THE DIALECTIC OF INFORMAL LEARNING:

A study of the discursive effects on the workplace learning of trainers situated within post-industrial corporate agendas.

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CERTIFICATE

I certify that this thesis has not already been submitted for any degree and is not being submitted as part of candidature for any other degree.

I also certify that the thesis has been written by me and that any help that I have received in preparing this thesis, and all sources used, have been acknowledged in this thesis.

Signature of Candidate

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

PREFACE

The notion of informal learning has captured a great deal of attention in recent years. There is an increasing volume of published works representing, amongst others, postmodern, critical, interpretive, and positivist perspectives. Informal learning is such a powerful and elusive phenomenon, however, that no one perspective has the capacity to capture its range of meanings. It has to be considered allusively. To adopt a single, exclusive approach renders any findings vulnerable to attack from other approaches. This is symptomatic of a more general crisis of knowledge associated with the "postmodern condition".

Within the field of practice of human resource development (HRD), debates over informal learning have tended to focus on *how it can be enhanced*, or *what can be done* to enable individuals to learn more "efficiently and effectively" in their day-to-day work. The debates have not substantially challenged existing definitions, conceptions and uses of the term. There has been little critique about the uses of the term informal learning, or of its construction within the master discourse of economic rationalism. Two of the principal challenges of this text are to promote debate and to animate critique of the convenient exploitation of the rhetoric of informal learning by "new" workplace practices.

Informal learning does happen in everyday contexts as part of day-to-day life, but it is also a key element of a discourse which has this "everyday" process as its "subject". As such informal learning is constructed in certain ways, for example, as a component of "experiential learning" and as an aspect of performing one's work tasks "competently". This highlights problematic terrain for the study. Usher points out that this discursive construction (of a subject) can be problematic in several ways:

> I don't think it is coincidental or 'natural' that we focus on certain things rather than others. Once we start analysing something, once we start making something the object of our investigations, we do so within and through a discourse. It gives us a vocabulary, a set of concepts and pre-understandings, a motivating focus and direction of our investigations — above all a disciplined and systematic way of 'talking about'. (1993: 169)

By "talking about" informal learning, I am discursively constructing what is sayable about it and, by implication, leaving something unsaid. The unsaid relates to what falls outside of the discourses that enable analysis of informal learning and to the influence of informal learning in discourses themselves.

In Australia and throughout the OECD nations, HRD literature has contributed to a highly instrumental notion of "informal learning" being used by Commonwealth and State authorities reforming national training and accreditation processes. To simplify, this "national training agenda" seeks to make the country more "competitive" through having more highly-skilled, more highly-trained workers who will serve the needs of industry. Informal learning thus becomes part of the discourse of "competence". It is precisely the aim of developing a "competent" workforce which can compete internationally against emerging "tiger economies" that underlies the powerful drive to incorporate informal learning into an economistic discourse in which the purpose of "skills acquisition" (including skills learned informally) is to enhance competitiveness.

The connection between economics and training has been referred to variously by Marginson (1993), Wexler (1993), Stevenson (1993; 1994), Barnett (1994) and Burbules (1995). They note that the education of the "whole person", a long cherished ideal of a liberal education, is being rapidly lost through the alignment of education with economics. It is being lost, in part, because education is becoming increasingly absorbed into an economic-training agenda. Critical and postmodern theorisations about this alignment have for some time been concerned that education increasingly plays a secondary role to market economics.

With education in a secondary position to economics at a national policy level, workplace training too is constructed as secondary to industrial relations. This is particularly so within production-oriented industries. This thesis does not attempt to argue why this may or may not be economically justified. Rather, a counter argument emerges through the stories of industry trainers themselves. A close examination of the industrial contexts of the stories, and the emergence of clearer understandings of the parameters of informal learning reveal the banality of much of the contemporary training reform rhetoric.

There are, however, problems in developing richer notions of informal learning. Many more questions are raised than are answered. And the stories demonstrate a certain "irreducibility" inherent in informal learning. As an educational concept, informal learning appears less suitable for competency-based assessment than many in

industry, and sections of education communities, may have hoped. Indeed, the notion of informal learning is problematised, thus expanding debate about its uses in the competency movement.

Also raised is the issue of how learning tends to be shaped by economic imperatives. Opposition to dominant (economically based) expectations at particular sites has resulted in fascinating "internal dialogues", reflected in the trainers' stories. A significant part of this project is to interpret these reflexive moments so as to highlight the lived experience of industry trainers in their daily practices. Clearly, informal learning involves engagement among persons and between persons. But, as Burbules (1995: 13) warns us, "for this engagement to avoid dependency, there must also be a critical distance". It is precisely the lack of "critical distance" which remains a concern in relation to the new bridges being formed between education and learning-at-work, bridges which, to a significant degree, centre on recognising the informal learning of individuals.

The first chapter of this thesis provides details of why these stories are gathered. Chapters Two, Three and Four review the literature on informal learning focussing on the underlying philosophies of informal learning, work as a learning environment, and postmodern doubts and truths about industry training. Chapter Five describes the research methodology and Chapter Six commences the dialogue with industry trainers from several major corporations about their own informal learning. The power and influence of the corporations (and their industry contexts) upon informal learning clearly emerges through these "grounded" interviews. In Chapters Seven, Eight and Nine the focus moves to the informal learning of trainers within one corporation and one industry context: construction. The site for study is that of the Sydney 2000 Olympic Games.

Chapter Ten discusses the findings, suggesting more radical ways of viewing informal learning and of work as a learning environment. Contemporary views which seek ever increasingly to link "the person" to work-productivity fail miserably to play with the tropes of irony, tragedy, and parody — elements of education which Burbules (1995: 13) convincingly argues are so important to learning. This in turn leads to the failure to hear the voices of difference and other influences that are not always directly observable at any given site. And yet they are always present.

It is my hope that enhanced understandings of informal learning may lead in the longer term towards paths of qualitatively better work lives and, in the shorter term, analyses which help us make sense of the turbulent postmodern and post-industrial

conditions. Such hopes directly relate to how industry trainers learn from dealing with their experiences and dilemmas at work and the implications of this for their formal education.

When workplace "bottom-lines" are at stake (as they frequently are), learning about "other voices", about different perspectives and indeed, opposition, can become difficult. This difficulty can lead to the uncritical adoption of certain stances which should be resisted or at least interrogated. It can also lead to critical stances which allow alternative types of oppression. The development of new views about informal learning has implications for the links between formal education and work-based learning, the reflexive learning of individuals (and their adaptations to work purposes), and training practices within industry. I think there are ethical directions and purposes in this, but they will not be to everyone's wishes.

CONTENTS

ABSTRACT

The study critically examines definitions of "informal learning", focussing on the term's application in workplace training contexts. Drawing on Foucault, Heidegger and Habermas, it is argued that we cannot understand ourselves (and thus our informal learning) without challenging the assumptions of modernity and coming to terms with what Lyotard has termed "the postmodern condition".

Industry trainers are at the forefront of implementing "designer" corporate cultures which, in the rhetoric of "work-based learning", make enterprises more innovative and competitive. This study challenges that rhetoric, showing that the implicit philosophy of contemporary workplace learning and training is framed by an economistic "human capital theory". The "stories" of industry trainers from several multinational corporations challenge assumptions about what is learnt through competency-based training and about corporate uses of informal learning. It is argued that *being* at work entails far more than simply performing the tasks one is required to *do*, which, in turn, effects the links between informal learning and formal education.

The final chapters are directed towards expanding and realigning interpretations of "informal learning" away from the narrow and instrumental purposes for which the term has been appropriated. Equity, respect for the dignity of others, and a philosophy of ethics have a place in "workplace learning". Informal learning is shaped by our deepest ethical and moral responses. It does not follow that measurable tasks, what one can be observed doing at work, represent one's learning.

PART I:

INFORMAL LEARNING OF INDUSTRY TRAINERS IN THE WORKPLACE

CHAPTER ONE

The Dialectic of Informal Learning

1.1 Orientation and problematics of the research

Many workplaces today are characterised by automation, computer and information technologies in production which have resulted in restructuring of work tasks, occupations and organisational practices. But the relationships between the institutional processes of the "new" work — particularly in "post-industrial corporate culture" (Casey 1995: 5) — and self formation have not yet been adequately described. Describing "self formation" alone is astonishingly complex. Some postmodern theorists reject the notion of a 'centred self' (Derrida 1982; Lyotard 1984). Some say the self is a convenient "modern" fiction, arguing it is contingent upon innumerable forces (Rorty 1989); others emphasise identity processes (Aronowitz 1992), or say that the self is never a fixed entity (Goffman 1959). Some philosophers (Marx, Durkheim and Freud) variously point to the social and historical conditions that pattern the self; others espouse the existential project of self creation (Sartre). Or as Foucault (1988a) suggests, a key "project" remains the development of an ethics in the care of the self.

The perspective adopted for this project is that the self is the fluid locus of one's subjective experience, "it is where affect and reason are experienced and the capacity to act beheld" (Casey 1995: 3). As Casey points out, the self is the name given to processes of modern identity and is often regarded (in the language of industrialism) as an outcome or a social product. If, however, we take a view of self that encompasses both identity-making processes (including multilinear, biological, psychological and cultural) and outcomes (self-strategies), the self remains a useful term in understanding the person. It endures into postmodernity's pursuit of free play, difference and plurality. But it hinges upon the idea that "the person" retains the capacity to act.

This study examines the informal learning of industry (or workplace) trainers, the terms are used interchangeably throughout. It focusses on their everyday experience

at work, exploring the effects of workplace practices upon trainers' learning. The study assumes that there is learning, including self-strategies that are dynamic and open to multiple configurations: the trainers' negotiations, dilemmas, conflicts, successes and "failures". Trainers' desire to help in the development of workers and the cultural/occupational requirements of trainers highlight the dialectical nature of informal learning.

The term dialectic is not used in this study in the Hegelian sense of a synthesis of opposing tendencies in the thesis and antithesis. The term "dialectical" here needs to be distinguished from the conventional Hegelian and Marxian useages of dialectic which would relate learning to a privileged "system" of needs and societal class divisions. I have drawn on Foucault's theory of power, which represents a major departure from the Marxist and Freudian understandings of power, in which power was viewed respectively as primarily located in the economic base and as repression (see Horkheimer and Adorno 1944; and Marcuse 1972; 1973; who integrated Freudian psychological theory and Marxist social theory). Critical theory (before Foucault) tended to conceive of societal construction as a composite of psychological, cultural and economic activities — not as primarily (although ultimately) determined by the base.

Post-structuralism, however, abandons the idea of universals, holisms and composites, in favour of fragmentation and discontinuity. Foucault viewed the individual as constituted by power, and the relations of power cannot be "established, consolidated nor implemented without the production ... and functioning of a discourse" (Foucault 1980; in Casey 1995: 13). The discursive practices of construction work are examined in this study, showing how the subjects of the study (the workplace trainers) are caught in discourses which 'frame' informal learning as a form of competence. But at the same time they experience informal learning in the everyday. The trainers stories thus represent an intersection between discourses and lived realities: they *speak the tensions*. Their stories are discursively constructed at one level and they live them at another.

The communicational practices of the new organisational "designer culture" within the post-industrial corporation are therefore viewed in the study as important in shaping the informal learning of employees (see Chapters Four, Six and Nine). These shaping practices and their effects on working selves, are described systematically, but not so as to "totally" privilege discourse over the materiality of production.

Contemporary training developments emphasise workplace learning procedures such as coaching, mentoring, job rotations and trial and error. These "educative" processes are convenient to assess and are amenable to the instrumental requirements of workplace learning as reflected in "flexible specialisation", "transferable skills", "performance appraisals" and "enterprise objectives". This cluster of terms constitutes a language in which desired human resource products are highly-trained, flexible and competent. It is *the* dominant language of "human resource development", and has the backing of industry, governments and unions. Indeed, the state is promoting a language of "experiential learning" as a valid form of knowledge acquisition. Work-based learning is thus inseparable from discourse and from power relations.

It is argued in Chapter Two that influential notions of informal learning have been located under the theoretical umbrella of "experiential learning". The distinguishing feature of experiential learning according to Andresen, Boud and Cohen (1995), is that the experience of the learner occupies central place in all considerations of teaching and learning. They add, "the ultimate goal of experiential learning involves the learner's own appropriation of something that is to them personally significant and meaningful (sometimes spoken in terms of the learning being 'true to the lived experience of learners')" (1995: 208). These standpoints serve as the "ultimate" (and most "truthful") justifications of experience-based learning. But this study argues that these standpoints are problematic at several levels, especially at the assumed levels of learner autonomy and intentionality.

Powerful shaping influences, such as construction-site power relations and, more broadly, industry discourses, cast doubt on the degree to which one should accept the notion of "the learner's *own appropriation* of something which is to them personally significant or meaningful". Not only is the subject's sense of meaning mediated, it is socially as well as personally constructed. Andresen, Boud and Cohen to an extent acknowledge this by arguing that learning is a holistic process — socially and culturally constructed. But the extent and effects upon the person of the discontinuity of contemporary society, the strategies of flexible accumulation and the pragmatic world of labour markets should not be underestimated.

The philosophy of Andresen, Boud and Cohen somewhat rests upon Kierkegaard, who wrote in his Journals:

> in order to help another effectively I must understand what he [sic] understands. If I do not know that, my greater understanding will be of no

use to him... Instruction begins when you put yourself in his place so that you may understand what he understands and the way he understands it. (1959, cited in Kegan 1995: 278)

It is not enough, however, to know what a person knows, or the *way* they may understand. The person is being shaped. Their "own" ways of knowing are immersed in discourses, power relations and local networks. The comfortable cohabitation of the valuing of experience (in learning) with a period of deeply conservative western governments is worth noting. Without directly acknowledging postmodern forces, it is the "normative" (ideological) world of the state that links informal workplace learning with formal education.

The study's orientation towards everyday experience at work raises several contextual questions. For instance, do corporate trainers really 'help' workers with their learning? Or, rather, are they tools of management to help meet the economically based objectives of the organisation? These questions need not be mutually exclusive, but they highlight the problematic and at times binary nature of worker and manager perceptions that can relate to both training and to informal learning. The complexity of industry training is such that there are multiple answers to each of the above questions — there is no overriding "truth". This project addresses broad questions such as "just what is informal learning?", "how do trainers learn informally?" and "what shapes their informal learning in the everyday of work?" rather than narrow questions that quantify, assess or measure such learning.

The study also examines the effects of informal learning on the practices of individual trainers. Tensions between individuals and their workplaces raise many questions about the intersubjective nature of human discourse[1]. The dialectical relationship between the self and society, inherent in social action, is described by Lee (1992: 7) as "a complex process of negotiating a pathway through the circulating discourses which produce the possibility of meaning ... for the world as well as for the 'self'".

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[1] A discourse in Foucault's sense (in Lee 1992: 10) is a particular way of organising meaning and hence of ordering the world. Different 'institutions' (forms of social organisation, such as workplaces) produce different discourses which set up positions for individuals to occupy — things they can and must say and do, and things they cannot and must not. Hence discourses are forms of regulation of social meanings and social actions. Given that the world is governed by a multitude of often competing and contradictory discourses, individuals are positioned in complex and multiple ways, some of which may be traced at particular moments (through analyses of these discourses).

To address the dialectical relationship between the self and society and its inherent multiple meanings, the study draws on theories about how we learn, particularly in the world of work (Maurice, Sellier and Silvestre 1986; Mezirow 1990; Marsick and Watkins 1990; 1992; Boud and Walker 1992; Usher 1992; Usher and Edwards 1994; Barnett 1994; and Casey 1995). This literature links (and critiques) macro-sociological phenomena (educational public policy, business organisation, industrial relations) with the micro-sociology of individual's "situated" learning (including reflection, experiential learning, informal and incidental learning). Such links are the focus of this research.

Marsick and Watkins (1990) assert that up to 83% of workplace learning occurs informally or incidentally. Mezirow (1990) writes that at the heart of informal and incidental learning is reflection. Boud and Walker (1992) argue that reflection is not conceptually neutral, but is structured by the personal foundations of experience which is shaped by historical and cultural influences. Usher (1992: 203) reminds us that "it is necessary to 'unpack' taken-for-granted concepts of experience" and Maurice, Sellier and Silvestre (1986: vii) raise important theoretical questions about how a nation's apparatuses of social and political power "decisively coordinate and structure work relations".

These perspectives, although not directly examining work-based learning, raise questions about the inextricable connection between learning at work and society. These are questions which should be central to the massive growth in writing and research on work-based learning in the past ten years. Yet they are not. My contention is that many of the analyses — for instance within organisational theory, the sociology of organisations, systems theory, and indeed adult education and training — either bypass or obscure what actually happens to individuals at work.

In the field of practice within which most industry trainers are located — HRD — it appears that many researchers are either satisfied with the literature's concentration upon technical aspects of training and learning at work, or are lured (directly or indirectly) by their institutions or outside funding bodies to write about "exemplary practices". Examples of "successful" practices which empower or make one's organisation, enterprise, workforce — indeed one's country — "more clever", are prevalent. Perhaps such themes attract a greater likelihood of funding from both government and private sources.

Whilst this study's interpretive theoretical orientation cannot account for all paradigmatic views of informal learning, its analyses counterpoint the interpretive

findings through postmodern and critical perspectives. This counterpointing is intended both to challenge and stengthen the theorisations and hypotheses of the research, including the study's methodology, its epistemological and ontological assumptions and its ethical position by raising the questions: "why is it that informal learning is, at this particular moment, the focus of the academy's gaze?" and indeed, "how is this research constructed through discourses of informal learning?" The literature review in Chapters Two, Three and Four examines these questions, critiquing positivist, interpretive, critical and postmodern theories of adult learning.

1.2 Why do this study?

Australian industries are currently either considering or implementing remuneration and career advancement arrangements based on the acquisition and formal recognition of skills. Consequently, adult education and training providers face three major challenges and changes:

- the introduction of competency-based standards for workers in most industries, including workplace training itself;

- a greater emphasis on work-based learning; experiential learning; and recognition of prior learning;

- demands from government, business and trade unions for "greater relevance" of formal tertiary education courses to industry requirements.

Alone, each of these points carries enormous implications for the reform of adult teaching and training methods, curriculum development and assessment. Their interconnected effects represent a reform of the national training agenda. Indeed, the researcher's interests have been somewhat framed by these discourses and it is no coincidence, as suggested in the preface, that informal learning has moved to the forefront of enquiry in this field. Although it is frequently industry trainers who are at the forefront of implementing these changes, the informal learning of the trainers themselves has never been closely examined.

Associated with the training reforms is a "master discourse" about economic imperatives (Marginson 1993) including the need to seek greater productivity and competitiveness in the workplace. In Australia, large-scale foreign debt and poor competitive performance in a range of industries are perceived by government, union

and industry leaders as significant concerns to future standards of living in this country.

It is precisely this rhetoric which is prevalent in current industrial award restructuring and workplace reforms. Assumptions underlying so-called economic imperatives need to be questioned. Bolwijn and Kumpe's (1990) widely accepted assertion, that industry and workplace reforms are required to compete successfully in international markets links market economics and the skill-formation requirements of the workforce. These links, as the rhetoric goes, are meant to enable companies to become more flexible, innovative and competitive.

At the broad level of "human capital theory", Marginson (1993), expressing strong scepticism, questions how sensible this linking of market economics with educational goals is. His concerns centre on "the production of competencies, or of students as human capital" (1993: 239). This production is seen by governments and major industry bodies as the solution to problems of modernisation and the future and, as Marginson points out, "in these cases the object is the already existing economic subject... The implication is for a deeply conservative education" (1993: 239). Teasing out the educational implications of linking market economics with educational goals is an important subtext of this study. For example, at the level of individual experience, questions relate to *how* workers actually become more flexible. Rainbird for one, notes that in many instances:

> the process of learning the skills required for a new job occurs informally, through one person training another ... and that new skills are being acquired without the legitimation of a formal training period... Although the scope of a job is being extended ... this is not always rewarded in the wages structure. (1988: 177)

In other words, becoming "more flexible" can be coded language for workers having to accept additional responsibilities, perhaps work different (more extensive) hours, but be paid no more.

This linking of skill formation and workplace reform to work-based learning has major industrial relations implications for the roles, purposes and practices of workplace trainers. It is thus pertinent to ask whether informal learning is being structured, recognised and remunerated in the context of reformed workplaces, and, if so, how? Failure to recognise new skills adequately has often occurred in the past, not only where training is based on informal arrangements but, according to

Rainbird, "where training is narrow, and competence is acquired largely through experience".

With an often repeated Federal Government aim that, as a nation, we are to become more competitive, structural changes are occurring throughout private and public sector enterprises. The changes are partly to make the workplace function more productively. They also involve an examination of formal day-to-day work practices, and the informal interactions that result from work organisation and structures. Marsick (1987) and Marsick and Watkins (1990) have hypothesised that informal and incidental learning may become much more prominent in the workplace. Yet we know only fragments of what such terms actually encompass. It is precisely this territory of informal and embedded operations that is of interest here.

Against this background of government policy and strategy there is also my personal motivation to explore the informal learning of industry trainers. This is in part a reaction to HRD literature glossing over the problematic nature of work-based learning. Relying heavily on logical positivism, it is frequently instrumental, seeking predictions and generalisations about examples of "best practice", or ways to improve techniques. I wish to declare an interest of a different nature. It is to make some sense of the messy, contradictory and, at times, politically charged complexity of organisational life. My desire is to document some personal accounts that will express day-to-day experiences of industry trainers and through these stories identify what is important to them about their informal learning and the central issues around which such learning revolves. The study, in addressing meanings of informal learning for industry trainers themselves, is concerned with the implications of such learning for training practices and the formal education of trainers.

1.3 Key themes and research aims

For adult education theory and practice the study is concerned with the different forms that informal learning might take. For instance there is the notion that informal learning is directly related to the experience of lived reality. At the same time there is a separate (but connected) notion that relates informal learning to the discursive production that constitutes it. At its broadest level the study seeks to shed light on the interplay between these notions by asking "what is this phenomenon, informal learning?" It explores the ways in which industry trainers learn informally in their workplaces, seeking insights into the ways individual trainers interact with their

work environments. The research explores how individuals learn at work including personal factors and corporate micro-politics that effect their learning.

Underlying these broad aims are several research questions covering the following areas:

- what are the main "triggers" for or "shapers" of informal learning?
- in what ways is the informal learning of workplace trainers constructed through (and by) dominant industry discourses?
- how is informal learning recognised, assessed and rewarded (if at all)?
- how does informal learning affect trainers' perceptions of their organisation, and their roles within it?
- what kinds of changes to training practices are reported by trainers as a consequence of their informal learning?
- how do personal beliefs and values affect informal learning at work?
- how does informal workplace learning affect self-perceptions?

These questions are interconnected with broader questions about the nature of informal learning: what it actually is, what it means to the participants in the research, and what might be important about it socially and pedagogically.

Such wide ranging research questions raise several interconnected aspects of the informal learning of industry trainers:

- *macro-political influences*: the broader industry environment and the workplace reform movement as they affect industry trainers at particular sites. (To contain the scope of the study, particular reference is made to the Australian construction industry);

- *micro-politics of informal learning*: what counts as being important to the trainers themselves? How their learning may be recognised or rewarded at work is included within this consideration;

- *actual processes of informal learning*: how it is constructed or negotiated, what processes (internal and external) affect it, and in turn how these affect individual trainers.

In the process of gathering the data, issues related to reflection and critical reflection emerged as important themes[2]. The apparent central role of reflection in learning from experience is significant for those who facilitate learning in the workplace. Thus, some implications of the study extend to the role of reflection in the informal learning of trainers and to the purposes of training in organisations. Should, for example, informal learning be structured or organised in new ways to enable the recognition of informally developed skills, and (if so) should these be accompanied by correlative new reward systems? Or, would such moves represent the "colonisation of lifeworlds" (Welton 1995). Amongst others, Welton argues "lifeworlds" may be better left alone rather than turned towards new capitalistic corporate endeavours. Indeed, should one adopt definite stances at all? For instance, should one support the development of competency-based standards for industry trainers, or might this lead, as Usher and Edwards (drawing on Foucault 1977) suggest, to an alternative "normalisation" that includes:

> a surveillance that makes it possible to qualify, to classify and to punish [establishing] over individuals a visibility through which one differentiates them and judges them. (1994: 103)

Questions on the issue of "taking stances" relate informal learning to theoretical and also practical policy matters associated with workplace reform, work organisation, work culture, skill formation and accreditation. Linked together, such policy issues present a major challenge for my research, its theory and the theory/practice relationship more generally. Such links are explored in greater depth in the literature review.

1.4 Definition of terms

With the central focus of the study being the *informal learning* of *industry trainers*, discussion of definitions commences with these two terms. The question posed by Usher (1993: 169), "is there a difference between learning from experience and experiential learning?", provides a critical foregrounding of the definitions. Usher distinguishes these terms claiming that learning from experience happens in everyday contexts and is rarely recognised, whereas "experiential learning" is a key

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2   Reflection, says Mezirow (1990), is "an examination of the justification for one's beliefs primarily to guide action and to reassess the strategies and procedures used in problem solving". Critical reflection is distinctive in that it focuses on the validity of the presuppositions which underpin those belief structures. Critical reflection, point out Boud and Walker (1992), is "reflection on the presuppositions which we hold about ourselves and the world and which limit our freedom and constrain our actions" (see Chapter Two and Glossary).

element of a discourse which has this everyday process as its 'subject' and which constructs it in a certain way, although it appears to be merely a term that describes the process.

Usher's point is that there is indeed a difference and that accounts are, of necessity, discursive:

> They are cast in and communicated through language and are understood by us by our discursive frameworks. Yet the discursivity of accounts and the discursivity of our interpretations of accounts is given virtually no weight. (1993: 169)

This project is itself an example of a disciplined and systematic way of exploring informal learning. It discursively represents what informal learning might encompass (and thus what it might exclude). In considering the recognised and respected definitions of informal learning that follow, it is worth keeping Usher's question in mind as the implication is that the discursive constitution of informal learning has tended to "fall out of view" (1993: 170). By falling out of view there is a silence about the power of discourse to delineate the sayable, to highlight those features of the subject that are constructed by the discourse as being, for example, more or less important. Once informal learning is objectified, classified and measured it is also being reduced and, in some ways, marginalised. Definitions of a term such as informal learning thus become a site of tension for the study; one of its problematics. Concerns about the power of discourse in 'defining' informal learning therefore underpin the following discussion. A glossary of other key terms used in the text follows the Postscript.

1.4.1 Informal learning

Bagnall suggests informal learning is "that learning obtained unconsciously, existentially; through the mere experience of living in a particular 'environment' or 'context'" (1990: 1). Informal learning is often distinguished from other kinds of learning by the fact that "it is non-intentional" (Wain 1987: 48) as against formal learning, which refers to intentionally constructed learning activities. Authors such as Coombs (1973), La Belle (1982), Mocker and Spear (1982) define "informal learning" by its distinction from "formal learning", the latter characterised by university or college studies or shorter courses such as professional training courses or externally planned programs of instruction. Such definitions have the effect of positing "informal" as something left over from the formal. Other authors such as Knowles (1975), Brookfield (1981; 1982) and Candy (1988), respectively link

informal learning to the "autonomous learner", "independent learner" and "self-directed learner". A key element in this self-direction for Candy (1988: 160) is that informal learning "occurs without participation in externally planned programs of instruction in the subject area concerned". Marsick and Watkins reiterate this theme, suggesting informal (and incidental) learning:

> happen outside formally structured, institutionally sponsored classroom-based activities, taking place under non-routine conditions or in routine conditions where reflection and critical reflection are used to clarify the situation. (1990: 7)

In this definition the processes of reflection and critical reflection are central. These processes, argues Mezirow (1990), enable people to "re-frame" problems they may be experiencing; that is, to realise that a particular situation can be defined and solved in many different ways. The processes are explored in Chapter Three and are included in the glossary of terms.

A standard objection to the inclusion of "informal learning" within "formal education" is that informal learning has the potential to render the term "education" meaningless, if experience is perceived as "valid" learning. For example, Dewey asserts that "one of the weightiest problems with which the philosophy of education has to cope is keeping the balance between informal education and schooling, the more incidental and the more intentional modes of education" (cited in Wain 1987: 50).

Informal learning, in contrast to formal education, is predominantly experiential, non-institutional and, according to Marsick and Watkins' (1990), distinct from incidental learning. Marsick and Watkins' (1990) distinctions between informal and incidental learning include:

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Informal Learning:

- self-directed learning

- networking

- coaching, mentoring

- performance planning

Incidental Learning:

- learning from involvement

- learning from mistakes/trial and error

- assumptions

- beliefs

- values

- hidden agendas

- the actions of others.

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Informal and incidental learning, although interconnected, are not necessarily the same according to Marsick and Watkins, who define "incidental learning" as:

> a by-product of some other activity such as sensing the organisational culture, or trial and error experimentation. (1990: 8)

As such, incidental learning is not planned or intentional as it may be with self-directed learning, or where help is consciously sought from advisers, coaches or mentors. A key distinguishing feature in Marsick and Watkin's definition is therefore that informal learning is intentional, incidental learning is not. Such a distinction may, however, be dubious. It seems unwarranted to separate "self-directed" learning from the beliefs and values that influence "incidental" learning. In Chapter Ten it is argued that separating informal and incidental learning represents a false dichotomy and that the existing definitions do not adequately problematise the phenomena. Wain's technical definitions, derived from "lifelong learning" literature, exemplify this shortcoming:

> Formal education: the hierarchically structured, chronologically graded "education system", running from primary schools through the university and including, in addition to general academic studies, a variety of

specialised programs and institutions for full-time technical and professional training.

Informal learning: the truly lifelong process whereby every individual acquires attitudes, values, skills and knowledge from daily experience and the educative influences and resources in his or her environment — from family and neighbours, from work and play, from the market place, the library and the mass media.

Non-formal education: any organisational activity outside the established formal system, whether operating separately or as an important feature of some broader activity, that is intended to serve identifiable learning clienteles and learning objectives. (1987: 51)

Here the formal and non-formal focus on institutional structures whilst the focus of the informal is on the learner. Wain's separation of informal from "formal" and "non-formal" is however, problematic. "Informal" learning may occur in each of these contexts and they are not mutually exclusive. Such technical definitions thus deny a "boundarylessness" that can accompany informal learning. Nonetheless, Marsick and Watkins stress the distinction between informal learning and non-formal education, pointing out "non-formal is where education is difficult to access and frequently tied to social class; non-formal education is often introduced as a 'second chance' for credentials, credibility, or knowledge and skill development" (1990: 32).

In the HRD context, Marsick and Watkins' contributions have influenced recent discussions on informal learning in the workplace. Their main focus is on ways to enhance informal and incidental learning based on a "human capital" theory of learning. Thus, their research has inherent theoretical limitations (which they acknowledge). For instance, their research does not set out to portray critical perspectives such as the Freirean notion of action-reflection-action, which is a core method in non-formal education. Action-reflection-action, although posited by Marsick and Watkins as influential to informal workplace learning, is without much of the "political" intent implicit in Freire's critical theory of pedagogy.

Marsick and Watkins' work on informal learning does not address postmodern theoretical insights that problematise the very notion of workplace learning. Yet, as Bagnall points out: "people do learn in unintended ways in particular environments or contexts" (1990: 2). Wain adds that:

what distinguishes informal learning from formal and non-formal learning is that it is unintended by the learner. Indeed, it is easily demonstrable that people pick up attitudes, values, skills, and knowledge by simply interacting with other people or being present in a particular social context, and, as Aristotle pointed out, [this is] how we are educated into "virtue" or moral behaviour. (1993: 63)

One of the emerging problematics of the phenomenon (of informal learning), often neglected in the literature, is that ethical behaviour is no longer as clear cut an issue as it was once believed to be. An "incredulity" now stalks the globe. Incredulity is a part of our "postmodern condition" (Lyotard 1984). In this condition, how can societies that celebrate virtues such as liberty, individuality, variety and tolerance sustain themselves when those virtues, carried to extreme, threaten to subvert those very societies and those very virtues? The problem of informal learning may thus be not so much about its relationship to formal learning, or about how it can be enhanced in the workplace, or how it is defined, but more about the political, social, cultural and ethical or moral issues which underpin these questions — such as 'what ought one to do' in the pusuit of wise (or virtuous) practice? For this study, therefore, it is the way informal learning in the workplace is constituted through and by these embedded and discursive influences that is of particular interest.

Marsick and Watkins (1990) do identify a range of key issues and writings that help in this exploration including: definitional complexities, learning from experience (Dewey 1938; Cell 1984; Kolb 1984; Pfeiffer and Jones 1983), learning from the context (Zuboff 1988; Brookfield 1986), the influence of action science (Lewin 1947; Argyris and Schon 1974), non-routine versus routine conditions for learning (Jarvis 1987; Schon, 1983), the tacit dimension of knowledge (Polanyi 1967; Inkster 1987), critical reflectivity (Mezirow 1985) and enhancing informal and incidental learning (Brookfield 1986; Freire 1972).

1.4.2 Theoretical conceptions of industry trainers

The various discourses of training are suggestive of different approaches to HRD purposes and practices. The following theoretical characterisations do not, however, attempt to catalogue the full spectrum of industry training approaches. Nor are they mutually exclusive. For instance, trainers often perform research functions, corporate change functions and provide information and support functions that are intended to assist work colleagues. Some line managers perform training and mentoring roles; "leading-hands" may offer coaching and so on. But the "full-time" trainer's own

informal learning will most certainly be influenced by the discourses related to the nature and purposes of their training function.

• **The skills deficit model**

Central to popular conceptions of industry training is the "skills-deficit model". This approach to training program development is based on the sequential performance of tasks such as training needs analysis, course design, delivery, assessment and evaluation. This model is, however, far from exhaustive in relation to what industry trainers actually do, or what training encompasses. The skills deficit model holds that training needs are a practical empirical problem which can be satisfactorily determined through objective, rational scientific methods of investigation and decision making. Such beliefs about training have tended previously to be treated as "good common sense ... and good business" (Jackson, 1992: 76).

The skills deficit model is based upon the dubious inheritance of this "common-sense" logic from a century of scientific management. It allows training goals to be specified in advance, in clear and precise detail. Making goals explicit and concrete produces more predictable outcomes. Managers and workers alike are meant to see what is expected and whether the objectives are being reached. Jackson (1992: 77) points out that this makes supervision possible and accountability reasonable because everything is supposed to be visible and agreed upon in advance. Edwards and Usher (1994) warn that this apparently reasonable accountability also lends itself to increased surveillance. Its logic is, however, very persuasive, particularly where maximizing the working potential of the labour force is a primary training goal.

