities practice in the curriculum' within the University to demonstrate how equal opportunities could be incorporated into the curriculum across and within disciplines, and to identify the issues that staff and students felt were important in this area.

> Prior to commissioning the good practice research, we held a series of internal seminars with a variety of interested staff members to get a feel for the issues and concerns which might exist in 'diversifying' the curriculum. The most common message we received was

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[17] Oxford Brookes is a former polytechnic in the southeast of England which has a diverse student population with significant numbers of international students and students with disabilities.

that staff needed a clearer understanding of what they could do and how equal opportunities might relate to their specific area of work. In the light of this, we felt that abstract guidance alone would not be totally effective in overcoming these concerns or inspiring new and innovative ways of working. We needed to be able to say that our goal was to some extent already part of the University culture, but generally rather ad hoc and patchy. We also needed to be able to offer concrete examples of approach and practice, so that individual members of staff would be able to recognise the relevance for their own professional discipline and teaching/research environment. (Pearl & Ryan, at the Equal Opportunities in the Curriculum Conference in 1997, presenting the outcomes of the research project, see Pearl & Singh, 1999).

The ground was therefore already well prepared for the project and extensive participation was forthcoming from staff and students. I was commissioned to undertake the project over an 8 month period which included interviews with over 100 staff members (15% of all staff), focus groups (students with disabilities and international students) and individual interviews with students from a range of groups[18]. Between 20 and 30 students participated in the research. It also involved observations of lectures, tutorials and seminars, as well as examination of teaching and course materials and assessment tools, teachers' portfolios presented as part of their Certificate of Tertiary Teaching and Learning, and comments from evaluations of units contained in their learning portfolios, and discussions in tutorials by students.

Focus groups were held at the beginning of the project with staff and students to define the areas to investigate, and on the basis of these, a questionnaire was developed and distributed to all staff asking for their comments on what they perceived to be issues for investigation, and on their needs for information and training about how to 'operationalise' equal opportunities in teaching and learning. Students were recruited through the student association, the student newsletter, via student notice boards and through nomination by academic staff members. Staff were asked (via the University staff newsletter and the pro-forma

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[18] These included gay, lesbian and bisexual, mature age, 'ethnic minority' and international students (from Asia, Africa, the Middle East and Europe), and students with different disabilities (including those with sensory, physical, psychiatric and learning disabilities).

survey sent to all academic staff members) to volunteer examples of their own or others' practice in this area, and subsequent interviews and observations of teaching took place. This resulted in the identification of examples that eventually were featured in the report as representing 'good practice'. The examples were chosen so that they represented each discipline area of the University, illustrated good practice for varying groups of students, addressed each of the issues identified for examination, and reflected a number of different approaches and teaching styles. The publication of these examples was intended to not only provide staff with concrete examples within their own disciplines on how to incorporate equal opportunities practices within their own professional practice, but to celebrate the work that was already being done by many within the University, and to send a message that these kinds of practices and approaches were valued by the University hierarchy and should become an acceptable and rewarded part of the University's academic culture.

On the basis of the early research, a broad framework of the issues and areas to be examined was developed in consultation with the EOAG project reference group, grouped around three broad categories - curriculum, pedagogy and assessment - and particular themes within these categories. The examples and descriptions of 'good practice' contained in the report represented and reflected these issues and topics:

- Curriculum
    - course content
    - illustrative examples
    - case studies
    - range of perspectives
    - tailored to needs of students

- Pedagogy
    - teaching strategies
    - classroom organisation

- ground rules
- valuing of perspectives
- reflective practitioner

- Assessment
  - diverse range
  - negotiable
  - explicit
  - values difference

This project in many ways was the 'lynch-pin' for the subsequent research projects, providing the impetus and overall framework for the work that was to follow. Each subsequent research project was informed by and built on the work of this first research project. The first project revealed the paucity of information in this area, yet a desperate need by staff for information and support. It also revealed the 'gap' that existed between how students from particular groups perceived that their teaching and learning needs were being met, and the extent to which teachers felt that they were meeting the students' needs.

The first project alerted me to the differences in perception of staff and students and the need to identify these, as well as possible ways to redress this 'gap'. It provided a framework for the issues and themes that emerged through the subsequent projects. Although my own teaching experience had alerted me to the relevant issues within the areas of curriculum, pedagogy and assessment, and although I was aware of issues of marginalisation through earlier exposure to critical pedagogy, the projects gave me a deeper and broader understanding of the impacts of marginalisation on students.

In the project, 'the curriculum' was not confined to what happened in the classroom but was defined more broadly. '[O]ur interpretation of *the curriculum* has been broad…in practice activities such as field trips and placements are as critical to creating and sustaining diversity as are admissions procedures and

recruitment practices' (Pearl & Ryan, 1999, p. 7). 'Pedagogy' included all of the educational practices that occur within university lecture and classrooms, and 'assessment' included the methods, techniques and criteria used in making judgements about students' learning. There was a recognition of the importance of the experiences of students on a day-to-day basis. '[N]o matter what statements are contained within policy documents, the reality for most students exists in the lectures they attend and the assessments they receive.' (Pearl & Ryan, 1999, p. 8)

Following the publication of the report, a number of activities were conducted across the University to ensure that the report's findings and recommendations were put into practice [19]. These included official endorsement of the report, tabling within each of the Schools of the University, and the requirement that Schools produce a plan of how they would further this kind of work. The approach was intended to maintain the 'bottom-up' spirit of providing guidance and advice to Schools and academic staff, based on what had been developed within Schools for their own discipline areas rather than imposing 'solutions' determined from outside.

The report was also published by the University for external distribution and the University subsequently held the inaugural 'Equal Opportunities in the Curriculum' Conference in September 1997 (proceedings were published in 1999, see Pearl & Singh, 1999), which was attended by staff from universities across the United Kingdom and overseas, and where I reported on the research findings in the keynote address (with Martyn Pearl, leader of the EOAG project reference group). A second Equal Opportunities in the Curriculum conference on 'sustainable diversity' was held in 1999.

From the various research data collected through this project, it was clear that the most obvious and largest 'gaps' in perceptions existed for two groups of students, those with disabilities and international students. The following research projects

looked specifically at these two groups of students, in part because it was clear from reports from both students and staff that their teaching and learning needs were being least well met.

Project 2: *Supporting students with disabilities on small university campuses*

The purpose of the second project of the program, *Supporting students with disabilities on small university campuses* (1997), was to develop a 'mainstreaming' model of support for students with disabilities on Australian university campuses where no specialist support is available, based on research of good educational practice and the views of staff and students. The project was developed to fulfil a need for improving the support provided to students with disabilities, as it had become increasingly clear that specialist disability support was not sufficient to meet the needs of such students, and that broader support was required. The project was commissioned by The University of Melbourne (through its then Victorian College of Agriculture and Horticulture - VCAH) and Australian Catholic University (ACU). The project was funded through the Victorian Committee for Students with a Disability in Higher Education program, which was funded by the (then) Commonwealth Department of Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs (DEETYA).

The aim of the project was to research students' and staff's experiences and views about 'good' practice in supporting students with disabilities in their studies at university. It was designed to provide information and training to academic and other university staff in an area where it was widely perceived that the needs of a particular group of students were not being met. In this case, the group was students with disabilities who attended small, rural or isolated campuses. The project developed a model of good practice, in all areas of student support, including the teaching and learning area, based on an examination of students' and staff's needs, and an examination of models of good practice.

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[19] These are detailed in the report, and discussed in Chapter 5.

I was employed on this project for 8 months, and followed similar research methods and approaches to the earlier project. This project included a questionnaire survey of all students in Year 10[20] (aged approximately 15) in receipt of integration funding in all government and Catholic secondary schools in the Victorian Department of Education regional area, and from three regional Catholic dioceses, on their level of knowledge of disability support services provided by universities, their expectations of university study, and their perceived needs for support. The responses to this survey generally helped to determine information and services with which students needed to be provided.

Focus groups and individual interviews with university staff were conducted, and seminars and workshops were held at ACU and VCAH campuses, focusing on Aquinas Campus (ACU) in Ballarat, and Dookie Campus (VCAH) in Dookie, Northern Victoria, as case studies. Information was also collected via interviews with disability organisations, the Victorian Regional Disability Liaison Unit (RDLU), from a survey of support services which are provided by other Victorian universities, and from a review of the literature. This resulted in a model developed for universities of teaching and learning, and other support for students with disabilities, with a series of guidelines and checklists, and operational guidelines for each section of a university (including guidelines on teaching, learning and assessment and curriculum support), as are detailed in the research report. The report was also included on the RDLU's website (which serviced all Victorian universities) and has since been used as a resource by Australian interstate universities.

Project 3: *A guide to supporting disabled students*

The third report, *A guide to supporting disabled students* (2000), researched staff roles and views in relation to supporting students with disabilities across a

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[20] Year 10 students were chosen as it was anticipated that they may not have made a decision about attending university. Responses to this survey were not included in the report due to the low return rate (12). Most of these responses related to students with intellectual disabilities.

university campus. It was commissioned by Oxford Brookes University's Student Services division, was designed to follow the general nature of the first report (that had been commissioned by the University previously) but be based on the types of information in the second project (the small campus report), since it was perceived that staff at that University needed the same kinds of information about supporting students with disabilities as had been outlined in that report. This project was designed specifically, however, for the needs of this one university, and was based on the identification of needs for information and training expressed by staff themselves through a recent staff training needs analysis carried out by a member of staff of the Student Services Division. The needs analysis provided a guide to the specific topics and issues and interview questions for research, and these were further explored and confirmed in interviews with members of staff at the beginning of the project, and throughout the interviews.

This research project was specifically tailored to the needs of staff in different categories of employment at Oxford Brookes University, and involved individual and group interviews with academic and general staff to determine what their jobs entail and how they come into contact with disabled students[21].

Approximately ten staff from positions across the University were interviewed. Interviews were semi-structured and conducted with the use of open-ended questions which sought information about their previous experiences of disability and students with disabilities: the nature of their particular position and how they came into contact with students with disabilities; their views about how support for students with disabilities could be improved; what further information or resources they considered that they needed; and what kinds of information and support the University should provide to both students with disabilities and staff.

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[21] Note: the term 'disabled students' is used in the United Kingdom, whereas in Australia, the term generally used is 'students with disabilities' – these terms have evolved through different philosophical approaches.

Again, this project was an identification of 'good' practice examples and guidelines but this time for all categories of positions where people come into contact with, or are involved in services for, students with disabilities. It also provided information requested by staff on various types of disabilities, how these can impact on living and working in a university environment, and on learning in particular, and the likely needs of students regarding teaching and learning practices and support. Like the previous studies, it also identifies issues and attitudes of staff and students and places a particular focus on impacts on the teaching and learning needs of students with disabilities, beyond physical access issues.

Project 4: *Guide to teaching international students*

The final project, *Guide to teaching international students* (2000), was commissioned by the Oxford Centre for Staff Learning and Development (OCSLD) at Oxford Brookes University. Its purpose was to investigate issues associated with teaching international students in higher education to identify exemplary practice. A major activity of the OCSLD is the production of staff development publications for university staff in the United Kingdom and overseas, and for many years it had identified a demand by academic staff for research into the teaching and learning needs of international students.

This research was based on the design and nature of the first project undertaken at the University three to four years earlier, that is, research into good teaching practice to provide guidance for others to follow. This time, however, the audience and the materials gathered reflected a broader audience in the United Kingdom and Australia. Staff and students across United Kingdom and Australian universities were asked about their experiences of, and views about, 'good' or exemplary teaching and learning practices for international students studying in Western academic environments. International students were interviewed at a number of United Kingdom universities, and were contacted through the United Kingdom universities International Students Advisers email discussion group

network[22]. Interviews were conducted either face-to-face or via email. Staff were contacted through teaching and learning centres at universities in the United Kingdom and those who volunteered to participate were interviewed at their own universities, and examples were also researched and collected through direct contact with academic staff at Australian universities and through a review of the literature in the United Kingdom, United States, Canada and Australia[23]. All interviews were semi-structured, and included a range of open-ended questions designed to elicit information about international students' experiences of the curriculum, staff experiences of teaching international students, and both groups' views about 'good' teaching and learning and other relevant issues for international students.

All of the research projects primarily used semi-structured interviews to collect data, with non-directive questions which explored participants' interpretations of their experiences and views about each of the research topics. According to Bogdan and Biklen (1982), the use of semi-structured interviews 'allows the subjects to answer from their own frame of reference rather than from one structured by prearranged questions' (p. 2). The interview questions were used as 'prompts', rather than as set questions, which 'often inhibits the development of ideas, and seems to encourage short, unelaborated answers' (Marton, Hounsell & Entwistle, 1997, p. 20). Interviews were generally conducted in 'authentic settings' (Marton et al, 1997, p. 11) which were a normal part of their higher education experiences, such as staff offices, seminar or tutorial rooms, and student common rooms or cafeterias.

Although these reports were conducted in different countries and across different universities at different points in time, they are all connected by their focus on the views of students and staff about 'good' teaching and learning for diverse groups of students. As can be seen in Chapter 5, what emerges from these studies is

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[22] Between 20 and 30 students were interviewed. They came from the Middle East, Scandanavia, Africa, Asia, Europe, the United States and Australia.
[23] Participating universities are listed in the Acknowledgements section of the report.

that many of the views and themes identified by students and staff as representing 'good' teaching and learning practices are common. What also emerges, however, is a 'gap' between the views of students and staff about how well these practices are being achieved, and a picture of marginalisation and exclusion by students and a desire by staff to better understand the learning needs of diverse groups of students.

Each of the research projects examined how diversity is responded to, at different *levels*. Project 1 looks at the level of *disciplines* within university faculties and schools; Project 2 looks at the level of *services* across a university; Project 3 examines this at the level of *occupations* within a university; Project 4 examines this across a range of *issues* that affect students. All of the research projects include as a core element a focus on teaching and learning, on curriculum and pedagogy, but examine these in different contexts, countries, universities, levels, and through the experiences of different groups of students, at different points in time, and enabled conclusions to progressively be drawn across these dimensions about what is viewed as 'good' practices that result in better university education for all students.

The following chapter describes the theoretical foundation that not only underpinned these projects and influenced their outcomes, but also led to a new theoretical framework that evolved through the conduct of the research.

CHAPTER 4

Towards a theoretical framework for the data:
From critical pedagogy to 'universalist' views

[I]t is theory that permits students, teachers, and other educators to see what they are seeing. What is not so obvious is that theory does more than structure one's selection of the facts that shape one's world. Theory also plays a vital role in reproducing a reality that includes tacit common sense assumptions about what society and history are all about. (Giroux, 1988, p. 47)

Approach to data analysis

This chapter describes the initial theoretical underpinnings of the research work within this professional doctorate program, and the theoretical framework that evolved during the program. An initial critical framework enabled an analysis of the impacts of curriculum and pedagogical practices on individuals from diverse backgrounds, and a qualitative, phenomenological approach facilitated this analysis by describing how these impacts are experienced by such students. This chapter describes how a critical framework laid the foundation for a move towards a 'universalist' approach.

The overall approach to the development of the research was phenomenological, especially in terms of how data was selected and analysed. Bogdan and Biklen (1982) believe that 'all qualitative researchers in some way reflect a phenomenological perspective' (p. 31). The 'essence' (Husserl, 1970) of the data, and the unit of analysis, was 'experience', in that the focus was on the perspectives, or reported experiences, and views of participants and their descriptions of what they believed constituted 'good teaching and learning practices'. Most of the data collected came from the various interviews conducted

in each project, but also from analysis of documents and materials from other sources such as policy and admininstrative documents and curriculum materials.

Analysis of the data from the interviews broadly drew from the phenomenological approach developed by Colaizzi (1973; 1978), where participants' descriptions were closely read and considered; 'significant statements' were extracted and meanings formulated and organised into 'clusters of themes'; fundamental structures were identified; and findings were validated with participants.

Repeated readings of interview data to identify common themes allowed for an 'immersion' in the data (Janesick, 2000), 'the researcher's insight being the key instrument for analysis' (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982, p. 27). Potential themes were identified 'by pulling together real examples from the text [to identify] the categories and terms used by informants themselves' (Ryan & Bernard, 2000, p. 783). This involved extracting phrases or sentences that directly related to the investigated phenomenon (Colaizzi, 1978). The initial topic prompts (the categories and sub-categories of 'curriculum', 'pedagogy' and 'assessment') were used to guide many of the core themes and categorisation, as well as themes raised by the students and staff themselves.

Following the identification of themes and categories, extracts from individual interviews, the participants' 'voices' (Bakhtin, 1981), were chosen as representative quotes for the themes and categories, and were often included in the reports verbatim, and were used as one of the methods of reporting research findings.

The themes identified as common to participants' descriptions were validated by checking them against the original descriptions, as well as with participants themselves. Participants were provided with a transcript of the sections of their accounts that were proposed to be included in the research reports, especially in Projects 1, 2 and 4, to ensure that they did represent a 'recognisable reality' for them (Marton, Hounsell & Entwistle, 1997, p. 15). Participants were able to

amend or change these if they chose to do so. This was an attempt to limit my own biases in including and reporting data.

Validation of the findings was also sought throughout each project by checking with 'expert informants' (Ryan & Bernard, 2000) to establish that they were meaningful and relevant. In the first report, for example, all initial research findings were referred to the Equal Opportunities Action Group by the project reference group for validation. In the second report, findings were referred to the Project Steering Committee for validation. The findings of the third report were referred to the University's Student Services division, and the findings of the fourth report were validated by the Oxford Centre for Staff and Learning Development and the University's Teaching and Learning Committee.

During the process of data analysis, an attempt was made to 'bracket' or suspend my own assumptions and views (Colaizzi, 1978; Janesick, 2000; Valle & Halling, 1989; Valle & Kings, 1978; Van Manen, 1990) to discover participants' own themes and categories and interpretations, to ensure as much as possible that themes and categories emerged from the data themselves (Crotty, 1998; Van Manen, 1990). Valle and Kings (1978) argue however that it is impossible to completely bracket the researcher's own 'gaze' on the research, and that some assumptions and preconceptions will always remain. This was evidenced by the fact that some of the participants requested amendments to the final descriptions of the examples they had provided.

The themes that emerged from the research became the basis for reporting on issues and findings for each of the research projects. Sometimes this was done in an aggregated, interpretative way, and in others (particularly Projects 1 and 4), verbatim quotes of participants were included in the reporting of themes from the research, to illustrate and illuminate the themes. In each project, the initial responses of research participants determined and directed the identification of themes and the issues subsequently reported upon and discussed. Where

recommendations were included in reports, these were based upon the experiences and views expressed by participants in each of the settings.

Methodological approach

A number of qualitative research methods were used across the projects and were determined by the nature of the research questions and tasks involved, sometimes with elements from several research methodologies. Each project informed the next, and the answers to the research 'question' - that is, what is viewed to be good teaching and learning practice for diverse groups of students - changed and developed as the research was informed by the many hundreds of views from staff and students in two different continents, in different cultural settings, at different points in time, and at different kinds of universities. The boundaries and nature of the research projects and their findings have therefore been progressively determined by the participants within them, as well as by the original institutional political and systemic factors that influenced the commissioning of the research projects.

The intent of the professional doctorate program of research was to identify and describe university staff's and students' experiences of, and views about, 'good' teaching and learning for diverse groups of students, and therefore uses the philosophical approach of *phenomenology* and has some parallels with the focus of the research field of *phenomenography*.

