

# **Re-thinking workplace learning:**

**Worker subjectivity/ies as  
sites of alignment and  
resistance**

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requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

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## **CERTIFICATE OF AUTHORSHIP/ORIGINALITY**

I certify that the work in this thesis has not previously been submitted for a degree nor has it been submitted as part of requirements for a degree except as fully acknowledged within the text.

I also certify that the thesis has been written by me. Any help that I have received in my research work and the preparation of the thesis itself has been acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

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## Table of Contents

Acknowledgements.....	iii
Table of Figures.....	vii
Abstract.....	viii
Chapter 1 .....	1
Introduction .....	1
Introducing the Uncovering Learning project.....	5
My interests, concerns and methods .....	10
Meeting ‘the Chief Investigator’ .....	11
More positionings .....	11
Renegotiating the thesis.....	15
Discourses of learning, work and workers.....	16
Organisation of the thesis.....	19
Chapter 2 .....	23
Introduction .....	23
Governmentality .....	23
Foucault’s Moves .....	27
Power-knowledge.....	28
Power as multiformed.....	28
Power as relational .....	30
The ongoing renegotiation of power.....	30
The discursive production of knowledge .....	32
The discursive construction of subjectivity .....	32
Processes of subjectification (the embodiment of discourse).....	33
Chapter 3 .....	37
Introduction .....	37
The emergence of the organisational learning literature.....	37
The learning discourses in circulation in the organisational learning literature.....	40
The mainstream literature.....	40
Learning at work with an emphasis on the individual .....	40
Theories underpinning mainstream organisational learning literature .....	42
Learning at work with an emphasis on the social .....	44
The critical literature on organisational learning.....	47
The meanings and values underpinning these learning discourses.....	48
The separation of power and knowledge in the organisational learning literature..	51
A poststructural critique of ‘the sovereign subject’ .....	52
Chapter 4 .....	55
Introduction .....	55
Constructing ‘the reflective practitioner’ .....	55
Constructing ‘the collaborative subject’ .....	62
Summing up.....	69
Chapter 5 .....	71
Introduction .....	71
The context for the contemporary production of workplace learning knowledges .	71
Changing workplaces .....	72
Changing workers.....	73

Changing universities .....	74
The take up of the SPIRT program by the workplace learning academics.....	77
The take up of the SPIRT program by the professional developers.....	79
Inscribing everyday learning .....	81
Re-configuring the workplace as a site of learning.....	82
The Uncovering Learning project as a site of contestation.....	85
Re-writing the Uncovering Learning project as enmeshed in relations of power ....	91
Interlude.....	93
Chapter 6 .....	95
Introduction .....	95
Writing about Beryl .....	95
The circulation of a bureaucratic discourse in the senior managers' workgroup ....	97
'The Queen' .....	98
Act 1 – Beryl's anointment.....	98
Taking up the position of 'the rational manager' .....	100
Beryl's language .....	102
The discursive practices of the senior managers .....	103
'The intelligentsia' .....	105
Self-regulating in relation to an ideal type of 'the rational manager' .....	108
Intersecting discourses.....	109
Tensions around being positioned as 'the workplace learner' .....	109
The circulation of a political discourse.....	113
Act 2 – the king is dead, long live the queen! .....	117
The circulation of a discourse of empowerment.....	117
Re-negotiating relations of power .....	119
Tensions with taking up the position of 'the liberator' .....	119
Summing up.....	121
A more complicated subject .....	122
Chapter 7 .....	124
Introduction .....	124
Eva's alignments.....	124
Re-directing the gaze - gazing at the professional developers .....	125
'The reflective practitioner' .....	127
The circulation of an experiential learning discourse through the texts of professional development .....	128
A 'lifelong learning' story.....	128
The appeal of communities of practice .....	132
Activating mainstream organisational learning discourses.....	136
Attempts to produce alignment.....	137
Pulling the plug on power .....	138
Erasing difference .....	139
Unanticipated outcomes .....	141
Another 'lifelong learning' story.....	142
The shrinking Professional Development Unit.....	143
Multiple selves .....	144
A more complicated story .....	147
Chapter 8 .....	151
Introduction .....	151
Introducing the trade teachers.....	152

The discursive construction of identity .....	153
Bruce's story .....	153
The master tradesman .....	158
The manager .....	159
The teacher .....	159
Us and them .....	162
The individual as a site of intersecting discourses .....	164
Re-negotiating relations of power.....	167
The feedback meeting .....	167
The Stage 2 meetings.....	171
Subjectivity as a site of resistance.....	177
Chapter 9 .....	180
Introduction .....	180
Discourse as an instrument of power .....	183
(A complex web of interconnecting technologies) .....	183
Discourse as a point of resistance .....	186
(Unanticipated outcomes).....	186
Another view of subjectivity and another view of everyday learning.....	191
The tactical function of discourse.....	191
Implications for the 'management' of learning .....	193
Implications for a rational and linear way of 'knowing' .....	195
Implications for 'doing' workplace learning research .....	196
Re-thinking power - tools and tactics for researchers.....	196
Ending the thesis .....	197
References.....	199

## Table of Figures

Figure 1	Stages of action research cycle.....	44
Figure 2	Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs .....	49
Figure 3	Social ecology of identity .....	51

## **Abstract**

The concern of this thesis is the way workplace learning is able to be known and spoken about and the effects of the contemporary privileging of an experiential learning discourse in the workplace. Following an analytic method outlined by Foucault, I explore a field of multiple and mobile force relations between professional developers, trade teachers, workplace learning academics, senior managers, organisational consultants and organisational learning theorists, and the purposes to which discourses of workplace learning might be put. The research site for the study was a recent industry-university collaboration that explored workplace learning in a large public sector organisation.

Using various organisational texts including: interview transcripts from workers participating in the industry-university research project, documents produced during the project, documents produced by a Professional Development Unit (the industry partners on the project), and academic texts on organisational learning, I examine the circulation and intersection of different workplace learning discourses. I also examine the positioning, position taking and resistances around the subject position of 'the workplace learner' in a workplace.

A number of Foucauldian themes guide the analyses in this thesis including: power as multiformed, power as relational, the distribution of power, multiple subjectivities, and subjectivity as a site of resistance. This enables an examination of workplace learning discourses as instruments of power, but also as providing points of resistance.

This thesis makes a significant contribution to knowledge in the fields of organisational learning and workplace learning by foregrounding complex mechanisms whereby technologies of power interplay with technologies of the self. These citings/sitings/sightings of power and subjectivity have implications for professional development practices and the 'management' of workplace learning, as well as the practices of workplace and organisational learning researchers.