Despite the enormous popularity of the skills deficit approach to training, it is not the only way to approach or characterise it. It is also important to ask: are we asking the right questions?, are they important questions?, what kind of answers will give quality information?, what constitutes evidence of training needs?, will proposed training solutions make any difference?, or will they simply produce management's desired outcomes or indeed reproduce the same problems in another guise?

Beckerman, Davis and Jackson (1992), McLagan (1989) and Stredl and Rothwell (1987) support overhauling approaches to training. McLagan (1989) and Stredl and Rothwell (1987) make the point that organisations often seek broader-based skills in

trainers. An Australian study of over eight hundred HRD position vacant advertisements found the most sought after competencies included "subject expertise and business understanding rather than more narrow, function specific HRD skills required in the skills deficit model" Moy (1991:27). That is, the "skills deficit" description of an "ideal trainer" has significant shortcomings. Minor innovations or adjustments to the systematic, rational scientific approaches may not answer these shortcomings.

Watkins and Willis define training as a broader component of HRD, viewing it as:

> the field of study and practice responsible for the fostering of a long term, work related learning capacity at the individual, group and organisational levels of organisations. As such it includes — but is not limited to — training, career development and organisational development. (1991: 92)

In this view, the human resource developer works to enhance individuals' capacities to learn and helps organisations create cultures that promote continuous learning. Underlying such a goal-focussed position is an implicit philosophy about the nature and purpose of workplace training. It represents a human capital standpoint and raises an important question for this research given its prevalence in workplace training: how compatible are individual learning goals with those of their organisations? This question is critical in considering the purposes of workplace trainers and their informal learning.

•   **Trainers as a form of "human capital"**

In Carnevale, Gainer and Villet's (1990) account of the organisation and strategic role of training in the USA, the trainer is conceived of as a "developer of human capital". For them, "the employer's ultimate goal in providing workplace learning opportunities is to improve the company's competitive advantage" (1990:28). On this model. employers identify and use learning approaches that rarely stray from the day-to-day requirements of the workplace. Employer interest lies in the learning approaches that are linked to both the individual on the job and ultimately the employer's bottom line.

In this economistic characterisation, individuals are part of the capital resources of a company and the purpose of training is to increase their "worth". Carnevale, Gainer and Villet believe that from this paradigm comes "efforts to link learning and real jobs by applying a careful methodology that translates real-world learning needs

into structured learning programs" (1990:29). Their interpretation of the "real-world", wherein human beings are simply a form of capital or "net economic worth", must also imply an "unreal world" to which someone belongs if they are not playing along with this narrow-band perspective.

- **Trainers and the behavioural paradigm**

In her landmark study on standards for trainers for the American Society of Training and Development, McLagan (1989) identifies 35 competencies related to training in four broad areas: technical, business, interpersonal and intellectual. Her study emphasises the development of quality outputs and ethical standards for practice. This perspective may not overly impress Ashworth and Saxton (1990), nor Field (1991). These authors also link the conception of industry trainer to the notion of the "competencies" required to perform the job, but see competency standards as tools of management to oppress labour. This issue of whether competency-based standards are used by trainers with oppressive consequences for workers is considered in more detail in the literature review and Chapters Nine Ten and Eleven.

For Watkins and Willis the competencies developed for industry trainers carry "a distinctly behaviourist view of learning, implying that what a trainer does, creates an observable outcome in a learner" (1991: 243). This behaviourism is implicit in the two categories of trainers recognised by the Australian National Training Board (NTB 1992):

- Category 1 Trainers are: "those people who provide training in the workplace but for whom the training function is not a major part of their job. These people play a key role in providing training and raising the levels of competency in the workplace. They are important providers of on-the-job training."

- Category 2 Trainers are: "those people for whom training is a large part of their job. They may include training and safety personnel but could also be supervisory staff. They would be likely to be dealing with groups of trainees, as well as individuals, in a structured training environment and with considerable responsibility for documentation, reporting and recording."

The NTB is required to see competency standards established in all industries, rather than provide a comprehensive accounting of training roles. These categories,

in part, satisfy that requirement. The NTB's basic categories and accompanying "standards" posit industry trainers as practical, pragmatic problem-solvers who respond to the training needs within their industry and their enterprise.

Nadler and Nadler (1989) place trainers in the context of adult education, but distinguish training from education (and development) by its narrow focus on the "present job of the learner". The Nadlers (1989) see training as a component of HRD, specifically about organised learning provided by employers, within a specified period of time, to bring about the possibility of performance improvement and/or personal growth. They categorise roles and detail activities within an essentially behaviourist framework, in the traditions of behaviourism. These traditions have contributed enormously to the historical development of HRD, but do not take full account of the rich diversity of workplace learning or the potential in using experience for learning.

McLagan and Nadler and Nadler assume that if trainers acquire a specific set of knowledge, skills and attitudes, they will be able to perform "up to standard". However, the establishment of "competency-based standards" that are too prescriptive may narrow learning possibilities and training responses.

Furthermore, behaviourist conceptions of trainers do not reflect contemporary training practice. For example, Garrick and McDonald (1992) found that trainers frequently refer to the importance in their work of "generic people skills". These include the ability to communicate effectively, market products, demonstrate empathy, and "tune in to the politics and power relations within organisations" (1992: 179). These skills sit uncomfortably with a strictly behavioural paradigm. Alternative theorisations of workplace learning which have little to do with training competencies and more to do with interpersonal, experiential or indeed postmodern theories of action, take better account of these values.

•   **Trainers as engineers of human performance**

Jacobs (1987) likens training to "human performance technology". This uses a systems approach to ensure that the "right" individuals have the knowledge, skills, motivation and environment supports to do their jobs effectively and efficiently. This is linked to an engineering perspective which Watkins and Willis argue is about "engineering human performance" (1991: 243). The technologies involved are based not on behaviour itself, but upon theories about re-engineering work in order to

change the productive outcomes of behaviour. Further, the trainer is like a "toolmaker ... whose performance tasks have mechanistic overtones" (1991: 247).

This conception, especially when read in conjunction with Carnevale, Gainer and Villet's (1990) human capital perspective, is alive in many contemporary industry training practices. Indeed, "the person" in these characterisations is both mechanistic and disposable. What counts is not the person, but their measurable output. If output is not up to required standards, people can be "re-engineered" out. Developmental opportunities do not figure strongly in this model!

- **Trainers and "the learning organisation"**

Senge (1990) argues that people learn best from first-hand experience, and teaching technologies should aim to help people to learn more effectively from their experience. In this systems theory perspective, learning is not a separate role or function in an organisation, but an everyday strategy for enacting organisational purposes. And the formalised and separate role of "trainer" becomes redundant. Training functions would be absorbed into the daily duties of all workers, particularly line managers and supervisors who become "mentors" and "coaches" to less experienced or skilled personnel. A more detailed examination (and critique) of this perspective is provided in Chapter Three.

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The range of definitions related to "informal learning" and "industry training" indicates alternative discourses and understandings of the terms. There are no definitive meanings of either term. Many 'stories' are being told about them. Indeed, what is clear is that there are many stories to tell about informal learning and training, and many ways to tell them. As Usher convincingly argues, there is a "performativity and power of language implying that we should not look through but at words and the way they are put together in the stories people tell, stories of oppression and liberation in words of signification and significant words" (1993: 179). In the everyday corporate and site contexts this study visits, informal learning may well have very different significations for each of the participating trainers.

CHAPTER TWO

Underlying Philosophies of Informal Learning

2.1 Informal learning in the theory and practice of adult education

In the theory and practice of adult education and training, much of the writing on informal learning takes three main perspectives: informal learning as a valid form of knowledge acquisition; how people learn from experience; how learning from experience can be best facilitated and assessed. A postmodern critique of experiential learning has also emerged which challenges the arguments of each of these perspectives, asking "why has this form of learning become an important discourse at this particular historic moment?" This chapter is primarily concerned with the underlying philosophies of these approaches. In four sections, the first briefly considers conventional definitions of informal learning; the second views informal learning under the generic umbrella of experiential or experience-based learning; the third focusses on the politics of learning from experience; and the fourth identifies postmodern standpoints on informal learning.

This overview relates the main theories of informal learning to the practices and underlying assumptions of workplace trainers. It is frequently adult educators and trainers who are charged with promoting and structuring informal learning "opportunities". The chapter argues that learning from experience is never neutral, never independent of sociality and, as such, informal learning will be heavily influenced by the implicit philosophies, values and goals of the organisations that seek to utilise it. Developing a socially useful theory about informal learning requires attention to the elusive conditions of postmodernity, and one's informal learning — at work and in education — is immersed in these conditions.

This examination thus holds an important assumption — that a person's social positioning will influence their access to and experience of learning opportunities. Social positioning strongly influences one's identity leading to different knowledges of "reality". In the taken-for-granted world of "reality", adult educators and trainers

may be more comfortable working with an ethic of worker-empowerment; others may, for instance, prefer an ethic of corporate efficiency. The conception one holds of experience is tied to a politics of learning. In other words, "experience" can never be read as unproblematic. As Usher and Edwards argue:

> there is no single ordered view of the world to be imparted, but multiple 'realities' to be constructed through an already interpreted experience. Our knowledge and understanding of history and the present are relative and partial, dependent upon the meanings we take and which regulate and construct our experience. (1994: 199)

Wildemeersch relates the notion of "multiple realities" to assumptions about what has, historically, constituted "valid research", suggesting adult education literature has been framed:

> in such a way that the contributions of 'individual actors' are emphasised, or overemphasised; or important insights into the intersubjective character of human discourse, the 'big' factors, are given pre-eminence, or, not sufficiently taken into consideration depending on your perspective. (1992: 54)

Mindful of this tendency in adult learning literature to privilege "the individual" as being at the very centre of knowledge production (and acquisition), *or* privilege social/structural context, the following sections explore the relationship between experience and learning. This relationship is often analysed with learning being contingent upon experience; that is, explanation about what is learnt commences with experience. Yet it can also be argued that "experience" is precisely that which is in need of explanation (see Usher, Bryant and Johnston in print). Any approach to using experience for learning will generate its own representations of experience and thus what is being learned. In non-formal education, this principle has been a cornerstone of Freirean "action-reflection-action" pedagogy.

2.1.1 Conventional views of informal learning

Conventional definitions of the term "informal learning" usually refer to its processes — mentoring, networking, working in teams, receiving feedback and trial and error (see Chapter One).

Marsick and Watkins add that "informal learning can be deliberately encouraged by an organisation, or it can take place despite an environment not highly conducive to learning. Incidental learning on the other hand, almost always takes place in everyday experience although people are not always conscious of it" (1990: 12). Within this definition is an interest in how to make informal learning effective — "deliberately encouraged". It also acknowledges environmental barriers which are not "conducive to learning". It is this underlying instrumental interest and concern about organisational development which is of interest here. Wexler (1993), Gee (1994) and Barnett (1994) each identify such concern with the new "vocationalising" of education. This vocationalism is characterised by the promotion of work-based learning curricula and assessments and new linkages between work-based learning and formal education.

These developments have major implications for industry trainers' roles, purposes and assessment procedures. Employees now frequently desire to have their informal learning "recognised" so that it can be credited in formal courses. In some instances it can translate to extra remuneration. The notion of learning from experience is clearly located within a broader discourse of workplace and education reform. Wexler (1993) refers to the reforms of workplace and education as a "corporatist reorganisation" of higher education and training. Notable in this reorganisation are the new "partnerships" of the state, business corporations and significant groups of educational professionals which are effecting change in the infrastructure, implementation and rhetoric, and, ultimately, the meaning of education. Informal learning is a feature of this discourse, relating directly to the links between education and work.

Interest in informal learning, particularly in the workplace, is growing quite dramatically. Parallelling the discourse on workplace learning is a body of research (frequently funded by government and/or sponsored by industry) and theory within education (general and vocational), sociology, cognitive psychology, cultural psychology, ecological psychology and anthropology. Stevenson (1994); Billett (1992); Lave and Wenger (1991); Carnevale et al (1990), suggest that "authentic settings" such as the workplace provide a basis for rich learning experiences. The outcomes of learning through socially and culturally authentic, work-based activities, proposes Billett (1992), have the potential to be robust and highly transferable because the process has the capability of developing deep layers of propositional and procedural knowledge. Stevenson (1994) asserts that in these processes, the key to the transferability of work-based learning resides in the rich base of higher order procedural knowledge. The "optimum path" to these higher order cognitive functions

is, argues Pea (1987), through engagement with authentic (workplace) activities within a "purposeful" cultural and social context.

A key assumption about informal learning in the workplace in much of this research is that it has something to do with individuals (subjects) apprehending experience, reasoning, or logically thinking through their direct experience and giving that experience "meaning". But the knowledge, skills and competencies gained in the workplace represent particular kinds. They valorise operational knowledge — where personal and job-related developments are integrated. Mechthild Hart argues that this approach can undermine the critical intent of education by "blocking a fuller understanding of the cultural dynamics behind destructive and divisive economic and social arrangements" (1993: 19).

Furthermore, much of the research on work-based learning fails to acknowledge the (representational) effects of it's own theorising — "authorising" particular types of experience and 'framing' what constitutes an "authentic" setting. For example, Pea's (1987) cognitive science conception of "the optimum path" to transferable work-based learning posits higher order cognitive functions as a "truth" about experience. This discursively produces experience in a very particular way. It emphasises skills training for job requirements and transferable work-based learning which is, according to Hart, "oriented towards maintaining or restoring the economic status quo" (1993: 19). Indeed, subjective experience is not necessarily an incontrovertible starting (or concluding) point in any analysis of what has been learnt from experience.

As Heidegger[1] puts it:

> knowledge and understanding are not the product of deliberate, conscious and methodological acts of the ordinary subject but an encounter and engagement with the world where pre-understandings constitute a structure of intelligibility, an "absence" which is yet the condition of knowing anything. (1962; cited in Usher 1992: 205)

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[1] The nature of "being in the world" ("dasein", as Heidegger 1962, put it), is such that already knowing something is a condition of knowing anything. The world, and the structure of knowledge that goes with it, already exist and therefore there is no Archimedean point from which we can know the world by standing outside it — hence situated selves. But this pre-knowing is never an explicit conscious knowing. It is therefore always an "absence" — yet because it is the condition of knowing, it is also present — hence it is an "absent present"! This is not a binary logic, however, as it is not an either/or — the present is defined through absence — both are equally necessary to one another. (See also glossary of terms).

In formal learning, this "absence" is (theoretically) addressed by predetermined programs where subject experts, curriculum designers, teachers, academics and bosses construct desirable knowledge. The approach to informal learning with its focus on the everyday somewhat rests upon Habermas's theory of communicative action for its philosophical justification. This theory holds that what happens in the individual's encounter and engagement with their problems, tasks and dilemmas is fundamental to their learning. The processes involved in dealing with (and learning from) the apparently trivial tasks of day-to-day living are also important themes for Foley (1993); Blackburn and Blackburn (1990); and Jeffs and Smith who suggest:

> informal education is a special set of processes which involves the adoption of certain broad ways of thinking and acting so that people can engage in what is going on. It cannot be simplistically defined by a set of curricular aims. (1990: 3)

Marsick and Watkins (1990) suggest that the "everyday focus" of informal learning offers possibilities for improving learning qualities in large complex organisations. They draw upon human capital theory whereby progress and development are inextricably linked to the organisation's interests and economic performance. Foley, by contrast, applies concepts drawn from contestation theory to informal learning in two Australian women's learning centres. He finds that much "embedded learning is generated by *conflict* between people within the centres" (1993: 21). Saddington (1990), however, stresses the atmosphere within which people connect with each other and perform their tasks. Sinclair (1990) also underlines the centrality of culture, but at individual and organisational levels, whereas Foreman (1990) highlights personality and the conduct of training as being particularly influential in practitioners' informal learning.

These perspectives all privilege social/cultural context or individual autonomy in informal learning. Some are theoretically indebted to critical notions — thus being concerned about the structures and purposes of workplaces before they can be considered "educative environments". Some, such as Marsick and Watkins, favour the idea of development-work, although their theory at times silently assumes an acceptance of existing economic and social arrangements. Other perspectives, such as Foreman's are influenced by the traditions of an individualistic social-psychology.

Nonetheless, the various perspectives portray people engaged in day-to-day situations and interventions, trying to make sense of their lives. These cultural forms remind us of the reflexive nature of social life. That is, social life has the capacity to

change as our knowledge and thinking changes. As Carr and Kemmis put it, "social and educational thinkers must cope with this reflexivity ... the 'truths' they tell must be seen as located in particular historical circumstances and social contexts, and as answers to particular questions asked in the intellectual context of a particular time" (1986: 42). Thus, these perspectives can be seen as epistemological indicators that help locate informal learning under the notion of experiential learning.

Cervero notes that current researchers are not the first to observe that learning from experience is a central way that people create their world and give meaning to it:

> John Dewey most recently made this point and David Hume before him and Aristotle before him... However, for the better part of this century, our society has given legitimacy to knowledge that is formal, abstract and general, while devaluing knowledge that is local, specific and based on practice... For this we owe a debt to Plato and Socrates, who believed that for something to count as knowledge it had to be de-contextualised, generalised and abstracted to cover a range of situations. (1992; cited in Beckett 1993: 4)

Marsick and Watkins draw on Dewey's experiential learning orthodoxy to argue that "learning takes place through an ongoing dialectical process of action and reflection" (1990: 8). But to use reflection for learning, one must consciously become aware that they are actually learning. This implies intentionality, resting heavily on a paradigm of consciousness, which is also important to Giddens' (1983; 1986) theory of social structuration. Giddens emphasises the notion of "expanded consciousness" by conceptualising *structure* as "both the medium and the outcome of the human activities it recursively organises" (1986: 533). Intentionality is thus an important assumption of both experiential learning and critical social theory, and a foundation for subsequent action.

2.2 Experiential learning

Experiential learning or experience-based learning is based on a set of assumptions identified by Boud et al (1993) as:

- experience is the foundation of, and the stimulus for, learning;

- learners actively construct their own experience;

- learning is a holistic experience;

- learning is socially and culturally constructed;

- learning is influenced by the socio-emotional context in which it occurs.

(Cited in Andresen, Boud and Cohen 1995: 207—8)

Some powerful tensions exist within and between these assumptions — for example, that learners "actively construct their own experience" whilst, at the same time, "learning is socially and culturally constructed". On the surface these assumptions appear to represent a dichotomy: important differences exist between adult education as practised within an individualistic discourse of personal empowerment, and a pedagogy of critical social theory. That both are assumed as underpinning experiential learning is intriguing as they carry such different implications for practice.

Adult learning theory within the discourse of "personal empowerment" holds that learning can become most effective in overcoming barriers or blindspots if personal emotions are addressed (at least partly) in the learning process (Mezirow 1990). This position, shared by many adult educators in the humanistic tradition, holds that the individual may be most productive when they feels that work is personally meaningful and not simply an instrumental means to another end. What is personally meaningful is thus critical to learning, and problematic to any reconciliation of the above assumptions. Andresen, Boud and Cohen cite the words of Mao Tse Tung (1968: 20) to show the links between experience and action, learning and knowing and between political action and social transformation:

> all genuine knowledge originates in direct experience ... human knowledge can in no way be separated from practice ... practice is higher than (theoretical) knowledge. Whoever wants to know a thing has no way except by coming into contact with it, that is, by living (practising) in its environment ... practice, knowledge, again practice, and again knowledge ... such is the dialectical-materialist theory of the unity of knowing and doing. (1995: 212)

Mao's elevation of "practice" over "theory" has deep ironies. It was his own theories, his own interpretations of Marxism-Leninism applied to Chinese conditions which led directly to such momentous events as the Communist's "Great March", the

"Hundred Flowers" campaign, the Cultural Revolution, and ideology-led practice on a grand scale.[2] Ideology-led practice, or as Lather (1986) puts it, "adopting an openly ideological stance", can be seen as simply leading to a new form of oppression — rendering the notion of a "truly" liberating education very dubious indeed. An individualistic-humanist discourse of adult education seems incompatible with a critical social-transformation practice, but both constitute what might be "meaningful" work to many contemporary trainers.

One attempt to construct a framework for making sense of experiential learning is Weil and McGill's (1989) idea of "villages". They view experiential learning as "a spectrum of meanings, practices and ideologies which emerge out of the work and commitments of people" (1989:3). In this spectrum they discern four emphases on experiential learning, each the basis for a cluster of interrelated ideas, concerns and values which they refer to as "villages". They include:

- the assessment and accreditation of prior experiential learning experiences;

- experiential learning and change in higher and continuing education;

- experiential learning and social change;

- personal growth and development.

Weil and McGill hold that a person or organisation which knows only their own village, cannot understand it. It is through "dialogue across villages that we are enabled to consider what we intend and what we do from new perspectives" (1989: 4). Boud (in Weil and McGill 1989: 38), supports the Weil and McGill proposition about the need for dialogue across villages, but adds that "at the heart of the main traditions is *the role of autonomy*, and the variety of approaches which might promote the individual's autonomy" (1989: 40). He points out (1989: 40—43) that each approach can be located within the main traditions in adult learning, which include:

- training and efficiency in learning;

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2   Jung Chang's autobiographical account of Mao's role (in ideology-led practice) claims "Mao's ignorance of how an economy worked, [his] almost metaphysical disregard for reality ... might have been interesting in a poet, but in a leader with absolute power was quite another matter. One of its main components was a deep-seated contempt for human life" (1991: 293).

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- self-directed learning (and the andragogy school[3]);
- learner-centred education and the humanistic educations;
- critical pedagogy and social action.

The traditions, which highlight the main conceptions of experiential learning, share a central notion: *autonomy*. As Usher puts it in a postmodern critique:

> adult education works with an ethics of personal empowerment and autonomy. In this sense, adult education is part of the educational project of the Enlightenment and because of this is cast in and expresses itself through a discourse of individual agency. (1992: 201)

How good an account of reality does this "Enlightenment" theory of experiential learning provide? If experience is the sum of one's social relations, how one is positioned within social hierarchies and the effects of this positioning upon one's emotions, it falls within the humanistic discourse of reflecting upon and learning from experience. But to construe experiential learning as being able to stand outside these factors, to know and understand one's experience from reflection, requires the acceptance of the assumption that "the subject, through conscious awareness, can be both the source and shaper of its experience" (Usher 1992: 207). Usher's point is that the theory of experiential learning, most common in adult education practice, presupposes too much about individual agency.

2.2.1 Reflection and the autonomous subject

To address the question of whether experiential learning theory presupposes too much about individual agency, it is necessary to expand upon the notion of "reflection". Usher points out that in humanistic adult education theory, reflection is perceived as "the bridge between experience and learning" (1992: 206). Boud, Keogh and Walker (1985) refer to reflection as "a generic term for those intellectual and affective activities in which individuals engage to explore their experiences in order to lead to new understandings and appreciations." Mezirow (1990) views it as

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3 Andragogy, according to Knowles (1980: 39) is premised on at least four crucial assumptions about the characteristics of adult learners that are different from the assumptions on which traditional pedagogy is premised. These assumptions are that "as a person matures, 1. his(sic) self-concept moves from one of being a dependent personality towards one of being self-directed; 2. he accumulates a growing reservoir of experience that becomes an increasing resource for learning; 3. his readiness to learn becomes oriented increasingly to the developmental tasks of his social roles; and, 4. his time perspective changes from one of postponed application of knowledge to immediacy of application, and accordingly his orientation toward learning shifts from one of subject-centredness to one of problem-centredness."

including "making inferences, generalisations, analogies, discriminations and evaluations as well as feeling, remembering and solving problems".

This definition implies using beliefs to make interpretations, analysis and judgments, however unaware one may be of doing so, and as Mezirow (1990) points out, "if reflection is understood as an assessment of how or why we have perceived, thought, felt or acted, it must be differentiated from an assessment of how best to perform these functions when each phase of an action is guided by what we have learned before".

Cell (1984) seeks to clarify the distinction between action and reflection. Where action can be a creative process, but involves our prejudices and distortions, reflection requires attending to the distortions in our reasoning and attitudes. Miller (1989: 13) argues that attending to our reasoning and attitudes requires what C. Wright Mills called:

> a quality of mind that will help ... (people) to use information and to develop reason in order to achieve lucid summations of what is going on in the world and what may be happening within themselves. The sociological imagination enables its possessor to understand the larger historical scene in terms of its meaning for the inner life and the external career of a variety of the individuals ... the sociological imagination enables us to grasp history and biography and the relations between the two within society. (Mills 1979: 11—12)

Griffin (1981) uses just such an imagination in relation to her home town in her research paper on the "autodidactic or self-directed process of learning". She identifies five dimensions of learning, sometimes operating individually, sometimes together:

- the rational;
- the physical (or physiological);
- the emotional;
- the relational;
- the metaphorical (or intuitive).

She argues that there is constant shifting between, and interaction among these dimensions, which in turn are perceived through "valuing and judging systems".

Candy (1991: 172) claims that Griffin did not introduce the notions of cognition (or metacognition) or any higher-order processes mediating the transitions to her analysis, but this is a very specific (psychologistic) critique. What is missing in Griffin's analysis (and Candy's critique) is a more comprehensive critique of the overall social and economic context within which this "self-directed" experiential learning occurs. It could be argued, for instance, that social conditions and context can (and do) systematically exclude some groups from learning and developmental opportunities. Nonetheless, Griffin's findings suggest a picture of enormous complexity and unpredictability in adult learning and constitute an important hypothesis about the non-linear nature of learning. Subsequent studies such as Taylor's (1986; 1987) have refined this hypothesis identifying four phases of self-directed learning — detachment, divergence, engagement and convergence. Taylor argues "the four phases occur in a consistent order around a particular learning theme or problem being worked on":

- *Disconfirmation* (phase transition)
  A major discrepancy between expectations and experience

- *Disorientation*
  A period of intensive disorientation and confusion accompanied by a crisis of confidence and withdrawal from other people who are associated with the source of confusion

- *Naming the problem* (phase transition)
  Naming the problem without blaming self and others

- *Exploration*
  Beginning with relaxation with unresolved issue, an intuitively guided, collaborative and open-ended exploration with a gathering of insights, confidence and satisfaction

- *Reflection* (phase transition)
  A private reflective review

- *Reorientation*
  A major insight or synthesis experience with a new approach to the learning (or teaching) task

- *Sharing the discovery* (phase transition)
  Testing out the new understanding with others

- *Equilibrium*

A period in which the new perspective and approach is elaborated, refined and applied. (1987: 183)

Candy (1991: 176) points out that Taylor's work, [like Mezirow (1990) and Schon (1983; 1987)], posits "disorientation, or the collapse of the learner's frame of reference or assumptive world" as a critical starting point for the learning process. Taylor's hypothesis also firmly locates reflection within a psychologistic discourse. The conception of "subjects" in terms of linear temporality, and experience in terms of cumulative (albeit helix-like) progression, is simply reflecting rather than challenging the research's founding assumptions. In this case, the theory represented is that of an individualistic social-psychology consistent with the traditions of the "humanistic discourse".

This discourse celebrates experience and learning through experience as means of individual empowerment. It is a discourse whereby learners actively define their own experience by attaching meaning to events. As Boud et al put it, "we may use language and ideas to express meaning, and in the process use externally defined objects, but only the person who experiences can ultimately give meaning to the experience" (1993: 8). It is according this meaning-giving status to the person which postmodern approaches to experiential learning seriously dispute (Wildemeersch 1992; Usher 1992; Usher and Edwards 1994). They draw upon Foucault's "counter history of ideas" (McHoul 1987) to refute the idea of individual "agency" and thus the status of "meaning-giver". Foucault (1982: 208) views the subject as an effect of, to some extent subjection of particular, historically located, disciplinary processes and concepts which enable people to consider themselves as individual subjects and which constrain them from thinking otherwise ...

we have to know the historical conditions which motivate our conceptualisation. We need a historical awareness of our present circumstance. (1982: 209)

Foucault's influential notions of "historical situatedness" and "disciplinary processes" (power/knowledge formations), seriously challenge conventional adult education theory based on personal empowerment and autonomy.

Upon Reflection
A man who was accused of five rapes and six attempted rapes was being tried. The accused hardly spoke at all. The judge asked:

'Have you tried to reflect upon your case?'

... Silence.

'Why at age 22, do such violent urges overtake you? You must make an effort to analyse yourself. You are the one who has the keys to your own actions. Explain yourself?'

... Silence.

'Why would you do it again?'

Then a juror took over and cried out, 'For heaven's sake, defend yourself!'

(Foucault 1988c: 126)

Commonly, reflection is seen as taking place when we look back on something and question the assumptions which guided it. Less graphic, but similarly meaningful conversations occur regularly in the everyday. Reflective practices are generally less concerned with the question of "what cognitive processes are operating" and more with the interplay of the individual and influential social forces (see "reflection" and "critical reflection" in Glossary). But there is no clear way to determine at any point whether we are being driven by "false consciousness", or by the ways in which external authority shapes the mind (Lacan 1977). Nor is it always clear what one's "true" interests might be — a primary goal of reflection. Foucault (1982: 210) also warns of the dangers inherent in attempting to "rationalise" without investigating the links between the rationalisation and power. Boud and Walker (1992) suggest, however, that the uncertainties that surround the concept of reflection do not mean it is useless, arguing that it serves to promote a healthy mood of inquiry.

This linking of reflection to "transformation" is important to mainstream theories of experiential learning (for instance, Mezirow emphasises intentionality, agency and reflexivity in the transformation of one's "meaning perspectives"). Usher points out that experiential adult education has always implicitly recognised that learning does not entail "teaching" or transmitting a body of knowledge to a passive learner — "knowledge is something created in the learning process where teachers, learners, bodies of knowledge and experiential meanings interact" (1992: 211). Experiential learning theory is premised on idea that all parties to the transaction are affected, and to varying degrees, "transformed".

In the discourse of experiential learning are questions seldom addressed about whether "emancipatory intent" and so-called "liberating" reform processes merely lead to other forms of control. For example, what are the goals of empowerment underlying learning at work? What are the ethics of "other directed" experiential learning activities *set up* by trainers, line-managers, coaches and mentors to be "experiential"? A serious consideration of the ethics of "other directed" experiential learning events at work is relatively undeveloped in the literature. But experiential learning in organisations, defined in often well-intentioned humanistic terms, might ultimately be disabling rather than enabling — even though most trainers would most likely dispute this. Such an analysis can have demoralising affects, as recent empirical work on training practices in multi-nationals has found (see Coulter and Goodson 1992; Boje 1994; Casey 1995). They each suggest the new corporate language of "enabling", "self-direction", "teamwork" and "learning organisations" embodies forms of discursive control whereby workers are no more "empowered" than before. But they are, in effect, required to work longer hours and become more efficient.

Ontological assumptions about organisations — the "authentic settings" prized by the research referred to in Section 3.1.1 — are thus important to a coherent theory of experiential learning. For Greenfield, organisational administration "is not objective, but a social phenomena, subjective in nature ... organisational reality, as experienced, is thus like a cultural artifact" (in Evers and Lakomski 1991: 96). Collingwood draws on Aristotle's analysis of causation to present this classic paradox of educational thought:

> to create something means to make it non-technically, but yet consciously and voluntarily ... it should be clear that when we speak of an artist making a poem, or a play, or a painting, or a piece of music, the kind of making to which we refer is the kind we call creating... These things are not made as a means to an end, they are not made to any preconceived plan, they are not made by imposing form on a given matter. Yet they are made deliberately and responsibly, by people who know what they are doing, even though they do not know in advance what is going to become of it. (Cited in Beckett 1992: 140)

The paradox centres on the significance of "human dynamism" and its consequent philosophical constructs. These hierarchical constructions of knowledge give rise to dualisms such as theory and practice, thinking and doing, facts and values, mind

and body. These dualisms, says Hager (1989: 22), do not account for our common integrative experience which makes sense of life.

2.3 The politics of learning from experience

In considering informal learning under the theoretical umbrella of experiential learning it has been argued that knowledge acquired from experience is far from unproblematic and that much of the current research represents "experience" unreflexively[4]. Subjective "everyday" experience contains innumerable normative interpretations of "reality". The "common sense" used by trainers to inform their practice is, as Berger and Luckman put it, "the reality par excellence [where] the everyday appears already objectified ... ordered by a variety of cultural instructions as to how things should be done ... involving a complex of personal and social values" (1981: 35).

This section is not going to be turned into a political-science treatise, but the tensions between the values of individual trainers and the ideologies of their workplaces require scrutiny: How do the purposes that underscore what one does at work affect informal learning? What is particularly meaningful to workplace trainers, and why? What sorts of practice are most rewarding or intrinsically worthwhile to them? What conditions promote "meaningful" practices? How does corporate philosophy sit with these issues? Paraphrasing Brookfield (1991), four particular areas of tension for adult educators are identified:

- the connection between the educator's making explicit a political commitment and the encouragement of critical thinking in learners;

- the extent to which conceptualisations of critical thinking and models by which it can be taught should be grounded within one exclusive intellectual tradition;

- the need for a language in critical thinking accessible to those the process is designed to assist;

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4   "Unreflexive" is used here in the sense that much of the current research tends not to acknowledge the ways in which research theory frames it's own conceptions of experience through it's language and assumptions about the status of the so-called "authentic settings" that figure prominently in linking workplace learning and education.

- the need to balance inspiring a sense of possibility that thinking critically
  entails — with a realistic assessment of the risks and dangers it involves.

Underlying these tensions are the beliefs, convictions and values one holds and how these conflict with what one actually has to do at work. Brookfield (1991), for instance, describes how critical thinking and self-reflexivity are important to understanding influential factors on individuals at work, and the strategies used to deal with everyday tensions and dilemmas. He cites Carr and Kemmis (1983), Usher and Bryant (1989) and Usher (1989) to indicate that:

> the distinction between a practical discussion and formal theoretical
> discussion is somewhat spurious and demands a critical self-reflexivity to
> clarify what we are bringing to the discussion ourselves. (1991: 1)

Precision about "what we are bringing to the discussion ourselves" is problematic, however, as there are multiple perspectives. For example, Zinn (1983) locates practice within five prevailing adult education philosophies: Liberal, Behaviourist, Progressive, Humanist and Radical. Knowles (1980) simply asks whether the practitioner's orientation is "andragogical" or "pedagogical", whereas Candy suggests adult educators have theoretical orientations in their everyday practices "whether they realise this explicitly or not" (1991: 234). Critical thinking is to some developmental psychologists, "an empirical description referring to a discernible set of post-formal cognitive operations; to neo-Freudians it is the means by which we become aware of the assumptive clusters etched into our conscious, and by which we discern the inequities in the economic substructure of moral codes, beliefs systems and artistic forms" (Brookfield 1991: 2). And Usher (1992) raises postmodern perspectives whereby "individuals" are not actually meaning-givers but meaning-takers. Usher, Bryant and Johnston (in print) explain that this is "where the meaning of experience is not conferred exclusively or authentically by individuals ... [but] the place of language is a key issue".