Phenomenology – experiences of teachers and students

In all of the research projects, participants reported on their experiences, or their perceptions or interpretations of their experiences, of teaching and learning environments in universities. The essence of what they were describing was not only their views about these environments, but also *how* they were individually experiencing them. The 'essence' of the research is therefore firmly rooted in the

phenomenological tradition which investigates 'life worlds' (Husserl, 1970), experiences of reality, or perceptions and interpretations of it.

Husserl (1970) believes that although individuals' life worlds are 'subjective', they are the key to understanding human existence. In phenomenology, 'perception is regarded as the primary source of knowledge, the source that cannot be doubted' (Moustakas, 1994, p. 52). Colaizzi (1973; 1978) also draws attention to the emphasis in phenomenology on the study of experience, which, he argues, is not private or subjective; not something that 'happens in the head', but is always 'world-involvement experience' (1978, p. 54), and is always anchored in 'concrete, lived situations' (Valle & Kings, 1978, p. 6). Phenomenology questions 'the way we experience the world… and always begins in the lifeworld' (Van Manen, 1990, p. 7). It therefore challenges notions of 'subjectivity':

> The map developed for Western science during the past three centuries is based on the notion that reality consists of natural objects and that knowledge is a description of these objects as they exist in themselves. The purpose of the paths laid out on this map is to eliminate the distorting influence of personal perspective and the subjective properties of researchers. Phenomenological research methods are drawn on a different map. (Valle & Halling, 1989, p. 41)

Phenomenology is also concerned with the relationship between the researchers and those being researched, rejecting attempts to be 'objective' and 'technical', and advocating a more empathetic approach, with a 'dialogue' between researchers and participants as 'co-researchers' (Colaizzi, 1978, p. 69). This mirrors Freire's (1970) calls for researchers and participants to be 'co-investigators', where participants themselves identify the themes of the research (as in all of the four research projects of this study).

Although the term 'phenomenological' research is contested, with it being interpreted in different ways[24], it is usually used 'to include all positions that stress

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[24] For a discussion of this, see Wan Chaw (1995) and Crotty (1996).

the primacy of consciousness and subjective meaning in the interpretation of social action' (Wan Chaw, 1995, p. 19).

In researching staff's and students' views about or experiences of teaching and learning environments, the ways that these individuals experience these situations, for them, constitutes their reality of the situation. Further, participants' responses showed that there were differences in students' and staff's views about, and reported experiences of, 'good' teaching and learning. There was a 'gap' between how well students from diverse backgrounds perceived that their teaching and learning needs were being met, and the perceptions that teachers held about how well they were meeting the teaching and learning needs of such students. That is, there were two different 'realities' being reported. These perceptions or views may therefore be different for different people, but the importance of these perceptions (experiences, or views) is that they constitute reality for those experiencing them. By examining this, according to Bogdan and Biklen (1982), we can understand the participants' own frame of reference. 'The meaning that people give to their process of interpretation is essential and constitutive, not accidental or secondary to what the experience is.' (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982, p. 33)

Teachers' perceptions of how well they are meeting the needs of their students are clearly also important. For Van Manen (1999) however, 'no matter what teachers say their feelings and intentions really are, what seems ultimately more important is how the students *experience* them' (p. 21). The appeal of phenomenology for this program of research is this very feature of the approach, that it views experiences from the perspective of participants, recognising the 'primacy of the student experience' (Van Manen, 1999).

Phenomenography – experiences of learning

Related to the broader field of phenomenology, phenomenography is 'an approach to research' (Marton & Booth, 1997; Svensson, 1997) which looks

primarily at students' conceptions of learning. It therefore also has a bearing on the overall program of this research, since it also looks at ways that students experience their learning environments.

Phenomenography recognises that although students' conceptions of learning are diverse (Säljö & Marton, 1976), they can be grouped into distinct categories ('deep', 'surface' or 'strategic'), and are 'seen to be an interaction between their prior experiences of teaching and learning and the teaching and learning context itself' (Trigwell & Prosser, 1997, p. 241). Marton et al. (1997) argue that this approach has resulted in a shift in perspective in research towards the learner, away from previous reductionist quantitative models.

> The traditional research paradigm involves explaining student behaviour from the outside, as a detached, objective observer. The alternative approach seeks an empathetic understanding of what is involved in student learning derived from students' descriptions of what learning means to them. It involves a shift not just of methodology, but also of perspective. (p.13)

In shifting the perspective of the research to that of those being researched[25], this places an emphasis on the potential problems posed by the teaching process itself, rather than the traditional focus on problematising student characteristics, which 'ignores the responsibilities of the institution and the teacher for the outcomes of learning' (Marton, et al., 1997, p. 14).

'The phenomenographic creed – at least as far as "pure phenomenography" is concerned – implies "ways of experiencing" a primary unit of analysis' (Säljö, 1997, p. 177) and therefore inherits this from the field of phenomenology. Some of the factors influencing these 'ways of experiencing' teaching and learning would be background experience, the influence of disability on cognitive functioning, and cultural factors. Since it supports identification of the clustering of perceptions, and patterns, within students' experiences of the curriculum, or of

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[25] This issue was discussed more fully in Chapter 2 regarding how phenomenography shifts the focus in research from teaching to learning.

learning, phenomenography is useful in this program of research in terms of categorising experiences on the basis of different student characteristics or backgrounds, especially since it recognises differences in the ways that students approach learning, and the existence of factors that influence these approaches. For example, rather than arguing that in a class of thirty learners there will be thirty different interpretations of the learning experience, this approach allows for the grouping of perceptions and the drawing of some conclusions.

Further, rather than assuming a transactional relationship between the learner and teaching, phenomenography recognises the existence of continuous interacting systems and therefore differences in perceptions and experiences. The internal relationship between the individual and the world (or their learning environment) means that the world is an experienced world, and there are variations in people's experiences of the same thing (Prosser & Trigwell, 1997).

Phenomenographers acknowledge the possible subjectivity of selection and identification of categories (Hasselgren & Beach, 1997). Säljö (1997) sounds a note of caution in relation to the words chosen or concepts raised by the researcher. 'Any interviewer focusing on finding the limited number of ways in which a "phenomenon", as phenomenographers put it, is "experienced" would probably get answers to their questions but would fail to see that their conceptual system may often be incompatible with those of the interlocutor.' (Säljö, 1997, p. 180) Phenomenographers recognise the 'fundamental role of discourse in human affairs' (Säljö, 1997, p. 176) and that it is concerned with how people *report* their experiences or conceptions (Marton & Booth, 1997).

In the *Equal opportunities in the curriculum* project, my initial questionnaire of staff included reference to the term 'inclusive' curriculum and I subsequently discovered that my use of the term was incompatible with the understandings of some staff. My understanding had a cultural basis – I was using the term as it is understood in Australia to describe the inclusion of diverse groups of students within the curriculum. In the United Kingdom, however, at that time, the term was

more often associated with the inclusion of people with disabilities in schooling (and is now also used in this context in Australia). Terms and concepts used within the research needed to be progressively re-defined in the light of respondents' own understandings. As discussed in Chapter 1, differences in terminology across countries also provided for some initial confusion.

The importance of phenomenography broadly for this kind of research not only lies within its possibilities for examining particular student backgrounds and experiences and the potential impacts on learning approaches, but it also provides a theoretical basis for examining the importance of prior teaching and learning experiences for learning.

Issues for reflection

In selecting and analysing data, and identifying themes and issues, my own personal history and assumptions that underpinned the research (described in Chapter 1) undoubtedly had a bearing throughout the processes of the research. Denzin and Lincoln (2000) describe the researcher as a 'bricoleur', a 'maker of quilts', who 'understands that the research is an interactive process shaped by his or her personal history, biography, gender, social class, race, and ethnicity, and by those of the people in the settings' (p. 6). Research is 'always contaminated by the frame of our observational stance' (van Manen, 1997, p. 18) and by our own positionality and situatedness (Dei et al., 2001). According to Bogdan and Biklen (1982), however, a recognition of these assumptions can be brought to bear in a positive way in the research process. 'Good researchers are aware of their theoretical base and use it to help collect and analyze data.' (p. 33) They define theoretical bases, or perspectives, as 'a way of looking at the world, the assumptions people have about what is important, and what makes the world work' (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982, p. 33).

In my collection of data, examples and stories of the various participants, I was aware that the data had to 'go through' my mind (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982) and

that some of the approaches and examples presented were more consistent with my own 'way of looking at the world' than others. I was aware that my approaches were consistent generally with several theoretical approaches, such as constructionism[26], 'leftist ethnography' (which Avis, 1997, p. 9, defines as 'work that attempts to link social structures to processes taking place within educational institutions'), possibly what Denzin and Lincoln (2000) refer to as 'leftist cultural romantics', or, more particularly, 'universalist' approaches to the way that the world works and what is viewed as important (see Chapter 4). My work has certainly been described (in a journal review of the *Guide to teaching international students*) as being highly student-centred and 'culture-centred' (Harris, 2001). The need for reflection and reflexivity was highlighted when the transcripts were returned to participants for validation, when some of them questioned different emphases, or the fact that sometimes data was missing that they wanted included, and this process often led to significant changes in the final versions of manuscripts.

I was also aware of the effects of my own presence in the research, including the 'observer effect' (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982) where the researcher's presence (or questions) changes the behaviour of the people they are studying. Given that the projects were commissioned by universities for their own purposes, and were not conducted specifically for the purposes of this professional doctorate, with two of the projects being undertaken prior to the commencement of the professional doctorate, this to some extent helped to minimise a prescription and pre-determining of my own 'desired' outcomes of the research. I was aware, however, of the potential for participants to say what they thought might have been expected of them, given the topic and context of the research, and that there was a potential for teaching staff in particular to report aspects of their teaching practice that may not match the reality of their teaching. In the research for the first report, *Equal opportunities in the curriculum: Good practice guide,* for example, where lecturers invited me to observe teaching situations, or identified their own 'good' practice, there was clearly a potential for their practice on that

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[26] See Chapters 4 & 6.

occasion, or their reports of their practice, to not match the reality of the everyday experiences of their teaching for their students. Additionally, since participants in the projects were not randomly chosen, but either volunteered to participate or were nominated by others, their responses should be viewed in this light.

Ashcroft, Bigger and Coates (1996) comment on this in relation to undertaking research into practice in the equal opportunities area. '[I]n exploring practice, it is important to realise that it is often more difficult to get at it than first appears. There is often a gap between what people say and what they actually do.' (p. 6) Charmaz (2000) reminds us that participants' stories 'are reconstructions of experiences, they are not the original experiences themselves' (p. 514). In both the cases of reports by staff and students themselves therefore, these are clearly subjective reconstructions of their experience, based on their own post-experience, or post-reflection, interpretations.

There are also clearly some difficulties in attempting to study 'groups'. Corson (1998) argues that, '[a]lthough a person's cultural background and language are very personal possessions, there are obvious similarities between people in this area' (p. 6). However, Heath (1990) and Kolb (1984) recognise the importance of recognising heterogeneity within groups and the need to avoid stereotyping. Heath (1990) reminds us that group membership and characteristics are dynamic and ever-changing, describing the changes that had occurred within communities that she had studied so that within five years, they no longer existed as geographical groups.

In any study of diversity of learners, how much can individuals be described as belonging to one particular group? In reality, individual learners belong to many groups, they are multi-dimensional and have many complex layers to their learning. They may belong to a different gender, class, language group, ethnic background, socio-economic background, geographical location, age group, sexual orientation, political or religious affiliation, communication style, physical ability, physical health or mental health status, or have different coping strategies.

They may also have different learning preferences, types of intelligences, approaches to learning or different motivations for learning. This complexity makes the examination of group differences difficult, and the ability to describe characteristics of groups problematic. Kolb recognises this problem when he states, 'The basic dilemma for the scientific study of individual differences, therefore, is how to conceive of general laws or categories for describing human individuality that do justice to the full array of human uniqueness' (1984, p. 63).

It is therefore essential that all these possible limitations are acknowledged. For researchers, a reflexive approach (being aware of the researcher's own position and presence in the research) attempts to make explicit the situatedness of the researcher and the research. According to Gergen and Gergen (2000), in this approach 'investigators seek ways of demonstrating to their audiences their historical and geographic situatedness, their personal investments in the research, various biases they bring to the work…and/or the ways in which they have avoided or suppressed certain points of view' (p. 1027). Alvesson and Skölberg (2000) describe this as 'interpreting one's own interpretations, looking at one's own perspectives from other perspectives, and turning a self-critical eye onto one's own authority as interpreter and author' (p. vii). The results of my work are clearly therefore 'interpretations of interpretations' – my interpretations of others' interpretations of their experiences, which were influenced by my own situatedness.

Conversely, given the length of time over which the research was conducted, and the number of participants and others actively involved in the process over a number of different universities on opposite sides of the world, I consider that rather than my own assumptions and history predominantly acting to shape the research, the reverse has been true. The research itself has shaped and changed me – my ideas, philosophy, perspectives and beliefs have all been influenced and shaped by the stories and experiences recounted to me by students and staff over this period of time, and in turn have changed my views and practice of teaching. Although I began the research with an awareness of the

alienation and marginalisation that can be experienced by some students, through hearing the personal stories of so many students and staff, I now have a much richer and more intimate understanding of how this occurs and its effects on individuals. I consider myself to have undergone a deep change process as a result of the research, so that my professional approach as an educator is now fundamentally, and unashamedly, culturally aware and student-centred.

My own experiences through undertaking the research continue to inform and shape my own teaching practices and interactions with students. Perhaps the most obvious and profound effects of the research conducted throughout the study have been its effects on me.

Critical pedagogy

My 'tacit common sense assumptions about what society and history are all about' (Giroux, 1988, p. 47) were also influenced at a deeper level, by the work of critical educational theory.

From the very beginnings of my experiences as a teacher, I became aware of the inherently uneven and problematic relationships that exist between teachers and learners in schools and universities, and the unequal educational outcomes that can result. I quickly realised that 'learning' is constructed by, and inhibited by, a system of implicit values and beliefs that arise from underlying ontologies, epistemologies, pedagogies and values. This means that the learning needs of some students are not well met, and that they can be ignored, excluded and marginalised, and their failures can be blamed on perceived personal limitations or deficiencies. My later experience as an equity and disability practitioner reinforced this view, as I was able to learn from first hand accounts of students about how they are marginalised and excluded at universities. The program of research therefore sought to investigate and understand the *implications* of these constructs and constraints in terms of how they play out for *individuals*, and how they might be addressed in ways that better meet the needs of diverse students.

This thesis does not seek to provide a critical or discursive analysis of these constructs, or of the uneven power relationships between teachers and students, although there is clearly fertile ground for studies of this kind, but rather to focus on impacts of these on the learning of individuals.

The theoretical framework that fundamentally underpins this study, that influenced the choice of questions, methods of investigation and interpretation, and intended outcomes, came from the area of critical pedagogy, itself informed by critical theory. This orientation has informed the 'selection of the facts' that helped to construct the 'world' that this research explores and seeks to illuminate, that has constructed the 'reality' of educational environments that I see, that has created my own 'frame of reference' (Giroux, 1988). Like Gore (1993), critical pedagogy gave me 'a language with which to name my frustrations with dominant approaches to education' (p. xiii).

Work by critical educators highlights the reproductive, rather than the transformative, nature of education; the broader social structures and contexts of education; and how these act to construct and constrain education environments and outcomes. In particular, previous studies describe how education environments can contribute to social inequalities rather than address them (Apple, 1993; Bourdieu, 1976, 1984; Connell, 1993; Freire, 1970; Giroux, 1988, 1992; Henry, Knight, Lingard & Taylor, 1988; Kemmis, 1990; McLaren, 1989, 1995). Critical pedagogy, in taking an 'oppositional stance', concerns itself with marginalisation as a core issue, as a product of dominant and excluding discourses (Gee, 1996), and is sometimes itself described as a marginalised discourse (Gore, 1993).

Connell (1993) details the unequal distribution of the benefits of education, stating that, '[t]here is massive evidence of inequalities in chances of benefiting from the upper levels of education, depending on social background' (p. 13). He argues that social justice in education is 'fundamental to what good education is about' (p. 15). He further argues that a major flaw in the Commonwealth

Government's 1990 equity policy statement, *A fair chance for all*, which outlined the principles of equality of opportunity to participate in higher education, was that it focused simply upon access to education, but failed to state what kind of education this meant. He believes that education 'is a social process in which the "how much" cannot be separated from the "what". There is an inescapable link between distribution and content' (Connell, 1993, p. 18).

McLaren (1989) has drawn attention to the role of 'hegemony' in education where the dominant culture in a society exercises dominance over subordinate groups. He defines hegemony as 'a struggle in which the powerful win the consent of those who are oppressed, with the oppressed unknowingly participating in their own oppression' (p. 173). This study sought to investigate how such hegemony is manifested in higher education environments, at the level of individual learning, in terms of its consequences for the experiences of learning of those outside the hegemonic group. Freire (1970) has drawn attention to the oppressive nature of much educational practice, and the inhibiting effects that uneven power relationships between teachers and learners can have for less powerful, marginalised, students often resulting in 'internalised oppression'.

The program of research was strongly influenced by the writings of those who argue that social and cultural considerations construct and determine what is considered of value or deserving of reward in education (Bourdieu, 1984; Lemke, 1990; McLaren, 1989). These considerations also determine who, and therefore what, is valued in educational environments, what determines academic 'success', and what is neglected. Bourdieu (1976) highlights the roles of pedagogy and assessment:

> [T]o penalize the underprivileged and favour the most privileged, the school has only to neglect, in its teaching methods and techniques and its criteria when making judgements, to take into account the cultural inequalities between children of different social classes. (p. 113)

The study was also influenced by work which examines and highlights the underlying power relationships in education. This broadly includes the work of Bourdieu (1976, 1984) on social inequalities; Foucault (1979, 1980) on the social construction of 'truth', or knowledge[27], and the relationship between power and knowledge; and Habermas (1971, 1981) on the underlying power relationships, and inequalities of power that underlie and determine human relations within organisations. Foucault (1980) has described how the mechanisms of power work within cultures, producing (or constituting) normalised views (the 'gaze') of what is taken for granted, such as assessment or examination systems, what is valued and who can say what is valued as 'truth' (Foucault, 1973). His analyses are particularly pertinent where 'deviation' from the 'norm', such as in the area of disability, acts to marginalise and create 'differences'. Greene (1994) further argues that such 'differences' are often 'blotted out' in attempts to provide universalised explanations of experience. 'The concept of childhood itself was often universalised in such a fashion to blot out exclusion and humiliation.' (p. 447) Habermas (1987) has demonstrated how, in the normative assumptions about 'differences' and 'binary oppositions' that influence our thinking, those who fall outside of our own side of a 'binary' (e.g. normal/disabled) become 'the other', usually a subordinate 'other' (see also Gee, 1996). Sharpe (1980) argues that this view leads us to see those who diverge from the norm as 'deprived'.

Bourdieu (1976) for example describes how power operates in the area of university assessment, where the less explicit the assessment criteria, the more power teachers have to use their own subjective cultural values to determine 'merit'. Assessment is one area where 'power' can be manifested in university environments and, therefore, in each of the projects, the domain of assessment (as well as content and pedagogy) is given prominence in terms of the ways it can be made more explicit.

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[27] See Gore (1997) for a discussion on the usefulness of Foucauldian theory for analysing power relations in education.