The experience of conflict and ethical dilemmas at work prompts Foley (1993: 33) to state that "it is far too cosy to simply appreciate the [ideological] traditions which accompany the different 'villages' of adult education ... a critical consciousness is essential to learning". He draws on Skeggs (critical theory) to make the point that such a "consciousness":

> is not marked by a simple progression from one position of subjectivity to
> another. Rather it is characterised by an oscillation between moments of

relative incoherence, the breaking up of old political languages and positions, and moments when new formulations, often tentative and transitory, are being realised. (1991; in Foley 1993: 333)

Kemmis calls for greater self-reflexivity in research and reflection-in-action, but reminds us that reflection is not a purely internal psychological process, but "action-oriented and historically embedded: like language, it is a social process and as such is political and shaped by ideology" (1985: 140).

2.3.1 Personal meaning and ideology at work

If learning is to be a meaningful workplace purpose, an examination of the values held by individuals and how these can clash with workplace ideologies — macro and micro-level — is essential. Without explicit attention to these linkages, workplace learning will essentially reproduce the dominant values trainers sometimes purport to challenge.

Thorpe suggests that ideology is often used as a political "ism"; that is: "a person's or group's general social and political world view, as encapsulated in the various political philosophies, like liberalism, capitalism, fabianism, socialism and so on" (1985: 69). She says such philosophies "offer their adherents cogent [but different] explanations of the causes and nature of social problems, and provide blueprints for social and political change, according to the principles valued most highly by each particular 'ism'." The grand theories can give rise to significant clashes between personal perspectives and work requirements, for instance, by trainers disagreeing with corporate strategies related to "downsizing", "image-making" and so on. The alignment (or misalignment) of work contexts with the individual's values is a critical ingredient of the tensions and ethical dilemmas experienced.

Critical thinking and critical reflection, according to Brookfield (1991), can help. He defines critical thinking as "a process that helps people to judge the extent to which their values are fair and just, or serving to strengthen the position of powerful minority groups [and] that critical reflection is a process which requires fundamental challenges to conventional wisdom and taken-for-granted norms about what people expect from each other" (1991: 2).

Brookfield is concerned that "critical thinking can lead to the adoption of a certain ideological outlook, a certain ideological commitment, or a belief in the correctness of a particular political ideology" (1991: 3). His argument is that the success of an educational idea often rests upon "conceptual malleability" and its wider capacity

— in other words remaining open to (and critical of) alternate ideological perspectives. But this argument itself is clearly in the liberal, progressive tradition of adult education, a position rejected by critical social theorists due to its links with structural forces which maintain unequal distributions of power in society.

For practising industry trainers, workplaces are not always "conceptually malleable", and their requirements can, at times, fully test ideological resolve. If those adopting a conceptually malleable position run the risk of being uncommitted to anything (ie, becoming pragmatic), or worse, of becoming untrustworthy tools of management, the "ideologically committed" run the risk of an inflexibility, or dogma, which can also lead to oppression.

Usher claims that a central problem with a critical pedagogy is that it is itself a part of a discourse which counters individualism by theorising "the subject" as a construction rather than an originary point. This subject is generally regarded as an exploited object of "false-consciousness". The exploited subject has their experience:

> rendered inauthentic by distorting ideology and oppressive social structures ... [and] without some sense of agency and a notion of a contested and always 'in process' subjectivity, social empowerment easily becomes oppression in another guise. (Usher 1992: 203)

Experiential learning theorists such as Brookfield, despite the postmodern critique, hope that critical reflection will help resolve the binary which comprises, inter alia, the mutually exclusive aspects of "conceptual malleability" and "political activism". Adult educators seeking to base their practices on Brookfield's hope will not be reassured by Kemmis's assertion that "reflection is a political act which either hastens or defers the realisation of a more rational, just and fulfilling society" (1985: 140). It will not be reassuring because reflection — a centre-piece of experiential learning theory — is, according to Kemmis, a political act.

Underlying Kemmis's notion of reflection as a "political act" is Habermas's (1971) critique of instrumental reason in which "subjectivity" is not the rational individual, but shaped socially — by structural and political forces. This influential theory is based, however, on the binary of individual agency versus social construction. Usher points out that a problem with Habermasian theory is that "it is itself part of a [hegemonic] discourse whereby its subject tends to be the exploited subject of 'false consciousness', deprived of agency and posited as a social victim" (1992: 203).

The philosophical grounds for adult education practice that are based on the binary opposition of individual—social are problematic, particularly as trainers today face the daunting task of bridging the gap between the "professional body of knowledge that must be used and the expectations of the workplaces they are serving" (Schon 1983: 15). The social expectations trainers are supposed to meet include the drive for increasingly competitive workplaces. Skruber, for instance, reports findings from 50 case studies of bureaucratic organisations, where, to aid competitiveness, "a heightened sense of awareness [amongst workers] about the nature of their organisation, such as how they worked, what was possible, what was not and why, provided a sense of control and a diminishing of the "victim" syndrome which can afflict many workers in bureaucratic environments" (in Marsick 1987; also see Chapter Three for a critique of the current debate on work and education).

This "worker empowerment", to which informal learning is integrally connected, is said to lead to improved productivity and worker satisfaction (Kornbluh and Greene 1989; Marsick and Watkins 1990). This is why many organisations have, over the past few years, attempted to introduce reforms based on notions such as "the learning company", "learning organisation" and "quality circles".

Many adult education providers have actively promoted such concepts, often taking them up without calling into question their underlying values and epistemologies. Such notions, particularly in contexts of profit maximisation, can simply become the new forms of "strategic control" (Hart 1993) over the purposes of the trainer's practice, conceptions of "worker interests", "company good", "fairness" and what constitutes "ethical profit". As Beckett (1993: 5) points out, "in any one unit of practice, say, a consultation, or a lesson, or a visit, there is a rich array of values such as confidentiality, respect, discretion, accountability and so on". Awareness of strategic control brings trainers face to face with dilemmas such as "who owns the trainer?" And "what ought one to do when faced with crises of allegiance?"

2.4 Postmodern standpoints on informal learning

Burbules summarises the postmodern critique of education in this way:

> postmodernism is said to be the rejection of the Enlightenment; it is about
> the infusion of power into our theories of knowledge, language and ethics;
> it is anti-rationalistic; it offers a radical social constructivism; it privileges
> difference over commonality; it is the discursive constitution of social (and

natural) reality; it stresses a decentred view of the subject and the 'fungibility' of identity and so on. (1995: 2)

But such a neat summary (as Burbules acknowledges) is precisely that: too neat. "Postmodernism" is not a specific theoretical position itself, but an intellectual trend that comprises several quite different theoretical or philosophical theories. These theories are particularly indebted to the European philosophers Foucault, Lacan, Derrida, Lyotard and Baudrillard. More recently, their writings have been applied to the philosophy of education by Boje (1994; 1995), Burbules (1995), Burbules and Rice (1991), Lather (1991), Usher (1992), Usher and Edwards (1994). For Usher and Edwards, postmodernism encompasses:

> trends of interdisciplinarity and experiential approaches to teaching and learning [that] can be seen as changes taking place under the impact of the postmodern and therefore very much part of it. In other words, there is no uniform, unified postmodern discourse of education. However, it is through these [types of] changes that the Enlightenment tradition and the place of education within it is increasingly questioned, exposing the certainties and "warranted" claims of educational theories and practice to a critical examination, a shaking of the foundations. (1994: 25)

Informed in large part by Foucault, Derrida, and Lyotard, Usher and Edwards indicate the centrality of discourse, the importance of deconstruction and the validity of assessing local (power) networks rather "universal" or large abstract social "systems". The story-teller, for instance, is positioned in relation to events (and other selves), and an identity conferred. Stories, although unique to individuals — in the sense that each tells her/his "own" story — are at the same time culturally located. As such stories are "transindividual". Postmodern writers therefore search for local/cultural conditions that produce "knowledge" and recognise the plurality of knowledges. In this way, discourse displaces knowledge as *the* object of study. In turn, this allows a freeing of linguistic meanings from the determinism of structuralist definitions, and a viewing of "actors" as participants in discourse rather than central to the process of signification.

Openness to knowing is thus a central standpoint of postmodernism which, in relation to informal learning, assumes engagement among persons and between persons and the adoption of certain stances while maintaining a "sceptical distance". A postmodern position would thus hold that educators and trainers should not take themselves too seriously (henceforth Baudrillard's statement: "forget

Foucault, forget Baudrillard"). This lack of "unreserved commitment" particularly upsets those committed to socialist and Marxist positions in adult education. Anyon, drawing on Aronowitz and Giroux (1991); Cherryholmes (1988); and Ellsworth (1989), asserts that there has been "a retreat of Marxism and socialist feminism in the face of postmodern and poststructural theories in education" (1994: 115).

Anyon's perspective is interesting in part because of her personal history as a Feminist-Marxist contributor in the early 1980s.[5] She points out that a binary opposition (of Marxism to postmodernism) does not aid the struggles for a more equitable society. The idea of a binary opposition between worker and capitalist, suggests Anyon, is limiting and "to some scholars has become the quaint remnants of the Marxist metanarrative" (1994: 116).

She is also critical of aspects of postmodernism, arguing that there is an often obscured metanarrative of postmodernism which describes a universal Truth:

> this is a metanarrative of indeterminacy; a metanarrative about *the certainty of uncertainty*. Arguing that meaning is always indeterminate seems no less a deterministic and universalising view than the Enlightenment narratives such as the orthodox Marxist view in which capitalists are "always" expropriators, and workers "always" righteous. (1994: 122)

She concludes that an essential characteristic of a socially useful theory is its theoretical recommendations must be capable of enactment. Thus "a theory that urges the integration of theory and practice must develop types of praxis that exemplify this: a theory that [does] not oppress others" (1994: 129).

The range of claims for postmodernism has given rise to the criticism it is too relativistic (Himmelfarb 1994; Mestrovic 1991; Mongardini 1990). Mongardini goes so far as to argue that postmodernism is:

> the last ideology adopted by modernity to save itself... Like it or not, postmodernism marks the end of the old order. Postmodernism aestheticises modernity's unqualified glorification of change, the engine of an economistic mentality and *values that Marxism did not annihilate*. The

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5   Anyon's (1983) analysis focussed on a critical theory of "accommodation and resistance", public/private discrepancies, gender and class issues, class difference and the contradictions of modern living.

effect is to continue modernity's economistic and rationalistic reduction of culture to privatism, fragmentation and neo-romantic exaltation of momentary experience. What is lost finally is not only the individual to the "fetishism of objects", but also the moral passions, religion, solidarity ... and a spiritual culture, life-giving tendencies, and symbolic structures ... to a rationalism that has become excessively abstract, but in itself does not produce anything more than primitive forms of fantasy, magic, regression and negation of history. (1990: 53)

Mongardini argues that postmodernism generates a crisis of identity which passes from the level of the individual to the entire culture. This criticism may be rather extreme, however, as Foucault rejects the notion of a monolithic discourse (of postmodernism), and Burbules (drawing upon Derrida) argues that:

> our practices of communication, explanation, justification, truth-telling and so on are always partly expressions of the particular language or languages we have. But because our languages are diverse and noncongruent, there will always be a limit upon any particular discursive system as a standpoint, in a place and time, within which one can try to describe all matters of truth, value and so forth; such matters will always be to some extent the expressions of *this* language, and *this* place and time. (1995: 6)

For Latour (1993), however, the postmodern critique does not go far enough, because it accepts and defines itself against the problematic category of the *modern*. For Latour, the 'crisis of modernity' isn't that circumstances have changed which suddenly throw modernist hopes into doubt, but that modernism was always self-deceived about its capacities to carry through on its (Enlightenment) promises, and has only recently become aware of it:

> postmodernism is a symptom, not a fresh solution. It lives under the modern Constitution, but it no longer believes in the guarantees the Constitution offers... [He adds that] Modernity has never begun ... hence the hint of the ludicrous that always accompanies postmodern thinkers; they claim to come after a time that has not even started. (Latour 1993: 46-7)[6]

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6   Latour advocates a "nonmodernism" that interrogates within the modern the "always present hybrids and oppositions that belie its categories and boundaries" (1993: 47).

2.4.1 Praxis and the villages of experiential learning

Section 2.2 referred to the four "villages" of experiential learning (Weil and McGill 1989). Underpinning the villages is a conception of experiential learning as a process whereby:

> people individually and in association with others, engage in direct encounter and then purposefully reflect upon, validate, transform, give meaning to and seek to integrate their different ways of knowing. (1989: 248)

Jansen and Wildemeersch (1992) point out a number of problems exist with this conception. Firstly there is the issue of "the integration of different ways of knowing". They assert that for any "framework of understanding to transcend the mere exchange of everyday experiences a balanced combination of informal theories [taken-for-granted understandings of reality] and formal theories seems necessary" (1992: 6). They are concerned that the villages do not adequately address this "balanced combination". The conceptual pathways within and between the villages are relatively undeveloped, leaving the notion of experiential learning as a collection of ideological standpoints rather than a coherent theory.

Secondly, a concern of postmodern philosophy about the villages is that, in the latter, "subjects are not the authors of their own 'texts', but their identities are being constituted and reconstituted by the forms of life, the lifeworlds or linguistic contexts in which they find themselves" (Jansen and Wildemeersch 1992: 6).

Notions of community action and social transformation (the third village), claims Giroux (1992), have become increasingly problematic. Radical frameworks have become increasingly fragmented and as Acker, Barry and Esseveld (1983) and Ellsworth (1989) point out, an emancipatory intent is no guarantee of an emancipatory outcome. This gulf between intents and outcomes is further articulated by Lather as a consequence of the "enactment of power relations, with research practices as more inscriptions of legitimation than procedures that help us get closer to some 'truth' that is captured by language" (1991: 14). The implication of this for practice is that research needs to continually demystify the reality of its own practice, or, as Edwards and Usher (1993) suggest — texts are always open to challenge.

Postmodern concerns about "orthodox" theorisations of experiential learning highlight the importance of the views one holds on "objectivity" and "subjectivity", and about authorities' claiming power to define "truth". These concerns will depend substantially on one's philosophical and epistemological grounding in what it means "to know". For Foucault:

> truth isn't outside power or lacking in power: contrary to a myth whose history and functions would repay further study, truth isn't the reward of free spirits, the child of protracted solitude, nor the privilege of those who have succeeded in liberating themselves. Truth is a thing of this world: it is produced only by virtue of multiple forms of constraint. And it induces regular effects of power. Each society has its regime of truth. Its "general politics" of truth: that is, the types of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true; the mechanisms and instances which enable one to distinguish true and false statements, the means by which each is sanctioned; the techniques and procedures accorded value in the acquisition of truth; the status of those who are charged with saying what counts is true. (1988c: 131)

Certain dynamics of asymmetric power which distort and compromise even the best of human intentions are inherent to institutional and informal patterns of life in which people are engaged. In addition to discursive control, Burbules also points out that "in the current world, technical systems of surveillance, manipulation and control are increasingly widespread and subtle. We inevitably participate in these, consciously or unconsciously, nearly all the time" (1995: 6).

The main problem with the "villages" is that all their theorisations of experience, despite their differences, fail to recognise adequately that, in theorising experience, these theorisations discursively reproduce power relations. Even with an emancipatory intent, they can end up having oppressive effects. Nonetheless, experiential learning, as exemplified through the villages, has been shown to have an important philosophic role in bringing together (as a core concept) various approaches to "experience". Indeed, the philosophies of experience-based learning are now being applied to work contexts and, as Hart points out, this "current debate on work and education contains suggestions that are important and useful" (1993: 33). The marshalling of informal learning contains potential for the experience of some marginalised groups to be formally recognised and accredited.

But this "applied" role is not without philosophical problems. The influential standpoints of postmodernism in relation to "the subject", autonomy, gender, local "conditions", language and discourse, power/knowledge, and the relationship of knowledge and experience tell us that, as Foucault suggests, "the theory generated thus far is not indispensable ... the task of "truth" is now linked to the challenging of taboos" (1990: 130). Based on this reading, one would need to be deeply sceptical of the ultimate purposes of structuring and "using" informal learning — irrespective of the village to which one believes (or at least feels) they belong.

CHAPTER THREE

Learning: The New Work Order of Late 20th Century Capitalism

3.1 Learning at work

Work, according to Rousseau, Mill, Marx, Gramsci and Dewey (amongst many others) has a profound educative function for human beings. Each asserts that developmental learning in the workplace cannot be separated from the deepest questions regarding "the person", "humane organisation" and the conduct of our common life. If work environments contain innumerable possibilities for learning, the prevalent assumptions of Governments, unions and industries about work-based learning, new technology, and the roles of industry trainers require examination.

Arguments for and against the fashionable notion of "work as a learning environment" are considered. For instance, Hart (1993; 1995), Senge (1990) and Marsick (1987), hold that within Taylorist[7] workplaces — where jobs are simplified according to the principles of "scientific management" — learning opportunities are reduced. Welton argues that "work is the fundamental 'training site' for a participatory democratic society ... [where] competencies acquired in the primary school of adult learning spill over into other spheres of life" (1991: 10). Hart (1995: 99) further claims that "a radical rethink of work as an educative site is essential for the future". She cites human capital theory as the dominant discourse on work, but:

> this discourse leaves corporations more than ever dependent on ideological constructs which legitimise certain form of exploitation ... and they have to safeguard against trends that would erode these beliefs. (1995: 105)

The Australian national training reform agenda currently embodies a human capital framework which links the theory and practice of work-based learning through the

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7   A "Taylorist" approach work organisation based on standardisation of tasks, specialisation of workforce skills, close supervision and a hierarchical management structure.

mechanism of competency-based standards. Industry trainers are at the forefront of implementing many aspects of training reform, yet there is a very small research base from which we might view these developments (McDonald et al 1992).

3.1.1 Work as a learning environment

The postmodern condition of work is characterised by dispersal and fragmentation: volatile labour markets, fast switches from one product to another, niche marketing, ever increasing consumer orientations, new patterns of management, new technologies, and global interconnections. These characteristics have reduced the need for manual labour, promoting the need for a "flexible" yet specialised labour force. The possession of transferable skills is increasingly posited as vital to workers who are to service and expand the market economy. Learning at work too has become a highly desirable "commodity". Contemporary education and training are increasingly transformed into "marketable" forms.

The transformation of education and training makes it important to distinguish between the rhetoric about how training will benefit workers — improve worker conditions and prospects for advancement — and corporate realities in which knowledge about worker competencies can become integral to decisions about downsizing and redundancies. At the same time, the notion of "cybernetic capitalism" has theorists contemplating the nature of modern work, and of workplaces as learning environments. Indeed, the nexus of contemporary government, union and industry cohabitation is also haunted by Baudrillard's postmodern question: to what extent has the cybernetic revolution "blurred the distinction between man [sic] and machine?" (1993: 170-171).

Zuboff (1988) presents an influential argument about modern technology in the workplace suggesting unprecedented developmental opportunities now exist for workers. She argues that the new technologies allow for more intellectual activity and therefore superior forms of work. Hirschhorn (1984) also argues that the "cybernetic workplace" allows for direct, sensual involvement, presenting new opportunities (and problems) for work design.

Hart (1993: 32), however, points out that the Zuboff and Hirschhorn arguments lead towards "Orwellian solutions", citing new "sensing technology" as an example of these "solutions". A worker's body can, for example, be connected to the plant in such a way as to become, as Baudrillard (1993: 171) puts it, a "cybernetic extension":

her body would shake with plant vibrations reduced electronically to a human scale, and she would feel warmer or cooler as the factory temperature changed. Pressure and sounds could be similarly transmitted. (Hirschhorn, quoted in Hart 1993: 32)

Hart correctly points out that the challenge for the worker is partly to "distinguish her own internal body cues from the messages of the plant ... a model for educative work? I believe not" (1993: 32).

These divergent views about work can be synthesised into three broad approaches to *the organisation of work*:

1)   first, that "Taylorism" is still the prevalent curricular structure, and de-skilling the pre-eminent method for workplace design (Watkins, 1986);

2)   second, that "one can no longer talk of a basically unified type of rationality organising and governing the whole of the work sphere" (Offe 1985: 139). This is related to "flexible specialisation" which emphasises the interaction between socialisation and work organisation (Piore and Sabel 1984);

3)   third, that "post-industrial technology makes both Taylorism and its critique increasingly irrelevant" and opens up the possibilities for a developmental and learner-centred curricular structure (Hirschhorn, 1984: 66). To an extent this approach is the theoretical forerunner to Senge's (1990) notion of the "learning organisation" (see below).

Furthermore, from Foucault, we can say that learning at work is a power-laden term; that is, it reflects certain kinds of dominant interests. Terms such as "flexibility" and "skills" symbolise power formations or "regimes of truth" which involve "discourses which a society accepts, the mechanisms by which people discern true and false statements, the techniques for acquiring truth which are accepted as valid, and the individuals and institutions which are able to define 'truth'" (Foucault, quoted in Rabinow 1984: 163). Workplaces, "designed" to enable learning experiences, enhance worker motivation and awareness of technological advances affecting labour processes and modes of production are now very important in determining what is accepted as "valid" knowledge. That this designing is "correct" underpins contemporary discourses of learning at work.

In Australia, the Australian Council of Trade Unions (1987) and the Business Council of Australia (1988) each assert that to attain competitiveness in the 1990s and beyond, most sectors of most industries will require a transformation to provide quality products or services and become efficient, flexible and innovative. The "learning organisation" sought by many corporations "requires a highly skilled workforce, modern technology and an appropriate structure and culture" (Harvard Business Review, July—August 1993: 78). But what is "appropriate" is indeterminate.

"Taylorism" is alive and well

Watkins's (1986) study of high-tech industries led him to a pessimistic vision of future work, arguing that Taylorist principles are still being applied in a variety of ways. Not all high-tech industries operate with high-tech occupations — "women and minorities are frequently hired to perform repetitive, low-wage tasks ... some high-tech corporations simply shift their assembly line work to countries like Taiwan and Hong Kong" (1986: 23). He argues that:

- the labour market is highly segmented (for example, between elite technicians, managers, sales personnel, those performing creative conceptual work and unskilled service workers);

- it is a myth that advanced technological workplaces require more highly credentialled and qualified workers, claiming a de-skilling process is operating for most workers;

- contemporary labour conditions propel a numerically small elite into the post industrial future, polarising the labour market — with most working under essentially Taylorised conditions.

Watkins's claim that Taylorism is alive and well owes a theoretical debt to Braverman's (1974) influential "de-skilling thesis". Braverman was never convinced that learning can be plausibly applied to the workplace, claiming:

> the unity of thought and action, conception and execution, hand and mind, which capitalism threatened from its beginnings, is now attacked by a systematic dissolution employing all the resources of science and the various engineering disciplines based upon it. The subjective factor of the labour process is removed to a place among its inanimate objective factors. To the materials and instruments of production are added a 'labour force',

another 'factor of production', and the process is henceforth carried on by management as the sole subjective element. This is the ideal towards which management tends in pursuit of which it uses and shapes every productive innovation furnished by science. (in Welton 1991: 16)

A notion central to Marxist sociology, that labour is *the* fundamental social fact, is now, however, being radically questioned. Contemporary philosophers including Foucault, Barthes, Habermas, Touraine, Gorz and Toffler no longer treat labour, and the position of the worker in the productive process, as the chief organising principle of social structures. Arguing from different theoretical premises, they hold that the industrial form of rationality — linear, logical, scientific — no longer heralds "Enlightenment" (modernist) social development. Post-industrial changes in production and consumption — from mass production, mass market, machine-paced systems — to the production of specialist, niche and luxury goods and production systems based on information technology, have led to a new form of social labour: flexible, but specialised.

"Flexible specialisation"
Labour is now required to have specialised yet highly transferable skills, henceforth flexible-specialisation. Offe (1985) questions some of the principal values of contemporary work-society and its criterion of rationality. He believes contemporary corporate goals of achievement, productivity and growth are examples that could be altered in favour of more humane standards of value. But he also points out that what might consist of "humane standards" can be problematic, with:

> the idea of work as an ethical duty disintegrating, not only because of the secularisation of cultural traditions, but also because the rationalisation of industrial work has undermined producer's pride. (1985: 141)

This "disintegration" theme is pursued by Dahrendorf who adds that "work as an honourable calling [as necessary moral duty] has been decentred relative to other spheres of life" (cited in Welton 1991: 24). But as Offe claims, "people [are developing] a growing sensitivity to the social and ecological costs of production" (1985: 144). This sensitivity is vital in challenging the idea that work can be thought of as *an institutional context* for human development. Because of the "social and ecological" costs of production, Offe argues that developmental possibilities exist within work sectors — through critical reflection and transformative action. It is ideas about "developmental possibilities" that are seized upon by proponents of the flexible-specialisation argument and by advocates of the new vocationalism.

In the post-Fordist context[8], the vocationalist discourse personalises economic competitiveness by stressing the need for individual employees to be motivated and continually up-skilled or re-skilled, and this provides a meaning which aligns skill and knowledge development to economic competitiveness. For Usher, Bryant and Johnston (1996 in print), however, this meaning is one-dimensional. They point out that the new attitudes and competencies required by employees change the relationships between pedagogy, knowledge and labour processes. What is foregrounded in the drive for flexibility and continuous learning, they argue, are social skills and flexible competencies rather than subject-based knowledge.

"Learner-centred" developmental possibilities and cybernetic work environments are also questioned by Lee and Zemke. They suggest many work environments are now characterised by "high levels of stress, insecurity, tough decisions and sixty-hour working weeks", adding that although "you might expect a resurgence of a management model based on Machiavelli's Prince ... or some other Theory-X icon, instead there is a string of scholarly articles and books trying to make sense of the chaos by proposing management and work organisation models based on heart and soul" (1993: 22). Exemplifying their point, DuPree, chairman of a major American furniture manufacturer, surmises that participative management is the most effective contemporary practice. As Lee and Zemke point out, DuPree's version of participative management ends up "in a place where leaders create covenantal relationships — bonds that fulfil deep needs and give work meaning for employees — with the purpose of the corporation redemption, not profit" (1993: 23).

Braverman would be sceptical of DuPree's interpretation of leadership. He argues that to maintain control over the labour process, capitalist operations de-skill work and limit worker discretion on the job with new technologies a potent example. Berryman points out that this de-skilling theory was based on the existence of:

> a trade-off between skills and control of the work process and implied a deskilling direction as a by-product of the capitalist drive to control the labour process. Thus, [Braverman] replaced a technological determinism with an organisational determinism that emerged from the fundamental characteristics of capitalism. (1993: 353)

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8   Fordism may be viewed as the application of 'Taylorist' principles to manufacturing, with the added features, exploited by Henry Ford, of continuous flow line production and mass marketing (Weisbord 1989).

The power of Braverman's argument, suggests Berryman, lies in its theoretical underpinning. In conjunction with Watkin's argument that Taylorism is still prevalent, the de-skilling argument remains pertinent despite data on the persistence and growth of high-skilled production jobs. For instance, the 1990 Commission on the Skills of the American Workforce largely adopts Zuboff's (1988) argument that new technology leads to more rewarding and challenging production jobs, but only if the employer organised work to take advantage of those skills. That is, skill requirements are a function of the way that work is organised rather than of the technologies used.

This focus on "determinants of the choice of work organisation" (Berryman 1993: 354) theoretically underpins the "flexible specialisation" of Piore and Sabel (1984). Their work emphasises the interaction between socialisation and organisation, and the role of this interaction in shaping behaviour of workers. This emphasis accepts phenomena generally ignored, or treated as anomalies by economic theories such as human emotions and desires. Table 3.1 briefly summarises the main points in the deskilling and flexible specialisation theories:

Table 3.1: Analytical Implications of the Two Paradigms

	De-skilling Paradigm	Flexible Specialisation Paradigm
Long-term skill trends	Dynamic of de-skilling	Dynamic of upgrading and multi-skilling
Structure of control	Based on Taylorist ideas and techniques	Career structures and internal labour markets for core workers
Employment relations	Minimum of interaction model of least commitment	Worker commitment plus core/periphery labour market structure

Braverman, Watkins and Piore and Sabel examine how workers and firms conceive of their strategies with reference to workplace socialisation processes, rather than how workers and firms react to the laws of the market. But it is the link between workplace socialisation and the marketplace that is reflected in Hirschhorn (1984). This link is also implicit in Senge's 1990 notion of the learning organisation.

The "Learning Organisation" or a new operationalism?

Hirschhorn argues that the technology of the cybernetic workplace offers "developmental" opportunities for work, based on principles of integration and flexibility:

> the principle of flexibility creates a conception of work in which the worker's capacity to learn, to adapt, and to regulate the evolving controls becomes central to the machine system's developmental potential. (1984: 58)

He claims that the new workplaces require a "culture of learning, an appreciation of tacit knowledge, a feeling for interpersonal processes, and an appreciation of our organisational design choices" (1984: 169). More recent studies (Senge 1990; Watkins and Marsick 1992; 1993; Ford 1993; Kasl, Dechant and Marsick 1993) have argued that more effective and productive organisations have cultures that provide structured and active learning environments for employees at all levels.

What "effective and productive" mean, however, can be problematic in workplaces as there is a complex interplay of physical, technical and social forces in the constitution of skilled work and workers:

> The more deeply we scratch the surface, the more difficult it is to find a line where one begins and the other ends: it is a seamless fabric. Indeed, this seamless quality is precisely the way that power struggles at work are experienced in the ordinary routines of everyday life. (Jackson 1991: 17)

Schultz shows the coherence of these everyday forces, quoting from a woman worker in an Australian steel mill:

> they put me on one job for six weeks cutting steel. You had to pull a grid out. It was a real struggle every time. After six weeks, when they told me the knack, with a twist and a flick of the wrist, it was easy, but they only showed me after they decided that, 'yeah, she can do it'. There was always a knack. (1985: 170)

Cockburn (1985), Phillips and Taylor (1986) and Westwood and Bhachu (1988) through examples like Schultz's in a number of industries, show that the organisation of skill in the workplace has been an arena of recurring conflict — riddled with

politics and the ascription of privilege through the exercise of social power, gender and race relations.

With today's workplace restructuring, industry trainers are widely used as a medium for organisational redesign. Training initiatives are being used to reorganise trades-work and multi-skilling and job enhancement programs are being introduced. Training is also used to introduce management philosophies stressing new corporate cultures — flatter hierarchies, work teams and quality circles — largely inspired by Japanese models of industrial relations.

Senge (1990) and Ford (1993) follow Japanese managerial concepts which assert that individuals, teams and enterprises are continually learning to meet internal and external changes. This is an important goal of workplace reform in most industries, but few organisations, according to Ford, have fully achieved continual learning. Ford claims this is partly because such an achievement requires conceptual innovation by the enterprise and a high degree of workforce participation in critical aspects of organisation development, including the development of skills. In practice this means that all members of the workforce share in some or all of the following:

- enterprise strategic planning;
- enterprise conceptual and cultural changes;
- workplace reform strategies;
- skill formation practices, including the preparation of learning materials;
- development of new work organisation. (Ford 1993: 11)

A key term associated with these practices (and thus the "learning organisation") is *empowerment*. The term empowerment implies, according to Welton, that "all employees of the enterprise, especially those at operative level, are given more power and choice in the work of the enterprise and greater opportunities for learning. It means more autonomy for individuals and teams, and greater individual and team responsibility for production, construction, quality and safety objectives" (1991: 37).

Kornbluh and Greene identify four central themes about worker empowerment. They claim that people in organisations must be enabled to move from "learned helplessness to empowered actors" by:

- unlearning their deference to authority and understand the social and political processes within the organisation that negatively affect their lives;

- being nurtured in this process by a mentor, coach or friend;

- exercising their new understanding and competencies through progressively increasing responsibility;

- learning within a supportive organisational framework of interdependence and mutuality. (1989: 259)

Empowerment has deep political implications. As Jackson points out: "such changes invariably undermine the existing organisation of job categories and thus the organisational cohesion and power of the unions" (1991: 28). Newman shares this concern, positing trade union training as very important to people, arguing that workers can "protect themselves and others from exploitation, improve working conditions, make workplaces safer, contribute to the development of their enterprise and make their voices heard on industrial and economic matters — through their trade unions" (1993: 162). To achieve these goal-focussed objectives, he suggests that union officials, workplace representatives and rank-and-file members can benefit from training.

Rainbird (1990) asserts that unions now regard training issues as central to their own interests, not only technical upgrading to protect jobs, but also longer range policy issues like plant-based involvement, or worker participation in job design and labour force planning.

Stressing the importance of "shared vision and anchoring vision in a set of governing ideals to an organisation's learning," Senge argues "a commitment to 'the truth' amongst all levels or workers is essential" (1990: 223). For Senge "truth" is directly linked to "openness and honesty" which underpins team learning and aids local decision making. Senge encourages an idealism that needs to be set against the day-to-day realities of work practices, conflicts, politics and power issues.

Andresen points out that Senge fashions his arguments "from his experience of organisations that operate within the commercial marketplace" (1991: 182). The notion of "the learning organisation", coupled with Senge's focus on the roles of managers as "leaders", has been accepted by many managers. Senge's words — "systemic thinking is critical to a learning organisation" — strike a chord with contemporary corporate managers. These words are derived from the total quality movement in Japan which Senge describes as "the first wave in building learning

organisations" — systems thinking is now the *fifth discipline*. The other four "disciplines" are:

- developing personal mastery (emphasising a personal vision);
- having mental models (which test assumptions);
- building "shared visions";
- understanding the influence of "team-learning".

Senge's theory has a number of serious conceptual flaws including the patent inadequacies of his assumptions about the ontological status of "the organisation", the lack of acknowledgment of the problematic nature of the notions involved, the ideological blinkers — as if contestation over "shared visions" is an anomaly, or serious disputation doesn't even exist. Furthermore, his arguments about "shared vision", "team-learning" and so on, place ultimate responsibility (and power) for any radical change upon the executive staff of the organisation. It could follow from Senge's argument that management's right to manage now wears a new guise — dressed up in the liberal-humanist language of adult learning in the workplace. Indeed, Leymann (1989) challenges the myth of organisational learning, asserting that power structures of corporations generally are not being altered, and that "people who have learned something new must have enough influence or autonomy to change the communicative infrastructure of their workplace" (1989: 288).

Leymann's arguments are consistent with Habermas' (1984) ideal of non-coercive communication for democratic institutional life, Freire's (1970) call for a dialogical mode of learning (in contrast to an authoritarian pedagogy) and Forester's (1989) learner-centred communicative model "for planning in the face of power". Welton adds that we should not:

> underestimate the technocratic bias pervading our culture and organisational life (instrumental, anti-dialogic approaches to problem solving)... Another hindrance to the "learning conscious organisation" is the careerism of managers, professionals and technicians. Their status and reward system is usually not linked to the development of a real participatory managerial style. (1991: 39)

Watkins and Marsick (1993) and Bawden (1991), describe first hand experiences of promoting "learning environments", providing illustrated narratives of people working together to improve complex problematic situations. They highlight collaboration and the need to be conscious of the various activities involved in

multidimensional work places but, like Senge, do not comprehensively deal with ideological and industrial conflicts in workplaces.