Corson (1998) argues that schools are microcosms of society, mirroring their ideologies, value systems and power relationships. Bourdieu (1987, 1984) and others (Giroux, 1988; McDonald & Purpel, 1987) go further, arguing that educational institutions not only act to perpetuate social inequalities, but actively contribute to and shape them. In universities, Apple (1998) argues, 'the entire sphere participates in and is connected in complex ways to social transformations and to struggles over power' (p. 181). Many authors refer to the 'hidden curriculum' operating in educational institutions, the 'unintended outcomes' (McLaren, 1995, p. 183) and 'unexamined messages' (Henry, Knight, Lingard & Taylor, 1988, p. 151), the 'attitudes, norms, beliefs, values and assumptions often expressed as rules, rituals and regulations' (Print, 1988, p. 38). 'While the ideology or rhetoric of schooling might promote and legitimate notions of equality of opportunity, the structures and practices of schooling in fact act against such purposes, reinforcing and reproducing class and gender inequality.' (Henry, et al., 1998, p. 151)

Bourdieu's notion of 'cultural capital' (1976; 1984) was central to this study. 'Cultural capital' is the general cultural background, knowledge, attitudes and skills that are passed on from one generation to another, that act in unseen and unspoken ways to construct and constitute what is considered as 'ability' and includes and excludes 'winners' and 'losers' in education. In each of the research projects, the learning experiences of those without, or with less, 'cultural capital' were investigated. The projects examined the experiences of those without power, those who did not share the academic or social language of academe, those who are excluded from full participation for a range of reasons, or those whose knowledge and experiences were not valued or rewarded.

The work of McLaren (1989, 1995) has also strongly influenced this work, with its emphasis on the importance of the student experience and a focus on ways that educational practices create and maintain social reproduction:

Critical theorists want to restore to educational theorizing a public language that interrogates the ways in which the voices of teachers and subordinate groups are produced and legitimated. Curriculum must attend to the contradictory nature of student experiences and voice and therefore must establish the grounds whereby such experiences can be interrogated and analysed…Student experience, as the fundamental medium of culture, agency, and identity formation, must be given pre-eminence in an emancipatory curriculum; therefore, critical educators must learn how to understand, affirm, and analyze such experience. (pp. 40-42)

My 'tacit common sense assumptions' (Giroux, 1988) also included the influence of constructivist theories of learning which place learners at the centre of the learning process, and therefore attempt to at least in part redress the power imbalance between students and teachers. This included the work of constructivists and other theorists who highlight the contextual and interactional nature of learning. This included the work of Piaget (1932, 1952, 1959, 1972) who drew attention to the active, productive and reflective nature of learning; Dewey (1938) who recognised the importance of personal experience and the role of culture for mediating experience and learning; Bruner (1960,1972) who highlighted the importance of personal experience and the value of using real life experience for learning; and Vygotsky (1962, 1978), who described the social and historical embeddedness and interconnectedness of learning. The study was also influenced by the work of theorists who pointed to the primacy of language and language contexts as the medium of thinking and learning (Bakhtin, 1981; Bernstein, 1986; Heath, 1983; Lemke, 1989, 1990; Renshaw, 1992; Vygotsky, 1962). Many of the illustrative examples in the projects reflect these principles where teachers have either intuitively or expressly attempted to redress unequal power relationships.

A 'universalist' approach to human diversity

My own theoretical position and assumptions that have also informed and been developed through my research can be described as being aligned with the 'universalist' approach to human diversity. A major proponent of this view is

Jerome Bickenbach, a lawyer active in the disability rights area in North America. His views are characterised by the following statement on disability:

> A disability is not a human attribute that demarks one portion of humanity from another…it is an infinitely various but universal feature of the human condition. No human has a complete repertoire of abilities, suitable for all permutations of the physical and social environment… Until one appreciates that disability is the creation of an interaction between functional limitations and the social and physical environment, one has not yet understood disability. (Bickenbach, 1996a)

This view makes possible a 'universalist' conception of learners, each with a different repertoire and 'infinite variety' of experiences, with the results of their life chances being influenced by the interactions in their learning environments. In this view, disability is demonstrated as but one manifestation of the ways that normative attitudes and values, and structures and systems, can act to define deficit, and result in marginalisation and exclusion of individuals.

In an attempt to seek answers to the questions that my experiences of interviewing diverse individuals within universities raised, I subsequently sought out and was influenced by the work of theorists who are seeking new ways of understanding learning by constructing new relationships between teachers and learners. The 'lens' through which I look, through the diversity of students' experiences and their reports of alienation and exclusion, convinced me however that although there is much promise in these new, diverse theoretical directions, they continue to tend to take a deficit approach, with implied 'tolerance' for or 'recognition' or 'affirmation' of difference. Instead, I have sought to explore the possibility of a theoretical and pragmatic position, where diversity and difference are not only nurtured, but are recognised as universal features of all learners and act as core functions in driving the learning of individuals and the group. This is the central argument explored in Chapter 7.

The research program has been more than a personal exploration of these issues. The conduct and dissemination of the individual project reports were

designed to act as a conduit for alienated and excluded voices, as well as the voices of those teachers who were seeking to respond to this, as part of an attempt to positively recognise and celebrate these examples of 'good' or desirable teaching and learning practices.

Topics for investigation and analysis

How then did this general orientation determine and influence this program of research, in terms of the topics chosen for investigation, the questions asked, the responses that I chose to listen to, and the ways that I analysed and made sense of participants' contributions?

In Connell's terms (1993), it made me focus upon 'content', and, in Bourdieu's (1976) terms, on the 'methods', 'techniques' and academic 'judgements' that are made or neglected and on the impacts of these at a personal level. That is, there was a focus upon curriculum, pedagogy and assessment. Ramsden (1992) defines 'teaching' as including 'the design of curricula, choice of content and methods, various forms of teacher-student interaction, and the assessment of students' (p. 87).

The issues that I chose to investigate, examining how these are manifested through curriculum, pedagogy and assessment, were:

- how marginalisation and exclusion are experienced by students and how this impacts on learning in these three areas;
- impacts on learning of different backgrounds and experiences between teachers and learners;
- the impacts on students of when teachers seek to change learners; and
- students' and teachers' views about ways to improve teaching and learning practices.

The broader, or macro, issues of hegemony and cultural reproduction, raised by critical educational theorists, are viewed through the lens of how these are experienced at the level of the individual learner, the micro level. In this study, macro issues such as 'culture' and its various elements (ethnic, economic, physical, geographical) are made personal, and are viewed in terms of how the effects of these are experienced at the personal level. According to Ellsworth (1997), 'A pedagogical mode of address is where the social construction of knowledge and learning gets deeply personal' (p. 6).

Critical education theory (macro level theory) is used to analyse theories of learning at the individual level (micro level) to examine whether there is a compatibility of assumptions, to see whether they take account of these macro concerns. From a close analysis of the major theories of learning that have influenced educational practice, it is clear that they do not adequately take account of the issues raised at the macro, critical educational theory, level. Specifically, theories that have informed education at the level of classroom practice, or pedagogy, have failed to take account of:
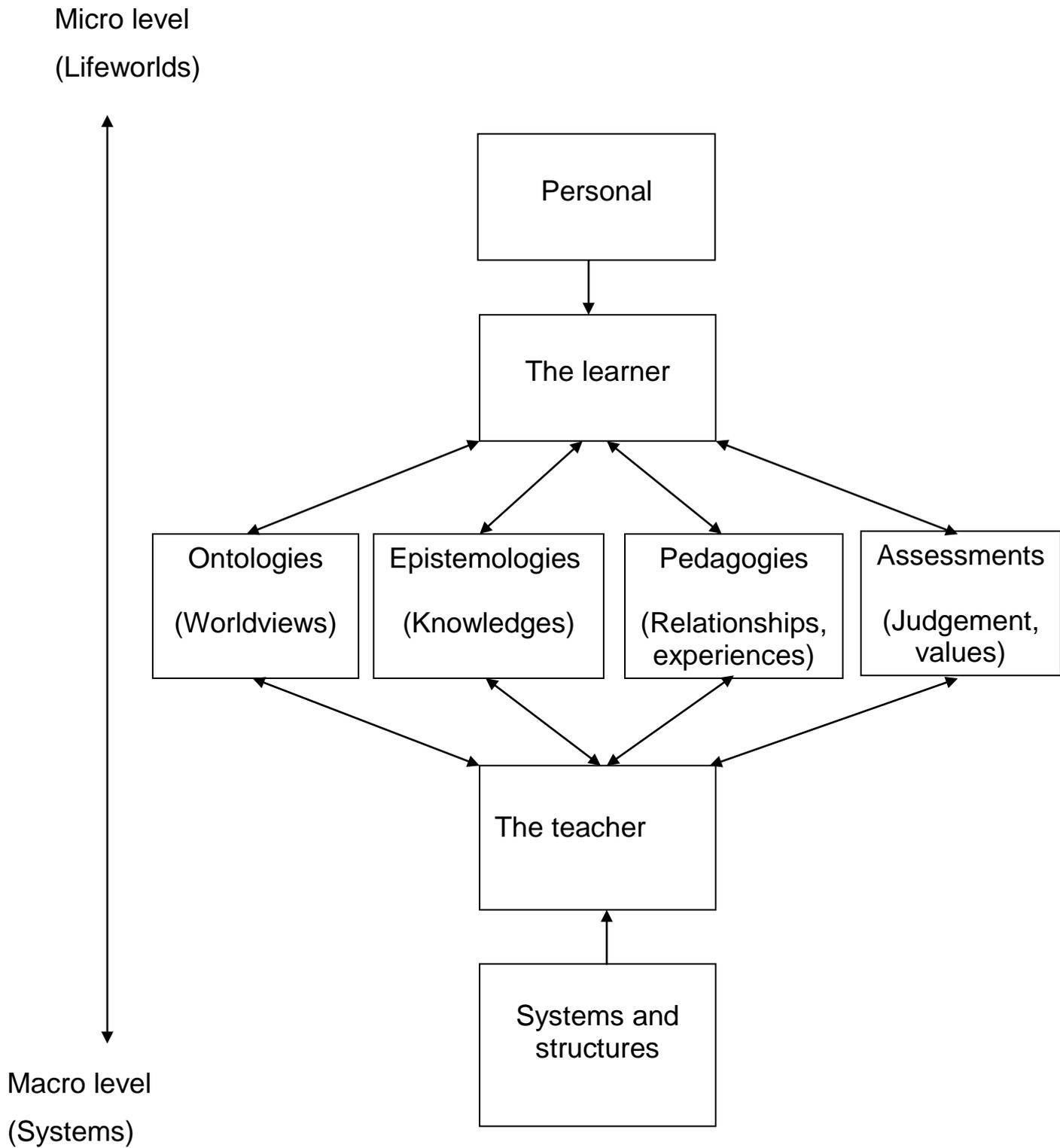
- The heterogeneity of learners;
- Individual experience of learning;
- The implications of social and cultural contexts;
- Differences in language;
- Differences in background experiences;
- Different epistemologies and worldviews; and
- Mismatches of social and cultural backgrounds of teachers and learners.

Chapter 6 explores these issues, by analysing how theories of learning account for or explain these issues, and whether these theories account for the experiences reported by students. From this exploration, it argues that a new theory of learning, a 'universalist' pedagogy, is required that includes these issues and concerns as its core feature. It investigates how the ontologies, epistemologies, pedagogies and values of teachers and students can be better

matched to meet the needs of a diverse higher education student population. These are illuminated and explained in the examples and suggestions found in each of the four research projects. The projects describe not only how differences in each of these domains can collide, but also how common ground can be found, and how some teachers have sought to achieve this.

Each of the projects looked at the domains where these mismatches can occur – curriculum (which reflects worldviews, or ontologies, and knowledges, or epistemologies), pedagogy (which broadly describes the various elements of relationships and interactions between teachers and learners) and assessment, that is, the methods and techniques that are used to measure and make judgements about students' learning (which reflects values and judgements), and describes practice in each of these areas. Individuals in educational environments, in their *roles* as teachers or learners, bring these different ontologies, epistemologies, experiences and values to bear on the learning process and outcomes. These differences act to construct and constrain learning interactions, and can lead to mismatches in expectations and outcomes. Learners operate from positions determined by their own perspectives, their lifeworlds, which interact with, and are positioned against those of teachers. Teacher actions are constructed and constrained by their own personal assumptions and experiences as well as the impacts and influences of the systems and structures within which they operate that help to shape their actions and give them power (see **Figure 1**).

FIGURE 1   Influences on interactions and outcomes in learning

Micro level

(Lifeworlds)

Personal

The learner

| Ontologies (Worldviews) | Epistemologies (Knowledges) | Pedagogies (Relationships, experiences) | Assessments (Judgement, values) |

The teacher

Systems and structures

Macro level

(Systems)

Theory into practice

The impetus for this research was to try to address some of the questions raised by critical educational theorists that point to the gap between theory and practice, to 're-vision' pedagogy (Gore, 1993). Following the work of theorists such as McLaren, many teachers have come to recognise the power relationships and hegemony that silently construct and maintain education environments, but are left with questions about how to address these issues in their own practice. As one teacher said, 'The trouble with McLaren was that he didn't tell us what to *do* about it'. Gore (1997) argues that although there is ample philosophical work about how pedagogy has excluded certain social groups, there is little detailed research into how this happens and therefore 'much of the critique remains speculative' (p. 2). Gore (1993) argues that this failure to provide teachers with a pedagogical basis to interpret critical pedagogy leaves them with feelings of guilt and blame. Gore (1997) calls for those who advocate for improved teaching and learning practices to direct their efforts at strategic applications. Gore (1993) argues that previous work has focused upon the 'macro' level of ideologies and institutions while 'playing down the instructional act' (p. xvi). For me, the instructional site and the instructional act enable an examination of the cultural and institutional practices as they are reflected and revealed at the 'micro', classroom, level.

Efforts to describe 'good practice' are attempts to provide such 'strategic applications' (Gore, 1997), to provide answers to the questions posed by such theories. The answers to these theoretical questions lie, in large part, in pedagogy; in curriculum and classroom practices. The research program sought to illuminate how these issues were addressed in practice by practitioners across a number of different higher education settings, and how they attempted to respond to the gaps identified by students, in particular, where these were reflected in content, pedagogy and assessment. The voices of staff and students provided testimony of the impacts of power, hegemony and identity and are summarised in the following chapter.

Power, hegemony and identity: Voices of teachers and students

> There is no objective truth waiting for us to discover it. Truth, or meaning, comes into existence in and out of our engagement with the realities in our world… In this understanding of knowledge, it is clear that different people may construct meaning in different ways, even in relation to the same phenomenon. (Crotty, 1998, pp. 8-9)

Introduction

Although a number of university-wide issues are covered in each of the research reports, this chapter specifically describes and explores the teaching and learning issues (curriculum, pedagogy and assessment) reported by staff and students[28] and which form the core of the reports.

All of the reports are concerned with mainstreaming equity and diversity issues and changing the culture of curriculum and teaching practices. They address 'the curriculum' broadly[29], as well as other areas that directly impact on the quality of teaching and learning. In each of the projects, staff and students were asked to describe and give examples of what they perceived to be 'good' teaching and learning practices for diverse groups of students. Both staff and students not only described what they viewed as good practice, but also took the opportunity to discuss negative experiences that they had had, or reported their perceptions of difficulties or tensions that existed.

Issues of hegemony, power relationships and identity were clearly reflected in the perceptions and experiences reported by both staff and students. Students with

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[28] Details of the findings of the reports can be found within each individual report. This chapter summarises some of these findings but is more concerned with a discussion of the meanings of these findings overall.

[29] See Chapter 3.

disabilities and international students reported the most negative experiences of teaching and learning overall, and the greatest gap in how well they thought their learning needs were being met. These two groups also provoked the strongest reactions from staff, with them reporting the most difficulties with teaching these groups, and often holding the most negative views of their abilities and characteristics.

Summary of reports

Report 1, *Equal opportunities in the curriculum: Good practice guide*, identified examples of 'good' teaching and learning practices for diverse groups of students across the range of disciplines at one university. Report 2, *Supporting students with disabilities on small university campuses,* and Report 3, *A guide to supporting disabled students*, were concerned with how to mainstream support at universities for students with a disability. Report 4, *A guide to teaching international students*, identified 'good' teaching and learning practices for international students in Australia and the United Kingdom.

All of the reports are aimed at encouraging a shift from a 'deficit' approach to students from diverse groups towards a 'universalist' approach. The four projects challenge how 'disadvantaged groups' are conventionally viewed within the curriculum. That is, they challenge teachers to examine their own preconceptions and assumptions about these groups of students and to change their own teaching and learning practices to recognise and accommodate the learning needs and background experiences of these students. This challenges the traditional 'deficit' view that these students, because of their 'differences', are in need of some kind of remediation, or specialist support, and are inherently problematic. The reports provide a range of 'good practice examples' for teaching diverse groups of students as well as a series of focus questions or points designed for academic staff to examine their own teaching and learning practices, and include information from research into the needs of diverse groups of students. The reports are not intended to be prescriptive, but rather to provide

strategic guidance to teaching practitioners who are receptive to examining and enhancing their own practice.

The interviews with students with disabilities and staff in Projects 1,2 and 3 identified:

- A fear by students of disclosing disability due to negative reactions by staff;
- A lack of awareness of services and adjustments available;
- A significant lack of understanding of students' needs, especially in relation to curriculum and pedagogy;
- Lack of recognition by teachers of different ways of learning amongst some students with disabilities;
- Lack of representation of students with disabilities in course content and materials;
- The stigma attached to disability, especially psychiatric disabilities and other 'hidden disabilities'; and
- An under-reporting of disability.

The interviews with international students and staff in Projects 1 and 4 revealed:

- A lack of relevancy of course content;
- A lack of recognition of different experiences and perspectives, and background knowledge;
- Eurocentric perspectives and materials;
- Negative attitudes about international students by teachers and fellow students;
- Different views of learning and attitudes to curriculum and pedagogy; and
- Significant stress and feelings of lack of support by both students and staff.

What the students said

<u>Findings</u>

Students reported a significant 'gap' between how well they felt that their learning needs were being met, this gap appearing to be the most significant for students with disabilities and international students. That is, they reported that their learning needs were being less well met than they expected, and less well met than how teachers perceived and reported that they were meeting the learning needs of such students. A significant gap was reported by students at Oxford Brookes University, despite the fact that the university is a nationally recognised leader in teaching and learning, and has developed a number of systematic and structural responses to improve how it meets the needs of diverse groups of students[30].

The major common themes and issues about teaching and learning reported by students in the projects[31] were as follows:

- Course content:

  - Lack of background knowledge;
  - Texts and materials used are Eurocentric and lack representation of people with disabilities;
  - Difficulties with field or practical requirements; and
  - Lack of relevancy to their needs or experiences.

- Pedagogy:

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[30] See the project report, *Equal opportunities in the curriculum: Good practice guide* for a discussion of the initiatives implemented in the various Schools of the University.
[31] See in particular Project 1, *Equal opportunities in the curriculum: Good practice guide* and Project 4, *A guide to teaching international students* for a fuller listing of the issues identified by staff and students in these areas.

- Problems with format of lectures (especially students with disabilities and international students);
- Problems with participation in group discussions and group tasks;
- Students' views and perspectives not valued, and often derided;
- Alienating and excluding use of language (concepts, expressions, anecdotes and jokes);
- Perceptions of lack of understanding and acceptance, and sometimes hostility;
- Feeling visible and isolated, sometimes harassed by peers with no intervention by lecturers;
- Lack of acceptance by 'mainstream' students, lecturers avoid them;
- Lack of understanding of impacts of disability and culture on participation;
- Stereotyped views about students' characteristics or needs;
- Lack of understanding of additional pressures and more time and effort required, especially in reading materials; and
- Autocratic styles of lecturers.

- Assessment:

- Perceived as unfair, unclear; criteria not explicit or overly complex;
- Hidden 'codes', don't understand what is the lecturer looking for;
- Lack of alternative assessment choices to suit their needs and interests;
- Unable to demonstrate their true abilities; lack sophisticated language to express ideas;
- Perceive that lecturers respond to their language or communication styles rather than content, over-emphasis on spelling and grammar errors;
- Negative attitudes towards and penalising of students with learning disabilities or language difficulties;
- Unsympathetic to added pressures (such as illness or cultural or religious pressures) in setting due dates;

- Lack of understanding of different cultural writing styles, with international students often accused of plagiarism; and
- Narrow views of ability, or what is considered of value.

<u>Discussion</u>

What was clear from discussions held with these students was that their experiences in higher education often differed significantly from the outcomes teaching staff believed they were achieving as will be seen below. This gap in perceptions appeared to impact directly on students' learning and their perceptions of the way they were treated in assessment. In Project 1, for example, students with disabilities often reported difficulty in participating in classroom activities. Ethnic minorities students felt that they were sometimes viewed negatively by staff and that their contributions were not valued. International students sometimes felt disadvantaged by assessment methods that differed from those to which they were accustomed. Gay, lesbian and bisexual students reported instances of discriminatory behaviour towards them by both staff and students. Women students sometimes felt unsupported and isolated in areas in which women are traditionally under-represented. Much of this went unnoticed by staff.

The primary role of experience in learning was reflected in many of the comments made by students interviewed for the research projects. Students often commented on their lack of background knowledge and experience, and how this inhibited, or made impossible, their learning, indicating that they did not possess the relevant existing schemas from which to build new knowledge. Mature age students in the first project commented that lecturers often assumed that they had come straight from school and assumed that they already had a shared body of knowledge from which they were working. International students commented that their background knowledge and experience was often so different from that assumed by lecturers, that they had no way to see how they would ever be able to use the new knowledge. Students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds or

students from rural backgrounds also commented that they were often unaware of what teachers were referring to, especially in their use of terms and expressions[32].

The content of courses or units was also often not perceived by students to be relevant to their needs. Students with disabilities reported that disability issues, or the experiences of people with disabilities, were missing from course content and materials. International students reported that what they were learning was not relevant for their future working lives. Some felt that as 'third world' students they were studying courses designed for 'first world' students, and topics covered were Eurocentric and dismissive of other cultural perspectives. One student from Kenya recounted (in Project 4) how she had complained to her lecturer that a unit in Education was focusing on advanced information and communication technology as a major teaching strategy. When she explained that schools in her region of Kenya had no computers at all, and she wanted to learn about other strategies, the lecturer responded that she needed to learn how to import the British education system into Kenya as it was more advanced.

Students with disabilities and international students reported difficulties with large classes and the lack of individual support. They often needed to put a lot more effort into their achievements, especially in terms of background or assignment reading, and that this was not understood by lecturers. They reported much more pressure on them to prove themselves, and felt that lecturers had negative views of their abilities. They were often aware that their presence was accepted 'under sufferance', and often, as Beasley (1997) noted, blamed themselves for their own perceived inadequacies.

Students often reported that they felt that their differences were not accepted by staff. In Report 1, a gay student described his feelings of betrayal when his lecturer did not intervene when other students made openly disparaging remarks about his sexuality in class. He said that other students as well as the lecturer

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[32] See Chapter 6 for a discussion of the role of language.

refused to eat the food he had prepared in class (in a hospitality course). Another student reported that his lecturer, aware that he was gay, often made disparaging jokes about gay people during tutorials, encouraging other students to laugh at the jokes. Students reported that they appreciated the opportunity to talk about their experiences and perspectives but felt that this should be done in a sensitive manner, and not intrude into personal details. A female social work student reported how for three years she had been 'stepping on egg shells' trying to disguise the fact that her partner was female. As the course entailed a lot of discussion around students' own lives and experiences, she found this a constant source of tension for her, always in fear of being ostracised. Many students commented on their frustration at being regularly asked for the 'black', 'Muslim' or other particular view on the topic being discussed, feeling that they couldn't talk for a whole group of people and not wanting to be stereotyped.

Reflecting the Vygotskian view[33] that language and thought are closely interrelated, international students interviewed in particular reported their frustration at not being able to articulate their thoughts and display their learning, as they lacked the sophisticated language they needed to express their thinking. 'If you don't have command of the language, you don't have a personality' (see Project 4, *A guide to teaching international students*).

Students reported that their most effective learning experiences were when they were given the opportunity to draw on their own previous experiences, as this allowed them to draw parallels between their own experiences and the concepts found within texts and materials used.

Each of the issues reported by students can be viewed through the lens of critical pedagogy as reflecting issues of hegemony (in terms of being outside of the dominant culture), power relationships (the result of disempowerment) or of identity (having personal characteristics that are different from those in power).

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[33] See Chapter 6.

Issues of hegemony were reflected in comments about course design and content, and the use of texts and materials that focused upon particular worldviews, generally being Eurocentric. Hegemony was also evident in students' reports of difficulties in being included or listened to in groups, commonly reported by students with disabilities and international students. They felt that they were either ignored or considered a burden by other students.

Power relationships were reflected in issues of pedagogy, about who and what is valued, or listened to, in small group or whole class discussions. It was most clearly evident in the area of assessment, where students often felt completely powerless. For international students this could be devastating, as they were often penalised for a style of writing and thinking for which they had previously been rewarded and judged as successful. Allegations of plagiarism were also extremely hurtful, as some students were unaware that the 'follow the master' style in which they had previously been trained was no longer acceptable.

Students' comments often reflected feelings of exclusion, isolation and marginalisation, feelings of being 'invisible' such as described by Rich (1986), a rejection of their identities. They made comments such as:

- "People talk to my dog, not to me." (a blind student);
- 'They make fun of the way I talk and call me 'girlie'." (a gay student);
- "It's as if I'm not even there." (an international student);
- "I make them feel uncomfortable." (a student with a disability);
- "Nobody wants me in their group." (an international student); and
- "I feel like I really stick out." (an international student).

What staff said

<u>Findings</u>

Staff were clearly aware of the increasing diversity of the student body, but often felt ill-prepared and trained to deal with this. Many however had worked hard and enthusiastically to make changes to their teaching practices and unit or module design and delivery to be more inclusive of students. Most of these teachers felt that these changes were better meeting the needs of diverse groups of students and reported much personal satisfaction from this. One lecturer, for example, who had experienced much difficulty in adjusting his teaching for the needs of a deaf student, reported that by doing so he felt that his teaching overall was more accessible for students. He said that he had realised the importance of clear delivery and coherent messages, and the importance of good communication and interaction with students.

Staff's views about what they considered to be 'good' teaching and learning practices for diverse groups of students can be summarised as follows:

- Course content:

- Content needs to be more inclusive with a wider range of case histories, illustrative examples and texts with different perspectives;
- Inclusion of flexible and negotiable learning objectives;
- Addressing of lack of background knowledge;
- Addressing the 'culture' of some disciplines that can be excluding;
- Inclusion of students' experiences as resources for learning; and
- Inclusion of diversity issues inherent within disciplines (gender, race, class, disability etc).

- Pedagogy:

    - Recognition of diverse backgrounds and experiences, background knowledge, academic values and styles, and approaches to learning and knowledge;
    - Sensitivity in language use, avoid excluding language and references;
    - Need to engineer composition of discussion and assignment groups, provide training and ground rules, monitor participation and intervene sensitively;
    - Need to invite and value different perspectives in whole group discussions;
    - Address negative comments and actions by other students; and
    - Need for individual attention to students' needs;
    - Awareness of potential to exploit power differential.

- Assessment:

    - Negotiable and flexible topics and due dates and explicit criteria;
    - Provide training and 'scaffolding' in assessment types;
    - Allow students to use own background knowledge and experience;
    - Recognition of different modes of expression and approaches to learning ;
    - Staff awareness of own cultural academic assumptions of 'ability'; and
    - Need to audit assessment outcomes for different groups.

Discussion

Many of the staff whose work is included as examples of good practice in the reports were clearly aware of issues of hegemony, power and identity and had taken deliberate steps to reduce the impacts of these. They had done this through their selection of course materials, changes to their pedagogy particularly in relation to how tutorials and seminars operated, and in their assessment practices. Some staff who reported that they had audited their unit or module results to assess whether there were any biases towards particular groups of students, had been surprised by the results of this, recognising that there were

indeed unequal patterns, and they had taken steps to redress this. Many staff reported that they had taken deliberate steps to be more proactive in examining the needs of their students, sometimes in direct consultation with them. Some staff reported negative reactions to such initiatives by other, 'mainstream', students and that they needed to address this, sometimes using these reactions as learning opportunities for all students to examine their own assumptions and values. Some staff had provided opportunities for students from different ethnic backgrounds to explore and report on different cultural approaches to topics, such as in health and medical care, or in tourism courses that encouraged students to report on different communication conventions used in their background culture.

Many lecturers recognised that common unit objectives (attitudes, knowledge and skills) assume homogeneity of learners and the desirability of homogeneous learning outcomes. They instead offered flexible and negotiable learning objectives and outcomes and learning contracts for individual needs and interests.

Some staff commented that they were aware of the nature of the 'culture' of some disciplines, which had the effect of only valuing certain types of knowledge and perspectives and therefore excluding or alienating some groups of students. This was especially mentioned in the cases of Engineering, Science and Construction (where women students can feel excluded and alienated by course content) and Nursing (where notions of 'able-bodiedness' were viewed as essential for a career in nursing and were given sharp focus during practical placements during a course).

Some lecturers recognised that some students may have no previous experience of some types of assessment and may need training and 'scaffolding' until they are familiar with these approaches. Some were also aware that their own assumptions of what was viewed as ability were influenced by cultural assumptions, and that students were often being assessed for their mastery of

academic discourse (or cultural capital) rather than for critical or original thinking. They recognised different styles and approaches to learning and allowed students to use their own words and ways of expressing ideas, assessing content rather than penalising for spelling and grammar (although some did still correct this or point to areas that needed improvement).

The responses of staff were sometimes however quite antagonistic, often due to the perceived personal impacts of these changes. This perhaps reflected the tensions reported in the literature of such changes occurring against a backdrop of increased pressures on academic staff generally. Even when staff stated that they were generally supportive of such changes, however, many of their comments displayed enduring dominant views of hegemony, power and identity.

Most staff interviewed (but not all) clearly accepted the power differential between staff and students as the natural order, and had no qualms about exercising that power. The comments of some staff displayed that they believe that they hold all the knowledge and they assess students against the knowledge that they hold. This represents a view of the purpose of education as being reproductive rather than transformative. These staff see their role as being the portal to their discipline and as gatekeepers for those allowed entry. These views could be seen as a reflection of hegemony at work, as well as a denial of students' own identities, and was most evident in assessment practices. Quite often this co-exists with espousals of support for equity principles (a contradiction also noted by Beasley, 1997 and Ramsden, 1995). The nature of university academic work also permits the unscrutinised, unaccountable exercise of power. There are few normalising or mediating influences such as those found in schools, for example, peers, principals, parents or School Council members. This autonomy perhaps also results in the lack of an impetus to engage in debates or learn about good teaching and learning, in contrast to other education professionals.

Reponses of staff also reflected a number of tensions arising from competing philosophical and policy imperatives currently characterising universities, both in

Australia and the United Kingdom. Many staff reported feeling 'torn between two cultures' of universities and that the value of their equity and diversity work, which they were once encouraged to pursue, is no longer recognised or rewarded, and competing imperatives can be contradictory and antagonistic to equity and diversity considerations. They clearly view these tensions as threats to existing and potential progress in this area. There was strong evidence of the gap between university rhetoric and practice, with staff often feeling caught in the middle, receiving 'mixed messages' from university hierarchies through university mission statements and policies.

'Torn between two cultures': Tensions and competing policy imperatives

The tensions reported in the literature amongst academic teaching staff, as a result of the changes in student populations arising from the expansion of higher education, were readily apparent in the research projects, both in Australia and the United Kingdom.

These tensions mirrored those reported in the literature and arose from perceptions of extra work pressures, 'lowering of standards', or competing university agendas of 'equity' versus 'marketisation'. Many of these tensions have clearly arisen because of the lack of support and training provided to higher education teachers to cope with the changes that are occurring. Many staff interviewed reported that they were keen to receive advice about how to improve their teaching and curriculum practices, and recognised that their conventional approaches did not meet the needs of many of these new groups of students.

Interestingly, although there was a clear gap in how well teachers and students believed that students' needs were being met, there were remarkable similarities in what they identified as being desirable for 'good' teaching and learning practices. This shows that although there is general agreement about what needs to be done to better address the learning needs of diverse groups of students, other factors and tensions are acting to inhibit and constrain this from occurring.

Some staff reported that they felt their efforts to meet the needs of diverse groups of students were sometimes limited by constraints beyond their control, such as course or unit or module organisational requirement that limited the flexibility of their approaches. Sometimes staff reported that external constraints, such as requirements of professional bodies, influenced course structure and content. More frequently, however, staff reported that the requirements of professional bodies often acted to encourage curriculum changes to respond to the increased diversity of the client groups that the profession serves. This was particularly reported in the areas of architecture, planning, nursing and education.

Many staff interviewed saw that the presence of non-traditional students had been imposed upon them as a result of external pressures (such as economic imperatives or the expansion of higher education generally). Some stated that they appreciated the different characteristics that such students bring to the classroom, and used this positively to influence the character of the classroom and interactions within it. Negative views of students however were found in both Australia and the United Kingdom. Teachers saw students with disabilities and international students in particular as 'hard work' and an unwelcome intrusion in their classes. They were supportive of such students only when the student changed their ways and learnt how to succeed in the 'normal' classroom. There appears little recognition by teachers (although there were notable exceptions, as discussed earlier) that changes to their own practice may result in more positive experiences and outcomes for all of their students.

These reported views indicated that although the presence of such groups in higher education is clearly well established, there is still a widespread lack of acceptance of this amongst teaching staff at universities. Many felt that this was creating difficulties and tensions for them in the classroom, and often viewed this situation as a 'necessary evil'. Many initiatives were clearly undertaken under sufferance and were perceived as a direct threat to academic 'rigour' or 'standards' and 'academic freedom'. There was rarely any understanding

displayed of theories of learning and the important of relevance of the content of curriculum to previous background and learning experiences.

Although staff in all four projects reported that the increased numbers of students with disabilities and international students are putting extra pressures and demands on staff, many also reported that although they initially had such concerns, with extended contact with such students, their concerns had reduced. They were initially concerned about their lack of experience in teaching such students, but felt that subsequent experience had improved their teaching and the learning of other students, and they had appreciated the opportunity to reflect on and improve their teaching. Some staff reported that they initially provided too much help to students with disabilities, for example, and that this had become burdensome for them and they had become resentful. Over time they had learnt that this was unhelpful and disempowering for students, and they were able to find a satisfactory balance, recognising that changes to their practices generally obviated much of the need for 'special' assistance.

These kinds of conflicting views reflect the tensions that continue to exist despite increasingly diverse student cohorts within universities and explicit government and university level policies promoting diversity and wider participation. The theoretical framework underpinning this program of research recognises that there are various competing tensions and agendas within universities. This dilemma was often alluded to by staff participants in the various studies who made a point of commenting on the apparently contradictory messages they received via university strategic and policy statements.

Competing agendas

Staff reported that they also viewed equity and diversity policies as sometimes being in direct contradiction to the 'managerialism' increasingly pursued by universities where economic imperatives are perceived to be underpinning policy shifts. The tensions reported in the literature arising from the apparently

101

competing agendas within universities, characterised by whether universities are seen as serving the 'market' or serving 'society', were readily apparent in staff responses. Institutional agendas impact on efforts to widen participation, even though this is a stated policy in both the Australian and United Kingdom contexts. For example, some staff in universities which compete for students at the 'top end' of the academic grade scale feel torn by competing agendas within those same universities that require them to meet the needs of all of their students, so there are differences in the tensions that arise within different types of universities. Even teaching staff who were highly committed to changing their teaching and learning to better meet the needs of their diverse students, reported that their efforts often went unrecognised and unrewarded, and that they felt torn by competing and contradictory demands on them by university hierarchies.

Some staff saw the imperatives to broaden the range of students as part of the push towards the marketisation of higher education, in terms of increased 'markets', especially international students. Pearl and Singh (1999) refer to the tensions within universities created by seemingly more market-driven agendas,

> The concept of customer care has perhaps been slower to infiltrate academe than many other public services… one of the more significant impacts [of the expansion of higher education in the United Kingdom] has been to force HE institutions to rethink their traditional expectations of student cohorts… The attitude in the majority of HE institutions has, however, differed markedly from this approach. Many other institutions have perceived the increase of diversity purely in terms of extending the market for their products. International students have become very attractive because of the higher fee income they represent. However, irrespective of future expansion, the position currently facing most British universities, particularly the newer ones, is one in which student cohorts reflect a high degree of diversity. (p. 1)

Summary - Competing viewpoints

It can be seen from the issues identified by students and staff that there are some common elements of their perceptions and concerns, although significant

differences are apparent particularly in how well both groups believe that the needs of diverse groups of students are being met. On the whole, students with disabilities and international students were less likely than other groups of students to believe that their learning needs were being met well. They reported feeling unsupported, misunderstood and unaccepted, and that the extra difficulties that they face in their university life and studies, arising from physical, social or cultural factors, were not understood or tolerated. Their comments reflected that they believed that teaching staff held negative views of them, and did not appreciate their different abilities, needs or perspectives. The reports of negative views by teachers were especially marked amongst particular groups within these groups of students, generally those whose culture was most different from the host country, and students with 'hidden', less accepted disabilities, especially psychiatric and learning disabilities.

Amongst staff, despite reports of tensions, there was nevertheless evidence of a recognition that 'mass education is here to stay' and staff clearly wanted guidance and training to be able to deal with it, and there has certainly been evidence of noticeable change over time. Some staff argued that until the *teaching staff* of universities reflect the composition of groups within the society that they seek to serve, that is until universities become diverse, attempts to better serve students from those groups will be piecemeal and tokenistic.

The reports of staff and students, and the discussions in various literatures in relation to university policies and programs discussed in this work, can be summarised as representing competing viewpoints and worldviews. They are manifestations of deeper, underlying philosophies and worldviews, that impact across the range of university life and work. The tensions alluded to by staff, and the source of much of the gaps identified by students, reflect competing and underlying tensions that exist at all levels within universities, at the structural, systemic and individual practice level, and reveal a much deeper, and more complex, set of tensions and opposing views.

They reflect competing tensions and agenda that exist within university hierarchies in terms of policies and programs, but also within individuals in terms of their teaching and learning practices. These could be seen to be occurring right through the entire spectrum in terms of the individual worldviews and life worlds that flow from teachers' philosophical and ideological viewpoints about social and cultural conditions and filter through to their views about teaching and learning. These in turn impact on the choices they make about curriculum content, pedagogy and assessment. They determine their views of students and causes of failure or success, how they see their relationships with students, and whether they problematise individuals or systems. They determine the types of assessment they choose and the way that they judge and reward. They determine who enters a profession and who is denied entry. They determine who can speak with authority and who is silenced, and these all have direct and lifelong consequences for individuals and their life chances.

'Standards' versus 'excellence'

Tensions amongst staff also often particularly centred on perceived threats to 'academic standards', a concept jealously guarded and defended by academic teaching staff. They felt that responding to students' different needs meant lowering standards. They saw the push to make universities more inclusive as a threat to 'academic rigour' and to what Ramsay (1999) describes as the 'still relatively protected intellectual autonomy of academia' (p. 17).