3.2 The rhetoric of workplace reform

As society becomes more complex its professional labour becomes more differentiated, more fragmented, more subject to change. The cognitive demands upon workers, and thus upon those constituted to train workers, correspondingly alter. Barnett asserts that:

> no longer are the pools of knowledge and expertise acquired in initial education sufficient for the new order. What are now required are the abilities to put that knowledge and expertise to use in unfamiliar circumstances; and so we find demands for "flexibility", "communication skills" and "teamwork". Also required are the abilities to jettison that learning over the lifespan, to be prepared to take on new forms of experience and knowledge and to develop these skills anew. In other words, the regeneration of capital requires not knowledge per se, but abilities to exploit, and if necessary, discard knowledge. We are in a throwaway society, cognitively speaking. (1994: 15)

It is not only employers urging a stronger relationship between industries and education, it is part of the rhetoric of the dual tropes of workplace and training reform. These reforms are on the agendas of big business, unions and government. Such agendas favour forms of knowledge which are "useful"; that is, instrumental and operational, exemplified by a key question for employers to prospective employees which is: not so much what do they know, or what do they understand, but rather *what can they do?*

3.2.1 Discourses of competitiveness

The rhetoric of both private and public sectors is that flexibility in the workplace will help bring about improved productivity, efficiency, career opportunities for workers, and enhanced satisfaction. For companies, this is meant to translate to stronger levels of competitiveness in the market place. Dawkins and Holding exemplify this belief:

> standardised production will increasingly give way to flexible production systems especially in manufacturing. Such flexible systems place a high

premium on broadly skilled staff at all levels of the design, production, management, and marketing processes. (1987: 4)

Processes of structural change, point out Gonczi and Hager, are "phenomena common to most OECD countries" (1992: 27). They refer to the 1990 report of COSTAC (an Australian government overseas mission) which shows that the need to improve workplace skill is recognised in even the most highly successful economies. Thus, Germany, the USA, Canada, the UK, and Sweden have all recently initiated major change in their vocational education and training systems as a strategy for increasing their competitiveness.

OECD reforms commonly include improving the training opportunities for adults[9]. This involves improving the training of trainers and integrating education and training by such methods as assessment of prior learning, articulation arrangements, setting competency standards for general education and developing new models of formal education which link industry and education more closely. The notion of skill formation is central to this transformation, and industry trainers are thus configured as strategic personnel in a discourse about economic competitiveness.

Advocates of post-Fordist "flexible" workplaces, such as Burke in a 1990 discussion paper for the Australian Manufacturing Council, also call for:

> better technology and dramatic changes in the relationships between management, supervisory staff and employees. This change can be described as building more flexible, participative and co-operative relations within the firm ... firms may need also to consider their relations particularly with other firms and sources of information, in a new, more flexible and co-operative manner. (in Watkins 1991: 25)

OECD nations are currently considering changes required to work organisation to be competitive beyond the 1990s. For manufacturing, Bolwijn and Kumpe (1990) describe a four-phase model, outlining structural and cultural requirements of each phase (see table 3.2). Case studies of large manufacturers in Europe and Japan provide research support for this model (Hayton 1992).

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9   Increased flexibility is held to have developed due to the requirements of capital accumulation, but these trends are not experienced evenly across the globe (Edwards 1994: 162). In its widest sense, flexibility can be seen (Lash and Urry 1994) as an attempt to resolve the problems of capital accumulation as capital becomes more internationalised and the globe more integrated into market mechanisms (globalisation). The OECD nations and, in particular the United States (Reich 1993), are actively supporting the 'flexible accumulation' solution.

Table 3.2: "Efficient Firm" Model — Structural and Cultural Change Pathway

CULTURE

	Supervision and control	Communication and co-operation	Participation and democratisation
Hierarchical	*efficient firm* →	*quality firm*	
		↓	
Decentralised		*flexible firm* →	*innovative firm*

STRUCTURE
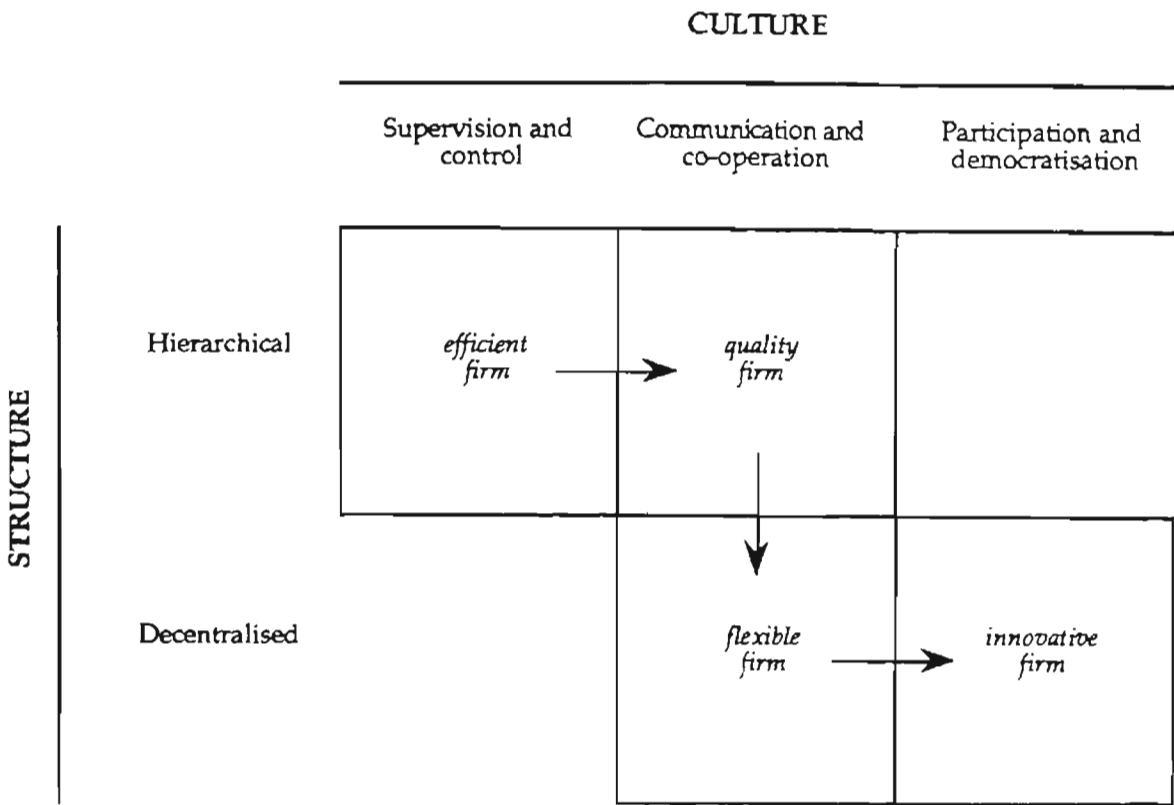
(Bolwijn and Kumpe 1990; in Hayton 1992)

Bolwijn and Kumpe (1990) are promoting a discourse of industry competitiveness that is meant to encourage workplace cultures based on participation and democratisation. Their theory holds that people in the innovative firm need to be *empowered* to take responsibility and set organisational goals (see table 3.3).

Table 3.3: Descriptions of the Four Phases of Organisational Development

Efficient Firm	Quality Firm	Flexible Firm	Innovative Firm
In the "efficient firm" all efforts are directed at reducing costs. The firm specialises in a narrow range of products or services. Work organisation is based on standardisation of tasks and specialisation of labour. Management's role is mainly planning, control and supervision.	All efforts are directed at the pursuit of quality while recognising the still necessary efficiency improvements. The many changes necessary to achieve this are a cultural shock to the efficient firm. Many firms are pursuing this through the Total Quality Management strategy.	As well as cost reduction and quality improvement, efforts are directed at increasing speed. This means faster delivery of service, faster adaptation to market changes, and offering greater variety in services. To achieve this a flat management structure is used and most work is carried out by small multi-skilled teams.	The teamwork concept is used to its fullest extent to tap the creative abilities of the workforce. There are few distinctions between managers and workers. The innovative climate is maintained by the employment of "mavericks", an open-door policy, and promotion of diagonal communication.

(Bolwijn and Kumpe 1990; in Hayton, 1992)

Bolwijn and Kumpe, in line with many other post-Fordist writers, interpret current changes in the workplace as part of a widespread trend towards flatter management structures with greater autonomy and responsibility being given to trade and non-trade (operative level) staff. Their model, although useful for clarifying conceptual elements of work organisation, does not distinguish the organisations' everyday cultural, social and industrial relations features from structural, organisational and administrative arrangements.

3.2.2 Discourses of "skill formation"

Maurice, Sellier and Silvestre's major study of French and German work structures points out that "compared with the state-run general education system in France, it may appear that German employers lay a heavy hand on the German (occupational training) system, particularly in the light of the frequent protests aroused in France by any attempt to bring occupational training into closer association with industry" (1986: 65). They add that in Germany, the fact that many social institutions — unions, churches, and towns — have established their own occupational training programs "reveals a fairly broad consensus about the value of acquiring professional skill".

Their point is that the development of skills and the organisation of the "actors" within a firm or enterprise are heavily influenced by the broader social and institutional links formed by industry-government arrangements and national accreditation systems. This has major implications for any long-term trend of skill upgrading, multi-skilling and for programs seeking to recognise informal learning. It also raises some fundamental questions about:

- the effects on workers of becoming more flexible;
- how workers are 'being made' more flexible;
- how new skills are being acquired;
- how new skills are recognised and reflected in reward systems or wages structures;
- the roles of trainers and formal and informal learning in skill acquisition programs.

Horkheimer and Adorno (1993); Habermas (1987); Wexler (1992); Casey (1995); Pateman (1970; 1989); Rainbird (1988); Welton (1991); and Hart (1993); and others, have variously observed the effects of the authority structure of institutions on psychological qualities and attitudes of individuals. Drawing on de-skilling concepts

developed in Braverman's (1974) *Labour and Monopoly Capital*[10], Rainbird argues that:

> in a period of high unemployment, when workers themselves are under the threat of redundancy, pressures to adopt flexible working practices can be intense ... companies rely on the fear of the workers that if they don't adapt and exhibit "flexible attitudes" and abilities of their own innovation then they are ripe for selection for redundancy. Incredible pressure is being placed on [those aged] 45 or so who dread what's happening and the indications suggest that older people are accepting more menial tasks to avoid being trapped by the constant changes. (1988: 174)

It has become increasingly clear that major and rapid economic and social change characterised by cyclical, temporary unemployment has given way to structural and ongoing unemployment. Flexible specialisation is resulting in core and periphery workforces with the growth of an "underclass" (Galbraith 1992). Because of this, contemporary Marxist scholarship which addresses structural deficiencies and the theme of alienated labour in the context of technical change retains analytical power. Welton (1995) and Mezirow (1995) both emphasise that human beings can learn to be helpless when confronted with structures that either block scope for their imagination or action.

Recent sociology holds that learning and human development are set in relation to work content and to the opportunities available to workers to control their lives. Apathy is posited as something we learn: hence the interest in the organisation of work as a learning environment (Pipan 1989; Schurman 1989), and the fashionability of notions such as the learning organisation. Kahn and Gardell argue that "concepts of learning can be plausibly applied to workplaces, and that workplaces should be evaluated, at least in part, by the extent to which they enable workers to acquire and enhance valued skills and abilities" (1989: xi).

The application of a Marxist ontology within contemporary capitalist workplaces in aspects of the learning organisation and TQM is, however, less grand (Enlightenment) narrative and more grand irony. Under the guise of enlightened workplace practices, learners are now required to adapt, in ever more subtle ways,

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10 Braverman argues that the development of the productive forces under capitalism requires constant technical innovation whereby management seeks to extend managerial control over the labour process by separating conception from the execution of work.

to the competencies needed for optimal capital efficiency. Usher, Bryant and Johnston (in print) link this phenomenon to a "vocationalist pedagogy".

In a vocationalist pedagogy, learning means proceeding to the correct answer in the most efficient way. That is, Usher, Bryant and Johnston argue, adaptation and application provide no room for experimentation, open-endedness and unforeseen outcomes. Experience at work is only valued if it contributes to learning about the most efficient outcomes being sought. If it does not, it is discounted. Thus experience has no inherent value other than as a tool for enhancing motivation and achieving behavioural competencies even though, in the post-Fordist context, skills are meant to be empowering. Experience and knowledge of learners and knowledge arising from this becomes a mere device, a means for best achieving a predefined end. Learner experience *appears* to be valued, but its use is instrumental, selective and at best illustrative.

The vocabulary of the "learning society" with its notions of skill formation, competence, outcomes, problem-based learning, experiential learning, transferability, TQM and so on, alters traditional understandings of knowledge and reason. Traditional emphases on language, formal and discipline-based conventions and open communication provided outcomes which could be tentative, ambiguous, uncertain, contradictory. The new terminology suggests that knowledge is related to observable outcomes, the doing, the actions and transdisciplinary forms of skill. Employers want to be more certain of what their workers now do. Barnett argues that this new vocabulary is not "linguistic window dressing, but an epistemological assault on the very character of what counts as reason" (1994: 71).

Within a context of contested notions of knowledge, one should be wary of any prescriptive definition of "skill formation". Hayton, Garrick and Guthrie drew on the terms used by the Australian Construction Industry Development Agency (CIDA) to examine the new industry-based code for skills acquisition:

> skill formation is the means by which all those in the industry are empowered to participate in the continuing development of work organisation, structures and processes and contribute towards attaining enterprise objectives. (1993: 37)

Within this definition lies important contemporary code about skill formation: "the means", "empowerment" and the attainment of "enterprise objectives". Hayton, Garrick and Guthrie point out that the means include education and training

programs (both external and in-house), the implementation of training policies and systems within an enterprise, and the active learning environment provided by the interaction of individuals and teams with people and work-related processes. All forms of learning, both formal and informal, are included in this definition. Unclear, however, are the boundaries between these forms of learning. Nyhan (1991) divides learning within enterprises into three types:

- Structured and active learning environment:
  learners, who have responsibility for their own learning, learn by planned and structured interaction with people, knowledge and experience, using problem solving and inquiry;

- Structured and passive learning environment:
  learners receive "deposits" of information, like banks receive money;

- Chaotic learning environment
  learning is not actively encouraged and learners learn things by accident or informally.

A planned program of work experience and coaching of a worker by an expert would mostly be "structured and active". While some would regard such learning as "informal", Hayton, Garrick and Guthrie point out that any learning that occurs through a planned program of skills development — even when it occurs in non-formal settings — is now sometimes classed as a form of "formal learning". Indeed, Lave and Wenger (1991), Billett (1992; 1994) and Stevenson (1994) contend that "authentic" settings such as the workplace can provide optimum environments for vocational learning, providing equipment, activities and access to on-site experts.

Jackson says training activities enact power relations which "constitute work as 'skilled' or 'unskilled', and thus determine the power and privilege of the worker" (1992: 26). Following Jackson's line, Gaskell (1986) suggests training serves as a kind of "proxy for level of skill", with the nature and type of training associated with work often used as criteria for judgments about the presence or absence of the skill in both work and workers. The significance of training in the workplace is thus not only technical, it is social and political. As Jackson argues, "in fact, in the current round of restructuring, it is precisely the capacity of training to transform the social relations of the workplace that has put it high on the political agenda" (1992: 26).

Now firmly on the political agenda, training is viewed as a way to promote workplace communicative processes — something which interests some feminists. Pateman (1989: 217) for example, says that "women's speech [in the workplace] has been persistently and systematically invalidated". She claims it is precisely the socialisation dimension of workplace learning that has never been fully appreciated by political theorists. But as awareness grows about the implications of training as a tool of restructuring, so too do training initiatives become more central to industrial relations. Mechthild Hart is very sceptical of the effects of training coming under an industrial relations umbrella, claiming that "evidence abounds that sexism and racism remain a primary organising factor in distributing and structuring work". Hart views upskilling "opportunities" for women, minorities and immigrants "as a lever for greater economic exploitation" (1993: 28). She adds that despite the so-called revolution of the smart-machine (Zuboff 1988), work remains propped up by "a very unrevolutionary industrial division of labour" (1993: 28).

Unions and management frequently negotiate about extending worker skills so workers can undertake a wider range of tasks. Multi-skilling is an essential part of the workplace reform strategies of many organisations. The popular rhetoric about multi-skilling is that it enables small teams of workers to be largely self-sufficient in carrying out a range of production or service functions. It is thus associated with structural changes in work organisation involving a move away from centralised to decentralised management and the formation of supposedly semi-autonomous work teams. This usually means broadening each worker's skills. Communication skills and inter-personal skills are held by senior managers to be increasingly important to decentralised work organisation structures. In particular, abilities that contribute to "team-building" and participation are prized because they promote "self-directed" and "team-based" learning (Hayton et al 1995). Noyelle says this team building symbolises "a movement into an era in which the traditional separation between working and learning is disappearing, with learning becoming increasingly integrated into a person's work life" (1987: 121).

3.3 Education reform: aligning educational goals with industry needs

The beliefs that knowledge is no longer the special province of formal institutions and that learning in the workplace is valuable and assessable, form an overarching

rationale for the national reform of education and training[11]. Modularised training activities designed to assist workers achieve the necessary standards required for optimum enterprise efficiency have become central to adult education. Participants in workplace training activities desire — indeed expect — to have their experiences validated in the form of competencies. Big business and unions support them in this. Workers and others within many sections of industry assume that competencies assessed in the workplace are (or at least should be) automatically transferable to courses within formal institutions, and more generally recognised by employers. Such assumptions are aligned with successful movement in a flexible labour market. More radical "readings" of the education reform process, such as that by Usher and Edwards, suggest that "the social system is going 'nowhere' even as it changes; it is 'simply' being driven to maximise its efficiency" (1994: 176). Proponents of the reforms, however, argue that there can be no objections in principle to the application of competencies and work-based learning outcomes to educational processes.

3.3.1 The Australian training reform agenda: context

"Heightened activity at the intersection between industry, government and training has emerged in the interests of national wealth and development" (Hattie 1992: 25). This agenda, says a sceptical John Hattie, disguises several ills by promoting, amongst other things, the need for a greater education and training effort involving remodelling traditional systems of vocational education and training and reconsidering ways in which decisions about workers' competence are made.

The promotion of competency specification of work skills, says Oliver (1992), has received strong support from the labour market, the bureaucracy, and many in the education sector. Peak bodies, particularly trade unions, have strongly backed workplace reform and award restructuring which, in many instances, have included financial remuneration for improving workers skills — with associated industrial relations implications. The effect on industry trainers is an increased demand for recognition of learning, greater access to vocational education, training and accreditation and, thus, changes in training arrangements. These changes are driven both by touted industry needs and by government policies.

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11   I say 'national' as the focus here is on the Australian context, but this phenomenon is common to most modernised western countries (eg see the British National Council for Vocational Qualifications; Human Resource Development, Canada and similar bodies throughout the OECD nations).

The increased demand and changes in training arrangements has led to the establishment by the Commonwealth Government of a new national co-ordinating body — the Australian National Training Authority (ANTA). A strategic part of ANTA's charter (inter alia) is to promote stronger links between workplace learning and formal education and accreditation agencies[12].

Government policies on vocational education and training aim to increase the quantity and quality of vocational education and training to support workplace reform and enhance productivity. While the push for improvements in the quantity, quality and flexibility of vocational education and training has come, since the mid-1980s, mainly from the Federal Government, it has been broadly supported by unions, employer groups and big business.

The Minister for Employment, Education and Training, Dawkins' (1989) policy statement identified five priorities:

- to substantially increase the level of national investment in training;
- to improve the quality and flexibility of our national training arrangements;
- to improve the national consistency of training arrangements and the co-ordination of training;
- to improve access available to disadvantaged groups;
- to reform current arrangements for the recognition of overseas qualifications.

New partnerships between education and industry are evolving in a direction which Wexler (1993) refers to as "educational corporatism". In this corporatism, specific mechanisms such as skill-based pay and embedded training — what Stern (1992) calls "doing by learning" — will supposedly increase the amount of learning at work. Ethically and epistemologically however, the point of the "doing" or "doing by learning" appears to be to increase practical knowledge to boost short and medium-term productivity. Purposeful human activity calls for goals beyond the practices of, say, boosting economic competitiveness or being more "work-smart". The notion of a work-smart or clever country, founded on economically competitive practices forms a marked contrast to a notion of practices which have human goals which are, says Beckett (1993), having outcomes with intended ethical justification.

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12 A scathing critique of the underlying econometric and corporatist tendencies in the ANTA charter is provided by Yeatman (1994).

Key ethical questions are whether the new conceptions of knowledge, education and training will ultimately reward the human capacities intended to improve economic competitiveness? Will this be at the expense of other kinds of virtues that might lead to different forms of society — friendship, altruism, kindness, ethical concern, generosity, cultural understanding and so on? Will the reforms widen our sense of rationality, or "simply" lead to new forms of epistemological closure?[13]

One of the most influential of the major Australian government reports addresses initial vocational preparation for young people. The report of the Australian Education Council Review Committee (known as the Finn Report 1991), recommends that targets should be adopted for participation of young people in vocational education and training. The Finn Report converts the rhetoric of improving Australia's skills base into precise and concrete targets. The Finn Report's key recommendations, which have been endorsed by the Commonwealth and State governments, are:

- by 1995 as a minimum, participation of all 18-year-olds in vocational education and training to at least the National Training Board Level 1, in traineeships, or in Year 12 schooling[14];

- by 2001 at least a NTB Level 2 traineeship, or progress towards a higher level vocational or academic qualification, for almost all 20-year-olds;

- by 2001 at least a vocational certificate of NTB Level 3 or progress towards a vocational qualification above NTB Level 3 or a diploma or degree for at least 50% of 22-year-olds.

The Carmichael Report (1992) sets out an elaborate scheme of entry-level vocational education which builds on the Finn Report by proposing a competency-based system of vocational education. The scheme, termed the Australian Vocational Certificate System, has been endorsed by the Federal and State governments, but specific targets for implementation are yet to be developed for most industries. The linchpin

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13   For Aristotle, the purpose of practical wisdom was eudemonia, the well-balanced life of well-being. Practical wisdom — phronesis — became wisdom once the ethical (virtuous) purpose had evolved for an individual. Ensnarement in a rationalised, social-economic lifeworld, devoid of deeper ethical purposes, represents a part of the social emptying — the absence of the social and "the commodifying of human relations" (Wexler 1987).

14   The National Training Board is a body established to set guidelines for the development of industry wide national competency standards and to endorse competency standards developed by industry bodies. A description of the NTB levels is given in the next section.

for most of these initiatives is the introduction of a national system of competency standards and competency-based training. The system addresses, at least in part, four of the five priorities set by Dawkins (1989): training quality and flexibility, consistency, access by disadvantaged groups, and recognition of overseas qualifications. It does little to confront the key financial priority directly — to substantially increase the level of national investment in training, particularly private sector investment.

3.3.2 Competency-based training

To assert a person is competent is to say their actions are being performed to a prescribed standard. The standards may be difficult or easy to attain. For example, performance at "level one" of an industry's competency-based standards usually implies the ability to perform routine, predictable work (table 3.4 illustrates a standards framework). This work is judged, usually with the aid of a standardised check-list, and forms a basis for progression. "Level four" might imply a greater complexity in task performance, a greater degree of responsibility or personal accountability, perhaps the supervision of others and so on. Supporters of the notion of competency-based standards argue that "outcome statements can be created for all learning which is considered important or what people want ... after all, if you cannot say what you require, how can you develop it and how do you know when you have achieved it?" (Jessup; in Barnett 1994: 72).

Australia's framework for competency-based standards relies on guidelines provided by the National Training Board (NTB) and the National Office of Overseas Skills Recognition (NOOSR). The NTB recognises a Competency Standards Body for each industry or occupation, and such bodies have the task of developing competency standards for their industry. For industry trainers, this task falls to the Competency Standards Body. Important features of the competency standards system are the framework of eight levels of competence covering all occupational levels, and the specification of key competencies needed by all members of the workforce, given in the reports of Finn (1991) and Mayer (1992). Jackson argues that Finn and Mayer have neglected important underlying questions: "about why we have to have competency standards, and whether they are necessary at all" (1991: 19).

Whereas much of the focus of award restructuring is on multi-skilling and the breaking down of occupational demarcation and technical skill boundaries, there is a strong argument that the non-technical, or interpersonal skills, are at least equally as important as technical skills for effective workplace reform. The key competencies thus include both technical and interpersonal skills:

- collecting, analysing and organising information;
- communicating ideas and information;
- planning and organising activities;
- working with others and in teams;
- using mathematical ideas and techniques;
- solving problems;
- using technology.

The National Training Board developed a framework of eight levels of competence covering all occupations and industries (1992). Termed the *Australian Standards Framework* (ASF), it specifies broad attributes and levels of responsibility for each level from operative (level 1) to senior professional (level 8). Distinctions between levels are made on the basis of level of discretion in the work, application of theoretical knowledge, complexity of tasks, supervision and responsibility for others, and need for creativity and design. Descriptions of the eight levels are given in Table 3.4.

Table 3.4 The Eight Levels in the Australian Standards Framework (ASF)

NTB Level	Level Names	Description
Level 8	Senior professional or manager	Likely to have full responsibility and accountability for all aspects of the work of others and functions including planning, budgeting and strategy. This involves self-directed development and mastery of a range of knowledge and skills.
Level 7	Professional or manager	Works in accordance with a broad plan, budget or strategy, involving self-directed development and mastery of broad and/or specialised areas of knowledge with a range of skills. May have accountability for the structure, management and output of the work of others.
Level 6	Senior administrator, specialist, technologist or para-professional	Works under limited guidance in line with a broad plan, budget or strategy, involving self-directed development of knowledge with substantial depth. Responsibility for the management and output of the work of others may be involved.
Level 5	Administrator, specialist, technician or para-professional	Works on a range of tasks in a variety of contexts, applying knowledge with substantial depth in some areas and a range of technical and other skills. Works under broad guidance, and may plan and supervise the work of others.
Level 4	Advanced skilled autonomous worker	Works on a wide range of tasks in a variety of contexts, applying knowledge with depth in some areas and a broad range of skills. Works under limited supervision, but with autonomy under broad guidance where working in teams is required, and may organise the work of others.
Level 3	Skilled autonomous worker	Applies knowledge with depth in some areas and a broad range of skills, and works under limited supervision, but with autonomy under broad guidance where working in teams is required.
Level 2	Advanced operative or service sector worker	Applies knowledge and skills to a range of tasks, working under routine supervision, but with considerable autonomy where working in teams is required.
Level 1	Operative or service sector worker	Has an established work orientation and performs routine, predictable, repetitive and procedural tasks, involving very limited theoretical knowledge and motor skills, and under close supervision, but with some autonomy where working in teams is required.

Table 3.4 shows the arbitrary distinctions between levels in the ASF. As Barnett points out:

> the identification of occupational standards is not something that can be settled, and competences read off in any absolute fashion. That debate must go on. Any attempt, therefore, to draw up a list of competences is

bound to be partial and debatable. To any such list of competences we are entitled to respond: whose competences are these? (1994: 73)

Jackson (1992), Brown (1992) and Newman (1993) point out that what counts as "skill" and what is translated into training activities may be linked with industrial power-plays. Acker (1989) claims there is an ample body of evidence to show that without the presence of a strong union, what are valued as worker skills will represent capital interests. She further asserts that the training of workers has most commonly been formalised where unions have a strong hand. Rainbird agrees:

> skills are more likely to receive recognition in the wages structure if unions effectively claim and defend them. The problem is that management may impose new skills on workers and resist acknowledging their existence if training is very short, or if informal training takes place outside the ambit of union control and initiatives. (1988: 176)

Paradoxically, unions are being encouraged to enter into co-operative training arrangements, either with individual employers or enterprises, under the sponsorship of government instrumentalities such as the Department of Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs. The contradictions inherent in these arrangements, suggests Jackson, "will surface over time since the fundamental interests which unions and management have in organisational design are not the same". She cites an Oregon Equal-Pay Project which saw conflict emerge over the technical details of training policy and practice as it became clear that the "readily available, and even readily imaginable models of training are deeply embedded in the existing power structure" (1991: 29).

In Australia, the restructuring of industrial awards, with provisions for the establishment of skill-related career paths, is contributing to the push for a more skilled workforce (Curtain and Mathews 1990). Major unions and the ACTU argue that skill related career paths give employees incentives, such as increased pay and more satisfying jobs, to progress along the career ladder (Hattie 1992). Vocational education and training support this progress and thus unions and employees themselves demand that such training be provided. Competency-based standards are a central mechanism to the industrial relations (IR) agendas of both business and trades union.

Conventional trade union theory has been based upon the distinction between "labour" and "work" which comes from Marx. Habermas (1978; 1987; 1991), R.J.

Bernstein (1991) and Wexler (1993) variously assert that if labour is envisaged as a set of competencies, of performance to a prescribed (external) standard, then the person is diminished. Their argument is that for work, ideas of ownership, authenticity, care, craft and identification are of critical importance. Without these elements, labour faces the issues of alienation, estrangement and commodification.

It is therefore curious that trade unions have combined with business over competency-based standards — because the standards are defined externally (by others) and have a tendency to *reduce* the authenticity of human actions. By definition, competencies require a degree of predictability (they have to in order to be prescribed, observable, assessable standards). The idea of a competence which is unpredictable is ultimately incoherent. Thus the standards prescribe what is "right" in the workplace.

Even with business and unions supporting the national training reform agenda, however, it will take a few years for training providers to fully implement a complete system of competency-based training for all major courses. The projected national system of competency-based training has seven main components — national competency standards for each industry and/or occupation; national curriculum development through the Australian Committee on Training Curriculum (ACTRAC); accreditation of courses by state bodies under nationally agreed guidelines; national recognition of training providers; delivery of major TAFE courses to be competency-based; a national approach to competency assessment; a nationally consistent approach to the certification of training outcomes. Delays in implementation are unavoidable for many industries which require time to develop training activities that will satisfy, as a minimum, the following criteria (Thomson 1990):

- a full list of competency-based standards for the course must be documented;

- assessment must be based on the performance standards specified in the competency statements;

- assessment must be largely based on actual demonstration of skills.

Gonczi and Hager point out that full implementation of competency-based training does not necessarily mean that the specified competency standards themselves become the curriculum (1992: 38). Teaching single competencies in succession would focus learning on tasks only, rather than underpinning knowledge, understanding

and attitudes. Also the learner may find it difficult to integrate a collection of single competencies dealing with more complex workplace functions, a difficulty which is clearly undesirable. A more integrated approach is to base the curriculum on the competency standards, but to conceive of the development of competencies in a variety of ways. Examples include problem-based curricula, case studies which deal with a number of competencies in combination, and the teaching of underpinning knowledge as a subject or "discipline".

Proponents of competency-based training (Gonczi, Hager and Oliver 1990; Masters and McCurry 1990; Curtain and Ormond 1994; Hager, Athanasou and Gonczi 1994) argue that when fully implemented it will impact significantly on entry-level training, particularly trade apprenticeships. It dispenses with the notion of "time serving" in trade training and will change the way "competence" is defined and assessed. Defining competence in a broad way, assert these writers, should allow a wide variety of delivery mechanisms, in particular, skill formation in workplaces, to be made more systematic and accredited.

Competency-based training and assessment is, however, a slippery notion. Hager and Gonczi identify three broad approaches to conceptualising competencies:

- analysing work in terms of roles and thence tasks and sub-tasks. This focusses on the performance aspect of a competent worker;

- analysing the knowledge, skills and attitudes required by the worker. This focusses on the attributes of a competent worker;

- analysing knowledge, skills and attitudes in the context of the performance of realistic tasks. This integrates attributes and performance into a single framework. (1990: 30)

The third, most holistic interpretation, argue Hager and Gonczi (1993), offers the strongest conception of competence as all occupations involve performance of generic tasks such as planning or contingency management in addition to specific tasks. At their broadest, tasks might include performing in accordance with an overall conception of what one's work is about, working ethically and so on. Just as abilities or capabilities are necessary, but not sufficient for competence, so the performance of tasks is also necessary but not sufficient for competence. Thus, they argue, any satisfactory account of competence must include both attributes and tasks.

Gonczi and Hager (1993) further assert that "competence" is relational: it links together two disparate phenomena. Only by taking proper account of its relational nature can the richness of work be captured in competency standards. Any approach which ignores this will lead to inevitably impoverished competency standards.

Walker supports this "holistic" notion of competence, although he is concerned that competency standards focus on outcomes, and essentially performance outcomes, rather than inputs and processes:

> competency based approaches tend not to differentiate workers on the basis of any characteristics other than what they are capable of doing. Age, gender, cultural and ethnic background are irrelevant in the determination of competencies; though of course they will be highly relevant to the processes leading to the achievement of competencies. (Cited in Hattie 1992: 94)

This lack of differentiation, claim supporters of the competence movement, makes the application of standards essentially democratic. But this so-called democracy does not address the issues of control, management and integration of workers into the production process. There is substantive documentation of the increased exercise of control over workers' productive activity and work habits in the cybernetic era. Aronowitz follows Marx's labour theory of value (in which value is measured by quantities of labour time to produce commodities) to argue that under the new technological changes, production becomes "more and more based upon technocratically-controlled systems of knowledge organisation rather than the control of labor" (1981: 86).

Thus questions of how to assist people of varying age, language, gender and experience to achieve the relevant occupational competencies foreground issues of domination and control rather than of civil liberties and individual opportunity. Although labour-time remains a key aspect of production, it is the new knowledge which becomes an increasingly significant productive force. As a result, workers are increasingly observed and monitored through the mechanism of "objective" workplace competencies.

Further, there is conflict between linking the acquisition of competencies with remuneration and employer desire to keep production and labour costs to a

minimum. This can easily result in the wish not to recognise and reward skill development (Jackson 1991; Rainbird 1988). Indeed, "what counts" as learning in a competency-based system can have major career and remuneration consequences. For trainers (who regularly double as workplace assessors) this can result in a range of dilemmas. For them, there are rules of the game to be observed as discourses of competence are (following Foucault) sites of power.

3.4 Without 'definite' conclusions

Contemporary theorisations of work as a learning environment have paralleled historical changes to workplaces from scientifically managed "Taylorised" workplaces, to flexible-specialisation to cybernetic learning organisations and enterprises. Aspects of each theory may apply and they are not necessarily mutually exclusive. What is significant is the growing conviction amongst work sociologists that there are very important links between the ways in which work is organised, the content of work, and opportunities for employees and learning. This conviction corresponds to a re-configuration of the meaning of knowledge in society. Contemporary knowledge in the context of workplace and education and training reforms is being re-moulded, and increasingly aligned with the skills and assessment of competent performance — to pre-specified industry standards.