Pearl and Ryan (1999) comment on this perceived threat:

> In reality the implementation strategy [of the Equal Opportunities in the Curriculum project] we have adopted has been based on a combination of subtle persuasion and the strength of sound academic evidence. We have recognised from the outset that of all the areas of activity tackled by the EOAG, influencing the curriculum was likely to be the most problematic. After all, it lies at the very heart of the professional integrity and status jealously guarded by academics at large. (p. 6)

Many of the lecturers whose 'best practice' work is showcased in the first report see that equity (or equal opportunities in the curriculum) equates with quality, and is viewed as 'Excellence through diversity' (one of the University's mottoes). In commenting on the progress that had been made since the implementation of the project, Pearl (Pearl & Ryan, 1996) related how equal opportunities in the curriculum had come to be viewed in terms of excellence rather than as a challenge to academic standards:

> As something of a postscript, two significant events have taken place following the conference in September 1997. The first of these relates to the School of Planning (SoP) undergoing a teaching quality assessment by the Higher Education Funding Council. The SoP has been one of the most progressive parts of the University in terms of adopting a proactive approach to equal opportunities. The result was an outstanding achievement of 24/24, the maximum available score. Reference was made in the inspection team's feedback of the student-centredness of the staff team and the integration of equal opportunities into all activities. Perhaps the lesson to be learned is that good equal opportunities practice delivers both equality and *quality*. (p. 13).

The essential purpose of this thesis is to provide a rationale for the view that 'good' teaching and learning practices for diverse groups of students will deliver quality outcomes for *all* students, that is, that both equality *and* quality are possible, and indeed depend on one another.

This chapter has discussed how some teachers have responded to the diversity of student needs. However, the data collected in the research projects on student experiences show that these may still be insufficient in meeting these needs.

The following chapters specifically examine the implications of marginalisation and exclusion for students in terms of learning outcomes. They argue that marginalisation inhibits good learning, but that, also, 'universal' good teaching and learning practices which take into account the diverse learning needs of *all* students, are prerequisites for quality learning outcomes.

CHAPTER 6

Effects of marginalisation on learning

> When those who have power to name and to socially construct reality choose
> not to see you or hear you, whether you are dark-skinned, old, disabled,
> female, or speak with a different accent or dialect than theirs, when someone
> with the authority of a teacher, say, describes the world and you are not in it,
> there is a moment of psychic disequilibrium, as if you looked into a mirror
> and saw nothing. Yet you know you exist and others like you, that this is a
> game with mirrors. (Adrienne Rich, 1986, *Blood, bread, and poetry: Selected
> prose 1979 – 1985*)

Introduction

This chapter examines the issue of the impact of marginalisation on learning.
Using learning theories to analyse the data from the research studies, it
examines some of the main theories of learning relevant to the assessment of the
impact of marginalisation on learning. What are the educational implications on
learning for individuals when they are marginalised or excluded in learning
environments? What do the feelings of marginalisation and exclusion reported by
students really mean for how they learn? This chapter considers the impacts of
different background experiences, social and cultural factors, identity issues,
language and the role of knowledge. It also outlines the implications of some of
the main theories of learning for understanding the role of previous and current
experiences and backgrounds of learners in terms of how they can influence the
outcomes of learning for different individuals, and it points to the need for a new
theory that better accounts for such outcomes.

In examining theories of learning, this chapter demonstrates how these theories
do at least partially explain students' reported experiences, but it also suggests
that existing theories may be problematic, particularly when they tend to assume
a homogeneity of learners. It concludes that perhaps new theories of learning are

needed that not only explain the reported lack or failure of learning, and different experiences of learning, but explicitly account for this, and use these differences as their core feature.

Specifically this chapter examines those theories of learning which seek to explain the nexus between learners' experiences and backgrounds and learning outcomes, as the research is constructed upon the assumption that learning outcomes are influenced by our experiences and background. In essence, as the research is influenced by the work of critical educational theorists, it assumes that learning is a social and cultural construction. Consequential to this, the research assumes that educational matters cannot be fully understood outside of the social and cultural situation.

In this chapter, how individuals learn is discussed in terms of how this is influenced by both internal and external factors. Much of the theoretical literature covered focuses upon either the learning of children (especially in the case of constructivist literature) or of adults (particularly in the experiential learning literature). Distinctions between these two groups have not been made in this discussion. Focus instead has been placed upon discussing features of learning that appear to extend over all age groups and are lifelong. Similarly, no distinction has generally been made between teachers at schooling level or lecturers at university level (being viewed as 'academics as teachers'), instead treating teachers as one part of the generic teacher/learner relationship.

Role of background characteristics and experiences in learning

In examining these theories, the role that the individual's background characteristics play in the learning process has been considered in terms of whether these theories take into account the impacts of such characteristics. The role of experience is discussed in terms of students' previous educational and cultural histories, as well as the way that the learning process itself is experienced.

Learning theories in the various constructivist traditions are considered below, beginning with the Piagetian and Vygotskian traditions, and more recent sociocultural approaches to understanding learning, as well as the role of language and identity. Recent calls for new pedagogies recognise 'difference' and the heterogeneity of learners. The shifts in focus from the individual learner, beginning with the work of Piaget, to their social, historical and cultural contexts, and back again to individuals, with the calls for new pedagogies, are described below, and all are examined through the lens of individual experiences.

This chapter discusses these theories of learning specifically in terms of how they highlight the role of previous experience in driving the learning of individuals. These provide a foundation for explaining why people from different backgrounds can experience learning differently, in the same learning situations. They also explain why feelings of alienation and exclusion can lead to failure to learn, or feelings of 'cognitive dissonance'.

Effects of marginalisation: Cognitive dissonance

Common themes reflected in the comments by students interviewed in the four research projects were about difficulties they had understanding, making sense of their learning, feeling excluded or marginalised, or feeling that their abilities or perspectives were not valued.

What causes these feelings and outcomes reported by students and why is it a problem that students report feeling alienated and unable to learn? Shouldn't they learn anyhow, if they are good students? What is the connection between what teachers do and how the learner learns and why should teachers be concerned about this?

The experiences that the students were reporting have variously been termed 'cognitive dissonance' (Festinger, 1957), being unable to 'solve the jigsaw puzzle'

(McInerney & McInerney, 1998, p. 91), or as Rich (1986) so forcefully puts it, 'psychic disequilibrium'. Cognitive dissonance theory (Festinger, 1957) explains 'how people respond to information that does not coincide with their current understandings or beliefs… an individual can experience psychological tension or dissonance when new knowledge or information is incongruent with previously acquired knowledge' (McFalls & Cobb-Roberts, 2001, p. 165). Festinger (1957) argues that dissonance creates 'psychological discomfort' and that 'when dissonance is present, in addition to trying to reduce it, the person will actively avoid situations and information which would likely increase the dissonance' (p. 3). It can act to hinder learning or it can act to facilitate it. Piaget (1932) claimed that development can be driven forward by cognitive disequilibrium, through disagreement between peers that produces rational and thoughtful conversation.

It has been recognised that cognitive dissonance can be experienced by students at several points during their university study, and can be used as a learning tool to deliberately challenge students' previously held assumptions (Blais, 1988; Watts & Bentley, 1987). Cognitive dissonance is a common early response to the first year experience for university students. 'The early weeks will be a significant cognitive dissonance as students match the expectations built up during university selection processes with the realities of their eventual course and university' (James, 2001, p. 102). It is important however that this cognitive dissonance does not become overwhelming for students, especially those for whom many aspects of university life will continue to be alien and confronting (Shaddock, 1996).

Is there a connection between cognitive dissonance or failure to learn, and the feelings of exclusion and alienation that some students report? The Institute for Research on Learning (1999) argues that failure to learn is a common result of exclusion from participation:

> Learning requires access and opportunity. People have difficulty learning when they are only accorded marginal or tentative membership. Limited privileges of participation do not

entail rights to contribute and make meaning, hence do not provide opportunities for engaged learning. This deeper perspective requires a more textured understanding of the means and implications of discrimination and exclusion. (p. 1)

Negative stereotypes by teachers of students from diverse backgrounds can also hinder learning and have damaging effects. 'Stereotyping promotes damaging assumptions or omissions in teaching and learning behaviours, which can leave students untaught and distraught.' (Sanderman-Gay, 1999, p. 46)

How can teaching and learning practices be improved to avoid these negative impacts and enhance the learning of different groups of students? Some believe that it is not enough to simply describe or prescribe 'good practice' in teaching and learning, without a fundamental understanding of the underlying factors and practices that influence the learning of individuals, and the contexts within which they learn.

> Some teachers believe that good teaching techniques are effective tools in the fight against discriminatory practices in the classroom. However, all good techniques require another essential ingredient: an understanding of the complex context in which these techniques are being employed and learning occurs. (Wallis, 1999, p. 1)

Teachers, therefore, need to not only examine the learning contexts that they are creating for their students, but they also need to be aware of the ways that individuals learn and how personal factors interact with social and cultural contexts to produce different learning outcomes for individuals. Therefore, before considering what may constitute good teaching practices for diverse groups of learners, theories that examine and explain the factors that influence learning for individuals need to be explored. Is it true that learning takes place differently for different groups of learners, and if so, what implications does this have for teachers?

The answers to these questions can be found within educational theories that examine and problematise the dynamics between learners and teachers in

educational settings, and examine how these dynamics directly and indirectly influence the learning of students.

How people learn

There is a vast literature on how people learn. A large amount of this literature, using different approaches and examining different aspects of learning, provides compelling evidence of links between individual characteristics and their circumstances or contexts in determining the outcomes of learning.

Learning theories place different strengths of emphasis upon the role of each party in the teaching-learning relationship. These include theories in the areas of cognitive science and schema theory, constructivism and social constructivism, sociohistorical and sociocultural psychology, and experiential learning theory. Each of these has been examined to determine how it might provide explanations for the reported gaps or lack of connections in learning relationships. Work in the area of phenomenography over the past twenty years has advanced understandings of how individuals learn in institutional contexts[34].

The theories discussed in this chapter all firmly place the learner at the centre of the learning process and help to provide explanations for why individual differences determine different learning outcomes. They help to strengthen the argument that educators need to recognise and value individual perspectives in the learning process if meaningful learning is to take place.

Effects of different background schemas

One possible explanation for the root cause of students' reports of feeling excluded, unable to learn, and unable to connect with what they are learning may be found in schema theory. Schema theorists argue that schemas are essential

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[34] This area comes more broadly under the constructivist umbrella (see Biggs, 1999), and its specific findings have been discussed in Chapters 2 and 4.

for understanding, and if learners and teachers have vastly different schemas, this can influence or inhibit new understandings.

Schemas are defined as 'the mental structures of knowledge' (Watson & Lindgren, 1979, p. 81), the 'network of connected ideas or relationships' (Biggs & Moore, 1993), the 'systems of personal constructs' (Candy, 1991), the organisational structures used to store and retrieve knowledge. Howard (1987) links the definition of schemas directly with experiences, 'a schema is a representation abstracted from experience, which is used to understand the world and deal with it' (p. 31). Cole (1996) also links the definition of schemas[35] to experience, arguing that human experience is mediated by cognitive schemas which channel thinking by structuring the selection, retention and use of information.

Schema theory, which is now used more commonly in examining how people learn to read, is useful in explaining the reasons why students may fail to learn from what is being taught to them. The term 'schema', used by Kant in 1781, was used by Piaget as the basis for his theory of the personal construction of knowledge. It is also used in information processing models of learning to explain how information is organised in the brain (Smith, 1992).

Piaget (1959) argued that:

> objects are recognised and perceived by us, not because we have analyzed them and seen them in detail, but because of 'general forms' which are as much constructed by ourselves as given by the elements of the perceived object, and may be called the schema or the *gestaltqualität* of these objects. (p. 131)

Like Piaget, Gagné, Briggs and Wager (1992) also believe that schemas control perception:

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[35] Note: the plural of schema is variously given as schemata, schemes and schemas.

[A]n individual sees an event or stimulus only in reference to a schema. The schema directs attention to relevant stimuli (or perhaps more accurately, makes a stimulus relevant); and in conjunction with existing knowledge, it gives meaning to an event. This view implies that learning is a highly personal act. What the instructor should realize is that individuals do possess different knowledge and process schemas. Therefore, what may be obvious to most students may not make sense at all to another. (p. 107)

Schema theory states that new knowledge is built on 'old' or existing information and shares this view with the constructivist model, as well as theories from cognitive psychology. Bruner (1972) also believed that new knowledge is built on old knowledge by 'assigning' new knowledge to existing categories. In order for new information to be understood, it therefore has to 'hook into' existing knowledge. This theory also shares with more recent theories from the area of neuroscience (see Bransford et al., 1999) the notion that learning is driven by experiences, and is understood through previous experiences, by activating relevant schemas in their mind. 'Incoming information that fits an existing schema is more easily learned and retained, because it becomes meaningful by virtue of that fit.' (Biggs & Moore, 1993, p. 224)

Piaget believed that because individuals actively construct their own knowledge through interaction with their environment, individuals construct different knowledge from the same information, a useful notion when examining or attempting to explain the learning outcomes of different groups of learners, 'because no two people have had identical experiences, each person constructs a more-or-less idiosyncratic explanatory system; a unique map of the topography that we call reality' (Candy, 1991, pp. 251-252). 'Every individual brings his or her own pre-existing schema to each different learning experience because knowing is based on previously constructed knowledge.' (Ernest, 1994, p. 2) Piaget argued that an individual will fail to learn if the new learning situation does not fit the individual's existing schemas. '[A]daptation only exists if there is coherence, hence assimilation.' (1952, p.7)

In a similar vein, Bilbow (1989) argues that international students may not possess existing schemas or background knowledge required to understand learning in a foreign cultural environment. He states that in these cases, students *cannot* (rather than fail to) understand new information since the curriculum does not facilitate this. Edwards (2001) and Howard (1987) argue that teachers must help learners build schemas and make connections between ideas. They need to activate prior knowledge for students and recognise that schemas change and grow as new information is gained.

For effective communication to occur, participants need to share some background knowledge. Because communication in teaching is often one-way (in lectures, for example), there are few opportunities for teachers to get feedback about what they need to make explicit to students who may not share their background knowledge or schemas. What are the implications then for students who come from vastly different cultural or social backgrounds and may have vastly different schemas from their teachers? Are schemas culture-specific?

Cole (1996) argues that schemas embody meaning systems of cultural groups, representing the idea of internal notions of culture as meanings. Howard (1987) and Jannuzi (1997) argue that because people from different cultures inhabit different environments and have different experiences, they may pay attention to different features or aspects, or see things in very different ways. Their schemas may be fundamentally different from those of people from other cultural backgrounds and this may result in a lack of understanding or misunderstanding.

University environments embody powerful academic-specific discourses that may inhibit learning for students outside of that discourse, but also at a much deeper level, it could be seen that the very schemas that lecturers may be relying upon to communicate meaning to their students may be different from those of some students, thereby providing no way for students to make connections with what they already know to build new learning structures.

Theories about the origins of different schemas bring us to consider theories about the nature of the social or cultural environment within which learning has previously, or is currently, taking place and the context within which the individual learner is situated – that is, to look at sociocultural theories of learning.

The role of the individual and their social context

Much of the literature on achievement in learning has traditionally problematised the student, looking at individual characteristics of learners that may or may not produce good learning outcomes. There has been much less focus on the problematic aspects of teaching or teachers. Biggs (1999), Bilbow (1987) and Cannon and Newble (2000) argue that educationalists take a traditional 'external' view of the student, where failure is seen as the result of low ability or lack of organisation or application, rather than as a possible consequence of poor or problematic teaching.

Yet the majority of learning theories, especially social constructivist and sociocultural theories, focus upon the relational roles of teachers and learners in the learning process. These theories view learning as being constructed through interactions with others, so that what teachers do (or don't do) clearly has a powerful impact on the learning outcomes of their students.

Constructivist (and its several forms – individual, social, cognitive and postmodern), sociohistorical, and sociocultural theories of learning all examine the roles and relationships between the individual learner and their context, but place different emphases on the importance of the individual learner versus the learning context.

Piaget's (1959, 1972) work on child learning provided the foundation for the constructivist view of learning which sees students as actively constructing their own knowledge rather than passively receiving it from the outside world, and argues that 'knowing is active, that it is individual and personal, and that it is

based on previously constructed knowledge' (Ernest, 1994, p. 2). The mind of the student mediates input from the outside world to determine what the student will learn. Constructivists have long recognised that learners can make connections with knowledge in a variety of ways and that there are multiple representations of knowledge (Kafai & Resnick, 1996) and that learning is highly personalised (Malderez & Bodóczky, 1999).

Many theorists have questioned elements of Piaget's work, especially regarding the universality of his findings to different, especially different cultural, groups. Theorists in the disability area have also been critical of the assumption that Piaget's theories, based upon able-bodied children, will apply to children with disabilities, whose cognitive and emotional growth may differ according to the ways that they need to interact with others (Crewe & Zola, 1983).

Piaget has also been criticised for neglecting the social context of the learner, an area where the Vygotskian school of thought has become prominent in the development of the social constructivist, sociohistorical and later sociocultural theories. Renshaw (1992), for example, argues that the Piagetian view does not recognise the importance of social communication for individual and shared understandings:

> [T]he constructivists painted the learner in close-up as a solo-player, a lone scientist, a solitary observer, a meaning-maker in a vacuum. This picture is distorted because the individual is removed from the fabric of social relationships from which individual understanding emerges. (p. 91)

Even theories of learning that take a wholly social focus, such as situated learning theory, recognise the importance of individuals being able to participate in learning effectively (Lave & Wenger, 1999). This view recognises the multiplicity of learning by individuals and learning relationships and their interconnectedness with the environment within which the learning is taking place. 'We assume that members [of communities of practice] have different

interests, make diverse contributions to activity and hold varied viewpoints' (Lave & Wenger, 1999, p. 25). Further, Lave and Wenger (1999) recognise that learners who are marginalised within specific communities of practice will not be able to learn effectively, and that there will be 'mismatches'.

Marginalisation and the role of inherited knowledge and learning

By contrast, Vygotsky's sociohistoric theory of learning (which now tends to be labelled sociocultural and placed within this broader school) regards learning as a shared 'understanding between minds' (Vygotsky, 1962, p. 6), a 'sharing of culture' (Renshaw, 1992). It is a result of the inheritance of learning by previous generations, but also an active process. Vygotsky's aim was to explain how our specifically human capacities to use language, to think, remember, and solve problems evolve from the social and historical conditions of human existence (Renshaw, 1992).

Vygotsky (1962) and Bruner (1972) recognised the role of the social context of the learner in influencing and driving learning. Vygotsky (1962) argued that through adult, or expert, assistance, a child or novice's learning can be extended into a 'zone of proximal development' or growth zone. Glassman (2001) describes the teacher, in this view of learning, as a 'social interlocutor' who 'stands as a mediator between tools developed through social history and individual human inquiry' to 'guide the thinking of the neophyte' (p. 4). Vygotsky's claim that learning is a cultural and communal activity, according to Renshaw (1992), 'goes to the heart of the sociocultural perspective – namely, that culture and the communal context of socialisation are not overlays on a basic substrata of individual development (as Piaget would claim), but are constitutive elements of individual development' (Renshaw, 1992, p. 92). Sociocultural conditions are said to determine thinking and its development (Moll & Whitmore, 1993).

This theory of learning suggests that learners who are not part of a mainstream culture within a learning environment, may experience difficulties in learning or a lack of learning. They may feel excluded and marginalised by the learning process itself, since they cannot fully participate or take advantage of the social processes involved in the learning environment, as they possess different 'constitutive elements' (Renshaw, 1992).

Bruner (1972) originally tended more towards the role of the individual and was described as having a 'personal constructivist' view of learning but later came to recognise the role of the social and cultural contexts of the learner. 'I have come increasingly to recognise that most learning in most settings is a communal activity, a sharing of the culture.' (Bruner, 1986, p. 127) He also recognised that culture not only influences what is taught, but thinking itself, arguing that 'cultural variation yields variation in modes of thought' (p. 21).

Effects of the personal and the social - common ground

Although there are similarities in the views of scholars in these two broad schools of thought, they differ in their emphasis on the importance of the role of either the individual learner or the social context within which the learning takes place. Some theorists argue however that both Piaget and Vygotsky have to some extent been misrepresented in the apparent polarity of their views, in fact each recognised the importance of both the individual and the learning context (Hatano, 1993; Cole & Wertsch, 2001).

Some have argued (Cole & Wertsch, 2001; Kolb, 1984; Hatano, 1993) that Piagetian and Vygotskian theories have been interpreted too narrowly. For example:

> [F]or Piaget, individual children construct knowledge through their actions on the world: to understand is to invent. By contrast, the Vygotskian claim is said to be that understanding is social in origin. There are (at least) two difficulties with this story. First of all, in principle,

> Piaget did not deny the co-equal role of the social world in the construction of knowledge…Second, Vygotsky, contrary to another stereotype, insisted on the centrality of the active construction of knowledge. (Cole & Wertsch, 2001)

Goodnow (1993) argues that the two lines of thought are complementary, with one emphasising the individual as actively constructing schemas and meanings, and the other emphasising social or guided instruction, and these two lines of research should be used together to strengthen each other.

A close reading of Piaget's and Vygotsky's works reveals that that there is much in common in their views on learning and what both of the Piagetian and Vygotskian schools of thought have in common is the role of experiences as the source of and catalyst for learning. The apparently different foci of the two paradigms are, in reality, highly interactive and interdependent, and attempts to draw out contrasting perspectives could appear to be merely an academic artifice.

The role of culture in mediating learning

Theorists in the social constructivist or the sociocultural traditions are connected by a strong view of the importance of the social context of the learner for the outcomes of learning, but they vary according to where they place relative importance along the continuum between learner and context. Even within social constructivism, there is a continuum of thought about the relative importance of the social, with positions such as 'situated learning' (see Lave & Wenger, 1991, 1999) having a wholly social focus, and Bandura's (1997) social learning theory emphasising the power of 'socially mediated experience' (p. vii).

These views tend to assume that individuals and society exist in a relatively harmonious or homogeneous situation and seldom discuss the implications of where these might be mismatched. What occurs for individuals if the sociocultural

context within which they are attempting to learn is not aligned with their previous experiences or contexts?

Renshaw (1999) recognises this dilemma in his discussion of communities of learners, arguing that these can create tensions for those who are marginalised or excluded from membership of the learning community:

> Another dilemma that arises from 'community' is the benign cooperative tone that is conveyed about the process of learning. It is necessary to consider issues of power, the politics of gaining entry into communities, and the subtle and explicit ways that membership might be restricted. (p. 3)

Marginalisation, it is argued, may also result in a conscious or unconscious resistance to learning:

> [E]ducationally significant human characteristics do not involve abstract bearers of cognitive structures but real people who develop a variety of interpersonal relationships with one another in the course of their shared activity in a given institutional context…For example, appropriating the speech or actions of another person requires a degree of identification with that person and the cultural community he or she represents. Educational failure, in this perspective, can represent an unwillingness to subordinate one's own voice to that of another rather than an inability to learn. (Foreman et al., 1993, p. 6)

Post-Vygotskians argue that in discussion of the agency of the individual versus social context, a major *mediating* influence on learning has been neglected, that of culture (Cole & Wertsch, 2001). Vygotsky (1962, 1978) recognised the primary role of culture, that human activities and interactions take place within and are shaped by cultural settings, and cannot be understood in isolation from these cultural contexts. Vygotsky 'posits culture as the raw material for thinking' (Glassman, 2001, p. 3).

Post-Vygotskians argue that constructivism and social constructivism focus too narrowly on the instructor. '[T]he zone of proximal development is an

adultocentric view of the child's behaviour…too exclusively concerned with what is being done by the dispensers of knowledge.' (Litowitz, 1990, p. 280)

Cole and Wertsch (2001) agree that there is both an active learner and an active environment, but argue that culture is a third force at play, the 'accumulated products of prior generations, culture, the medium with which the two active parties to development interact' (p. 1).

The post-Vygotskian debate about the role of culture has particular relevance in understanding how students from different cultural backgrounds (using culture here in its broader sense to include all those outside mainstream academic culture) can experience learning differently. Some theorists have drawn attention to the cultural bias that exists in most learning theories (Goodnow, 1993; Rogoff, Mosier, Mistry & Göncü, 1993).

Rogoff, Mosier, Mistry and Göncü (1993) criticise the Vygotskians for making assumptions about the type of learning that is desirable:

> This unidirectional focus privileging academic, literate approaches - common to Vygotskian as well as to other major developmental theories - must be questioned if we are to understand the cultural context of development, as the goals of literacy and academic discourse are not universal. (p. 233)

Dewey (1938) and Vygotsky (1962) recognised that all experience and learning is mediated through culture and that cultural 'artifacts' such as language, symbol systems, and schemas transform mental functioning in fundamental ways. According to Crotty (1998):

> We are all born into a world of meaning. We enter a social milieu in which a 'system of intelligibility' prevails. We inherit a 'system of significant symbols'. For each of us, when we first see the world in meaningful fashion, we are inevitably viewing it through lens bestowed upon us by our culture. (p. 54)

If people do not possess this heritage, or possess an incomplete or different form from others, then learning in a new context or situation may be impaired, or may have different outcomes from those assumed by the teacher to be likely to occur or desirable. They may not be able to fully participate in or benefit from group learning, as they may feel marginalised by their different experiences and perspectives. How much is the zone of proximal development, for example, impaired if the individual and the instructor do not match; where social or cultural origins or socioeconomic backgrounds differ?[36]

Wertsch, Tulviste and Hagstrom (1993) argue that intelligence and cognition are themselves social and cultural constructs and social and cultural factors not only mediate learning but also act to shape it. They argue that learning or thinking is shaped by the external sociocultural factors within which the individual acts, and that this explains the heterogeneity of thinking of individuals.

Whose knowledge is it anyway?

An interesting offshoot to the area of constructivism is radical constructivism (von Glasersfeld, 1991), which while broadly sharing a view of the process of knowledge acquisition, raises questions about the nature of the knowledge which is being acquired: Connell's (1993) 'what' of education. Questions of epistemology become relevant especially when students come from academic or cultural traditions with different views or bodies of knowledge.

If we accept the constructivist view of learning as an active construction of knowledge, of what then is it a construction? Are students meant to be constructing what teachers see as the 'right' knowledge or do teachers hold more postmodern views of the nature of knowledge and truth? Does what students learn extend and enrich their life worlds, or act to reject, ignore or denigrate their experiences? Candy (1991) argues that those who advocate particular approaches to teaching or learning rarely articulate their view about what

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[36] See, for example, Martinez (1994).

constitutes valid knowledge. Radical constructivism is useful in examining these questions. This theory also uses the concept of schemas and focuses upon the importance of experiences and the life worlds of the cognising subject (the learner). According to von Glasersfeld (1991), 'Piaget maintained fifty years ago, *knowledge serves* to *organize experience*, not to depict or represent an experience-independent reality' (p. xix).

Radical constructivism shares with other forms of constructivism, especially social constructivism, the view that all knowing is problematic and makes 'no presupposition about the existence of the world beyond the subjective realm of experience. The epistemology is wholeheartedly fallibilist, sceptical and anti-objective…there is no ultimate, true knowledge, possible about the state of the world' (Ernest, 1993, p. 7). This view therefore accommodates a diversity of worldviews, consistent with an approach in pedagogy that recognises and values different worldviews existing within students, especially those from diverse backgrounds.

This theory also accommodates views about individual characteristics of learners, particularly where there is some element of dissonance or mismatch of the individual and their context (either because they have different prior experiences or because they are experiencing the context in a different way). It recognises that learning occurs within the individual, not always in tandem with the social or cultural milieu, but sometimes regardless or even in spite of, their present learning environment. It recognises that students may be working from different epistemologies.

Social and cultural factors are therefore, in this view, more likely to influence learning when they are well matched to the individual circumstances of the learner. Ernest (1993) points out that this 'matching' is important for communication and for how individuals understand themselves:

> The account of the cognizing subject emphasizes its individuality, its separateness, and its primarily cognitive representations of its experiences. Its representations of the world and of other human beings are personal and idiosyncratic. Indeed, the construal of other persons is driven by whatever representations best fit the cognizing subject's needs and purposes…But such a view makes it hard to establish a social basis for interpersonal communication, for shared feelings and concerns, let alone for shared values. (pp. 7-8)

The reported experiences of diverse groups of students show that they do experience these difficulties with interpersonal communication with teachers, and lack of shared feelings, concerns and values. Their experiences do not result in solipsism, as some critics of radical constructivism have claimed (although this may be an outcome), but can clearly result in feelings of isolation and marginalisation.

Effects of different background experiences and modes of experiencing

Much of the focus of the research projects was on the experiences of students, taking a phenomenological approach, using Kantian views of phenomena being the objects of perception or experience, that is, there was a focus on how experiences are perceived by individuals, on their 'lived experiences' (van Manen, 1990), their 'inner or psychological experiences', their 'life worlds' (Husserl, 1970). Why are 'experiences' (past and present) so important for understanding different learning outcomes?

Most theories of learning stress the importance of experiences, and prior experiences, as being the starting point for learning. Piaget (1952) believed that learning and even intelligence results from experiences, gained through the interaction of the learner and their environment, a view which has been reinforced through recent findings in the area of neuroscience (Bransford et al., 1999). For students who either experience a learning situation in a different way (what Husserl, 1970, would term as their 'inner experience'), for example, if a sensory or learning disability means that different sensorial stimuli are being utilised, or students who have had different previous experiences through different cultural

124

or social experiences, it is likely that knowledge is being built in different ways. The impact of this on learning may be more significant than teachers realise, and may result in students having to consciously deny and work against their own natural understandings and experiences.

Constructivist theorists certainly recognise that learning outcomes for individuals can be different from what the teacher intended. The importance of the initiating stimuli, or experiences, as the central drivers for learning, has been recognised by experiential learning theorists and neuroscientists, especially the importance of early experiences, for cognitive development (Bransford et al., 1999). This research has shown that learning produces physical changes in the structure of the brain; experiences not only produce learning, but they affect and alter the brain. According to neuroscientists, information enters the brain through the sensory register. If senses or sensory messages are impaired however (as in people with vision, auditory or learning impairments), does this have an impact on what happens in the brain? Recent neurological findings have shown that for people who are profoundly deaf, for example, areas of the brain develop differently (Bransford et al., 1999) providing physiological evidence that cognition operates differently for some groups of people.

Dewey (1938) believed that there is an 'organic connection' between education and personal experience (p. 25) and that for effective learning to occur, the subject matter and materials used should fall within the 'life-experience' of the learner (p. 73). Glassman (2001) equates Dewey's view of experience with Vygotsky's conception of culture. In his experiential theory of learning, Kolb (1984) argues for the primary role of personal experience and defines learning as 'the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience' (Kolb, 1984, p.38). Using this definition, learning cannot occur unless it can be related to, and transform, previous experience.

Kolb (1984) argues that it was Vygotsky who first articulated the primary role of experience in driving learning and human development, and that this was long ignored by cognitive psychologists:

> In the overeager embrace of the rational, scientific, and technological, our concept of the learning process itself was distorted first by relationalism and later behaviourism. We lost touch with our own experience as the source of personal learning and development and, in the process, lost that experiential centredness to counterbalance the loss of 'scientific' centredness that has been progressively slipping away since Copernicus. (p. 2)

What then are the consequences when the learning or instruction that is occurring seems at odds with the student's experiences, or fails to make connections with it? What happens for individual students if the practices of the lecture theatre or tutorial room are alien to the way they live their lives, and the ways that they have been used to interacting with others? How do theories of learning that consider the role of experience help to explain these consequences? Heath (1983) raises this in her study of the children of working class children in two southern American communities, describing how they came into contact with the 'town talk' of the middle class teachers, and how this at least initially acted to alienate them from their experiences of education.

Even worse, students have reported how their experiences can be denied by academics who believe that they know more than their students through their knowledge from academic study of a particular area (Delpit, 1988, 1995). One Aboriginal student recounted (in a related research project in the portfolio, McLean, Hartley, Ryan, Macdonald & McDonald, 1999) how she felt that a non-Aboriginal lecturer in a unit on Australian Aboriginal studies demeaned her contributions on the subject. "What do they know about how we live?" she asked, "They have no idea but they try to tell us." Conversely, membership of a particular group may not mean that students will necessarily have the characteristics most commonly associated with that group. Even within identifiable groups there will be a diversity of experiences and characteristics.

Kolb (1984) believes that using methods of teaching that focus on learning through and from experiences can help students to use their own experiences to not only assist their own learning processes, but also to challenge dominant academic cultures. He believes that experiential learning can 'promote access to and influence on the dominant technological/symbolic culture for those who have previously been excluded' (p. 18).

Therefore, theories that help to explain the role of experience in learning as a source of the problems for students from diverse backgrounds in terms of hindering their learning in foreign academic cultures, can also provide an answer to this dilemma by explaining how facilitating students being able to use their own knowledge and experience can act as the basis for their learning. Freire's work with illiterate peasants in Brazil and Chile shows how effective teaching and learning can be when learners' own experiences and backgrounds are used to drive learning. Freire (1970) argued that when teachers talk about topics that are 'completely alien to the existential experience of the students', their teaching becomes 'hollow, alienated and alienating verbosity' (p. 45).

Kolb (1984) argues that the need to make connections with students' previous experiences has educational implications:

> The fact that learning is a continuous process grounded in experience has important educational implications. Put simply, it implies that all learning is *re*learning. How easy and tempting it is in designing a course to think of the learner's mind as being as blank as the paper in which we scratch our outline. (p. 28)

Brookfield (1998) reminds us that it is not possible to fully understand students' experiences. 'We can listen to students' words, but we can never know exactly the complex flow of thoughts, feelings, and impulses that comprise their experiences.' (p. 21)

According to von Glasersfeld (1991) and Usher (1993), teachers also operate from their experiences, and can only understand their students' experiences through their own:

> When we interpret 'our' experience, we do so from a particular context or standpoint. The context is both a material and linguistic location, a bank of cultural significations, deposits of already existing meanings including the meanings of one's own experiential history. (Usher, 1993, p. 170)

Boud, Cohen and Walker (1993) argue that there is a dearth of research into the role of experience in learning, but that experience is the very nucleus of learning:

> Experience cannot be bypassed; it is the central consideration of all learning. Learning builds on and flows from experience; no matter what external prompts to learning there might be – teachers, materials, interesting opportunities – learning can only occur if the experience of the learner is engaged, at least at some level. (p. 8)

Boud, Cohen and Walker (1993) argue that the major influence on how learners construct their experience is the learner's 'personal foundation of experience' (p. 11). Personal histories could include such factors as disability, socio-economic status and family background and cultural factors could include ethnic background or geographic location (i.e. rural/regional/urban) and exist as 'complex layers' (Boud, Cohen and Walker, 1993) that may produce multiple complexities[37].

Usher and Edwards (1994) however believe that theories of experiential learning are predicated on a liberal humanist paradigm, and do not take full account of the ways that individuals are 'constructed as pre-social or asocial'. They argue that individuals are part of contexts where 'there are already meanings, where signifying systems already exist…the meanings through which experience is interpreted, being so dependent on signifying structures and processes, thus

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[37] See, for example, the related research project, *Take your place* (Young & Ryan, 1998), which looked at rurality, low socio-economic status and disability.

have a fluidity which leaves experience constantly open to reassessment' (p. 187). This view adds further force to the argument that where individuals come from outside familiar contexts or constructions, such as those who are not from societies with liberal humanist traditions, even an experiential view of learning can be problematic unless it fully accepts different conceptualisations of learners, as possibly coming from different pre-social or asocial constructs or contexts.

The impacts of marginalisation on identity

Neo-Vygotskians share with other theoretical viewpoints an emphasis on the importance of identity (for example, poststructuralist and postcolonial views[38] about the need to re-theorise identity in terms of viewing it as multiple subjectivities) and its impact on learning. If learners do not feel a sense of identity with their learning context, what implications does this have for their learning as well as how they are viewed by others within that context? Both theories that emphasis the social aspects of learning, and the cultural, fail to look at the impacts on individuals of mismatches in their learning environment.

Litowitz (1993) discusses the importance of 'identification' that a learner feels with other people in influencing when learning takes place, and that feeling a sense of identity, or a wish to identify with, others may facilitate learning. She believes that teachers like to hold a 'fantasy' that learning is occurring when the learner is becoming like them. In assessing students, lecturers may reward something they regard as having academic ability or value because it may be similar to their own abilities or style. They may hold this same 'fantasy' or may be subconsciously aware that students hold the same kinds of 'cultural capital' that they hold. McLaren (1995) argues that many teachers believe that merely exposing students to what they regard as a 'correct' set of theories prevents students from being able to theorise for themselves. Worse still, students may consciously conform to what they perceive to be the expectations of teachers, even if they are

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[38] For a more detailed discussion of this view, see Comber, 1997.

in opposition to what they themselves believe, in order to be 'successful'. Teachers may regard this as evidence of desirable change, of students becoming 'like us'. Litowitz (1993) argues that teachers need to be aware of when this 'fantasy' about learners does not exist, when the learner is not like them, and who they are 'asking the learner to become' (p. 191).

Teachers need to be aware of the moral/change dimension and potential of education. For whom and in whose interests does this change in learners act to serve? Teachers, of course, like everyone else, may not be aware of the agency of their own cultural conditioning, or 'mental programming' (Hofstede, 1991). As Candy (1989) explains, people 'do not live in worlds entirely of their own devising' and are 'subject to influences and pressures that shape their attitudes and perceptions and yet of which they are often unaware' (p. 2). Ellsworth (1997) argues that teaching is always about 'shaping, anticipating, meeting or changing who a student thinks she is. And this is done in relation to gender, race, sexuality, social status, ability, religion, ethnicity, and all those other differences' (p. 7).

The concern about loss of identity is reminiscent of bell hooks's[39] (1994) account of her experiences in moving from a segregated school in America to a racially integrated one. She described how she felt the loss of community and belonging when she moved to an integrated school where black students then became a minority group. This may also be experienced by other groups who move from one educational setting to another and thereby become marginalised, not because of their own background or experiences, but by being subsumed into a larger group. For example, students with disabilities moving into mainstream educational settings, rural students moving to larger urban campuses, non-English speaking students moving into English speaking educational environments, or international students moving to a different country, may all have similar feelings of loss of identity and belonging; a loss of their own culture. Gee (2001) describes how hegemony works to ascribe identities to individuals

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[39] Note: This non-capitalisation is bell hooks's preference.

and argues that students become a different 'kind of person' when they are minoritised or marginalised.