"Human resources" are very costly and training is one of the central mechanisms used to "manage" these resources. Mistakes made by employees can be expensive, and expensive mistakes contradict market demands for ever-increasing efficiencies. This translates to the need for skills to be predefined and for knowledge to be packaged to meet the demands and desires of the consumer age. Such are the cultural shifts within which trainers are required to perform.

The centrepiece of the training reforms has been shown to be "competence", and there are different versions of what this can mean depending on one's standpoint. The connection between professional power, knowledge and control is, however, clear (from Foucault). On that reading, competencies turn out to be a form of control of workers. From the perspective of the various governmental and industry regulatory authorities however, the idea of competence represents a particular type of instrumental reason. The competencies provide a blueprint of industry standards which, in turn, are intended to promote an internationally competitive economy.

There is much ambiguity and confusion in between the perspectives of 'the authorities' and a Foucauldian reading of competence, but one thing appears certain:

the underlying interest in competence is practical in character, not epistemological. What counts is "whether competence has the desired outcome — does it work?" Barnett (1994: 101). I have argued that the reforms of education and training — based upon competency-based standards — are intended to serve workplace and industrial efficiency. Their justification is grounded in human capital theory and its accompanying economic rhetoric. This rhetoric frequently conflicts with individual experience thus, critical questions are raised about the underlying links between competency-based standards, the exercise of power, and learning in the new work order.

Inevitably, this raises further questions: How does the implementation of competency based training affect industry trainers? Is a competency-based standards framework a suitable approach to understanding (and assessing) a trainer's performance? Does the discourse of competence marginalise knowledge and understanding unrelated to workplace performance? Might the competencies represent relatively benign manifestations of attempts at industrial relations harmony between big unions and big business? Is the trainers' new "habitus" being constructed in a particularly tedious way — whereby competency-based standards are read as representations of:

> ever and more subtle refinements of technologies of power... Power exercised in the search for normalised and governable people. (Marshall 1989; in Edwards and Usher 1994: 6)

These questions have a direct bearing on how informal learning is conceived and, in turn, how it might be assessed.

CHAPTER FOUR

Postmodern Doubts and 'Truths' About Industry Training

4.1 Postmodern theory and industry training

This chapter asks whether postmodernism helps in viewing the multiple realities of industry trainers (or "learning coaches" as some would now prefer). If it does, how might postmodern theories of adult education inform practices, as the drive to legitimise learning in the workplace has brought new roles and purposes to industry training? Indeed, what constitutes valid knowledge is now severely contested, making any overriding definition of "learning" very dubious. Despite this, a predominant view of learning in the workplace has emerged, particularly in OECD nations. This view holds that the different realities are actually unitary, and explainable in the form of competency-based standards, uniform syllabuses and relatively shallow beliefs about what learning is, how it should be managed and indeed, measured. Such a view of reality is accompanied by image-making interventions into corporate "cultures", "performance appraisal" systems, and never-ending ethical dilemmas for trainers. It is precisely trainers' immersion in such conditions of postmodernity which is central to this exposition.

The term "post-modern" describes complex, contradictory and relational constructs. "Simplifying to the extreme, I define *postmodernism* as incredulity[15] towards metanarratives" (Lyotard; cited in Burbules 1995: 2). Indeed, there is range of interpretations of what constitutes the post-modern. From Jacques Derrida (1978), postmodernism has borrowed the vocabulary and basic concepts of "deconstruction": the indeterminacy and contrariness of language, the duplicitous nature of signs and symbols, the dissociation of words from any presumed "reality" and the pervasiveness of "discourse".

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15 Incredulity is not denial, rejection or refutation; it is an inability to believe.

From Foucault (1980; 1982) it has adopted the idea of power. This notion of power suggests that the "power structure" is immanent not only in language, (the words and ideas that privilege the hegemonic groups in society), but in the very nature of knowledge. Knowledge itself is both the instrument and the product of power. The combined effect of these perspectives, says Himmelfarb (1994: 132), is to "impugn traditional rational discourse as logocentric, totalising and authoritarian".

In her fight against "totalising and authoritarian" tendencies in "traditional rational discourse", Lather (1991: 4) uses the term "post-modern" to mean "the shift in material conditions of advanced monopoly capitalism brought on by the micro-electronic revolution in information technology and the growth of multinational capitalism". She uses the term "post-structural" to develop a cultural theory within the post-modern context. Post-structuralists hold that there is no final knowledge and view research as "an enactment of power relations; the focus is on the development of a mutual, dialogic production of a multi-voiced, multi-centred discourse" (Patai, 1988: 143).

A post-structuralist perspective is, in part, about the texts we read being "a part of the social world, human life and the historical movements in which they are located and interpreted" (Said, in Lather 1991: 4). For many industry trainers, the "texts" which they are often required to interpret come direct from the annals of economic rationalism — investing in "excellence", "benchmarking", "TQM", "CBT", making your "learning organisation" a reality and so on. As such, unexamined techniques of sense-making are central to practice, and require interrogation. For example, why do we respond in a certain way to a text? What are the conditions which produce such a response? Where and why might we want to be suspicious of our reactions?

Such questions lead to a deconstructionist way of reading texts. This requires that the conditions in which we are enveloped be scrutinised before any "understandings" about those texts can be reached. Deconstruction "foregrounds the lack of innocence in any discourse by looking at the textual staging of knowledge, the constitutive effects of our uses of language" (Grosz 1989: xv). For trainers, and particularly those who are compelled to focus on balance sheets, product outputs and profits over broader notions of learning, the "lack of innocence" can be quite transparent. Sense-making can often be directly related to one's own corporate survival.

In the Australian context of a national training reform agenda, (indeed, for most OECD countries) this raises several questions about industry trainers:

- to what extent do trainers embody or enact power relations within an enterprise or industry? What does this mean for their "agency"?

- how might a trainer's personal experiences be interpreted within the context and discourse of a training reform agenda? How are they constructing their own discourses?

- how is postmodernism relevant to industry training roles? In what ways can postmodernism assist trainers deal with the multi-voiced, multi-centred discourses of learning?

These questions are related here to the roles and purposes of industry training and the ways training is structured and managed — its links with organisational power, senior executive planning, industrial relations and so on. They also relate to the ethical positions trainers adopt when faced with dilemmas. Training others within the conditions of postmodernity presents ethical dilemmas and some deep ironies. One irony is that postmodernism emphasises the political nature of discourse where the subjects are not at the centre of meaning. It is thus, not so much a case of training others, but being trained by "the Other". In other words, subjectivity is constructed by the circulating discourses within which "the training" occurs. Trainers are therefore historically and contextually "framed".

To consider the ways a postmodern theory can be applied to industry training, this chapter focusses on two central themes:

- *corporate culture and training in postmodernity;*
- *managing the postmodern training function.*

It is often through these features of contemporary organisations that trainers' practices are shaped. They are shaped by the discursive practices of their organisations. For instance, the symbolic and communicational patterns both create and reproduce corporate image-making and re-structuring processes they are often obliged to serve. It is argued (following Lyotard 1984) that these types of processes reflect conditions of postmodernity. And it is the effects of the immersion of trainers in conditions of postmodern corporate culture which are examined here.

4.2 Corporate culture and training in postmodernity

Lyotard (1984) has coined the term the "postmodern condition" to describe the acceleration in social, political, economic and technical change. This acceleration has resulted in constant innovation and novelty, obsolescence of commonly held assumptions, and a continual fragmentation of social values. To Fox (1990: 193), this creates a context which can be "both exhilarating and nauseating". It can be "exhilarating" because of an opening of possibilities for people; for some a celebration of diversity. It can be "nauseating" because it can "de-centre" the individual, where the treatment of "the person" is extraordinarily impersonal. Indeed, the concept of "the post modern condition" provides a new perspective on today's emphasis on "corporate culture". It allows new interpretations of the acceleration of change, and the idea that to achieve high performance, organisations of all kinds need to "learn to love change" (Peters and Waterman 1982).

The hallmark of postmodern corporations, suggests Lyotard (1984), is the short-term employment contract. These contracts can adversely affect individuals as they can be more easily moved around in the name of increasing labour mobility and efficiency. Traditional communities can fragment due to the requirements of development, and family breakdowns continue to escalate. These new contracts are symbols of postmodernity. And they are enactments of the socio-economic changes brought about by developments such as globalisation, post-Fordism, the spread of the media and consumer society and corporate cultures which now (seek to) reach into the private domain.

The central issue here is the "production of culture" in a market economy. Fox (1990: 194) sees a situation in which "personal values and tastes, like business ethics and corporate cultures are increasingly commodified, merchandised and sold". Industry trainers are directly contributing to this process by intervening in and promoting corporate culture. It is precisely this promotion of corporate culture and image over "substance" which is the subject of the next section. An irony, and perhaps a weakness of postmodernism, is that "substance" tends to be disassembled, becoming more ambiguous and therefore less "substantial"!

4.2.1 Intervention in corporate cultures
Industry trainers, whether consciously or not, "trade" in status and image markets. They do this by promoting corporate or organisational cultures with so-called empowered workers, learning environments, quality circles, total quality management

and the like. Fox suggests that these artifacts are images, which have themselves become commodities, and Bourdieu (1984) notes that product brand image and company image has become dramatically more important than boardroom politics, production procedures and even the accounting perspectives of the modern era:

> in a world less and less cultivated via the institutions of old high liberal culture and more cultivated via the new institutions: mass media-television, cinema, modern mass education and higher education. (in Fox 1990: 198)

Drawing on Bourdieu, Fox observes that new "bourgeois" groupings are identified by marketing classifications rather than Marxian class analysis. The new groupings are marked by participation in "an international symbol market, where image has become more important than functional purpose, and increasingly even functional products are sold for their image value" (1990: 198).

Aspects of postmodernity such as the ultra media-conscious corporation and "status-image markets" have very few (if any) central values related to Enlightenment conceptions of progress or the person. It follows, therefore, that trainers do not represent a cultural "advance guard" because they are so immersed in the drive for competitiveness, efficiencies, measurement and performativity. This drive is described by Lyotard as a "social and technological system with the appearance of a runaway train independently pursuing its own maximally effecient function" (1984: xxiv). Trainers immersion in conditions of postmodernity does not mean, however, that they cannot contribute to critical dialogue with others. For example, they can challenge oppressive or "totalising" approaches which eliminate difference, or which marginalise those who are less powerful. Despite Lyotard's (1984) deterministic image of an out-of-control global train (social-technological system), forms of localised resistance are possible.

The globalising tendencies inherent in postmodernity directly affect trainers. For example, one influence upon their practices in Australia is the national training reform agenda described in Chapter Three. The Carmichael Report (1992) (which aims to create a new framework for vocational qualifications) and major Government reports seeking to promote competence throughout all Australian industries (Finn 1991; Mayer 1992) mirror developments throughout the OECD. In Europe, comparable developments on competence are reflected in reports of the European Union's CEDEFOP (1991) and the Training and Development Lead Body (TDLB 1991) in the United Kingdom. The Secretary's (1992) Commission on

Achieving Necessary Skills in the USA further echoes this drive to produce higher levels of competitiveness, quality and stronger training markets.

In Australia, indeed, in the advanced industrial context, Stevenson points out the link between the workplace and knowledge has led to a reconstruction of what is "valuable" in knowledge in favour of "knowledge which is obtained in the workplace, relating directly to the world of work, and [which] enables both specific and adaptable performance in work" (1994: 34). Stevenson adds that a perception is growing that the "contextualisation of knowledge with explicit relationship to function is more valuable than the acquisition of more abstract general knowledge for application to contexts when needed". Such a perception, to some extent embodied in the competency movement, tends to marginalise knowledge and understanding unrelated to workplace performance.

Despite this possibility, trainers are required to incorporate these developments into their practices. Workers are now expected to be able to put knowledge and "expertise" to use — competently, flexibly, co-operatively and in "cross-functional" teams. Trainers are expected to harness the operational potentials of the new knowledge by making it more efficient. This is reflected in contemporary training emphases upon customer care, quality, time management, benchmarking and the development of specific competency-based standards for workers.

Marshalling the new knowledge extends to the phenomenon of constant corporate restructuring. However, management can no longer hope that restructuring (to reach the desired levels of organisational efficiency) will automatically translate to the desired cultural changes. Many managers now realise that cultural changes can "naturally" follow work restructuring, including for some, disillusionment, anger, confusion, stress, loss and nausea, and for others, victory, elation, exhilaration.

Managers often use training to construct desired company cultures in the name of "competition". This use of training is abetted by government reports seeking more competitive, competent workers and efforts to change workplace practices (longer hours, more evening and weekend work, utilisation of home-based offices and so on). Such practices now reach into the personal lives and values of employees. In earlier eras this would have been an invasion of one's private self. In the postmodern era, Edwards and Usher point out that it is related to a construction of individuality and subjectivity, whereby workers:

become subject to the categorisations generated to "understand" and "learn" more about them and their actions. These categories are embodied in dossiers, files and records of various kinds. As the need to regulate increases, so does the need to know more about individuals. Hence the knowledge generated and the categories needed to classify this knowledge increases. Surveillance becomes ever more pervasive and intrusive yet without appearing to be oppressive. (1994: 5)

Corporate cultures, and the competencies required to fashion them, can be viewed as manageable, designable and preoccupied with image rather than with individuals. Individuals now, more than ever, have their abilities and knowledge exploited in the name of corporate development. Once passed their "use-by date" they can then be discarded (made redundant). As Chapter Six indicates, however, for some trainers this is one of their dilemmas. In many instances they would rather focus on human development, critique, rights, access to education and employment, opportunities for women, indigenous peoples and so forth. Sometimes they cannot implement such interests because it might not look good in their next "performance review" or "staff appraisal". These systems are increasingly used by organisations to regulate employees, and to fashion the corporate culture.

Interpretations of performance reviews can be used to demonstrate the "multiple realities" of HRD. One potential view is that they represent powerful control devices. Another view is that they can be used in positive ways to help people clarify their career goals. A further view might state that the above two perspectives represent a classic binary — and neither might apply. This in itself is an example of the "multi-voiced" conception of social reality for trainers, highlighting a postmodern standpoint on training.

4.2.2 Some postmodern standpoints on training

Three principal analytical references for a postmodern perspective are the importance of *the local*, the validity of *deconstruction* and the centrality of *discourse*. Postmodern writers tend to focus on local power relations rather than structures. In relation to industry training therefore, trainers are not central actors in the process of establishing meaning, or in the processes of "signification". Trainers are participants in discourses which have meaning which goes beyond their individual intentions. They are actors situated in complex power relations which set conditions within which they practice. What trainers do (and say) is therefore said to be "inscribed".

The notion of inscription gives rise to some of Letiche's (1990: 229-240) aphorisms for postmodern trainers:

- the depth to the trainer's message is "the look", that is, an aesthetic surplus which accompanies an "existential lack";

- trainers say what trainees already believe and accept; the trainers' discourse is part and parcel of the organisational consensus;

- training which strives to improve the quality of social interactions, lessens the level of individual action;

- telematicised work (including computerised training) is not alienating; it is psychologically suffocating.

These statements, delicious in their irony — slick, barbed — illustrate some postmodern critiques of training practices. Unfortunately, but rather obviously, they can leave industrial trainers with discouragement; the ineffable darkness of postmodernism. For example, Baudrillard proffers the image of training being:

> the degree Xerox of culture ... a mechanical reproduction of the same rhetoric ... pure form without content — a process by which trainers communicate messages about how things should be conducted. A close examination of what is said, however, reveals the banality of the text. (1993: 9)

It is unfair, I would argue, to say "pure form without content". Firstly, nothing of a social nature is ever "pure". Secondly, many trainers strive to achieve a variety of social justice objectives which do not warrant such discouragement. These objectives often include programs which allow time-out for reflection, critical reflection and self-reflexive moments in busy schedules. In localised ways, such activities can provide space for workers to interrogate the rational "authorising" systems that are shaping them. This "space" carries (at least) some potential to provide a momentary counter-balance to the postmodern condition described by Lyotard in which "individual blocks of time are increasingly calculated and rational, but its overall narrative perspective is less rational and has come to resemble a succession of disconnected events" (1984: 76).

This notion of social life, as increasingly being a "succession of disconnected events", underlies concerns of some postmodern writers about preoccupations of training with "skill audits", "performance indicators" and balance-sheets. The point is that as long as society is lived as *not purposive*, in an existential drift (or runaway train), organisational messages can sound like cliches. Training messages, performance review outcomes, career plans and so on, are thus "photocopies" of relatively transparent, or self-evident organisational cliches. Managing the training function in this context raises questions about its purposes and about the practices and the informal learning of the trainers themselves.

4.3 Managing the (postmodern) training function

Given the growth in international free-markets (General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade, North American Free Trade Agreement, Asia-Pacific Economic Co-operation, the European Economic Community etc), multinational and transnational corporations, indeed most trading organisations, are now obliged to tune in to international politics. International politics are increasingly conducted "on-screen", presenting new "theatres" of gamesmanship and warfare with style and image more important in many respects than depth. Postmodernity's embrace of image, symbols, culture and ritual has big implications for corporate strategy.

An expression of corporate strategy is the management of training. This function faces the same confusions, assumptions and concerns which generally characterise postmodernity. Fox and Moult claim that managing corporate cultures and self-reflexive interventions into culture "largely marks the postmodern organisational condition ... reflecting the predominance of mass media over other cultural forms of communication" (1990: 169)

Individual workers in this postmodern context face what Wexler calls a "recomposition of class specific foreshadowings of image, communication and network" (1993: 5). The foreshadowings involve the "new knowledge" which, to Wexler, is a surfaci-zation of knowing. This surface knowledge removes both the cultural resources and the practice of any depth, and "standards" are neither skills nor task related, but instead, simply different, decontextualised and related to immediacy. He adds that "what is important about this is the one-dimensionalising, or desocialising of knowledge/culture [with] the redefinition of culture mediated institutionally between production and culture, in the education sector" (1993: 5).

This "mediation" has direct implications for industry trainers. For example, assessment mechanisms based on competency-based training and the recognition of prior learning are now being used to redefine learning at work. Trainers play an increasingly important role in linking work-based learning, assessment and formal accreditation. Such linkages based on the use of these new cultural mechanisms, need further analysis than exist at present. For example, they tend to assume that the different realities which trainers are required to attend to, are explainable in a unitary form. A number of postmodern insights are offered in the literature to challenge this, but are seldom applied.

Foster (1985) describes "multiple realities" as an intrinsic plurality characterised by "reactive" and "resistive" postmodernisms. The reactive postmodernism is concerned with achieving increased levels of social order and control. The resistive is more concerned with emancipatory goals.

An alternative reading is offered by Carter and Jackson where postmodernism includes three broad positions — "reaction", "nihilism", and "praxis":

> the first two tend towards dysfunctional developments in management education and that it is only through the third type (praxis) that postmodernism can be seen to be making a positive contribution. (1990: 221)

Each of these postmodern positions, however, acknowledges that "truth" no longer serves as a normative standard for thought or action. Each seeks comfort with its own set of theoretical circumstances. In this study, it is *praxis* which is of most interest. The concept of praxis has been introduced into adult education literature largely since 1970 when Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* was published in English. Freire uses praxis to refer to "reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it" (1972: 28). Praxis thus becomes central in the dialectical relationship between thought and action. According to Armstrong (1987), this centrality "distinguishes theory for its own sake, on the one hand, and pure action or activism on the other" (cited in Miller 1989: 17). The "trick" of applying a postmodern praxis appears to lie in "destroying modernity's foundational quest for truth by revising, without completely rejecting, modernity's categories" (Lemert 1995: 78). (Also see Chapter Ten).

4.3.1 Praxis and profitability

Reactive forms of postmodernism are guided by the belief that if there is no absolute reason, no objectivity, no logic, then history and "faith" in the system is all we have. In modern capitalism this faith is underpinned by a principle tenet: pursuit of the holy grail of profitability is perfectly natural and therefore a good. Recognition and solution of social problems will be achieved in this reactive mode, say Carter and Jackson:

> by the great, through the application of their "warrior skills" in defending the social order and keeping the "dark forces" of ignorance and chaos at bay. (1990: 222)

To support their assertion they cite contemporary canons of management education — the move away from motivation theory towards emphases on "charismatic" leadership and resurrection of "trait" theory analysis. Such emphases are inherent in the works of, for example, Iacocca (1989), Mintzberg (1989) and Byrne (1990). The "reactive" position which characterises their texts resolves the problem of an absence of absolute rationality by adhering to "the system" — through an order assisted by "leaders".

Postmodernism does not reject the validity of this order per se. But it does say that truth is relative to context and discourse — hence there are many truths. This opens the door to a critique of "the system" and of the roles played within systems by leading figures. It relativises the directives or "vision statements" of the leading figures and the warriors of the market place by problematising the notion of "objectivity".

"Achievement" for trainers can relate to the individual, systems and/or organisational development. The values which underpin their practices are historically grounded. Grounds and values are, in this sense, practice-related. Thus there can be no transcendent grounds for accepting any particular direction as there are no absolute values against which that direction, and subsequent behaviour, can be assessed. The key issue revolves around interpretations of "transcendent" and "absolute". This issue of interpretation is a worry however, because of the potential for organisational leaders to arbitrarily elevate nihilist values. For example, Boesky's phrase "greed is good" influenced a range of corporate actions. Corporate ethics based on such a philosophical position would be both nihilistic and profoundly reductionist. "Achievement" for trainers in such an organisation would tend to be

based upon short-term gains irrespective of the long-term consequences. This concern is, however, related to just one construction of postmodernism.

Normative and problematic concepts such as ethics, fairness and humanitarianism have little place in the contemporary management of training unless they are perceived (by executive gatekeepers) as contributing to competitive advantage. As such, relative value systems can be ruthlessly exploited to serve corporate interests. The idea "good ethics is good business" does not necessarily imply a wholesale adoption of ethical behaviour. It can simply mean the cynical selection of actions which can be constructed as "ethical" and yet serve narrow self-interests.

"Nihilism", with its emphasis on "the individual" and denigration of "the social", can emerge from a social setting which is grounded in instrumental or repressive practices. This illustrates that, despite the differences between postmodernism and postmodernity, the two terms are intimately connected. For training practices, once a postmodern condition is present, so too is postmodernism. Some readings of postmodernism do not, however, privilege the individual over the social and do not neglect ethics and gender.

Reactive and nihilist postmodernisms tend to privilege the individual excessively. For this reason Carter and Jackson adopt a "praxis approach", viewing this as a version of postmodernism that offers advantages over modernism. They claim that if we accept that there are no absolute goals, "then whatever goals are pursued must be socially constructed and desirable ... where the praxis approach would be about the determination about which goals should be pursued" (1990: 225).

This may be a noble idea, but has inherent contradictions. For example, the processes of determining "social desirability" are extraordinarily complex, perhaps irreconcilable. Edwards and Usher (1994) argue that the transcendental and social discourse of modernism conceals the extent of this complexity. As such, the ethics of a praxis approach to training are worth considering. They include:

1)   **Consideration of the ecosystem**
        This precondition holds that the rationale for corporate activity would include effects on the ecosystem, rather than the one-dimensional ability to generate private profit. Such an approach would need to establish criteria for "system efficiency" and "social good" to which action must adhere.

An example of how this might affect industry trainers is that in any staff development or training activity, consideration would be given to environmental issues. Developing the technical skills and knowledge required of workers to advance corporate commercial interest would not be enough.

2)   **A semiotic approach**[16]

The value of a "semiotic approach" to management would be the development of new ways of understanding and interpreting corporate activity. Contemporary management activities which emphasise efficiency, excellence, total quality management, benchmarking and skill formation remain integrally connected to 'management's right to manage'. Such terms are, however, relative and can be critiqued by trainers. This could help to address some of the issues raised by Foucault (1980) related to conflict, political power and gender relations by questioning the arbitrary exercise of power and the ethics of practice.

3)   **Ethics**

Having abandoned scientific rationalism as "the principal divining rod", certain development decisions are no longer inevitable. Ethical approaches are now more important than ever. The modernist approach has been that ethical issues have been subject to the overriding framework and ethos of capitalism. In Sydney, an illustration of the overriding of ethics is the (1994) construction of a third runway at its airport. The new flight-path travels over the most densely populated area in the nation, shattering communities. Economic rationalists and representatives of big private capital, however, successfully argued that "economic benefits" will trickle-down to the citizenry. In this framework, ethics have been secondary to concepts such as free market forces. For trainers in the construction industry, promoting an ethical awareness of the social consequences of development would be quite novel and, although not easy, patently desirable.

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16   It is not implied here that a semiotic approach — the study of signs and symbols, especially the relations between written and spoken 'texts' — redresses the structural problems of, for example, inequality, class, or income distribution patterns. As Norris argues, if everything is ultimately constructed in and through the language of discourse — truth, reality, subject-positions, class allegiances and so on — 'then ex hypothese we could only be deluded in thinking that any particular discourse (for instance, that of feminism) had a better claim to justice or truth than the others currently on offer' (1993: 25).

4.3.2 The potential wisdom of training: some doubts, some "truths"

Ethics, like all social concepts, are value-laden and open to serious contestation. Getting "socially desirable" decisions on ethics cannot avoid messy politics. Postmodernism, particularly a praxis approach, does not withdraw from political engagement. What evokes postmodern scepticism are arguments based on transcendent ethics. This does not imply that a framework based upon clear ethical and social goals which protect the citizenry and the ecosystem cannot guide organisational and training decisions.

Whether postmodernism, or a more critical modernism offers the stronger theoretical framework to advance ethical interests is a matter of substantial interest. Foucault, in the *Ethic of Care for the Self*, highlights the importance of social ethics:

> philosophy is precisely the challenging of all phenomena at whatever level or under whatever form they present themselves—political, economic, sexual, institutional and so on. This critical function of philosophy, up to a certain point, emerges right from the Socratic imperative: 'Be concerned with yourself, ie, ground yourself in liberty through the mastery of the self'. (1988: 20)

Foucault's conception of ethics, however, concentrates upon the individual, and a notion of "liberty", which is, ultimately, strongly connected with a free-market ethos.

The free-market ethos, a powerful influence in modernism, has an association with reductionism. To understand something by adopting a reductionist stance, one must take it apart — as competency-based standards tend to do. Trainers are then required to teach the whole to others — in structured bits. In some instances, says Cunningham (1990: 209), the structured-bits become "reified into subjects such as Marketing, Personnel, Training and Development and so on". This reflects modernism's effects upon organisational design. Departments, units and sections are broken up in mechanistic ways, where the individual carrying out a job is "reduced to a role" (Harrison 1987). Where human beings are perceived as "roles" within "role cultures", they are diminished as people.

The diminution of the person occurred in the 1980s because of the obsession of organisations with behavioural objectives. In the 1990s the obsession has moved on to specific task-oriented competencies. More recent ideas about organisational transformation (Senge 1990; Pedler et al 1989) which purport to offer holistic

approaches, still refuse to deal with the aggressive, materialistic, instrumental ideologies which underlie them. For example, they quietly endorse the free-market pursuit of profitability, strategic restructuring and management's right to manage. They are thus manifestations of instrumental ideologies. Trainers who unquestioningly use such ideas continue the diminution of the person in a new guise. Postmodernism acknowledges this. Two questions must therefore be asked: can postmodernism assist trainers to develop wise judgment? Can trainers value the bottomline (instrumentalism), and at the same time value the human condition?

Cunningham turned to Watt's (1975) Taoist writings for an answer:

> hitherto, western science has stressed the attitude of objectivity—a cold, calculating, and detached attitude through which it appears that natural phenomena, including the human organism, are nothing but mechanisms. But, as the word itself implies, a universe of mere objects is objectionable. We feel justified in exploiting it ruthlessly, but now we are belatedly realising that the ill-treatment of the environment is damage to ourselves — for the simple reason that subject and object cannot be separated, and that we and our surroundings are the process of a unified field, which is what the Chinese call Tao. (1990: 214)

Cunningham asserts that wisdom is central to postmodern thought, whereby "it is not an additive process, but the intimate, holistic application of 'valued knowledge': one's values and one's knowledge should develop in harmony" (1990: 214). Wisdom in this sense links the object(ive) and the subject(ive) — "wisdom needs generalised, abstract knowledge and personal commitment ... one reason for favouring the term as it integrates aspects of ourselves which are separated out in Modernist thought (Cunningham 1990: 214).

4.3.3 Some implications for the education of trainers
When the critical gaze of postmodernism is turned upon work-based learning, the apparent gains (of this learning) become more ambivalent, more partial. Indeed, it is easy to critique training from a theoretical perspective in which there are "multiple realities". This relativism infuriates Himmelfarb:

> if the great subversive principle of modernity is historicism — a form of relativism that locates meaning and events so firmly in their historical context that history, rather than philosophy and nature, becomes the arbiter of truth — postmodernism is now confronting us with a far more

subversive form of relativism, a relativism so absolute, as to be antithetical to both history and truth. (1994: 131)

A problem with Himmelfarb's analysis is that she does not problematise 'truth'. And truth is problematic for trainers who are required to marshall the efficient use of workplace knowledge and assess worker competencies. Such practices are intended to establish 'truths' about workers. However, these marshalling and assessment practices are predicated upon modern assumptions about what is "valuable knowledge", with some trainers now requiring calculators to assess performance! An implication of the processes of this "valuing" is that some critical distance (from their workplaces) is extremely important to the formal education of trainers. With postmodernism opening further perspectives to critique training, trainers and educators should not despair. Rather, an acceptance of multiple truths as a notion, and "right" and "wrong" as terms which do not function in relation to an extra-discursive reality of absolute values can aid this critical distance.

The "liberation" such an education offers, differs of course, from the Marxist (and Freirean) notion of (structural) liberation. The post-structural notion implies more localised forms of resistance. As training and development has few secure rules to guide it, one suggestion is to promote opportunities for trainers to grapple with their own values, and to compare these with the ideals and practices of their organisations as starting points for learning. As corporate ideals and goals are socially constructed, then the value judgments upon which they are built provide opportunities for training, problem solving action *and* critique.

How and where might such processes begin? Miller and Usher point to "self-reflexivity", suggesting that:

> if adult educators became more reflexive about their own learning and developed the practice of autobiographical research, perhaps their effectiveness in facilitating the learning of others might be enhanced. (1993: 2)

Industry trainers and workers more generally (through training activities and courses) may indeed benefit from opportunities to clarify and develop their own values. And such opportunities can provide fertile ground for resistance to unethical corporate activity and the promotion of "wise" practice. Obviously self-reflexivity doesn't contain all the answers required to negotiate the complexities of contemporary organisational life. It is simply proposed as a coherent starting point. A word of

caution however: the postmodern discourse about "the subject" has the potential to aid the restructuring, the flexibility, the performance-oriented programming now required in the contemporary workplace if, as Castoriadis points out, it:

> talks about 'pluralism' and 'respect for the difference of the other', [but] ends up with a glorification of eclecticism. (1992: 22)

4.4 Again, without 'definite' conclusions

Postmodernism is both worrying and exciting. It is worrying because of aspects of postmodern culture it reflects. As Mongardini puts it:

> postmodern culture does not provide conditions to counter the integrated rationalisation of control or resources for social relations to realise identity in other than hypermedia, baroque compensations. There appears to be no reliable resistance, against which there is an opening to create the foundations of a new culture. (1990: 53)

It is also exciting in that it contains the potential to free us from oppressive definitions of reality. In the context of training it holds possibilities of expanding interpretations of practice away from "totalising", one-best-way approaches.

What is not desirable is a generalised version of the "anything goes" principle which can accompany some postmodernist perspectives. Although there is the strong potential to move beyond the "reactive", the "nihilist", and the "praxis" conceptions of postmodernism, such potential requires further development and interrogation. Postmodern training needs to understand the values of workers and the tensions between these and the ideals of corporate enterprises. Within this, wise practice must strongly represent ethical positions. This will never be easy for political (and other) reasons. Despite this, learning in a postmodern era can increasingly include "openness to new experience with new and multiple meanings where the aim is not so much to predict but to accept the possibility of uncertainty and unpredictability" (Kosmidou and Usher 1992: 77).

For those grounded in enterprises characterised by complex politics and bottom-line financial or production mentalities, a postmodern theory may not be immediately helpful. Nonetheless, postmodern theory when applied to training can relate to questioning the nature of knowledge, wisdom, values, and how these influence, and are influenced by corporate training contexts. One message is particularly salient.

The conception one holds about the nature of the "subjective person" is central to the debate and becomes, as Kosmidou and Usher put it:

> the site and the stake of resistance to and contest over meanings—which means that resistance and contestation are always present and the task of critical education never ending. (1992: 77)

An appropriate critical education for trainers would thus include a type of knowledge which is beyond the narrow, task-focussed competencies instrumentally linked to image, market-share, power and control of their enterprises. It would include challenging the social and environmental consequences of corporate activity. Critical scrutiny of trainers' roles and purposes in corporate activity, the values which saturate the language of their discourses, and the ethics of practice should never be the subjects of taboo. This critical scrutiny is fast becoming unfashionable, however, as the drive to promote learning in late-twentieth-century workplaces becomes a juggernaut.

PART II:

THE RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND FINDINGS: WHAT 'COUNTS' AS INFORMAL LEARNING?

CHAPTER FIVE

The Research Methodology

5.1 The field study and methods

This chapter describes the method and the methodology of the research, method referring to techniques for gathering empirical evidence; "methodology is the theory of knowledge and interpretive framework that guides a particular project" (Harding 1987: 2). This project is located within a phenomenological methodology. It is the world of "lived experience, the lifeworld, which is both the source and the object of this framework" (Van Manen 1990: 53). A methodology reflecting these concerns must focus on questions such as "what is it like to be an industry trainer?", "how does one learn informally?", "what impacts on the informal learning of trainers at particular sites?", and "just what is informal learning?"

Such questions tend not to fit into conventional methods of scientific inquiry which Lather (1991: 3) describes as "positivistic". She argues that efforts to make sense of lived experiences with positivist theories and hypothesising (testing) frameworks are inadequate and misleading at best. Positivist researchers, on the other hand, argue that phenomenology has no practical value. As Van Manen (1990: 45) says, "you cannot *do* anything with phenomenological knowledge". From the viewpoint of instrumental reason this may be so. But to paraphrase Heidegger (1971: 189), the more important question is not: Can something be done with phenomenology? Rather, we should wonder: Can phenomenology, if we concern ourselves deeply with it, do something with us?