The effects of marginalisation may cause students to deny their own identities, due to 'internalised oppression' (Freire, 1970) or 'cognitive coercion' (Greene, 1994). 'Students from diverse ethnic backgrounds have different experiences, assumptions and understandings. They may also deny their identities and values in order to achieve, especially if the curriculum is Eurocentric.' (Ashcroft, et al., 1996, p. 6)

> The denial of cultural difference compounds the problem of alienation and estrangement experienced by many young people: either it ghettoizes them within their own contexts of disadvantage or else it persuades them to reject their cultural origins altogether. In either case it fails them (although traditionally disadvantaged students who are persuaded to reject their own cultural origins are numbered among the education system's successes). (Nixon, Martin, McKeown and Ranson, 1990, p. 123)

Although the existence of 'minority groups' within a broader student population may benefit the larger, dominant group by broadening their perspectives and experiences, it may prove negative for members of the minority group itself. They may no longer feel the security and sense of identity and common purpose that a cohesive group can feel, but may move to a position of 'difference' or marginality – becoming someone else's 'other'.

Silent voices: The role of language and 'voice'

What are the implications for learning where language is different or suppressed, if students feel silenced or not listened to? "We speak but they don't listen" a student in one of the research projects said. Vygotsky (1962) believed that language is the 'tools for thinking', we speak in order to think, therefore if you can't speak or express yourself, will this inhibit learning?

Vygotsky (1962) wrote that without language, sharing of meaning, or 'understanding between minds' (p. 6) is not possible. He saw language as the 'conveying of experience and thought' to others (p. 6). For learners who cannot get full access to the language of the instructional situation (for example, international students, students with sensory impairments, or students from different socioeconomic, cultural or geographical backgrounds), their learning and thinking may be hindered by their lack of access to these thinking 'tools'. Vygotsky also pointed to the relationship between affect and intellect – the impact that emotions and feelings can have on learning and argued that thought processes cannot be separated from 'personal needs and interests, the inclinations and impulses' (p. 8) of the learner. Exclusion or marginalisation may produce negative emotional responses for students thereby potentially compounding a failure to learn. Vygotsky (1962) talked about 'inner speech' – 'thinking in pure meanings' (p. 149) - we speak to ourselves in order to think. If this is occurring in students in another language from the language of instruction (for example, for international students, non-English speaking background students, deaf students, or those from vastly different vernacular language backgrounds), it may provide further complications for thinking and learning. Vygotsky would also not have been aware that this 'inner speech' does not exist for all people. People with certain types of learning disabilities, for example, talk of having a 'silent brain', and they can experience profound difficulties understanding and communicating with others.

Luria (Luria & Yudovich, 1971) believed that learning, and even thinking, is not possible without speech, and that language is the means by which we represent our experiences of the world to ourselves. He focused on the need for experiences to be shared in order to facilitate communication, and thereby learning. Bourdieu (1984) and Bernstein (1986) argue that students need to be able to use linguistic forms that reflect their everyday experiences in order to develop learning relationships. There is an extensive theoretical literature on the role of language in learning and its impacts on promoting or inhibiting learning (Bernstein, 1975, 1986; Cazden, 1986; Heath, 1983; Lemke, 1989; Litowitz,

1993; Renshaw, 1992) and Foucault (1979) has written on the crucial role that language plays in establishing power relationships within institutions.

Renshaw (1993) refers to the 'privileged voice' which can act to include or exclude people. 'In order to be a member of a community, and gain status and influence, one needs to speak in ways that are accepted and valued by the community.' (p. 3) Language can be used as a 'vehicle for identifying, manipulating and changing power relations between people' (Corson, 1998, p. 5). This acts to determine who can speak and who becomes silenced and marginalised (Delpit, 1988, 1995; Foucault, 1980; Freire, 1996; Giroux, 1992; Rich, 1986; Hellmundt & Fox, 2001; hooks, 1994; Webb, 1997). Bakhtin (1981) was concerned with the suppression of 'voice', where groups being studied for research purposes are made 'voiceless', such as minority groups who are 'silenced' by their lack of access to privileged positions. Similarly, Yeatman (1993) refers to the 'appropriation of the contestatory and emancipatory voice by the custodian subject voice' (p. 235).

McLean (1992) and Heath (1983) see learning itself as the sharing of language between teachers and learners. 'A powerful way to think of learning is as the emergence of a voice or language which is shared between the teacher and the learners' (McLean, 1992, p. 33). McLean (1992) argues that teachers need to be aware of this and modify their own language. 'A common language can only emerge if both sides modify their own language to take account of the perspectives of others' (p. 35). Heath (1983) described how two very different communities came to use language, and how their teachers 'learned to understand their ways and bring these ways into the classroom' (p. 11).

Institutional 'discourses' may also act to include or exclude and prevent a sharing of language (Gee, 1996; McCann, 1997). According to McLean (1992), in institutional settings, 'behaviour and language take specific forms which we may call a discourse' (p. 4). Gee (1996) defines discourses as 'much more than language', they are 'ways of behaving, interacting, valuing, thinking, speaking,

and often reading and writing' by specific groups of people (p. viii). Discourses[40] are ways of being 'people like us…ways of being in the world' (p. viii). Gee (1996) argues that they also act to exclude, and create conflicts, treating those outside the discourse as 'deviant' and 'non-standard' (p. viii). Bourdieu (1976) referred to university language as 'the consecrated vehicle of a consecrated culture'. He pointed to implications of the gap which occurs in language used by staff and students from different social classes.

What impacts do alien, unfamiliar discourses have on students from diverse backgrounds? Cazden (1993) quotes a Native Alaskan student on her difficulty using language that was outside of her previous experience:

> As I began work on this assignment, I thought of the name of the course and thought I had to use the word "discourse". The word felt like an intruder in my mind displacing the word "talk". I could not organize my thought around it. It was like a pebble thrown into a still pond disturbing the smooth water. It makes all the other words in my mind out of sync. When I realized that I was using too much time agonizing over how to write the paper, I sat down and tried to analyze my problem. I realized that in time I will own the word and feel comfortable using it, but until that time my own words were legitimate. Contrary to some views that exposure to the dominant culture gives one an advantage in learning, in my opinion it is the ownership of words that gives one confidence. I must want the word, enjoy the word and use the word to own it. When the new word becomes synonymous in my head as well as externally, then I can think with it. I laugh now at my discovery but realize that without it, I would still be inhibited about my writing. (p. 197)

This student couldn't 'think' with this word. Many students interviewed in the research projects, especially international students, felt the need to learn the language of Western academia, but were also aware that it was foreign to them, and spoke about their discomfort using it. Cazden (1993) also quotes a Black female student reflecting the impacts that this dissonance and discomfort can have:

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[40] Gee (2001) uses capital "d" "Discourse" to refer to 'certain kinds of people' (p. 110), as distinct from "discourse" with a lower-case "d" as 'connected stretches of talk or writing' (p. 110).

Although as a beginning student writer I had a fairly good grasp of ordinary spoken English …When I came face to face with the demands of academic writing, I grew increasingly self-conscious, constantly aware of my status as a black and a speaker of one of the many black English vernaculars – a traditional outsider. For the first time, I experienced my sense of doubleness as something menacing, a built-in enemy. Whenever I turned inward for salvation, the balm so available in my childhood, I found instead this new fragmentation which spoke to me in many voices. It was the voice of my desire to prosper, but at the same time it spoke of what I had relinquished and could not regain: a safe way of being, a state of powerlessness which exempted me from responsibility for who I was and might be. To recover balance, I had to take on the language of the academy, the language of 'others'. (p. 209)

The impacts on students of operating in alien learning environments in terms of their identities can be profound. Of course, fundamental change within the learner can be a desired outcome of educational experiences but may present problems in causing such a level of change that the learner can no longer identify with their previous experiences or backgrounds. Many international students interviewed for the research projects recounted how much they knew that they had changed and were anxious about how they could fit back in to their former lives. One lecturer in northern Britain recounted the story of a female Muslim student from the Middle East who had so changed in terms of even her physical appearance that she was afraid to return home for fear of persecution.

New solutions for new conditions

This chapter has examined and described some of the main features of the theories of learning that have influenced this study. Although these various theories informed the initial framework for the study in terms of providing some understanding of the effects that marginalisation can have on learning, as the study progressed, it became clear that they did not provide an adequate or full explanation of what students were reporting and that new conditions, contexts and questions have arisen that perhaps require new theories and discussion. It also became clear that conventional theories of learning themselves have perhaps acted to exclude some from the learning process, by assuming a

homogeneity of learners and not addressing questions of mismatches of individuals and environments, perhaps because they were not conceptualised in times of significant and increasing diversity of student populations.

Where many of the theories of learning intersect however is where they focus on the importance for learning of personal experience or histories. Sociocultural theories of learning, with their focus on the cultural context (culture in its broadest sense) or background of the learner, perhaps best explain the reasons why students from different groups report feelings of exclusion, alienation, and failure to learn, where context and the individual involve some degree of mismatch or dissonance, although they do not provide a full explanation, and can tend to assume absolutist views of learners.

Such theories help to explain differences for whole groups but the literatures on the role of experience and language in learning show that there can be major differences, even within fairly homogeneous groups of learners, for individuals in a range of ways[41]. This brings this reconceptualisation of the original theoretical framework of this study back full circle to the individual (where Piaget began), to a focus upon the individual construction of knowledge and learning. It also points to the need for a deeper understanding of the complexities and factors influencing the learning of individuals. So although these various learning theories originally preceding the conceptualisation of the study provide some explanation for the experiences of diverse individuals, they clearly do not explicitly address this issue as a core feature.

Do current theories of learning adequately encompass current social and cultural conditions in education? Postmodern work in the area of learning has rejected the idea of 'grand explanations', 'social absolutist explanations or theories for social conditions' (Lyotard, 1984) to look more closely at factors within individual contexts, as well as the contemporary conditions present in learning

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[41] See also the discussion in the Chapter 2 on the literature on individuals' approaches to learning and learning styles.

environments[42]. Biggs (1999), for example, argues that learning theorists over the whole of the last century were more concerned with developing 'the one grand theory of learning' (p. 59) than with the contexts within which learners learn, and the impacts of those on individuals.

Kapitzke et al. (2000) believe that educationalists should take into account current social, cultural and material conditions in terms of their theories and practices. Rarer than work which calls for an examination of specific learning contexts is work that looks at the implications for learning of where social and cultural experiences and expectations of learners and their contemporary learning environments do not match. The area of learning theory does not appear to have considered the individual differences that students bring to the learning process in terms of their previous experiences to the same extent that, for example, the critical literacy area has examined how differences in social class, gender, and cultural positions influence the ways that students approach texts and make meaning from them (Gee, 1996; Luke, 1995), and few recognise that student differences affect ways of thinking and learning. They rarely consider that precursors for thinking and learning may be grounded in different experiences, epistemologies and worldviews.

Do current learning theories adequately embrace postmodern theories of knowledge? Kapitzke et al. (2000) argue that the postmodern condition of knowledge 'rejects absolute and totalising theories as explanatory frameworks for social conditions and formations' (p. viii). Most current learning theories tend to assume absolutist and homogeneous views of learners, assuming especially that their educational experiences have been embedded within Western neo-liberal academic traditions. Delpit (1988, 1995) for example argues that constructivist views of learning are based on Western, liberal middle-class norms of interaction. In employing the postmodern concepts of 'difference and dispersion', Kapitzke et al. (2000) believe that 'the only certainty for teachers and researchers of teaching and learning is uncertainty and complexity' (p. vii). They believe that

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[42] See Chapter 2 for further discussion of this point.

postmodernism has opened up debate for other voices, not just the previously accepted 'normative speaking position' of white, middle class, Western males, but the inclusion of 'the other' and 'the radically different' (p. viii). They further believe that market forces will push universities to cater for more diverse and complex learning populations.

Given the extensive accepted impacts that personal histories, experiences and characteristics can have on individual learning, how can theories of learning move beyond conceptualisations that tend to make unproblematic and benign assumptions about the process of learning, even for individuals within fairly homogeneous groups? How can there be a move towards developing a theory of learning that places individual differences at its core? The next chapter posits such a theory, a 'universalist' theory or pedagogy, based on the differences that reside within all learners and all learning communities.

CHAPTER 7

Beyond 'differences': From exclusion to inclusion, towards a 'universalist' pedagogy

Recognising differences without attention to the core learning of students is inadequate. Making learning relevant without substance is antieducational.
(Gore, 2001, p. 132)

From 'excluded' to 'different': Pedagogies for 'difference'

Theorists moving beyond sociocultural views of learning, recognising that these theories do indeed tend to make assumptions about the homogeneity of learners, argue that theories of pedagogy should place heterogeneity of learners at the centre of theories of learning. More recent theorists recognise the possibilities for learning of diverse perspectives and experiences so that rather than difference and diversity being marginalised within learning environments, they are used as learning resources and experiences to drive learning for all learners within the learning environment (Cortaizzi & Jin, 1997; Dei et al., 2000; García & Baird, 2000; Glassman, 2001; Green 1998; Hellmundt, 2001; O'Neill, 1995; Preece, 1999; Ramsden, 1995; Shaddock, 1996).

Renshaw (1999) proposes this view:

> Green (1998) argued recently that the pedagogy of New Times should be a pedagogy *for* difference – not just the accommodation of student differences but the production of difference. At face value, this confronts and challenges sociocultural pedagogy where notions of community, intersubjectivity, and collaboration are important…Spaces need to be constructed…where students' concerns and their diverse linguistic and social practices can be expressed, not to naively celebrate expression for itself, but to provide the conditions for socially critical forms of discussion, reflection and action…we need a pedagogy *for* difference, so that when students enter [learning environments] they do not have to leave their experiences and concerns at the gate, and they become sufficiently

engaged, curious, and critical that they can appropriate powerful social discourses for their individual and collective purposes. (p. 5)

What Green (1998) and Renshaw (1999) are proposing is the creation of educational environments where students who are different or diverse are not expected to conform to mainstream conventions, but are welcomed for their differences, and seen as living resources to expand learning for everyone in order to learn more about the world. Ramsden (1995) concurs with this view:

> The most under-used resource in higher education is the students themselves. A great deal of research and development work on peer teaching has been done in Australia and elsewhere, and the conclusion is that students are more effective teachers than we are! (p. 6)

Aronowitz and Giroux (1991) have also called for a 'politics of difference' within pedagogy. They argue for a broadening of texts and perspectives in education, to give 'voice' to students' experiences and history, to those who have previously been 'silenced', such as through the use of texts outside the 'Eurocentric tradition'.

> This approach…should be seen as part of a broader attempt to develop pedagogically a politics of difference that articulates with issues of race, class, gender, ethnicity, and sexual preference from a position of empowerment rather than from a position of deficit and subordination. (p. 101)

Giroux (1992) points to the need to analyse student experiences as part of the 'broader politics of voice and difference' (p. 169).

Gunew (1993) argues that, 'The dismantling of hegemonic categories is facilitated by the proliferation of difference' (p. 1). 'The time has now come to seek out and celebrate those differences instead of having to argue for their very survival' (p. 6). McLaren (1995) calls for this pedagogy of difference to be grounded in the importance of 'the other'. McLaren (1995) and Gunew (1993)

believe that common ground needs to be found to link the notion of difference to struggles for social justice.

Comber (1997) however is critical of the impacts that 'discourses of difference' can have on students. According to Comber, 'difference' is sometimes used to imply 'deficit'. She identifies a pervasive deficit discourse by teachers in schools when talking about students who were living in poor socioeconomic circumstances. She analyses the increasing use by teachers of the term 'different', arguing that it may mask negative constructions of the student. She argues that moves towards poststructuralist 'discourses of difference' may take the focus in research away from issues of class and poverty. Comber (1997) discusses the 'naming dilemmas' of referring to groups of students and the difficulties of categorising students into sub-groups.

> Poststructuralist and postcolonial arguments for retheorising identity in terms of multiple subjectivities and hybridity contest essentialist representations of people as individuals, groups or populations, yet the vocabularies of educational research frequently function as though the dynamic and complex were static and simple. (p. 2)

Hargreaves (1999) argues that a focus upon 'difference' can result in cultural separatism, especially if teachers stereotype the needs of different cultural groups, and what is required instead is highly flexible pedagogy and curriculum that can accommodate and capitalise on student diversity (see also Dooley et al., 1997). Giroux (1992) also argues that theories of difference have been 'theoretically flawed and politically regressive' and have contributed to 'paralyzing forms of essentialism, ahistoricism, and a politics of separatism' (p. 169).

How can we move beyond discourses of deficit and difference, to focus on individuality, to make the social and cultural personal? How can we move beyond looking for 'difference' in the 'other' (Habermas, 1987) defined by and from within the dominant group, from external views of 'difference' which can result in 'exotic' views of cultural diversity (Dooley, Herschell & Singh, 1997; Shah, 2000)? What

are the important features of learning that need to guide the development of pedagogies that better meet the needs of not just 'diverse' but all students? A number of general principles can be synthesised from the analysis and interrogation of theories of learning in this study and from the findings of the research projects, and their juxtaposition against issues raised by critical educational theories, to guide this new pedagogy.

These are:

- Learning is personal, complex and subjective, and is driven by previous experiences;
- Experience determines thinking, learning and language;
- Learning is mediated by social and cultural contexts and language;
- The student is at the centre of learning and the curriculum;
- Teacher-directed learning can alienate and marginalise; and
- Students are heterogeneous, and their ontologies, epistemologies, values and experiences can be used to mediate new learning and new understandings.

Beyond 'differences': From 'different' to 'universalist'

Given the uncertainty of learning and heterogeneity of learners, is it possible to posit a broad theory of learning that embraces and extends our recognition of individual, social and cultural contexts and characteristics? Can we move beyond the 'recognition paradigm' (Taylor et al., 1997)? Can we move beyond pedagogies that make benign assumptions about the learning process and educational environments that seem more concerned with stability and harmony, with a preoccupation, overtly at least at the level of schools, but also at the level of universities in more subtle ways, with what I choose to call 'seat-based' learning? That is, preoccupations with ensuring compliance with written or unspoken rules of behaviour, and assumptions that if students are sitting quietly in their seats in classrooms or lecture theatres and looking at the teacher, then

learning must be occurring? How can we move to a theory that accounts for the entire spectrum of learners, a theory with universal application that accounts for complexity and heterogeneity of learners, and that moves beyond critique to a 'language of possibility' (McLaren 1995, p. 33)? I would argue that it is possible to use a 'language of possibility' to extend the theory of difference into what could be called a 'universalist' theory of learning, or pedagogy.

This view of learning envisages learning being placed in a universal context; where learners are not seen as part of cultural sub-groups (some with more privileged vantage points), or even as bringing 'differences', but as individual learners within a universal tapestry of rich and diverse individual experiences and perspectives. In this 'universalist' view, disability for example is seen as part of the universal experience of human frailty (Bickenbach, 1996a) and culture is seen not from the vantage point of a dominant culture, but as a universal and varied human feature, not based on identities determined by belonging to nation states, but as reflecting backgrounds and experiences.

This view moves beyond an 'equal treatment' view to one of re-visioning and reconceptualisation of 'treatment'. '[E]ducators cannot approach this task by merely giving equal weight to all zones of cultural difference; on the contrary, they must link the creation, sustenance and formation of cultural difference as a fundamental part of the discourse of inequality, power, struggle and possibility' (Giroux, 1992, p. 170).

In this view, the 'small stories' (Lyotard, 1984) and individual situatedness and contextualisation (Greene, 1994) are recognised. Difference and uncertainty are not seen as threatening, and rules and codes of behaviour are problematised and are viewed as secondary to learning. Universal here means for everyone, and universal design refers to the design and practice of the curriculum for everyone. 'Differences' don't exist in the 'other' (Habermas, 1987), but in everyone, and are viewed as an educational resource.

This view requires not simply the affirmation of differences, with potential by-products of cultural separatism, but their interrogation and foregrounding as sites for learning, alongside all other positions.

> Teacher authority can be used to provide the conditions for students to engage difference not as a proliferation of equal discourses, grounded in different experiences, but as contingent and relational constructions that produce social forms and identities that must be made problematic and subject to historical and textual analysis…A pedagogy of affirmation is no excuse for refusing students the obligation to interrogate the claims or consequences their assertions have for the social relationships they legitimate. (Giroux, 1992, p. 175).

This perspective requires 'differences' to be constructed not from the inside out, not something that 'knocks up' against and is defined by the 'mainstream', as belonging to those on the 'borders' or the 'margins', but from within, and belonging, and universal, to all members of the learning group or community.

García and Baird (2000) argue that this approach has benefits for universities:

> Academically, diversity is important not only because of transmission of knowledge, but also because of the creation of new knowledge, which is dependent on the inclusion of multiple viewpoints, and we have seen the dramatic changes within our disciplines when different perspectives are incorporated. (p. vi)

The 'universal within the local'

Although postmodernism, for example, could be construed as a rejection of 'universalist' assumptions and theories that try to make assumptions for whole groups and ignore differences within those groups, we need to revisit how we view and define the 'universal', perhaps as 'universal individuality'. We need to see the concept of 'universal' in different ways, not as an aggregation of characteristics, and thereby an exclusion of the differences within the total, but 'the universal within the local' (McLaren, 1995), as a mosaic, an accumulation of all of the variants within the whole. It does not entail a privileging of the local

before the universal, but the local within the universal and the universal within the local.

> The postmodern position is, however, not just another grand narrative, privileging the local before the universal. A postmodern attitude focuses on the legitimating roles of these narratives, which it views as important but partial considerations. (Kapitze et al., 2000, p. viii)

We also need a reconceptualisation of 'community', as something not defined by commonalities, whose membership is somehow restricted (Renshaw, 1999), but by the diverse individuals within it. These then become real communities that learn from within, not false communities that silently act to marginalise some members within the community. These new communities recognise multiple perspectives, tensions, and assumptions and use these as driving forces for the learning of the whole group or community. Community then is not viewed as something that is opposed to individuality, but reflects and embodies and enhances the individualities of its members. *All* individuals within the community then (both those previously considered 'mainstream' and those on the 'margins') are required to move outside of their comfort zones, to experience 'cognitive dissonance' as a tool for learning, not alienation, for 'cognitive extension'. This 'cognitive extension' in turn provides a foundation and resources for all members of a learning community to have access to domains of power and influence.

Durie and Taylor (1997) take this approach in their work with students on cultural diversity:

> We developed a model of teaching through difference which starts with the cultural differences present in the classroom, and then moves out to look at other differences that may not be represented. The model provides the opportunity for the students to engage with cultural differences as they are embodied in the classroom, rather than being solely an academic exercise that distances cultural differences as material to be taught about 'the other' who is not present. (p. 4)

One teacher interviewed in Project 4, *A guide to teaching international students* (2000), recounted how, in addressing reactions by Australian students towards migrants and refugees, he asked all students to recount their own 'immigration histories', encouraging them to reconceptualise their views of identity and who 'belongs' or not. These approaches move away from 'the problematics of placing difference outside of the classroom and working with dichotomised notions of centres and margins' (Durie & Taylor, 1997, p. 4), and towards engaging with students' own experiences and discourses (The New London Group, 1996).

In this approach, students' experiences are not seen as 'different' (different from what?) but all experiences are seen as 'personal' or 'local' (McLaren, 1995). 'Difference' implicitly gives credibility to the notion of a more privileged position, an educational hegemony that is constituted by and validated or legitimised by that which is 'different'. In this 'universalist' view of learning and learners, 'difference' disappears; learning is designed and constructed for universal learning, rather than aimed at the mainstream group, with add-on special or remedial teaching and learning strategies for those who are 'different' or 'deficient'. This is a philosophical shift from 'exclusion' of certain groups to 'inclusion' of all learners (Ainscow, 1999, 2000). Here educational environments deliberately embrace the diverse learners within them and use experiences and perspectives as the tools for learning. The recognition of 'difference' is not merely used as a starting point for learning, determining 'where students are at', but anchors and continues to guide learning and assessment. All experiences and perspectives are valued, but are shared to provide for further, richer, extended learning. We learn about the world through people and in this view, newcomers are not treated as outsiders, but are willingly accepted as bearers of rich and complex experiences that can drive the learning of others.

> If individual history is emphasized, a diverse student population (and even differences between teacher and students) is something to be consciously pursued, even at the expense of initial communicative abilities. Rather than bringing in artifacts from the outside world, teachers might be more inclined to concentrate on the development of peer projects that lead to self-generated indeterminate situations. (Glassman, 2001, p. 12)

This perspective also requires a reconceptualisation of 'culture', as not something defined by broadly-based commonalities, and 'inner' boundaries, but by multiple and constituent parts defined by 'outer' boundaries. It rejects notions of 'cultural cartography' (Smith, 1999).

> In this perspective, culture is not seen as monolithic or unchanging, but as a site of multiple and heterogeneous borders where different histories, experiences, languages, experiences, and voices intermingle amidst diverse relations of power and privilege. (Giroux, 1992, p. 169).

Such a view offers students 'a sense of identity, place and hope' in educational settings (Giroux, 1992, p. 170).

This view clearly sees education as a 'bottom-up', individual, learner-centred and driven process (and therefore in the Deweyan tradition), rather than a 'top-down' process where the instructor has set pre-determined learning goals within broader sociocultural goals (in the Vygotskian tradition). In an ideal educational environment, 'top down' processes and 'bottom up' processes would be linked together in a natural synergy. Educators bring their own experiences and lifeworlds into the learning environment and these also influence interactions and outcomes. The educator needs to have a clear vision of how students' experiences and lifeworlds need to be shaped and developed so that they have optimum chances to achieve rewarding life opportunities.

Principles of universal design

A useful analogy for this universalist approach comes from architecture (and therefore also has parallels with the constructivist metaphor) where 'principles of universal design' are employed in the area of access to and within buildings. For example, rather than a building being designed with steps, and then a ramp being added on for access for the elderly, people with disabilities, people pushing

147

prams, or for the delivery of heavy equipment, the requirements of all of the users of the building are taken into consideration in the original design. Curriculum and pedagogical practices can be designed (or 'built') and educational environments structured in the same way, to accommodate the needs of all individual learners within it. This entails starting from, and working with, students' experiences, perspectives, ways of knowing and ways of learning. For example, a unit on hospitality might involve all of the students presenting information about practices and customs that they are familiar with, to build up a broad profile of what a range of hospitality clients' needs might be. Or, in the 'migration histories' technique referred to above, this approach enables a discussion to be formed around the students' experiences rather than the teacher's perspective. Another example of this at a pedagogical practice level would be an insistence by teachers that they will only use textbooks whose publishers make electronic versions available so that students with vision impairments (and all students) could directly access them via their computer (by enlarging text or using text reading software) rather than the present costly and time-consuming practice of converting to Braille or photocopying and enlarging later.

This principle has been adopted in the United States in terms of curriculum design and is known as the Universal Design for Learning Movement (Blamires, 1999; Kame'enui & Simmons, 1999). It refers to designing curricula with built-in adaptations (rather than adapting or modifying curricula) for the needs of students with disabilities, or those who have other special learning needs. 'An unadapted curriculum generally is one-size-fits-all, but adapted materials can be tailored to the students. In this way, universally designed materials can accommodate students where they need it, but those supports are incorporated during the development phase, rather than having to be added after the fact.' (Kame'enui & Simmons, 1999, p. vii) The University of Western Australia (1999) uses the 'universal design' principle in developing curriculum and teaching practices 'in the sense in which inclusive design explores difference and what it means to be an individual in relation to the particular and the local' (p. 41).

Bourdieu (1976) also used the term 'universal pedagogy'. In his analysis of social class and impacts of different educational outcomes, he pointed to the need for a 'rational and really universal pedagogy', which:

> would take nothing for granted initially, would not count as acquired what some, and only some, of the pupils had inherited [his notion of 'cultural capital'], would do all things for all and could be organized with the explicit aim of providing all with the means of *acquiring* that which, although apparently a natural gift, is only *given* to the children of the educated classes, our own pedagogical tradition is in fact, despite external appearances of irreproachable equality and universality, only there for the benefit of pupils who are in the *particular position* of possessing a cultural heritage conforming to that demanded by the school. (p. 13)

The move to mass education in higher education has been the catalyst for the focus on the need to cater for more diverse student populations; future moves beyond mass higher education to universal higher education should also mean that it is universal in character, not just in numbers.

Imperatives for change

The experiences of learners who stand outside a mainstream learning environment can tell us much about the process of learning, since normative assumptions about context and homogeneity are stripped away. As is the case with cultural rules and mores, which can only be recognised and understood by outsiders when they break them, diverse learners provide an opportunity to better understand the complex elements involved in the learning process since the dissonance that they experience in their learning highlights the factors and ingredients involved. It enables us to make the process problematic, rather than assuming that the learning process is a benign one that only causes problems for problematic individuals.

Gee (2001) refers to the 'exponential growth in diversity in most developed countries and the ever thicker connections in a global world that ensure that

nearly everyone confronts a great deal of diversity' (p. 114). Student populations in universities will become more heterogeneous, not less, and changing social and cultural conditions will produce more complex multi-layering of student characteristics, where the categorisation of groups of students will become more arbitrary and subjective, and less useful.

If, as McDonough and Sullivan (1996) state, 'It is now accepted that the *learner* is central to the *learning* process', do we also accept that *learners* are central to the *curriculum* process? Has the acceptance of the centrality of the learner, or student, flowed through to thinking about structural and systemic issues in higher education, or are these still teacher (or institution) centred and determined? This issue was shown clearly in Chapter 5 in terms of how students', and staff's, responses highlighted broader structural and systemic issues that act to create hegemony and power relationships that can marginalise students and fail to serve the needs of all learners.

In higher education, equity principles and policies have had some impact at the structural and systemic levels, most noticeably at the level of recruitment, admissions and access policies and programs, but their impact at the level of teaching and learning practices is far less noticeable. Nevertheless, changes at the level of teaching and learning will themselves require consequent structural changes, most noticeably in course design and assessment policies and programs.

How then can educational environments be structured and operate in ways that do not hinder the learning of different groups of learners; where universalist curriculum and pedagogical practices and design accommodate the needs of all individual learners within them? How can the varying aspects of the teaching and learning environment – learning content, teaching methods and assessment practices – be designed and operate to ensure better learning outcomes for diverse populations of students, as part of the whole population of students? How can the structures and systems that surround and maintain the learning

environment be changed to reflect and support such changes, not just at the level of teacher/learner, but also at all levels of higher education? As we saw in the stories of 'best practice' in Chapter 5, some teachers are answering these questions by addressing curriculum and pedagogical issues in different ways in their course content, and methods of delivery and assessment.   But as noted there, these may still not be sufficient responses to these questions, as they deal with particular areas of diversity, without approaching teaching and learning from the 'universalist' perspective of seeing all students as part of a diverse population with diverse needs.

CHAPTER 8

Conclusions and implications

> We shall not cease from exploration
> And the end of all our exploring
> Will be to arrive where we started
> And know the place for the first time
> (T.S. Eliot, 1943, *Four Quartets*, p. 20)

Issues and findings

This program of research sought to investigate ways that the learning needs of diverse groups of students, in particular students with disabilities and international students, are being identified and addressed by teachers and students in universities in Australia and the United Kingdom following the introduction of mass higher education in those countries.

The overall program of study has been concerned with opening up spaces in higher education teaching and learning debates for the voices of the marginalised and alienated, and those who recognise and seek to redress this. It has looked at this at the micro-level, from the perspectives of individuals and at the level of the university classroom. This study sought to investigate some of the root causes of the lack of impact of equity and diversity policies on curriculum and pedagogical practices within universities.

In the reports of students and staff in the research projects, there was evidence of alienation and marginalisation and a perception by students that their learning needs were not being well met. Issues of hegemony were raised in terms of the nature of the curriculum, power in terms of the relationships between teachers and students, and identity in terms of how the multiple and diverse identities of students impact on the teaching and learning environment and outcomes for students.

The major findings of the research projects of this professional doctorate program are:

- there is a gap in how well students and staff believe that the learning needs of students from diverse backgrounds are being met, with this being most marked for students with disabilities and international students;
- there is broad concordance, however, in the views of teachers and students about what constitutes 'good' teaching and learning practices for diverse groups of students;
- a number of factors act to construct and constrain responses to diverse groups of students' learning needs.
- there is a lack of understanding of how background characteristics and experiences influence learning;
- issues of hegemony, power and identity operate within relationships and interactions between teachers and students that influence the learning and outcomes of students; and
- although there are some differences in Australia and the United Kingdom, the above findings pertain generally in both cases.

From the data collected from staff and students about their views of 'good' teaching and learning practices for diverse groups of students, at many universities within Australia and in the United Kingdom, it is clear that 'good' teaching practice for diverse groups of higher education students is seen by both staff and students to occur when:

- teachers are aware of their own academic and cultural values and assumptions;
- teachers are aware of and respect the values, backgrounds and experiences of their students;
- there is a student-centred approach to teaching and learning;

- teachers appreciate the educational principles underpinning teaching and learning practices for diverse groups of students;
- teaching and learning strategies are defined by teachers themselves; and
- these practices are seen as having positive outcomes for both teachers and students.

Although it is clear from the reports of staff and students that there is much commonality of views about what they consider to be 'good' teaching and learning practices for diverse groups of students, other factors act to inhibit and constrain these practices from occurring. These are:

- pressures on staff following the expansion of higher education and changing student needs, backgrounds and expectations;
- a lack of training and support for staff in meeting these;
- a lack of understanding of educational imperatives behind teaching and learning for diverse groups of students;
- competing tensions and agendas operating within university environments.

Although this thesis has not dealt with structural and systemic issues in relation to teaching and learning practices, focusing instead on issues of curriculum and pedagogy at the level of individual teachers and students, it has clearly pointed to the crucial relationships between these levels and the impacts they can have on teaching and learning practices, as reflected by the tensions described by academic teaching staff.

The importance of the 'instructional act' and the 'instructional site' cannot be discounted however. As Ramsay (1999) has noted, equity and diversity policies that have been introduced externally through government policy are more vulnerable to change and erosion when these policies change as governments change. Changes at 'higher' structural and systemic levels therefore may be subject to shifting political and economic imperatives. Policies and practices that have been shaped by institutions and teaching practitioners themselves, on the

basis of educational theory and practice and through leadership from within the sector itself, and within what Avis (1997) refers to as 'the language of possibility' where educative research involves a dialogue between researchers and those researched, are more likely to endure and survive the vagaries of shifting political and policy agendas.

The projects that comprise the program of study also address change at the attitudinal level, challenging the conventional views of 'disadvantaged groups' within the curriculum. That is, they challenge teachers to examine their own preconceptions and assumptions about these groups of students and to change their own teaching and learning practices to recognise and incorporate the learning needs and backgrounds of these students. They challenge the traditional 'deficit' view that these students, because of their 'differences', are in need of some kind of remediation, or special support, and are inherently problematic. They encourage teachers to shift their focus away from problematising certain individuals to examining the ways that teaching and learning practices can be problematic for certain groups of individuals. They advocate a 'universalist' approach that moves beyond defining 'differences' in certain groups of students to an approach which recognises differences as residing in all individuals, that act as determinants for individual and group learning.

The enduring strength of 'bottom up' approaches that encompass changes in attitudes and consequent individual practice were attested to by academic teaching staff. Academic staff interviewed in the research projects reported that diversity principles can be successfully incorporated into curriculum practices when these practices are seen to be developed by academic teaching staff themselves and where it can be demonstrated that these strategies will contribute to improved outcomes for students.

Summary

The focus of the projects has been on encouraging academic teaching staff to examine their teaching and learning practices by identifying and sharing examples of teaching practices that have been designed to better meet the needs of students from diverse backgrounds. The results of interviews with staff have shown that it is not enough to simply describe and prescribe 'good' practice, however, and that teachers need a fundamental understanding of the underlying factors that influence learning for individuals, and of how individual and social and cultural contextual factors interact to produce differing learning outcomes.

The study has demonstrated the need for teachers to examine how their own cultural assumptions and experiences shape and determine how and what they choose to teach and reward, and address issues of hegemony, power and identity that construct and constrain their own teaching and the learning of their students. It has taken a sympathetic view, acknowledging the tensions and pressures that can exist, the competing agendas that can operate within universities, the lack of training and support, but on the whole, the eagerness of staff to respond to students' needs and concerns *when they have come to understand them*. This study attempts to represent a 'snapshot' of views and experiences from a number of university staff and students in different places at different times. It does not claim generalisability but rather is offered as a 'mosiac' of experiences and examples from those universities and groups of students with which the research was concerned.

Implications

The major implications for universities flowing from this study are that academic teaching staff need to:

- shift their perspective in examining their teaching and learning practices to that of students and how they experience learning;

- examine the philosophical and cultural bases for their teaching and learning practices in terms of how they design and deliver the curriculum, how they interact with students, and how they judge and reward students;
- understand the impacts of marginalisation on learning and how teachers' own attitudes and values and the systems and structures within which they operate can shape and maintain marginalisation for some students; and
- adopt a 'universalist' approach to teaching and learning to address hegemony, power and identity, so that:
  o the curriculum reflects learners' backgrounds and experiences;
  o relationships between teachers and students reflect a mutual respect for backgrounds and experiences, and
  o multiple identities are recognised, valued and used to drive learning.

Postscript: Evidence of change

The third and fourth research projects commissioned by Oxford Brookes University enabled me to see the development of equal opportunities within the academic culture of the University, following the first research project commissioned by the University in 1996. Since then, there had clearly been an embedding of equal opportunities principles in teaching and learning practices. Staff had moved on to 'second order' issues of looking at the needs of particular groups of students (international students and students with disabilities), again wishing to develop 'best practice'. The staff training needs analysis conducted prior to the third project demonstrated that staff had accepted the need to embed equal opportunities practices and principles within the curriculum and were now requesting further strategic guidance on how to provide for best practice for particular groups of students.

Clear evidence of cultural change could be seen in staff at all of the universities involved in the research in Australia and the United Kingdom as a result of being actively involved in various stages of the projects. Issues raised in the projects

have become embedded within practice (especially when there has been institutional support for such practices), and systems and structures have been put in place to support them. This has been especially evident in the case of Oxford Brookes University, as evidenced by ongoing initiatives (see Pearl & Ryan, 1999). Interestingly, despite the lack of systemic and structural responses to equity policies, a more student-centred, individual approach was found on small, rural and isolated university campuses in Australia. Despite the lack of detailed systems and structures in place, staff demonstrated a greater flexibility and willingness to respond to individual student needs.

It was also possible as a result of the different projects to observe differences in the approaches of universities in Australia and the United Kingdom, and between smaller and larger universities. There are clear differences between the generally 'top down' Australian approach, and the 'bottom up' United Kingdom approaches, with apparent better acceptance of the need for change, and evidence of ongoing change, when changes are initiated and implemented by academic staff themselves, and in tandem with students. The 'top down' approach also appears to result in attention given to such changes being subject to changing government policies, priorities and imperatives. Change seems to be more sustainable and self-sustaining when introduced by academics themselves in 'bottom up' approaches as recognition of good teaching and learning practices, rather than when they are introduced in compliance with government or university policies.

In Australia, as shown, there seems to be some reaction to the lack of debate surrounding the introduction of equity and diversity policies, and a lack of debate of the role that curriculum and pedagogical practices play within these policies and within the changing student profile of universities, with some residual resistance, and sometimes active opposition, to these policies. These issues need to be further debated within universities, and active consideration needs to be given to the educational implications and imperatives entailed in increasingly diverse university student populations.

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