An interpretive methodology assumes that it can, asking questions such as "what is it like to have a certain experience?" and "what makes a *learning* experience?" But one cannot necessarily pose such questions outright. A straightforward approach can lead to misinterpretations based on underestimates of the method's probing nature. Instead, concrete stories or examples of experience are sought to bring to light the topic issues. It is an understanding of lived experience derived from the

participants themselves which is important. This approach is adopted for the empirical components of the study. It is an approach that carries its own theoretical schemata based on assumptions about the subject-person, the life-world and the validity of making sense of lived experience through participants' stories. Postmodern insights question the authenticity of one's "own story", posing an important challenge to theories derived from interpretive data. This chapter thus examines in further depth interpretive assumptions as they affect the methods used in conducting the research. The following details of the method consider the aims of each of its three phases. The section:

- examines the assumptions of the method;
- describes the procedures adopted;
- identifies issues for analysis;
- shows how key outcomes in each phase influenced further phases;
- reflexivly considers the place of the author herein.

5.1.1 Interpreting lived experience

Using an interpretive perspective to probe trainers' everyday experience of work makes use of trainers' stories about their work — their language, descriptions and metaphors — to highlight what is important to them. It therefore uses personal experience as its starting point. For example, I asked the trainers in the study to tell me about their job, its challenges and the dilemmas they have sometimes faced. This generated descriptions of their lived experience at work. Whilst these descriptions provided tremendous data, enabling the tracing of etymological sources and identification of main themes and key metaphors about their informal learning, this methodology is not without problems. For one, there is the question of "face validity" — is it meaningful to ask qualitative questions of individuals given their historical and contextual situatedness? Second, there is a range of assumptions that accompany interpretive research that requires interrogation:

Underlying assumptions

Lukes (1973) places the interpretive model in the philosophical domain that stresses the liberal value of respect for the person. A central tenet of this domain is the belief that individuals are not merely passive vehicles in social, political and historical affairs, but have certain inner capabilities which can allow for individual judgments, perceptions and decision making. Possession of such capabilities, it is assumed, can contribute to, influence or even change events.

Such a belief is based on five further assumptions commonly shared by interpretive theorists. Candy (1991: 432) identifies these as:

- The belief that any event or action is explainable in terms of multiple interacting factors, events and processes. Causes and effects are mutually interdependent.

- An acceptance of the extreme difficulty in attaining complete objectivity, especially in observing human subjects who confuse or make sense of events based in their individual systems of meaning; what Mezirow (1991) refers to as meaning perspective.

- The view that the aim of inquiry is to develop an understanding of individual cases, rather than universal laws or (predictive) generalisations.

- The view that the world is made up of tangible and intangible multi-faceted realities. These are best studied as a whole rather than being fragmented into dependent and independent variables. This recognises the significance of the context in which experience occurs.

- The recognition that inquiry is always value laden and that such values inevitably influence the framing, focussing and conduct of research.

These assumptions need careful scrutiny as, according to Habermas, "the communicative base of understanding necessarily implies that an objectifying position of the social scientist is insufficient if real understanding is to be the result of the research process, the observer has to engage in it in an active way" (1971; cited in Wildemeersch 1992: 49). What it might mean to "engage in an active way" is, to a large extent, determined by one's standpoints on the philosophical arguments surrounding the above assumptions.

Arguments for and against interpretive assumptions
(a) For
Although arguments about the uses of interpretive theory need not be binary and oppositional, various standpoints are worth briefly contrasting. Interpretive theorists are by no means unified, but as Giroux points out, they do "share a rejection of the belief that human behaviour is governed by general (transcendent) laws" (1983: 7). They argue that an individual's experience is best understood from the standpoint of the social world of that individual.

Candy (1991), a leading proponent of interpretive theory, contrasts this belief with positivism, arguing that the assumptions and methods of the positivist paradigm are simply not amenable to the study of certain educational phenomena such as self-direction or informal adult learning.

According to Candy, "recent research on self-direction [and informal learning] in both the theory and practice of adult education, seems to have become stalemated" (1991: 426). He partly attributes this to a number of causes:

- the absence of a consistent theoretical perspective underlying the study of self-direction;

- the failure to create a cumulative knowledge because of the indiscriminate application of the term "self-direction";

- "methodolatory", or a fixation on one particular approach to educational research. (Brookfield 1988; cited in Candy 1991: 427)

Both Candy and Brookfield critique recent research on self-directed learning and yet, paradoxically, they do not critique the apparent shortcomings in contemporary notions of "self-directed learning". These notions rest heavily upon "individual agency" and tend not to problematise the idea of "autonomy". Each of these two writers call for varied approaches to inform the "knowledge-base" of adult education. Candy in particular argues that this knowledge-base "needs to be first extended, in educational research, through approaches within a predominantly interpretive framework" (1991: 427). This argument is based upon the value of having an immediate description of "lived experience" as this is vital to adult learning and education. Indeed, adult education works with an ethics of personal empowerment and autonomy congruent with interpretive approaches to research. Usher points out, for instance, that in adult education "experience is at the centre of knowledge production and knowledge acquisition, the foundation of a learner-centred educational practice congruent with the unique characteristics of adults" (1992: 201).

An interpretive approach seeks a mediated description, for example, through "story-telling" and the recording of a person's experience in symbolic (told or written) form. It is in this latter sense that interpretive research has a symbolic interactionist perspective. Interpretive research rests heavily upon Heidegger's theory of *being* in

the world for its (ultimate) justification (see glossary). Heidegger (1962: 37) argues, inter alia, that "the meaning of phenomenological description as a method *lies in interpretation*" (my italics).

An interpretive approach seeks to explain how people attribute meaning to their circumstances, and how they develop and make use of rules which govern their behaviour. By contrast, a critical approach might have as an underlying motivation the desire to change the structural conditions within which one experiences "circumstances". Bauman (1978) and Van Manen (1990) each refer to the *explanatory form* of study as interpretive. Van Manen (1990: 25), points out that "it is a form of existential phenomenology which, on the one hand, seeks to describe the quality of lived experience and, on the other, the expressions of lived experience". Van Manen is a particularly strong advocate for interpretive approaches. He joins a growing number of writers on research and adult education such as Boud et al (1985; 1987; 1993), Schon (1983; 1987), Mezirow (1990; 1991) and Candy (1988; 1991) who argue that a preferred method for social science involves description, interpretation, self-reflection and critical analysis.

Candy's argument, however, is that "human interactions are not governed by inviolable laws so much as by agreed rules which are consequently validated by people" (1991: 431). In this sense they are often symbolic. Blumer calls this "symbolic interaction", which refers to "the distinctive character of human interaction based on people interpreting or defining each other's actions instead of merely reacting to each other" (1962: 186). A methodological consideration for this study is thus to capture symbolic meanings through personal accounts and trainers' use of metaphors describing their workplace experiences. Blumer (1962) asserts this involves doing research with people rather than on people.

Interpretive research should bring with it "a conception of 'organisation' as the product of multiple social interactions" (Ball 1991: 167). Its (organisational) "realities" lie in the things that people do, say and think, rather than the kind of abstract system that is somehow greater than the sum of its parts. This means the ontological status of the organisation is also important to interpretive research.

(b) Against
Usher (1989), Usher and Bryant (1989), and Carr and Kemmis (1983) argue that a knowledge of the meanings of an individual's experience is not enough, as human beings do not live in worlds entirely of their own devising, and are subject to influences and pressures that shape their attitudes and perceptions. People are often

unaware of these. These critics tend to advocate approaches to research of lived experience that explore how social relations have developed historically, and how individual interpretations may be distorted by factors such as ideology, the politics of experience and conditions of post-modernity. Such emphases are suggestive of postmodern (Usher) and critical (Carr and Kemmis) approaches to research.

Arguments against using interpretive approaches centre on their philosophical alignment with a humanistic discourse which Usher (1992: 203) argues "fails to adequately problematise 'autonomy'". For example, the very notion of individuals reaching their "own" understandings about phenomena like informal learning is problematic. Taylor points out that 'understanding', "is structured historically in the traditions, prejudices and institutional practices that come down to us... [Understanding] depends on trying to find the unity in all the conditions that pertain to learning" (1993: 59).

Postmodern doubt precludes "unity in all the conditions" that pertain to learning. Postmodern and poststructural writers emphasise the power laden and political nature of discourse (Foucault 1980; Usher and Edwards 1994). For these writers, a discourse implies a political apparatus, a community, and the power to assign legitimacy. Anyon also points out that discourse sets conditions of "what kind of talk occurs, and which talkers speak" (1994: 120).

Two apparent paradoxes inherent in interpretive approaches are posed as a result of the political nature of discourse. The first is that one cannot place subjective accounts of learning at the centre of research as accounts are "inscribed" through the circulating discourses. The second is that the postmodern assumption of the power/knowledge linkage means that interpretive accounts can inadvertently marginalise the voices they are supposedly highlighting. They do this by telling someone's story back with additional "insights", additional "authority". In other words, the researcher becomes a coloniser of the subjects through re-telling *their* stories. Indeed, the dialogue between the learner and researcher can be raised as a further methodological concern about interpretive research (see 5.5.3).

There are at least three serious categories of doubts about the interpretive paradigm. First, the positivist suspicion of the subjective nature of such studies and their inabilities to make generalisations based on what can be regarded as "hard" or "factual" evidence. Second, and based in critical theory, is that interpretive accounts simply do not go far enough to explain the complex historical, structural, social, economic and environmental influences upon individual experience. Third, are the

problems associated with the subject-person (in adult education and research) in the so-called "crisis of modernity". A postmodern view, inter alia, does not place human subjectivity at the centre of meaning construction.

The first two have been, to an extent, already addressed — the aims and objectives of this research do not lie within positivist or critical research paradigms. It is this third category of doubts that requires exploration as it directly relates to meanings and validity of findings from "the individual". As Biesenbach (1988), Oelkers (1987), Pongratz (1987), Aronowitz and Giroux (1985), Usher (1993) and Wexler (1987; 1993) variously argue, there are increased tensions between "the individual" and "society" which affect such meanings.

Finger describes these tension as occurring "between personal development and professional development, or between the search for personal self-fulfilment and the imperatives of economic competition" (1990: 24). The "subject" of modern education is, argues Finger:

> simultaneously to be an individual and a collective entity linked together through the pre-industrial idea of an unlimited developmental process [the Enlightenment project]. (1990: 25)

"The subject", following postmodern insights into the nature of experience (Foucault, Lacan, Derrida and Lyotard), cannot be assumed to be autonomous and self-directing. "Experience", as argued by Usher and Edwards (1994), tends to be discursively constructed. The subject is a new subject for new times (Lyotard 1984), times that decentre "the self" and construct multiple subjectivities. It is "technologies of the self", "exemplary little practices of resistance" (Foucault 1988b), the contradictoriness of human relations and the "non-pure" relations between public/private thinking and behaviour that (inter alia) "constitute" critical thinking. The notions of "decentred subject" and "multiple subjectivities" do not, however, automatically eliminate "society" from the benefits of critical thinking. But they have major implications for theory, practice and research in adult education. These implications are alluded to by Finger who asserts that a commencement point for adult education research and practice is the "already de-centred subject [who] cannot be assumed to reflect 'rationally' upon everyday experience and to comprehend their 'own' experience objectively" (1990: 27).

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This research does not attempt to resolve these philosophical dilemmas. It emphasises the interaction of the "context" and the "individual". It requires adults to surface their taken-for-granted lifeworld. The inquiry thus presupposes a form of dialogue between the researcher and the trainers, whereby its methods seek to represent how the practitioners feel about what they do at work, how they know their job, what their own concerns, perceptions and understandings are, in addition to how these are shaped. As a form of research, Boud and Griffin point out that:

> this is not easy ... it has its own standards of rigour ... and requires not only research skill, but also personal skills. Like any research approach it is suitable for exploring only some kinds of questions — the meaning people attribute to their experiences, how people perceive themselves and their worlds and how they communicate their understandings to others. (1987: 9)

Such an interpretive conception of research assumes there will be no absolute answers and emphasises the need for qualitative data that can provide an alternative to prevalent functionalist, systems theories of learning in the workplace. It requires:

> A consideration of actor's definitions of their situation need [that do] not preclude attempts at sociological explanation that go beyond the level of the actor's own consciousness; indeed this was precisely the point of Weber's insistence on theoretical adequacy both at the level of meaning and at the level of causality. (Saunders 1979: 203)

Further developing this point, Ball says: "it seems perverse and constraining to want to direct all social science into one model for understanding human action" (1991: 188). Arguing against the imposition of a "testing mode", he claims that a study focussing on the micro-politics [of an organisation] "has little to do with cause and effect but (should have as a central aim, the desire to) capture, part at least, of a social totality ... where complexity and interrelatedness rather than simplicity are the end points" (1991: 188).

This study attempts to make sense of the complexity of informal learning *in context*. The context includes the social reasoning embedded in everyday work. Clarifying concepts is a key part of this aim which relates to the elucidation of the nature of informal learning in certain contexts. The ontological status of the organisation is thus quite important. Rather than beginning with a reified view of the organisation as

a structure — separate from those who make it up (a la systems theory) — these approaches acknowledge social actors as basic constituents of the organisation. On this basis the "own voice" issue is not viewed as strictly individualistic, but indicative of personal experience of the social, the interpretation dialectical.

Interpretive accounts must also "make sense to the actors whose behaviour is being studied; in other words they must pass the test of participant confirmation" (Carr and Kemmis 1983: 91). Implicitly, this approach brings an ethical stance which involves participants in decision making about the data gathering and its subsequent uses. Interpretive accounts do not seek to reinterpret the actions and experiences of the "actors", but to give a deeper, more extensive or systematic representation of events, highlighting the viewpoints of those involved. Analysis of the functioning of the organisation (or site) thus depends on the way the actors define, interpret and "handle" their daily situations. Blumer argues that such an approach yields insights which bear directly upon the concerns typically ignored or obscured by organisational theorists and systems analysts:

> problems such as morale, the functioning of bureaucracy, blockage in effective communication, corruption, the rise (and decline) of oligarchic control, the disintegration of the organisation or the infusion of new vigour into the organisation. (1976; in Ball 1987: 27)

Georgi (1985: 4) points out certain problems with this methodology. For example, "there is the issue of a lack of historical precedent in phenomenological research". Georgi argues that a major difficulty in developing a method without an established historical record is that every problem becomes foundational, "one that has to be worked through from scratch". Equally problematic is that all phases of the research presuppose each other and yet one can only work on one stage at a time. This can give rise to premature codification or categorisation of the data. These, however, are not arguments against the pursuit of a phenomenological understanding per se. They are arguments which stress the need to be clear about what one is researching, the purposes of the research and what can "legitimately" be made of the data.

Further, an interpretive approach does not automatically exclude positivist, critical or postmodern insights. A key issue is how such insights are used, and whether they are used coherently. Indeed, the generation (and legitimation) of knowledge about the social world is stronger when not reliant upon a "one-best-way" approach.

Table 5.1: "Paradigmatic" and Postmodern Inquiry

Predict	Understand	Emancipate	Deconstruct
positivism	interpretive	critical	post-structural
naturalistic	phenomenological	neo-Marxist	postmodern
	hermeneutic	feminist	the post-modern
	symbolic interaction	minoritarian	post-paradigmatic
	constructivist	praxis oriented	diaspora
	micro ethnography	Freirean	
		participatory	

Table 5.1 is grounded in Habermas (1971) categorisation of human interests that underscore knowledge claims — "prediction", "understanding", and "emancipation". But it also adds "deconstruction" (Lather 1991: 8). She argues that "Habermas would not have approved of this addition as he identifies postmodernism with neo-conservatism and argues that the 'Enlightenment project' is not failed, only unfinished" (1991: 8). This is a perspective shared by Kemmis (1992) who explores several postmodernisms concluding that the unfinished emancipatory project of Enlightenment must not be abandoned.

My own position on these philosophical issues is ambivalent, partial — how can one be sure whether (or not) the Enlightenment has expired? This ambivalence, this doubt, also enables the study to be grounded in an interpretive framework. Ironically, *doubt* is *enabling* because, while phenomenology rejects the "certainties" of positivism, its methods have become more attractive and even appropriate with the decline in grand theory and the emergence of postmodernism. Several chapters draw upon postmodern ideas of power/knowledge, deconstruction, textuality and "performativity"[17] in order to counterpoint the phenomenological findings and theorisations. As Edwards and Usher (1993), Lather (1991) and Aronowitz and

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17 Lyotard's (1984) influential theorisation of the distinction between the modern and postmodern conditions of knowledge argues that the production and dissemination of knowledge in modernity was justified on the grounds that it contributed to to the pursuit of truth and/or the liberty of humanity. These 'metanarratives', he argues, are unsustainable, and educational and training practices are being replaced by a postmodern condition ... in which the criterion of optimising efficient performance, the 'performativity', of the system is brought to the fore (in Edwards 1994: 166). This viewpoint will surely resonate with many adult education and training practitioners today and is a matter of some concern. I suggest these ideas radically and usefully counterpoint phenomenology on the grounds that they do not privilege the individual voice. Rather they bring a critique to the metanarratives within which individualising processes (which, it can be argued, includes phenomenological research) are set.

Giroux (1985) variously point out, no single method can completely filter out widespread social biases that are deeply inscribed in a culture.

5.2 A three phase method

The empirical methods of this study are developmental in two senses. First, they take phenomenology as descriptive of "lived-through quality of experience" (Van Manen 1990: 25). Secondly, these methods are are characterised by a "grounded approach". This refers to a progressive focussing of the research questions based on initial, unstructured or semi-structured interviews (a la Glaser and Strauss 1967). In this study, the initial interviews with industry trainers helped to shape the questions of phase two and enabled a constant comparison of emergent ideas and concepts. In other words, concepts were progressively constructed. This "progress" is characterised by a movement from using initially "unstructured" interviews, to highly systematic data gathering techniques.

- Phase one involved two rounds of in-depth interviews with six workplace trainers. Each trainer came from a different industry and was asked about their roles, responsibilities, principal concerns and learning in the workplace. This phase provided qualitative information about their experiences at work. It sought to theorise about the phenomenon of informal learning from various points of view and contexts. This served to shape phase two.

- Phase two concentrated on industry training practices within the context of one industry. It consisted of field visits and interviews with thirty personnel at three separate sites within the construction industry, and a further ten interviews with union, construction company and government leaders. Information was sought about work organisation, skill formation practices within the industry and at particular sites, and specific examples of informal learning. Important aims of this phase of the research were to better understand the industry dynamics which impinge upon an individual's informal learning. This also provided a data base for comparing the sites studied. An important aim was to enter phase three with strong industry wide insights.

- Phase three involved an in-depth case-study based upon numerous field visits, interviews and observations at one specific site — the Sydney 2000 Olympic Games construction project. This phase examined, over twelve

months, the informal learning of training personnel at a large, complex construction site. The site was selected, after completion of phases one and two, for empirical analysis of the informal learning of the site's trainers. It explored local influences including the links between work-based learning and work organisation, skill formation practices, the informal culture and the activities meaningful to the trainers themselves.

This three phase approach allows theory development in addition to some theory testing. Comparisons and contrasts of experiences at this site to the earlier sites studied reflect my interest in the nature of the tensions, conflicts and contestation which occur amongst the stakeholders within organisations: for instance, who seeks to define "what counts" as informal learning at work, and upon what grounds are judgments made at particular sites? In this study, each site is a multi million dollar project encompassing many construction activities. The Olympics site faces a stronger than usual public scrutiny due to the size of government contracts involved, the impacts on local communities of staging such an event, the political mileage sought from it, and consequent global media interest.

Table 5.2 sets out the phases of research over time.

Table 5.2: Flow Chart of Research for Informal Learning in the Workplace

P
H
A
S
E   1992–93
O
N
E

| Literature review | → | Identify key issues about informal learning. General research questions. Develop theoretical framework for the study. |

| Exploratory (grounded) interviews | → | Industry trainers from a range of industries. Using an interpretive approach. |

P
H
A
S
E   1993
T
W
O

Develop Research Protocol.
Refine the principal research
questions and scope of study

| Further interviews, visit various sites within the construction industry | → | Identify industry specific issues; gather data related to the phenomena.
Refine the Research Protocol for in-depth study.
Consult with industry representatives. Obtain approvals for Phase Three from:
• the client (NSW Public Work)
• the builder (Phaedrus)
• the union (BWIU). |

| In-depth case study (at the Sydney Olympic Games Construction site) | → | Interviews, observations and visits to gather detailed data about informal learning. |

P
H
A
S
E   1994–96
T
H
R
E
E

| Draft research findings, analysis of data | → | Submit mid – 1996. |

5.3 Phase one: the "grounded theory" approach

5.3.1 Phase one aims

The grounded theory approach to phase one sought data through what Reason (1988: 18) describes as a "story-telling" technique. Using this technique, I twice interviewed six industry trainers over three months. They came from banking, finance, community services, manufacturing, retail and small business industries. Each was employed by a major corporation, but the objective was to concentrate on their experiences rather than descriptions of their organisation.

The guiding idea was to develop a consistent and explicitly qualitative method to highlight issues about informal learning "as experienced". These issues would inform the further phases of the research. Marsick's (1987: 177) work on informal learning was a useful commencement point with data gathered on:

- the contexts of the trainers' learning;
- problem situations;
- how learning was perceived to be originated;
- learning processes, strategies and techniques;
- consequences of learning;
- reflection and awareness of taken-for-granted assumptions;
- feelings about the learning;
- ideas about what informal learning means to the trainers themselves.

This framework established some essential boundaries. But at the same time, constructing boundaries was a concern in that I did not want early dialogue with the industry trainers to be too shaped by my questions. Because the accusation of researcher bias can be levelled at any social research, a key feature of this study is its reflexivity about its construction and development. Although the stories which emerged from the industry trainers were intended to clarify the issues being experienced, the research addresses the dialectical relationship of selves with work (and by definition others and Otherness in general) and the issue of research subjects/researcher interaction.

A reductionist approach to the conceptual elements contained within their stories was not therefore used. "Questionnaire-type" interviews were also dismissed as inappropriate to this study, and analytical categories were held at broad levels. The

descriptions and analyses of phase one were primarily to focus the issues and research questions for phases two and three.

5.3.2 Phase one procedures

The research was inductive with phases two and three grounded in their preceding phase. To that extent, the hypotheses about the informal learning of industry trainers were data-led, with interpretations and findings being more deeply explored in subsequent stages. All the interviewees of phase one were known to me through my teaching and research work at the School of Adult Education within the University of Technology, Sydney. Each participant was asked about their work and what they considered to be significant workplace learning for themselves. In addition, a critical incident technique was included, in which trainers were asked to describe a complex or problematic work situation that made them feel they had lacked the necessary skills or knowledge. They were asked to think about how they went about learning — what they needed to know, who (or what) in the organisation helped them, and whether their informal learning "worked" for them — in their contexts.

The initial grounded interviews included prompts or open-ended questions, categorised in relation to learning about *the job, the organisation* and *oneself*. (See Appendix One for the broad protocol or framework for these interviews.)

Each interview was conducted at the workplace of the trainer and in private. Each interview was approximately two hours long. I began by explaining the broad aims of the research and encouraged the trainers to ask any questions to ensure they had the information to feel comfortable about participating (or indeed withdrawing). Although the interviews were not formally structured questionnaire-style, they were guided by a set of prompts. The prompts were opening questions designed to enable the workers to tell their own stories. The interview technique is best described as "person-centred" in the classic Rogerian[18] (non-directive) style. I sought stories about their lived experience and learning as they confront their most difficult work tasks, significant learning achievements or events.

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[18] Roger's theory (in Corey, 1991: 205) "emphasises the importance of a permissive and non-interventionist approach to interviewing". Roger's approach comes under critical scrutiny, particularly from postmodern theorists. Usher and Edwards (1995) question the validity of focussing research on assumptions about the subject's abilities to grapple successfully with the historical, power, gender-based issues which shape an individual's experience. Where the research is interpretive, however, this approach is a useful (and coherent) method for drawing out the subjects' personal stories of learning at work.

Narratives, for example about one's personal history or experience at work, hold important information about informal learning. This information reveals much about organisational norms. I thus also sought stories about "stand-out" achievements of respected colleagues which could highlight their cultural contexts. Some of the most "telling" data came in the form of discursive asides about colleagues and corporate norms.

I taped the interviews (with permission) and later transcribed them. Having established categories and grouped concepts, I used Filemaker Pro (Macintosh) to organise the transcript data. I soon discarded this high-tech procedure as it was more satisfactory to organise the data manually. This allowed me to work more directly with the data, a procedure which may not suit all.

After each interview, the tapes were transcribed and sent to the subjects for their verification. This allowed for clarification of any points which they felt they had not made clear or that they did not want included. Next, following receipt of their comments and verification, I sent participants copies of their transcripts with interpretive comments to which they were invited to respond.

In a few instances trainers made minor changes clarifying their meanings. Williams (1988; in Mac an Ghaill 1991: 114) points out some procedural and ethical dilemmas of this kind of research. He argues "that a more damning criticism could be subsumed under the heading "paternalism" ... and the arrogance of the researcher invading another group's world in order to get information to relay it to the outside world". The African American author bell hooks is even more scathing on this issue, particularly where it applies to marginalised others:

> Often, speech about the "Other" annihilates, erases: No need to hear your
> voice. Only tell me about your pain. I want to know your story. And then I
> will tell it back to you in a new way. Tell it back to you in such a way that
> it has become mine, my own. Re-writing you, I write myself anew. I am still
> author, authority. I am still the colonizer, the speaking subject, and you are
> now at the centre of my talk. (1990: 151).

Using the stories of others clearly raises important political questions: Whose side is the researcher really on? What is the researcher's agenda? What purposes and interests will the outcomes ultimately serve?

5.3.3 Issues arising in phase one

The criticism of "researcher arrogance" raised by Mac an Ghaill (1991) and by hooks (1990), cannot be taken lightly. Indeed, it is magnified when the research concerns a group labelled as "disadvantaged". In my research, industry trainers are not being represented as a disadvantaged group in the community (even though some of their work touches on access and equity issues). My experience throughout the study was that the trainers welcomed the research effort and were far from naive about potential consequences of the findings. They were aware, for example, that a study of this nature could be highly critical of workplace practices. Nonetheless, they were keen to participate and derive any insights about their own learning at work. But hooks' point requires further comment. It reminds the researcher that what ought to accompany analyses and theorisations based on others' stories is the creation of opportunities for them to tell (or write) their own stories, should they so desire.

Taking this notion seriously, I sought to establish a spirit of co-operative research, consulting and sharing with participants as much about the research process as practicable. Trainers were encouraged to use the data from their own stories for their own ends. This approach helped each of us focus upon the ways micro-political influences shape "what counts" as informal learning to the trainers themselves. It also helped bring attention to how individuals are rewarded (career paths, promotion, project allocations, remuneration, peer recognition) and to mechanisms used in workplaces to deliver (and withhold) such rewards. The approach did this, I believe, through requiring a continuing dialogue with the participants.

An important feature of the continuing dialogue and the grounded interviews (some might argue, an inadequacy) is that they were largely self-directing, long, contained many diversions and were full of anecdotes. The principal assumption of this type of dialogue, however, is that it is precisely such anecdotes which contain vital information about individuals' situated learning. The approach to interviewing thus attempted to minimise "topic" questions and maximise "cue" questions. Again, it sought to pass as much control as possible over the substance of the interview to the respondent. The following extract from one of the trainers, Warren, is fairly typical:

JG: Can you tell me a little about your experience in this job, for example, has it influenced the way you see your future career; perhaps the way you now see yourself?

W: Yes, it has helped me to address the fact that I am a provider of a service to others whereas before I was a technical expert. Sometimes, I'm providing a service to an area I know nothing about. Having been a specialist and moving into a more generic role has made me change the way I see myself and it hasn't been all positive, in fact some of it has been quite negative. At first I felt very uncomfortable not being an expert in areas I was being asked to intervene in such as management training. Whereas I would have been comfortable training anyone in how to fly a Sea-Hawke, I knew very little about supervision skills.

At an early stage of my life I was removed from my parents and joined the Navy. I was about 14, nearly 15. I learned a lot in the service and from the way they instilled things into you. They (the Navy) reinforce things in very strong ways and some of it is unpleasant and confrontationist. In my previous job, some of my prior experiences in the Navy were touched on. I feel strongly that humiliating someone, or yelling and screaming at another person is no way to get them to learn or to change. I was humiliated as a boy in the Navy and now in later life, feel strongly that there is no need to humiliate people even if you fundamentally disagree with them on an issue. In fact what I learned to do was present things in a negotiated attempt at win-win solutions.

JG: I am picking up a sense of how powerful an influence the Navy has been to your development and learning and must confess I'm intrigued as to why you joined the Navy at 14 or 15.

W: I was born and raised in a small country town in Western Australia. Long term job prospects did not look good. My father was a motor-mechanic. I was appalled at what I saw as his lifestyle; very hard physical yakka; very rough and ready. I saw him come home in the afternoons all but exhausted, with dirty, stinking, filthy hands. He'd be so tired he would have nothing to do with us kids. He would sit down in the lounge room after showering and his hands would still look dirty. He'd talk to us a little and then go to sleep. I often had to wake him up for dinner. I knew within myself that this was not going to be for me. I wanted to join the Navy from an early age. It seemed very exciting to a young boy scrambling to get out. Its interesting to reflect that at the time I won a cadetship to go into journalism, but to the horror of my parents, rejected it and went for the Navy. In some ways I didn't have the confidence to go for it at the

time and the Navy seemed more exciting anyway. I've proven to myself now that I could have done that cadetship, but from where I was at the time it was somehow out of reach. I stayed in the Navy for twenty years, but when I married moving around became a real drag. It was difficult with family life.

The above extract exemplifies inter alia the importance of biography as a context for understanding career choice, and how identity can influence informal learning. The interviews therefore touch on "life-history" methods.

Such free-floating interviews are indicative of the nature of a grounded approach to research. The topics explored relate to what Ball (1991: 166) describes as "power, conflict and micro politics". Hoyle (1981, in Ball ibid) refers to this micro-politics as the "organisational underworld". Such topics require participants to talk about potentially sensitive matters. To address, from the trainer's perspective, this "organisational underlife" and everyday experience of corporate life, a high degree of confidence from respondents was required.

Such confidence was obtained, as can be seen from examples of tacit knowledge embedded in the interview transcripts (see Chapter Six). Tacit knowledge relates to informal aspects of organisational life — that is, taken-for-granted assumptions about the rituals of daily work activity. The better I knew the interviewee, the more candid the disclosures — again raising the critical issue of ethics. No personal or professional disclosures are used in this text without the prior approval of the participants. Instead, pseudonyms are used and workplaces disguised.

5.3.4 Outcomes of the theory and methods for phase two — a little reflexivity

Preliminary analysis of the phase one transcripts clarified a range of categories, conceptual elements and hypotheses related to informal learning. The hypotheses regarding relationships amongst the categories and conceptual elements, being grounded in the stories of the trainers are often tentative, offering ideas for further exploration in phases two and three. For instance, the stories highlighted a range of discursive industry influences upon informal learning. This outcome clarified the theoretical and empirical advantages of studying in-depth trainer's stories within one particular industry. Hence, phase two was intended to provide contextual data about the construction industry *before* interviews with the trainers at the Olympics construction site in phase three.

At the outset of phase one, it was not my intention to develop the grounded interviews into a chapter within this text. The initial idea was for phase one to refine the research questions based on the experiences of practitioners. I wanted to obtain trainers' views from a cross-section of industries, believing that a variety of contexts may yield valuable insights about phenomena beyond the single industry setting of construction. I intended the outset to focus on construction, as I had been involved in three national research projects within this industry and this prior research gave me the background (and contacts) to access sites to study. (See Hayton, Garrick, & Guthrie 1993; Garrick; in Smith et al 1995; Hayton, Roberts & Noble; Hayton, Garrick, Shaafsma, Fishman, & Stone 1995).

The Olympics site was of particular interest because of its national significance. I considered abandoning phase one, however the richness of the data, its insights into corporate demands upon trainers, called for inclusion. While deriving insights from several industries was ultimately very useful to the overall project, in-depth examination of each of the industries and corporations involved was beyond the scope of the study.

The trainers' stories led to the establishment of three overarching themes analysed in detail in Chapter Six:

- *informal learning and the corporate self;*
- *autobiography and informal learning;*
- *power, experience and learning.*

The themes address different aspects of informal learning, but all interact with one another. The first includes the discursive or communicational influences on the trainers within their corporation and the impact of corporate culture on learning at work. The second acknowledges the influences of personal history on the present. The third does not presume automatic learning from experience but recognises the impact of power in its various guises on the processes of learning identified by the trainers.

While the themes constructed in phase one do not frame all that is encompassed by the term informal learning, they did sharpen considerably the research questions for the ensuing phases. For example, all interviewees repeatedly commented on external influences such as industry award restructuring and discourses of workplace reform, as impacting on their training roles and learning. As a consequence, key external

issues were identified as directly relevant to their own learning. These shaping influences were categorised in the following way:

- *industry environment;*
- *the organisation of work (hierarchies, teams and so on);*
- *management (for example, managerial styles and decision-making procedures);*
- *the actual operations (for example, production processes).*

These categories highlight intersubjectivity and the extent to which learning is shaped, as distinct from self-directed. This is critical to the research development and subsequent theorising. The research protocol of phase two, for instance, was constructed to explore systematically the influences identified in phase one, applied to the construction industry (see also Chapter Six).

5.4 Phase two: learning in the Australian construction industry

5.4.1 Phase two aims

Phase two examined contextual influences on trainers within one industry — construction — foregrounding the trainers' personal experiences at specific sites. Here the term *construction* includes non-residential building construction and non-building construction (such as civil construction), but excludes house building and residential construction. Skill-formation and learning processes in the housing and residential construction sector was thus excluded. It was this foregrounding which clarified important industry discourses influencing industrial relations, enterprise bargaining, safety, total quality management (TQM) and training systems. These discourses directly impacted on the roles and purposes of the trainers and, in turn, the researcher's heightened awareness of them allowed their further exploration in phase three.

Three further aims of phase two were:

- to provide a statistical overview of construction in order to provide a macro profile of broad industry influences;

- to describe and evaluate current skill-formation practices, focussing on informal learning, in the construction industry — with particular reference to three selected case-studies;

- to identify dominant industry discourses.

Phase two therefore aimed to provide a strategic view of skill-formation practices in the construction industry. It sought to foreground key effects upon trainers' roles and thus aspects of their informal learning, including important concepts and issues related to work organisation and workplace reform.

5.4.2 Phase two procedures

Phase two, firstly analyses a collection of statistics and briefly reviews recent major industry reports which profile the industry. Secondly, it undertakes three case studies of major construction projects in Australia. The case studies were chosen to provide insights into some of the trainers' practices and of the factors which affect their day to day experiences. The criteria for selection of the sites were relatively straight forward: a large, complex Sydney metropolitan project (Chimaera Park), a medium-sized construction (a multi-storey project in Brisbane's Central Business District) and a significant non-metropolitan project (Upper-Hunter Valley). Each project recommended by the industry lead body — the Construction Industry Development Agency (CIDA). CIDA responsed to my request for examples of new or recent projects which offered different types of work organisation, subcontracting arrangements, team approaches to construction, training activities and learning.

Case studies have a number of advantages for this research. With the purpose being to explore the informal learning of industry trainers, an "open" method is preferred over other methods (Stoecker 1991; Yin 1994) because it is suited to this form of exploratory research. They suggest it helps establish the bounds of the overall research project. Each case study involved individual interviews on site. With introductions to the site managers from CIDA and approvals from the university, I spent two days at each site. Ten interviews were conducted (in private in a construction shed) at each site. Those interviewed were people in the following roles:

- the principal trainer or learning coach at the site;
- union representatives;
- construction workers;
- tradespersons;
- an engineer;
- an apprentice or trainee;
- the project manager;
- foreman;
- a subcontractor.

Thirty interviews were conducted over six months at the three construction projects. A cross-section of construction workers (including the trainers) was interviewed about issues associated with work-based learning and training at their site and in the industry more generally.

For the case studies a number of data collection techniques were adopted. Data were primarily qualitative and gathered through the interviews, but some quantitative data were also gathered. For instance, aspects of corporate organisation such as attendance patterns at training, and perceived cost benefits were analysed. Quantitative data were collected to complement understandings of industry discourses and thus enhance the validity of phase two research. Although a protocol was developed to guide the data-gathering process, this could not cover pertinent research questions or perspectives. Unexpected factors sometimes arose within the specific sites and the relatively open-ended nature of the case-study method allowed for these to be included. The protocol for phase two (see Appendix Two) sought data about five main categories: the company, the site, the organisation of work, formal training arrangements and informal learning "practices".

Results of the interviews were recorded in a field-book. Tape-recording was inappropriate in these workplaces for cultural and industrial relations reasons. In addition, I did not spend the time in this phase to develop relationships in which workers might be willing to have their conversations recorded. As it was, I was very grateful for their participation and frankness. A key aim of this phase was largely met — to further focus key issues for in-depth follow-up at the Olympics site.

5.4.3 Issues arising in phase two and implications for phase three — a little more reflexivity

At each site, access to workers required permission from the project manager and the relevant trade union representative. I stressed to each that I did not want to speak to people who may be inclined to give me "glossy", or overly cautious replies. It was important to hear the full spectrum of views about learning at the site. This direct approach was met favourably and, I believe, with some relief. But it may also have affected some of the findings. For example, were participants more likely to express critical comments as a consequence of these being openly sought? Were workers more likely to participate because they had a particular barrow to push? Was my research being used as an avenue to raise industrial concerns? Did management have a particular line to be expressed?

Qualitative research by definition can never fully account for such questions. Where there are small numbers, chosen by non-probability sampling procedures, there can be no claim to representativeness. And this study makes no such claims. The aims of phase two were to build hypotheses and theories rather than test them. Exploration of issues at various sites was to enable some comparisons to be made to establish any "trend theories" (Sarantakos 1994: 11). This is in keeping with the systematic approach to theory construction offered by grounded theory. As such my interests in informal learning directly related to any micro politics or agendas being pursued at particular sites. Primary experience is very important in this approach which assumes that there is "continuity between everyday thinking and the empirical use of the data generated" (Sarantakos 1994: 269).

It was agreed at the sites that I would send a draft of the case studies to the trainers for comment before any publications ensued. This was mutually desirable. I wanted to ensure that my facts were accurate and to have the depiction of the issues affecting learning at the site verified by the participants. In each case, comments were made on the drafts, refining the findings. Even where a critique of the site's organisation of training was made, there was little or no attempt to prevent publication. This was important as training, being one of the strategic bargaining chips in enterprise negotiations, could have been very sensitive to both unions and management. Had some form of censorship been sought, this approach would have become less viable. I was prepared to find other sites for study but, thankfully, this scenario did not eventuate.

Despite the contextual variations and approaches of each site, some common issues did emerge. One was the effects of removing labour demarcations in the workplace reform process. Each company saw this as adding to their competitiveness at the tendering stage. Workplace reform, based upon multi-skilling, is now central to industry discourse about "competitiveness".

How this discourse influences practice is particularly exemplified in two of the projects. In these projects, a key success factor in the tendering process was a fixed maximum price. This meant contractors were prepared to take the risk of not delivering on time and within budget, a risk traditionally borne by the client. The contractors were prepared to take this risk because of their confidence in the efficiency and reliability of the workplace reform process: improvements in work organisation, skill formation and the industrial relations climate. Such arrangements meant contractors could be rewarded when the project was completed ahead of

target. In this, many millions of dollars are at stake and the game (of "reform") is taken very seriously by the players involved.

Corporate pursuit of workplace reform impacts directly on the roles of the trainers. Workplace reform at the Chimaera Park and Upper-Hunter Valley projects aimed to develop company employees through multi-skilling and "team" approaches to work organisation. In these case studies, two strategies for achieving team approaches were observed:

- work organisation based on the principle of self-directing "work area teams". This involved employment of a high percentage of direct labour (for example, in the Chimaera Park project);

- the use of fewer, but larger, subcontracting arrangements that foster the re-organisation of the subcontractors' work to "fit in" with the workplace reforms of the principal contractor (for example, in the Upper-Hunter Valley project with its main sub-contractors).

In each case, the contractors had encouraged the retention of their skilled direct labour for future projects. Key workers in the Upper-Hunter Valley project were retained from Seamus' direct labour at an earlier regional project. Site bosses perceived that problem solving, teamwork, communication skills and "positive attitudes" to reform were vital.

The case studies show differing perceptions of the value of skills such as communication, language and literacy, team-building and so on. In each, the principal contractor perceived these skills as a key part of the workplace reform strategy for projects. That is, there was an expectation that the investment in training would provide paybacks in productivity, quality and safety in both the present and future projects.

A critical barrier to "effective reform" and improved skill formation, according to the industry leaders interviewed in this phase, is the specialised trade subcontracting arrangements. This is reputed to be because they are difficult to reorganise without major changes to skill-formation practices, structure and culture of construction projects. This perception too has major implications for trainers, raising contentious questions related to the close links between training and industrial relations, including:

- who gets training?
- who pays for it?
- in whose time?

The point of highlighting some of these issues here is that they were used in the construction of research questions for phase three. For the method, two key questions are therefore, "how valid" are these tentative findings and to what extent (if at all) was the author "taken in" by the prevalent industry discourses?

Phase two was a helpful "nodal point" for identifying prevalent discourses within construction industry training. It allowed the capture of qualitative aspects of the sites' lifeworlds. The standard of rigour employed is based on the reflective awareness of the stories being described. An immediate test on the research data's rigour at the Sydney 2000 Olympic Games site appeared to withstand the intense scrutiny of practice. That is, the prevalent discourses and dominant issues identified as important in phase two were confirmed in phase three. (See Chapters Seven and Eight).

5.5 Phase three: The site for the Sydney 2000 Olympic Games

5.5.1 Phase three aims

The main aim of phase three was to examine the informal learning of the trainers based at this large, complex construction site. This aim required description in detail of the site influences which directly impacted upon their roles. The Olympic Games site offered the best available prospects for on-going construction activities to the end of the century. Rare indeed in an industry of constant movement and change. It cannot, therefore, be regarded as a typical or ordinary project: it is a one-off, high profile construction with the potential to influence national industry standards.

The Olympics site presented many advantages. My personal interest was high due to the local excitement (and scepticism) generated by Sydney's hosting of the Olympic Games for the year 2000. A part of this local "excitement" translated to extensive media coverage, some related to training. For example, the *Daily Telegraph* reported "building workers are on a collision course with the State Government after vowing to use their bargaining power on major projects in the lead up to the 2000 Olympics to push for improved industry training" (11.7.95).

Such features made the project attractive for in-depth analysis. Having conducted extensive research within the industry, an aim of this phase was to build on existing

ideas, networks and my ongoing re-thinking of the political processes which impinge upon informal learning. Through good fortune, the principal contractor at the Olympics site had also built Chimaera Park and I had already met a number of the construction workers through an earlier case study. This proved to be a huge advantage when I arrived at the Olympics site, as I was known to several workers there and had established relations I could build upon. These contacts quickly introduced me to local power-brokers from unions and management. They were also more willing to speak openly about their personal experiences at the new site, comparing it to the previous site. Such personal anecdotes were sought to contextualise the stories of the site trainers — David and Marta (pseudonyms) — and to theorise about the nature of informal learning.

5.5.2 Phase three procedures

Phase three was conducted in two distinct parts. Part one involved extensive interviews with a cross-section of personnel, and observations about contextual influences on the site. Part two examined in-depth the personal experience of the site's two principal industry trainers. Entering this site required a number of approvals — the university, the Heydigger Corporation (the developer), Phaedrus (the principal contractor at the site), the NSW State Department of Public Works (the client), and key unions. This process took time and patience. Although I had a letter of introduction to the site general manager from Heydigger, possession of a developed research protocol and the necessary approvals, these provided no guarantee of acceptance at the site. Whatever documents I might possess, whatever I might say about my research interests, the perspectives I might be likely to represent would remain unclear to the workers themselves for some time, and trust in this industry does not come lightly.

At the construction site, I was allocated a shed for conducting interviews. I was also required to attend, initially as a participant (later as an observer), an induction training program for new construction workers at the site. I also attended a formal occupational health and safety meeting for familiarisation with the safety requirements of the site. At this meeting, I discovered that I needed to wear a hard-hat and heavy boots for site visits. This was my first indication that safety was viewed by unions and management as a serious industrial issue at the site. The hat and boots were also symbols of hierarchy which accompanied my foregrounding to the site-text!

I planned to reach workers from a cross-section of the site. This was not to be a random sample or even a stratified sample. Positivistic sampling was not the intention. Rather, an initial set of names of workers who might be prepared to be interviewed was provided by one of the trainers. Further names were added by the various stake-holders (unions, managers, foremen, subcontractors and labourers) who wanted to discuss their particular points of view. I too was keen for this pyramid-type process to develop. I wanted to gather data about the context from as wide a range as possible. Unfortunately, not everyone could be interviewed and, anyway, a census style procedure was too cumbersome.

To gather the contextual data a detailed protocol was used to guide interviews with the 80 (of 400) workers at the site (see Appendix Three).

The 80 interviewees included project managers, engineers, foremen, trainers, subcontractors, trades persons, union delegates and construction workers from various labour activities. They were asked about their jobs, their views on the site and its culture, and the things they had learned from their experience of the project. This included their perceptions of any training activities in which they had been involved. Interviews took from twenty minutes to two hours depending on the worker's level of interest, time available and inclination to co-operate with the research effort.

No interviewees are identified for reasons of confidentiality. Wherever quotes are used, the respondent was shown how the written material was to be used. In some cases, respondents did not want their comments recorded because they feared they might be identified even though names and positions were disguised. In such instances their comments were excluded.

In fulfilling ethical and consultative requirements, it was clear that site managers and union delegates were very important to interview-access. This was made "crystal clear" to me, in the vernacular of the site. An essential agreement was reached that a union representative, a trainer and a project manager would form an informal "advisory" committee to assist the research. The assistance took two principal forms: approvals for workers' release from construction activities to be interviewed; and, critically, "symbolic endorsement" of my presence at the site.

A possible third reading of this "committee" is that it could have been a control mechanism. I have not taken this reading seriously because it did not really attempt

to censor my movements, nor my ideas. By their own admission committee members had not been exposed to this type of research before and were intrigued about its method. The committee also helped clarify some of the communicational features of Phaedrus. That I was perceived at the site as "not owned" by management or the union was fundamental to obtaining some of the startling disclosures from the workers which ensued.

The field study at the Olympics site took twelve months. I was based full time at the site for January, February and March 1994 and then at least one day per week until the end of June 1994. The six months July to December 1994 involved obtaining feedback, meeting participants to discuss draft material, seeking clarification on the many issues raised and ensuring accuracy. (This process continued with the trainers throughout the entire project.) As a higher degree of trust was built with the workers at the site, questions related more to their personal experience and learning. All interviews were conducted in private, either in the shed allocated to me, or, for subcontractors, in their sheds. Senior project managers were located in the main Phaedrus office and were interviewed there.

- *Part two: the "mini- narratives" of the trainers at the site*
After having gathered extensive information on the context and the discursive or communicational features of the Olympics site, its two principal trainers — David and Marta — were interviewed extensively and in a various ways including formal and conversational approaches. Most of these interviews with David and Marta were taped. As we began to know each other better, we often met to discuss possible meanings embedded within transcripts[19]. We did not always agree upon interpretations — see section 5.5.4 and Chapter Nine.

On occasion, informal discussions and observations required immediate note taking into my "field-book". The use of note-taking and the observation book obviously has limitations, but I found it a most efficient method in the context. Thoughts about taping all interviews, desirable in much interpretive research, was dropped soon after entering the site for various reasons. For example, the research followed soon after a Royal Commission into corruption and mismanagement in the industry. This alone made tape-recording conversations "suspect". Taping is not a part of the culture. Taping interviews with David and Marta was, however, the exception.

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19   The system for the transcription is not based on a formal convention or coding method that might for instance characterise language research (see Gumperz and Berenz's 1990 suggestions for transcribing and reporting conversational exchanges). For consistency and clarity, however, I use *italics* whenever the speaker is emphasising a point (i.e. italics in the transcripts = the speaker's own emphasis). The data appears in Chapter Nine.

For reasons of confidentiality, ethics and economy, some of the data gathered with David and Marta cannot be included in the body of the text. Detailed excerpts of the transcripts are, however, included in Chapter Nine. These show examples of the questions asked, the nature of the responses and analytic interpretations.

5.5.3 Issues arising in phase three — and a little more reflexivity

This phase of the research addressed phenomenologically the informal learning of the two principal trainers at the site, primarily through their transcribed stories. The interviews with David and Marta provided sensitive insights into their life-worlds — the impact on their informal learning of their professional roles, the interaction of "corporate culture" with their own beliefs and values, and the subtle (at times stressful) influences of the hierarchies of work-power on their behaviour. Other important issues raised in phase three are the level of intentionality in learning, the skills trainers require to balance competing interests such as industry demands and educational ideals and the emotions generated in day-to-day interactions. Themes for discussion that emerged include:

- managing training and the training — industrial relations link;
- public face/private thoughts: personal adaptations at work;
- networks, peers and mentors;
- recognition and feedback;
- the pendulum swings: industry demands, educational goals.

These categories cannot fully account for what is encompassed by "informal learning", but they open pertinent analytical avenues. Analysis of the themes in Chapters Nine and Ten also challenges the interpretive findings by utilising critical social theory and postmodern insights. This carries several major implications for the theory and methods of the research, challenging the limits of a "strictly" paradigmatic approach.

For Ericsson and Simon (1980), Moustgaard (1981), and Georgi (1982; 1985), the descriptive, interpretive approach requires:

- obtaining a holistic description in order to get a general sense of the subject's experience of a phenomena;

- once "the sense of the whole" has been grasped, the researcher goes back to the beginning, re-reading the texts with the specific aim of

"discriminating meaning units" (Georgi 1985: 10) which focus on the phenomenon being researched;

- once "meaning units" have been delineated, they are synthesised into a consistent statement regarding the subject's experience.

This approach tries to understand what is important about informal learning to the participants themselves. The fact that the researcher's perspective is circumscribed does not mean that findings are unworthy of recognition. Rather, it stresses the importance of attention to the detail of the contextual analysis and participant confirmation of any "meaning units" being expressed. Although what might stand out in a text depends very much upon the researcher's perspective, a more collaborative approach in practice means that meanings are neither univocal nor arbitrary. Indeed, the effort required in obtaining participant confirmation often leads to self correction.

Self correction and incorporating a collaborative aspect to the research do not, however, address postmodern doubt about the construction of knowledge. Postmodern analyses, in this case used to counterpoint interpretive findings, reveal the multiple discourses, the marginalised voices of others and the darker side of the Olympic Games-site story.

The guiding theme of the interpretive method is, however, to "go back to the [subjects] themselves" (Husserl 1970: 252). This is an expression Georgi interprets as "going to the everyday world where people are living through the phenomena in actual situations" (1985: 8). The trainers were, as I mentioned, interviewed and observed in their "actual situations", including the sheds at the site, the Heydigger head office training unit in Sydney's central business district, a training room at the University, and at Marta's home.

Interviewing on site raises several contextual considerations and representational issues. At the practical level, creative approaches and procedures were required to suit the work context. For example, I sometimes asked questions about activities while workers were in the actual process of "doing it". This presupposes an intelligibility about the experience being studied which is not always fair. Marta's experience of conducting a literacy course exemplifies this. Her personal experience would have had certain unique qualities which the research sought to identify and understand. If the "personal qualities" related to, say, a power dynamic, a key issue for the methodology is explore this dynamic. It may involve asking: What is her

experience of this? What is this phenomena? How can we better understand the nature of this power dynamic? What is its relation to Marta's informal learning? These are the types of underlying questions at the heart of the interpretive approach. But these questions are not necessarily best approached directly with, in this instance, Marta. They required, in addition to her voice, careful observation of the context within which her activity was set, and an acknowledgment of the intersubjective aspects of her learning. In turn, the researcher's own observations required scrutiny.

Representationally this meant that the research activity needed to be closely intertwined with the trainers' daily activities. The research process adopted in the study with David and Marta became inseparable from the writing task. The structure of the text, in its decisive form, emerged only after initial dialogue with the participants. After organising the transcripts, I met with them separately or together to discuss interpretations. A key issue raised by this approach is whether this form of research can, in a deep sense, "understand" the informal learning of the trainers involved. The assumption of the method is that it can reach meaningful understandings.

At the meetings with David and Marta, we sometimes disagreed about interpretations. This issue has very important ethical and epistemological dimensions. We sometimes shared intense conversational interviews. These led each of us to new levels of self-awareness with accompanying possibilities for changes in life-style, work-practices and shifting personal priorities. There was no blue-print to follow to resolve this conundrum, though, in the process my approach was to keep a sense of the overall project and address broad themes rather than a particular point or contested notion. The research itself became part of the informal learning of the trainers (and of the author) and where we remained in disagreement about an interpretation, this is acknowledged in the text.

As the genre of this empirical study is interpretive, I need to acknowledge the risk taken in developing broad theoretical propositions about trainers' experiences. For instance, the use of insights from postmodernism to counterpoint interpretive propositions is unusual within this genre. But I wish to assert that the contingency and plurality of knowledge does not preclude this use of theory. It enables the formation of deeper perspectives. At the same time, this theoretical construction does not mean the abandonment of systematic methods including precision and reliability in representing interpretive data.

In doing the research I spent a great deal of time with individual trainers, interviewing them and observing them in their work roles. At the Olympics site I got to know a range of workers, had lunch with them, and visited some at their own homes after hours. I met with a range of industry leaders from trade unions, corporate head-offices and government. In many respects I entered the lifeworlds of these trainers — a particularly privileged position. A position that carries an important duty to interpret their narratives in a way that justifiably makes sense of their lives within their industry contexts. This has left me with niggling doubts about whether I could have "worked the data" a little harder or pursued further specific insights in greater depth. Indeed, the status of the mini-narratives of David and Marta is, as Usher and Bryant (1989) point out in their analysis of theory development, limited: "experience without critical analysis can be little more than anecdotal reminiscence; interesting, but unconnected, experiential travellers' tales from the front lines of practice" (cited in Brookfield 1993: 30).

After extensive time involved with people — in which my views were actively sought, where workers divulged to me sensitive personal and professional information, and where I made new friends and colleagues — it would be wrong to assert the authoritative voice of the calculating scientist. The narrative presented here is my construction. Although it is based on a systematic methodology, there is no illusion that the selection of data, the choice of quotations for inclusion, the theorising, is definitive and objective knowledge. It is not. It is a construction that strategically represents my observations and insights following several years of research with the "subjects" of the study. As such, the discussion and analyses are not attempts to give voice to the participants, although such attempts are often characteristic of phenomenological research. The results here differ from this paradigmatic norm, achieving credibility, I would argue, from the validity of the data and their theoretical representation.

The theoretical representation is itself a narrative portraying one story. By definition this rejects any closure on the topic of informal learning. I have drawn on critical and postmodern insights to conterpoint the interpretive approach, and to work towards a new theory and ethics for workplace learning. This use of theory is intended as a challenge to conventional "humanistic" and "economistic" theorisations and practices of adult education and training, but it does not represent an all-encompassing new narrative.

CHAPTER SIX

Developing Corporate Selves, Training Others

6.1 Introduction: phase one

You have to be more than flexible in training. You have to have a chameleon approach to change, but this has dangers. The dangers are that different cultural sub-groups in the organisation can be suspicious of your motives — that you are wearing their colours today but underneath you really wear management colours.

Jodie, Corporate trainer 1993

This chapter explores the informal learning of six corporate trainers. Each worked in a different industry and their accounts make explicit the effects of corporate environments on their own learning. The purpose of these "story-telling" interviews was *theory-building* rather than theory-testing, focussing primarily on what informal learning means to the participants: how they conceptualise their informal learning, what is important about it and what shapes it in the work context. But talking about one's informal learning is fraught with difficulty as various institutional and discursive processes of modern society are at play. My tasks are thus to systematically describe the industry context and to write a narrative woven around transcript excerpts and corroborative episodes from trainers' daily work lives.

Two sets of interviews were conducted to establish sufficient trust in the subjects and depth in the data. The interviews established connections between what trainers learn, why and how they learn and their autobiographies. The interviews were transcribed into hundreds of pages of text and responses were initially categorised on the basis of the research questions. Ultimately, this method of categorisation was rejected on the grounds that it tended to "reduce" the trainers' stories, antithetical to the spirit of the overall project. Instead, three overarching themes were established for analysis:

- *informal learning and the corporate self;*
- *autobiography and informal learning;*
- *power, experience and learning.*

Influences of autobiography on informal workplace learning is highlighted in this chapter, but my exploration of the problematics of informal learning focusses on interactions and processes that occur in trainers' everyday practices. It is the 'situated self' that becomes the ongoing focus of the study, involving an ontology of the subject whereby "agency" and "situatedness" are inseparable. This ontology allows for the identification and analysis of the effects on individuals of influential industry discourses, organisational restructuring, new technology and cultural change. These effects are pertinent in the emerging post industrial era as we are yet to adequately comprehend what post-industrialism will mean for "learning", "knowledge", "education" (and its practices) and identity formation.

The themes are intended to look inside the lifeworlds of these corporate trainers rather than catalogue all that might be encompassed by the term "informal learning". There is a critical distinction made between the effects of corporate discourses on the trainers — such as their incorporation (and display) of required corporate attitudes and values — and affective consequences of corporate culture such as self-protection, accommodation and personal strategies of resistance. This distinction, in turn, is explored in-depth through the stories of Marta and David at the Olympics site (Chapter Nine). The analysis sketches theoretical links between informal learning and the discursive practices of corporate worlds.

The initial interviews provided data on the trainers' organisation, their role within it, critical incidents they had experienced and, consequently, a range of workplace influences on informal learning. The six interviews were:

- the Sydney head office of Litamac (a multi-national smallgoods and soft drink manufacturer and distributor) — Susan's story;

- a major financial institution — Marilyn's story;

- a multi-national commerce and financial management consulting company — Simon's story;

- a multinational aerospace engineering corporation — Michael's story;

- a high-volume aluminium products manufacturer — Warren's story;

- an Australian legal institution — Jodie's story.

The disparate corporate settings and production emphases provided insights into a range of corporate effects on individual experience, but were not intended for direct comparisons between the workplaces themselves.

Second interviews sought information about personal experiences, backgrounds and processes of informal learning. This data-gathering was at times quite sensitive, and the participants provided feedback and clarification of their meanings throughout the research process. Necessarily, a large amount of information has been excluded. The two principal criteria for editing included ethics and repetition. All participants were asked to veto anything they did not want published even though pseudonyms are used throughout. On occasion, this veto was exercised. Such exclusions have not altered the themes for analysis.

With regard to "repetition", once a point had been acknowledged in the text, additional references to it were excluded unless contributing to a different perspective. It was not my purpose to record everything that was said and done, but as Van Manen states, it was "to come to a fuller grasp of what it means to be in the world, taking into account the socio-cultural and historical traditions that have given meaning to our ways of being in the world" (1990: 13). (See glossary for further description of Heidegger's (1962) philosophy of the nature of "being-in-the-world" (dasein); also see Chapter Two, 2.1.1).

6.2 Informal learning and the corporate self

Discourses on industrial work have long held an implicit, commonsense view that people learn in the course of being at work. This includes socialisation. Alienation in industrial work and the "effects of the material conditions of work (and industrial tasks) on the person of the worker" (Casey 1995: 74) have for some time been subject to intense critical scrutiny. But we know less about the effects on workers of the discursive institutional practices, and their current configurations in post industrial conditions. High-technology corporate workplaces are facsimiles of the post-industrial conditions that affect the trainers in this study. The development of participants' ideas about their own learning is briefly explored here through three interrelated sub-themes:

- training discourses;
- corporate culture and informal learning;
- informal theories about learning at work.

Theorisations of learning in modern industrial work can, however, be troubling because deliberate or overt educational activities at, or for work, only comprise the manifest curriculum of work. There is much more to learning than that which is directly observed or stated:

> corporate educational activities include the collection of deliberate learning activities that the company or company approved educators provide and in which workers participate knowingly for the perceived advantage of both themselves and the company. (Casey 1995: 78)

Accompanying this manifest curriculum is the hidden curriculum of work, the curriculum that socialises and shapes adult workers. It requires compliance (with corporate objectives and directions) and that renders self-choice in decision-making illusory at best. For instance, choices confronting trainers are often ambiguous and based on insecure grounds. But corporate culture, often manifest in the new managerial language of "teams", "TQM", "competitiveness" and so on, seeks firm (measurable) outcomes. As Chapter Four has argued, organisations are frequently in contexts of such rapid change that the grounds on which they base decisions are often uncertain or, as Giddens suggests, "existentially troubling" (in Usher and Edwards 1995: 17). This uncertainty feeds corporate desires for firm (decisive/rational) collective outcomes that are subject to binding corporate/managerial discourses. Notions of "choice" and "self-development" are thus set against a highly problematic social backdrop.

6.2.1 Training discourses

Each person interviewed was, to some extent, familiar with a language and literature of adult education and training. All had degrees, in some instances higher degrees, in adult education and training. Each referred to Senge's (1990) organisational learning concepts when talking about their training roles. This "shared" discourse was a convenient entry point into discussions about informal learning as there was a contemporary training jargon related to similar task requirements and corporate injunctions.

Personal definitions and interpretations of training jargon included different perceptions about what is encompassed by the term "informal learning". Explicit

examples of corporate rhetoric were incorporated into trainers' speech, exemplifying some corporate injunctions at the conscious level and others that are incorporated unconsciously.

For Simon, the point where formal learning ends and informal learning begins is:
> where someone else is determining the goals and outcomes and determining the standards for me. Informal learning is when I set my own goals and outcomes and set standards for myself.

Simon's task-oriented definition carries with it assumptions about the intentional nature of learning. For example, he adds that if he wants to learn something, "I tend to map out a fairly formal structure for myself. I like to have clear goals and seek this in my staff."

Warren's definition emphasised the range and scope of things which had influenced him in the past. In particular, he referred to generic "people skills" acquired from experience:
> my informal learning has not been what I call about training and training methodologies, but more in relation to people skills and this comes as a surprise to me.

Jodie's definition similarly referred to abilities "to tune in to the perspectives of a range of people", but she also emphasised "an element of intuition". Knowing what needs to be followed up and the perspectives of a range of people was important to her. Learning in this context has a pragmatic aspect she acknowledges. She implicitly acknowledges the importance of understanding the politics, power relations and areas of real or potential conflict within the organisation. "Intuition" in this context was partly about aligning herself with people and issues which (politically) carry sway within the organisation. For Jodie:
> the job entails a lot of discussion. I need to tune into the perspectives of a range of people. Knowing what needs to be followed up requires an element of intuition; a sense that there should be a better or simply another way of doing things.

For Susan, informal learning is about "life's experiences and the contributions which help to broaden her perspectives and ideas". This interpretation emphasises the input of other people, and in particular, ideas and perspectives:
> Life's experience is far too complex for me to isolate what is a learning experience and what is not. I'd like to think that I am forever in a learning

mode and that means I need to tune in to things that I hadn't considered; that can broaden my perspective. If I get input on an idea from half a dozen different people, then I'm automatically learning — I can label that learning.

Susan also asserts that learning is holistic:

I don't think you can divide it up [informal learning at work]. I think little bits add up over time; its about a collection of life's experiences. It is too difficult to point to different specific influences as they all form a very complex picture.

Marilyn emphasised the importance of belonging to a team or work in "project teams". More specifically, she referred to:

the tasks being taken on by certain people, the steps involved in problem solving and then action. Project or work teams are very important to my sense of informal learning.

Michael's view was similar, although he specifically referred to his peers:

Probably my most important informal learning occurred through my peers when I first came into training.

The micro-politics of work also figured in Michael's definition. The management hierarchy was frequently referred to in a language of "us and them". In this language, he stressed "the communication amongst peers was very important as we [the trainers] learned about the politics together." This "learning" was, according to Michael, about corporate survival in a production driven environment and culture.

Although these differences existed, some strong similarities were observed. Shared definitions included:

- having views challenged or expanded; perspectives broadened;

- becoming able to see a bigger picture;

- having access to the perspectives of a range of people, including senior managers, subject experts or those involved with implementing tasks or projects;

- obtaining formal and informal feedback from "respected others";

- being recognised for their work achievements;

- trial and error, or learning from doing the job.

Trainers saw their learning as aligned with the economic and political requirements of the job. Embedded within the above descriptions of personal learning is an emphasis on role-performance, linking the requirements of their roles and the disciplining effects of the corporation on trainers' identity. Their language suggests that the trainers incorporated some of the desired traits and attitudes of an "ideal" corporate trainer into their informal theories about learning at work.

6.2.2. "Corporate culture" and informal learning

The critical influence of organisational cultures on informal learning was constantly stressed in all the interviews. Industry environments, politics, power, industrial relations and the ways work is organised and managed were never far away in our discussions. They are shapers of organisational culture, and enacted, in part, through trial and error. According to Marsick and Watkins (1990; 1993); Jeffs and Smith (1990); Boud and Walker (1990; 1993), trial and error is central to informal learning. But "good" learning conditions can never be presupposed. The question of whether there are conditions which can be designed to assist learning from doing was raised by each of the trainers. Susan in particular had definite ideas on this, describing a staff development program she had led:

> It was a four-day program called "Making Change Work" that we put together for our first line supervisors. It was about initiating change in the workplace under the heading of continuous improvement. It was a four day residential followed by a workplace project. This was followed by a stage two, when those who had been involved provided feedback to the top managers about what they've done and learned. As an experienced trainer I would have said we couldn't shift attitudes in four days, especially in the classroom [but] we did shift attitudes and that was a pretty mind blowing experience. There were some simulations and case studies which showed what could be done. It had a strong experiential base and involved senior people to ensure a strong feedback loop about what the company is doing and where it is going. It was synergistic.

Susan asserted that the organisational characteristics which promote "synergistic" learning include:

cooperative participation amongst all staff including senior management; open-mindedness and a preparedness to experiment with what can be done, or is achievable; innovation; an atmosphere which encourages continual learning; and financial support for innovative training measures.

In Susan's example, connections are made between the company's formal training program and the informal learning from involvement in workplace projects. The projects and trial and error learning are directly connected to the formal training program in that they supplement, refine and ensure 'appropriate' feedback-loops between the training-room and everyday informal learning processes. Her example is of a group of people who are reasonably unified in their approach, and who shares goals and objectives. At least this is the image she wished to convey — and which corporations are now advocating. It is unclear, however, what happens if there are dissenting voices, and it is overly idealistic to assume that there are none of these in a large complex organisation.

A point of interest is her ready incorporation of corporate rhetoric into personal discourses. This is something Casey refers to as the "corporate colonisation of the self" (1995: 138). But this fails to acknowledge Susan's personal contribution to the push for a desired corporate culture. She cheerfully advocates the new "synergistic" learning corporation.

Susan's perspective on the conditions which assist learning at work is similar to Marilyn's, whose perspective is aligned with her personal values:

> I think project teams or work teams are very important to my sense of informal learning, particularly if you are aware that everyone is in the same position as yourself. I don't think the project teams would work so well if senior management had already made their minds up on a direction or prescribed what had to be done.

For Marilyn, good learning conditions require a high degree of 'self-direction' and control within the work teams. As this seemed (to both her and me) to be a critical issue, I asked what happens if her personal values conflict with the direction required on a project? This opened a sensitive topic for her:

> Right from the time you start in the bank there is a set of values which you must stay within. This can clash with your personal values. This happened recently when we were going to implement a training program where I didn't like the style of learning which was involved [for the participants]. I really didn't like it; it was imposed and I let the whole project team know

how I felt. I was angry, and wrote a letter to management about it. It was important that I dealt with my emotions and channelled them in a positive way. The idea was to do something about a project which clashed with my values and I don't think this affected relationships within the project team. It could have been destructive had I not been able to take some action about it, and receive some feedback.

Based on the stories told here, the more innovative and encouraging an organisation is towards its employees, the more it is likely to tolerate difference. But it was conflict management that was at the forefront of their comments on "tolerance", and conflict management affected none more than Michael! His experience in the manufacturing industry was of the arbitrary exercise of power by senior managers to crush dissent:

> We attempted a number of different strategies and methodologies to help change the organisational culture from a rigid 'Taylorist' bureaucracy to something far more participatory in nature. Along the way we ran into resistance and money problems. Trying to gain commitments from both ends of the hierarchy is difficult from a middle position. I was bitterly disgusted at times with the ways some managers dealt with their subordinates. Where people are playing 'us and them' games when we [the trainers] are trying to promote team work just breaks the whole thing down.

The impact of Michael's retrenchment, particularly as he had been striving for co operative work arrangements, was important to the informal learning of a range of people including immediate colleagues and the site workforce more generally. Michael constantly referred to "the hierarchy" as if it were something to which he did not belong, or indeed as Newman (1994) describes it, "the enemy". It now seems to Michael that he had been "working towards ends to which senior levels of management had not been committed". They were ends which Michael valued and believed in, but co-operative work arrangements were, as he put it, "little more than rhetoric".

Warren referred to "the hierarchy" in a similar way. Here too the environment was highly production driven. It was also predominantly male. Warren had learned to, in his words, "put a clamp on my emotions". He suggested this learning had come from his training in the Navy. One question Warren asked himself to help deal with his work environment was: "I seem to be in a battle here; why am I in a battle when there should be no need for battle?" Again he emphasised clarifying strong emotions

in dealings with others at work. But, as Warren put it, "the battles" he was involved in also needed deciphering, and this included interpreting industry discourses.

All interviewees commented on the discourses associated with industry-award restructuring and workplace reform as having a continuing impact upon their training roles, learning and anticipated future learning needs. Discourses of most importance to them related to:

- *the industry environment* (becoming competitive, promoting flexibility, removing demarcations);

- *the organisation of work* (building teams, total quality management and learning organisations);

- *management* (flattening management hierarchies and procedures, promoting managerial styles and attitudes to enable 'participative' decision making);

- *operations* (production processes, time-lines, customer relations, budgetary responsibility).

Tentative findings indicate that trainers internalise enough of the corporate "belief-system" to train others, even though the development of a "corporate self" is never complete. Organisational and managerial influences on the trainers' learning — as distinct from personal strategies of resistance to corporate injunctions — are prevalent themes. This "non-pure" distinction assumes inter subjectivity, with managerial influences effecting the atmosphere and culture within which trainers develop informal theories about their work.

6.2.3 Informal theories about learning at work

Informal theory is far more than a knowledge of what needs to be done in terms of performing tasks, or through having had experience of the job. Argyris and Schon (1974) argued that it is possible to infer from someone's practice the implicit theory that underpins it.

At work, individuals are always negotiating their informal theories — refining previous conceptions based on current experiences of tasks, relationships with others, emotions and the wider work environment. A theoretical perspective about work (and learning at work) aids both work performance and self-preservation.

According to Candy, "a theoretical perspective can be implicit or explicit; it can be homespun or informed by research; it can be eclectic or 'pure'; but some view is essential" (1993: 105).

The processes of developing a theoretical perspective include responses to the hidden curricula of corporate requirements for training workers. Examined here are interconnected influences on the evolution of one's viewpoints; the shaping, and being shaped by, processes of informal learning which can be distinguished by internal and external factors. External factors may relate to the interactions of the individual with others and the broader work environment; internal factors include cognitive growth, self-awareness, gains in self confidence (or loss of esteem) and so on.

Jodie understands the challenge of what is expected of her by others as:
> knowing what needs to be followed up. This requires an element of intuition; a sense that there should be a better, or simply another way of doing things.

She pointed out that she learned from both feedback and people's behaviour. She described:
> a relatively trivial matter where my questioning was being taken the wrong way. I was comfortable with it, but others weren't. I needed to make a conscious effort to explain that my questions were not designed to show that they were wrong about something, but I was simply gathering data to inform the training effort and to open possibilities.

Jodie appears, in this example, to have held an informal theory which was re-defined through her interaction with others. She had assumed that the people she was consulting with shared her understanding and perspectives about how the agency training program could help them. But they did not. In her words:
> I could see they were unhappy with the type of questioning and I needed to approach things more gradually.

She later talked about the ways informal learning had influenced her self perceptions and her own personal development indicating that she had been through crisis periods but had "survived":
> I have at times doubted my effectiveness and felt a lot less confident in things I could or couldn't do. I went through a period where I cried a lot. I cried and reflected a lot about the effects I was having on others. I was recruited for a purpose, however. Changes were on the way and reactions

to me were not necessarily personal. In some ways I symbolically represented a new or changing ethos. I learned through this that I had to approach people in a softer way.

Simon's informal theories were influenced by his experience of hierarchically structured organisations:

Basically, I learned a lot about working the hierarchy from my armed services days where hierarchy really matters.

Simon also commented on how his informal learning influenced the way he sees himself:

I have got to know myself better and recognise the importance of my personal values to decisions I make and on the way my life is balanced. You have to be honest about what you are doing, move around the boundaries of your role and be outward looking as well as internally [focussed]. You have to be able to identify threats and have a strategy to deal with them. I've learned that when you challenge people the truth can come out. Challenge is important, but you have to know your ground to do this and this requires reading the key reports and talking to the key players about the implications.

"Challenge" was important for Simon's informal learning and this involved "reading the key reports, talking to the key players about their implications and moving around the boundaries of the role as well as being internally focussed".

One's theories of informal learning can develop in more dramatic ways. In Susan's case, immigration (from Canada) to Australia was a factor:

Those first three years in Australia were what catapulted me into a desire to be on a continual learning curve. In some ways it was like re-defining myself in a totally new environment. I was not unhappy about working ten hours a day. I was meeting a lot of new people and was learning from them. I realised I could do different things and I enjoyed that... Along the way I've learned to increasingly define the environments I am most happy in, and also least happy in.

She explained that in a previous job she had:

a hard time coming to terms with some of the blockages I experienced. It was frustrating for me because often projects came to a grinding halt over what I considered to be ridiculous reasons. One of the many things I

learned from that job was that I made assumptions about how much people knew about an issue or project and how it worked. It turned out that key people who were making decisions did not really know what the issue was all about.

For Warren, the redefining of his informal theories came, in part, through the jolt of a major professional change. Moving from a technical role into a staff-development and training role taught him:

> to listen carefully and ask a lot of questions. I've learned to watch very carefully people's reactions to what I've been saying. I found I have needed new types of people skills which came as quite a shock to me. I needed to re-think the ways I conducted interviews and listened to people. Also selling things. I'd never sold anything in my life and this is very important to a trainer.

Warren also pointed out that his informal learning:

> has not been what I call about training and training methodologies, but more in relation to people skills, and this comes as a surprise to me. It is constantly being reinforced and is quite a discovery to me.

Warren says this has influenced his self-perceptions and the way he sees his future career:

> Having been a specialist and moving into a more generic role has made me change the way I see myself and it hasn't been all positive. In fact some of it has been quite negative. At first I felt very uncomfortable not being an expert in areas I was being asked to intervene in, such as management training.

For Warren, the awareness of the importance of what he calls "people skills" has been a revelation as he became more conscious of his emotions which he began to use "as indicators that something was wrong at work. I would then step back until I could approach the problems in a more objective and less emotional way." He added that "it is very important [when feeling strong emotions] to get feedback and at least have my concerns acknowledged by management."

Like Warren, Michael saw the training role as an opportunity to break out of his former aerospace engineering role which he found increasingly unrewarding. He pointed out that:

I feel more of a 'people person'. I wanted to be part of the change culture ... to help people confront new challenges. As I mentioned, we tried various methods to change the organisational culture from a Taylorist bureaucracy to something more participatory. But we ran into so much resistance and money problems.

The resistance and money problems led Michael to some intense emotions which, in his words, he "failed to hide". He mentions that he certainly does not regret this "failure" — but it may have cost him his job. He expressed opinions to managers about the reform process which he says (with hindsight): "I could have kept to myself". The move from bureaucracy to "participation" contained for Michael disillusioning exposure to managerial motives. (See later this chapter.)

Marilyn suggested that strong emotions were a trigger for her to reflect on events at work. This reflection "can be in relation to relationships with colleagues". As she pointed out: "there is a sort of negotiation going on in terms of roles." Being in a team, for example, has taught her to develop a wider perspective and of the value of a group approach, stating:

> you have to reflect on your emotions, which requires a little time-out. Being aware of your emotions is important. If things haven't worked out right, its better to recognise these as learning experiences rather than mistakes. Being true to yourself is really important. Being true to yourself as well as to others.

Postmodern ideas about "truth" and being "true to yourself as well as to others" interrupt this phenomenological "reading" of lived experience. "Being true" is more problematic than it might sound. It assumes a fund of "trustworthiness" which Foucault (1980) rejects, arguing that truth, or more precisely, "regimes of truth" are central to "modern forms of governance", and that power-knowledge formations have been cloaked in the "objective" knowledge of expertise and the humanistic discourses of helping and empowerment. Marilyn's comments reflect the humanistic discourses of "helping" and "empowerment". While helping others may feed new efficiencies required at work and the demands for new approaches to flexible accumulation, the ways in which trainers respond to power relations and emotional tensions at work affects their learning which, in turn, can be affected by their personal histories.

6.3 Autobiography and informal learning

> If I am sometimes deceived, how can I be sure that I am not always deceived? (Descartes; in Brew 1993: 95).

Corporate interest in autobiography now extends to seeking a match between personal attitudes and values and official corporate culture. Prior experiences contribute to individuals' predispositions to certain forms of learning. Miller, whose "ideas about research have been shaped not only by [her] feminist identity, but also by [her] experience as a member of a working-class family", argues that prior experience, the antecedents of present behaviour — including knowledge and emotion — shapes one's interpretations of the present (1989: 29).

Although very important to informal learning, the linkages between knowledge and emotion has been treated superficially in training research and literature. There is little critical discussion of the role of emotion at work, even though workplaces can be emotionally charged environments — encouraging or discouraging learning or, for some, emotionally disturbing. The trainers drew very strong connections based on "felt experience" between their current informal learning and their personal backgrounds.

The influence of antecedents on present learning is exemplified in Susan's story when, at 50, she pointed out how her learning at work was linked to her autobiography:

> This organisation is very open-minded and in some ways experimental. It encourages innovation and this atmosphere encourages continual learning. The culture of the company is to encourage employee involvement and initiative and I can relate some of my experience of this back to my autobiographical history. One of the things I'm now conscious of is that my mother, who played a typical wife's role (although she worked) always said I could do whatever I wanted to. In those days, although there were more delineated male/female roles than now, my mother never dealt with me in a way where my gender influenced what I could do. Education and careers were important as well as having and raising children. This must have been in my sub-conscious and I now realise how important this must have been for me.

Her mother's injunctions about female career prospects and the importance of education have had, according to Susan, a powerful sway on her determination to progress her training career. Her successes, she believes, are now accessible to any young women in the organisation should they "apply themselves". She does not see herself as a feminist, maintaining that "feminism represents a standpoint which may not be particularly rewarded within this corporate setting."

Michael also raised a connection between his personal background — "the way I grew up" — and informal learning. For instance, asked how his personal values and philosophies influenced him at work, he replied:

> I was disgusted sometimes with the ways some managers dealt with their subordinates. Sometimes I saw a level of cockiness in managers who treated workers in quite disparaging ways. I guess my values of this type of thing goes right back to the way I grew up — my parents — and later in my service with the Navy. Now we are trying to promote a team environment; cellular work groups in manufacturing. I think these personal values are very important. Where people are playing 'us and them' games when we are trying to promote teamwork just breaks the whole thing down.

Michael mentioned that his values were actually aligned with the rhetoric of the workplace reform — to promote self-direction, participation in decision-making and team-work. But in his own words:

> management were unwilling to relinquish tight control; the reality was their words were complete and utter bullshit. My one regret is that, before I left, some of my work colleagues may have associated *me* with the cynicism of the corporation.

Marilyn referred to her work ethic when she raised the influence of personal history on her learning at work:

> I have a strong work ethic. My whole family grew up with this ethic. I don't mind working back one or two hours to get a product finished. My father's work ethic was very strong. My sisters left school early and we didn't expect [our parents] to support us through university. We knew it would be up to us to get the education we wanted.

She translated her sense of personal achievement and pride in the values she grew up with into her ideas about the future of the bank's training program:

> Informal learning is definitely the individual's responsibility. The individual has to have that sense of responsibility. In the bank we quite often

spoonfeed everyone to a point where we [the training department] want them [staff] to be more responsible for their own learning. This is a huge shift, particularly for middle management. They expect the training department to do things for them, but that is changing. We look for them to have mentors or networks to help themselves. The training program has a role to stimulate the new culture. This has been done in a subtle way. I feel this is the way for the future, with compulsory central programs becoming less important and individual and local responsibility being encouraged.

Marilyn's personal history, her identity, is aligned with a politics (and Calvinist ethics) of self-help and self-reliance, and the belief that steady diligence will be rewarded. Although she was aware of the redundancy program which was accompanying the new corporate culture, she articulated a belief in the underlying (economic) rationale that has directly resulted in her promotion, and her training others to become more efficient — to be a "self-reliant" workforce.

Simon's values position was not dissimilar. He too referred to having a "fairly well-developed work ethic":

My father was a worker in the Queensland railways, was never wealthy, and I was the first person in our family to get a tertiary education. I learnt at a very early age that if I wanted to get anywhere it was going to be up to me.

As the professional development manager for the organisation, this background, he conceded, translated to a strong belief that informal learning is largely the responsibility of the individual. This is a position which mirrors the corporate policy on the education of staff whereby "it's up to the individual to be responsible for their own development." Indeed, informal learning becomes the strategy for training in the flexible firm, representing a discursive shift in the management of training aimed at enhancing corporate flexibility.

Warren and Jodie held different perspectives on how "responsible" the individual is for their own development. Both are, in their own words, "trying to foster learning cultures." This, to an extent, emphasises the organisation's responsibility in the learning process. Warren explained that he was comfortable with this emphasis "because of his values":

At an early stage of my life I was removed from my parents and joined the Navy. I was about 14, almost 15. I learned a lot in the service and from the way they instilled things into you. In my previous job, some of my prior

experiences in the Navy were touched on. I feel strongly that humiliating someone, or yelling and screaming at another person is no way to get them to learn or change. I was humiliated as a boy in the Navy and now in later life, feel strongly that there is no need to humiliate people even if you fundamentally disagree with them on an issue. In fact, what I learned to do was present things in a negotiated attempt at win–win situations.

In the alignment between personal values and the traits, attributes and stances sought by one's organisation, there is a constant, rarely explicit, negotiation. Simon's story illustrates that some of what is learnt is how to compromise. Simon believes strongly that learning is up to the individual: "when the organisation assumes responsibility for an individual's learning, I feel very uncomfortable. It feels like a form of control, or perhaps the imposition of political correctness. I don't agree with that." But as head of corporate training and development, this standpoint can be problematic.

6.4 Power, experience and learning

Trainers' understandings of *what* they are learning informally relate, inter alia, to experiences of power in organisations, skills acquisition, knowledge, and attitudes towards performing the job. Related to these experiences are processes of informal learning. This section discusses trainers' experiences of power relations, "role performance" and processes of informal learning at work.

6.4.1 Power relations
Within the trainers' stories lies a hidden paradox. Their descriptions frequently objectify the ends/goals/vision of their organisations. They operate within discourses of "quality", "empowerment of workers", "learning cultures" and "competence". Yet many of the practices that "objectify" these so-called visions remain firmly in the hands of an elite group — often financial controllers, management experts and consultants. The trainers are charged with implementing the ideas of these leaders, who Gee refers to as the "new organisational priesthood" (1994: 11).

The trainers commented on "structural" and "informal" power, gender relations and trade union issues. (For discussion of industrial relations issues see Chapters Seven and Eight.) Each trainer had strong opinions on the effects of the formal hierarchies on organisational culture and learning.

    Comments on structural power

Trainers' metaphors for power relations at work were sought, and in several instances, dramatic gulfs between the stated ideals of management and actual workplace practices were revealed. That such gulfs occur when training others can provoke ethical tensions for the trainers, as Warren pointed out:

> There is a goods train line which runs between the workshops and the administration office where the top-brass sit. This symbolises the divisions which still exist between the workers and managers. There is still us-and-them thinking that is difficult to get rid of. My mission is across the track. Getting total quality management while such a division exists makes the talk of TQM more like rhetoric. This poses an additional challenge for trainers like me — we need to facilitate a more trusting environment.

A number of the trainers spoke of the need for greater trust, but achieving change was sometimes difficult as Michael explained:

> The retrenchments and other things which management did undermined some of our [training] initiatives. You need much more than a "stated" shared commitment. The culture of this place is very hierarchical and the moves to change that are still fairly much on the surface. It was frustrating in a way.

His metonyms for the hierarchy were based on physical barriers:

> There are plenty of symbols around here. Recently we had a go at taking away the bundy-clocks, but they have had to go back up. In the canteen there is a physical barrier which separates the workers and managers. This is a problem because the total quality management system is being *driven down*, but unfortunately management aren't perceived as being committed to it. The attitudes of senior management are critical to the success of this type of initiative and yet we still have these corporate legacies.

One of Jodie's metonyms also touched on a corporate legacy — that of wearing robes and wigs in court:

> The court procedures influence the corporate culture here. Symbolic of this has been the decision for the judges to go back to wearing full robes and wigs. Registrars still wear normal clothes but robes and wigs are now very much on the agenda for them as well. This is partly due to a number of violent attacks on judges and their families in recent times. By wearing the robes there is a belief that this symbolically represents a more objective/rational/legal judgment. I think there are [however] areas of

court operations which are closer to the raw emotions of the clients. There is a natural scepticism on the part of those closer to those emotions about how objective the system can be. I would like the training program to offer an avenue for all staff to express their experiences, but this is not always easy... Dealing with diverse needs requires creativity and this requires resources. Unfortunately, we are quite short in this area.

The issue of competition for limited resources was several times raised in conjunction with the hierarchy — Marilyn's metaphor for this association was "bean-counting":

The organisation is very hierarchical and the ownership of training has included major political battles. You have to observe the hierarchy to get things done. This is very political and carries with it a real tension. Our immediate managers are very supportive, but further up the line there is a bean-counting mentality which does not necessarily see the value, in terms of money outlay, in training or organisational development. With the hierarchy, I have learned to ask a lot of questions to ensure the design of new programs clearly reflects developmental expectations. I have needed to ensure the processes are more clear cut.

Simon's metonym expressed similar sympathies:

The **dollar** sign is the only thing which drives this organisation. Not so much in terms of the overall training program, as this is a cost centre rather than a profit making centre. But the whole thing which drives this is the dollar sign. You hear terms such as utilisation rates, how much billing have I got, how much time is chargeable, numbers of clients, getting fees — you're talking about a firm of accountants, for heaven's sake. That is what it is all about.

Of his purpose as a training manager, he said:

Our mission statement says we have to develop our people, but that means nothing to them [the partners] really. But if you describe that training philosophy as: impact and performance-based training where the training value ratio equals fees generated as a result of this training, plus cost savings divided by the cost of the training — they think that's terrific!"

He suggested that the principle was:

Training value ratio = Fees generated + cost savings – cost of training.

I understand this requirement. In this environment you can't afford to be too humanistic although I would hold that I am [humanistic] and that the professional education program really needs to be for it to work. But you have to understand and respect the culture of the organisation for it to move towards a learning environment.

Simon characterises training as seeking to maximise bottom-line productivity: what is thus being learned informally — in relation to structural power — is how one's personal values align with those of the organisation. In another sense, what is actually being learned is the trainer's position within the system, and the relative influence which goes with this. How trainers fit in, includes how they are perceived in their staff development or training roles and the career implications of such perceptions. On occasion, this means that what is being learned is about values, personality and gender.

- *Comments on informal power*

The trainers made clear distinctions between formal and informal power. Their "sense data" (on their own status and influence within the organisation) was affected by the formal positioning of their roles within the hierarchy, but also by the more mysterious influences of informal power. Simon's sense of the influences of power was sharpened by his background in the armed services:

> In the armed forces, the interplay of personalities, networks and informal channels of communication were things which I had to learn quickly. It is important to know who holds informal power — people who might have a low rank can be informal power brokers... You have to identify where power lies and what sort of credibility people have. To do this you have to listen carefully and for me, I've been quite keen to have my own staff participate in a number of committees within this organisation which enables me to tap in to additional sources of information. This is not to extend my domain, but to provide information about the organisation as a whole and find out what's going on. You have to keep in touch with your network. Structural power on its own cannot fully implement change. It requires more than that. For example, there may be a case for amalgamating training and personnel functions, but structures by themselves are not the answer.

For Simon, keeping in touch with his "network" is very important as he believes that "structural power on its own cannot fully implement change". Likewise, Jodie found important informal influences outside the ranks of her senior managers:

> Access to various levels of the organisation has helped me enormously. This includes access not only to senior managers but to a range of people from different sections... The culture is, to a large extent, influenced by the actual functions of the court and requirements of the legal system. Trainers have to do a lot of listening here, for example, to the judge's remarks. This to some extent has its problems, as state-based workers can sometimes be wary of someone [like me] coming from the National Office. It is a dilemma associated with the issue of centralisation versus decentralisation of training. My role is to promote National Standards and this can be a threat to some people.

A key element of the informal power for Jodie had been tuning-in to the "judge's remarks". Such remarks from senior personnel are a part of the fabric of organisational politics and culture — as Marilyn also found:

> I took on some daunting tasks and had plenty of self-doubts. I hadn't been trained in this area, but I knew the culture. In a lot of ways I respect it, because after all, we are ultimately responsible for managing other people's money. You wouldn't want mavericks running that. I think my political and cultural awareness helped me at first, but I also had someone who helped me in my previous job in the bank, a mentor if you like. He came from a senior administrative position, and was motivating. This happened in an incidental way. It was not planned or orchestrated, it just happened. This helped my access to the State Manager to seek the necessary clarifications about a project I was working on where major changes were occurring. I had come from the area where changes were sought. I had an existing rapport with the workers there already. Being tuned in to the politics of the organisation is very important and a game that needs to be played... Sometimes management has hidden agendas. Agendas have to be known — in the open — for the training function to work. Otherwise unrealistic expectations can exist. Truthfulness about all the agendas is extremely important.

Each of the trainers offered many subtle variations on this issue about "truthfulness" and hidden agendas. For trainers, there are ethical tensions between those who seek extreme bottom-line productivity (techno-structural solutions) and

those who focus on a human process orientation (collaboration and personal development). These tensions directly impact on their informal learning.

- **Comments on gender relations**

A growing women's voice[1] in "Organisational Development" literature (Kaplan 1995; Hurley et al 1992; Jordan et al 1991; Belenky et al 1986) emphasises unique experiences of women. Gunnarsson, Knocke and Westberg (1991: 14) argue that "the type of work organisation at a workplace has a decisive effect on women's and men's learning and development, and that organisational structures must be understood and analysed as gender-political systems." Acker calls this:

> a gender-power system where underlying conceptions, standards and practices in modern companies are constituent elements in the logic of organisations ... the pluses and minuses, exploitations and control, actions and identities are [thus] differentiated in relation to women and men. (1987; cited in Gunnarsson, Knocke and Westberg. 1991: 14)

The trainers in this study expressed mixed feelings on the effects on them of gender politics at work:

Susan:

> I've never used being a woman as an excuse for not getting somewhere or not getting a job. People have told me in the past that I might have missed opportunities due to the sexist issue, but I'm naive about this. It was never obviously been an issue for me. I have never personally experienced overt sexism, but I can state unequivocally that I'm not 'one of the boys'. There are some circles and relationships which build up because of being one of the boys. I'm not going to pretend to be something that I'm not. If I'm not interested in doing a certain social thing I won't do it.

Susan described how this had influenced her networks and relationships at work:

> It has influenced my relationships with people. I'm conscious of that. I've probably only been openly conscious of that over the last few years. That doesn't mean I'm excluded, its just a fact of life I accept. If I were a male in

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1   Kathy Kaplan's (1994) PhD reviewed 1,400 articles published from 1985-1991 on "Organisational Development", in six major journals — the Harvard Business Review, Academy of Management Journal, Academy of Management Review, Journal of Applied Behavioural Science, Organisation Behaviour Teaching Review and Organisation Dynamics. Of the 1,400 articles, only twenty-nine were by women authors about women or gender-related issues. Kaplan's point is that there is a gender bias in the research and this has obscurred a "different voice" [femininist] on moral and epistemological issues in this field of practice.

the role, I'd probably be one of the boys, but it doesn't worry me. When it comes to performing the duties of the job itself, the gender issue is virtually irrelevant. Some of my colleagues would disagree with me on this, but I believe the most suitable person for the job will get it.

Susan's experience contrasts with Simon's:

I found I was readily accepted on important committees here which are all male. There are some classic male networking activities which are happening. They are in powerful pockets and I believe will be powerful for some time. I recognise that it could be difficult for women in such an environment. I've become more attuned to women's issues because I have got three daughters!

Marilyn's experience of her work environment was that it was less male-dominated than Simon's:

We have a good balance of female managers. I have a female boss, but I think that's irrelevant. What is important is the way managers think. We have a fairly well developed EEO program. In fact sometimes I think it is a touch unnecessary. Much depends on the individual, on personality. If I were to make one generalisation, perhaps women are more in touch with their emotions. But there will always be men who are in tune with this and women who are not, so it depends.

Jodie shared similar sentiments to Marilyn on women in her work environment being "more in touch with their emotions", but added that "they may have a tendency to qualify their statements more so than their male counterparts":

I think women may have a different process, especially when a group of women work together. I've been influenced by the fact I have five brothers and I'm used to interacting with males. I sense different processes when I'm working on developing a training program with men when compared to a group of women. I know this is generalising but this is my experience. I can feel this and it is tangible... In the Public Sector, the policies which exist have helped open opportunities for women... I'm now six months pregnant and recently went abseiling with a group from work. No-one overtly discriminated against me because of the pregnancy; this hasn't affected me although I was scared beforehand. I was in a context where I expected underlying sexist attitudes to come into the open — that I might be discriminated against. But this proved quite unfounded, but my expectations had still been there.

In interpreting these texts, I am reminded of Ferrarotti's thoughts "when I read biographical texts, I always have the impression that I am not sensitive or subtle enough to understand them fully; that I am not worthy of them" (in Mezirow 1990: 209), because what is embedded in them are fragments of gender-power influences upon informal learning, "access" to powerful networks, and expectations of what is actually required in the job. A recurring theme in the trainers' stories was a belief that when it comes to performing the required training functions, it is "abilities" that really count. Abilities that connect power in organisations to "trained" workers are particularly desirable to corporate managers seeking a skilled, flexible labour market. Workers are now advised to acquire both "transferable" skills and to be prepared to face new situations confidently, and even to bring about new situations (providing they have capital generating power). As Barnett puts it "far from being characterised by reproduction, the 'learning society' is founded on continuous change. Not so much getting on one's bike; more like getting on one's motor-bike to keep ahead of the changes before one" (1994: 175). Gender factors, abilities and task performance cannot therefore be "read" in isolation from power and contextual influences.

6.4.2 Experience in the training role: task execution

Candy writes that informal or "vernacular" theory is "not exclusively a matter of intellectual argument or conceptual clarity, but a preference for positions which resonate with and most closely resemble what we already believe" (1993: 103). All the trainers indicated an interest in people who could expand their perspectives or help focus their ideas. Workplace politics can be a factor affecting who has access to such expansion or focussing, and why they have such access.

All respondents reported ways informal learning had helped them in performing specific tasks and with their generic skills in doing those tasks. Michael referred to the importance of peer support when he came into the training role:

> I came cold into the training and development field and the people who were already in it helped me. They gave me a starting point: basic needs analysis, writing objectives ... they gave me feedback and time.

Michael added that a critical time for him had been when he first came into the training field. He learned informally through feedback from colleagues that his work would benefit from "tightening up his objectives." In his words:

> I found it quite exciting to be exposed to the background and the way things are developed. It was new and my manager was very supportive. I got to do a range of staff development activities. A big thing that came out

of it for me was the need to conduct training needs analyses and writing objectives that were not simply based on my assessment alone, but would be tailored to the needs of the workers.

For Susan, the broadening of her own perspectives was important to her informal learning. This translated to a deliberate gathering of views (on an issue or problem) from a range of people:

> Whenever I'm in a group situation, I'd like to think I'm in a learning situation ... everyone has something different to contribute to it.

Warren cited questions asked of him by staff which showed that he had made wrong assumptions about their level of understanding. As a consequence of this type of feedback, he made a conscious effort to develop what he refers to as his "people skills, the ability to sit back and enable another person to fully spell out their developing ideas." He stressed the importance to his learning at work of "contextual skills":

> Developing listening skills, particularly with line managers, and questioning skills to ensure there are no gaps in my understanding of what needs to be done ... when it comes to senior managers it becomes a question of appropriate assertiveness ... when to ask your questions or raise issues which probe at what has been said.

This resulted in changes to the way Warren worked:

> I now have what I call a strong customer focus. I now apply these people skills to identifying what customers want. Not so much how to satisfy the customer with methodologies but to go the step further and sell our training. This is exciting for me in so far as I have been successful at it. Not so long ago I don't think I had these skills.

The communicational practices at work here are expressions of corporate requirements for training and behaviour of trainers. Warren's story suggests that he was able to accommodate much in the drive for a "strong customer focus". Learning "appropriate assertiveness" is partly about knowing one's place in the corporate hierarchy. In Warren's example, triggers for his learning related to corporate imperatives for training (and Warren) to impress on workers the need for a "strong customer focus". Although it was a corporate requirement, Warren says it was also "exciting" to develop new communication skills. Drawing on Foucault's *Technologies of the Self*, this illustrates one of the ways we "constantly reshape our past creations to conform to our present creative needs [representing] a paradox of the human

condition: we are beings that create forms which ironically imprison our creativity" (Foucault; in Hutton 1988: 137). (Warren resigned from the company six weeks after this interview, citing "an atmosphere of repression" as one of his main reason for leaving.)

Corporate requirements of training were also a trigger for learning for Jodie. She spoke of experiences of other's behaviour that had upset her. In one instance she couldn't understand why she felt so upset:

> My questioning was being taken the wrong way. I was comfortable with it, but others weren't. I needed to make a conscious effort to explain that my questions were not designed to show that they were wrong about something, but I was simply gathering data to inform the training effort and to open possibilities... I could see they were unhappy with the type of questioning, and I need to approach things more gradually.

As with Warren's story, this statement suggests that informal theories about workplace politics, and assumptions about the level of knowledge others have about developments, are modified through interaction and dialogue. As informal theories are challenged, the behaviour, tasks and skills required to perform the job are correspondingly challenged. For Jodie this translated to her finding that she needs to "approach things more gradually." Jodie and, indeed, each of the other trainers, suggested that "access to senior managers and a range of people from different sections had a strong impact on her informal theories about corporate training."

Jodie also cited discussion within her own unit as influencing her interpretations of events in the organisation: "our collective experiences are valued within [our own unit]." The training unit functions as a team, and teamwork is being promoted throughout the corporation. It is a part of the new corporate language associated with becoming "learning organisations" — in efforts to be more efficient and competitive. The rhetoric also holds that teamwork will make work "more rewarding".

Marilyn referred to her experiences of working in teams and the need to "feel comfortable with other team members":

> Other people's perceptions and ideas help to redefine your own ideas and also identify constraints and considerations. Getting other ideas helps you to step back and think about where you are going. This has been one of the most important impacts on my learning at work: involvement with small groups with a project team approach.

As a result of her informal learning in teams, she cites as important "assessing the bigger picture before establishing the nuts and bolts." In the process of being exposed to a "bigger picture" through team involvement, she again highlighted the issue of trust. Trust is being promoted in each of these corporations through new organisational structures based on teams and corporate "families". The team to which one belongs is promoted as family-like and it is essential to trust your team members. Sporting metaphors are also quite common in this team promotion — such as "hitting home-runs".

The notion of corporate-team is a convenient cultural formation. It is now a common corporate script for obtaining the desired sensibilities in employees. Sensibilities are monitored through competencies which will promote greater involvement and productivity. The corporate script was reflected in each of the trainer's stories in various ways. Simon addressed it directly:

> Doing your job is not enough in this organisation. You have to be seen to be doing a good job. You don't have to be too overt about it, but you have to make sure that you are recognised for what you doing, and trusting people is important. When you delegate, you have to trust people. I think if I respect and trust my staff, work hard and am honest with them, we can feel as though we are doing something worthwhile. I now believe that being honest both to yourself and others is fundamental to one's learning — it is one of the things which is most important.

Belonging to a team or network was stressed by Simon, who links "belonging" to:

> knowing who holds power whether it be formal or informal... Knowing about the interplay of personalities, networks and informal channels of communications. Working the network matters. I now make sure that my staff are involved in the outplace [networks external to the corporation] as well as on a range of internal committees. This helps with developing a collective team approach as well as giving the individuals on the team a profile and network of their own. I don't want people to interpret this as an attempt to manipulate the system. It comes back to honesty. You have to be honest about what you are doing.

"Being honest" holds a presupposition here: that is, *knowing* about "the interplay of personalities, networks and informal channels of communications". Without this "knowledge", corporate design for team-families is vulnerable. It is vulnerable because the team structures are being orchestrated through communication patterns

based on artifacts: images of the desired corporate employee. The "teams" are not based upon the spontaneous creation of groups of workers who wish to establish a community together. This is corporate work and the vulnerability indicates the fundamental importance — to the corporation — of reward (and punishment) systems.

Individual notions of success, failure, the hidden agendas, emotional experiences at work and career motivations all impacted on the trainers' informal learning. Learning experiences were associated with major successes, crises, jolts, perceived threats, fear of failure or coming to terms with major change. These day-to-day events shaped the nature and extent of the learning. From the comments of these trainers, informal learning was intimately connected with a constant defining and redefining their informal theories that applied to their organisations, their roles and purposes within them, and their required task performance levels.

All participants also highlighted "networking" and "informal mentoring", particularly where good quality feedback was obtained in relation to their own learning processes. Networking and mentoring can imply strikingly different things to different people. The language used in the stories appeared, on the surface, to be relatively similar. However distinctions were constantly made about the meanings given to the discrete processes which make up the individual versions of what networking and informal mentoring actually are. All subjects had read a range of networking and mentoring texts. Their readings produced few shared understandings of the terms because the battery of HRD materials sent to trainers tends to make arbitrary distinctions between networking, informal and formal mentoring, teamwork, job secondments and rotations. For instance, some descriptions of mentoring promote line-managers as being responsible for the 'development' of less experienced staff. Other descriptions stress the need for mentoring to develop spontaneously — based on mutually recognised interests and desires. These distinctions clouded interpretations of the processes as the trainers viewed networking, informal and formal mentoring, teamwork, job secondments and rotations as a part of a continuum.

Reflection too, was mentioned by each of the trainers in relation to their learning. A fairly typical example of how this was discussed was in Warren's story:

> Reflection was very important to me because we had done significant downsizing and restructuring. The process was somewhat traumatic. My credibility [as a trainer in this context] was right on the line. It generated a

lot of emotion and I had to be very careful to be aware of how my emotions were running.

This experience was typical because all of the trainers had recent experiences of corporate restructuring or redundancy programs. Michael had been required to establish counselling and disciplinary procedures to aid one such restructure. Elements of this requirement made him "very angry". He mentioned that his reflections helped him to:

> realise that my anger needed to be channelled appropriately, otherwise it could make the situation worse. The situation had to be diffused.

Unfortunately for Michael, his reflections did not save him from the personal experience of the company's redundancy program:

> If my anger contributed to my retrenchment then so be it. I have no regrets about being a person who stood up for what I believed in. But I don't think it was the reason. It was more economically based and training might have been politically easier to cut that somewhere else.

The significance of the trainers' stories for the theory-building aspect of this study is that any 'true' meanings of informal learning can only be read as situational. For the participating trainers, this situatedness includes something very personal, as exemplified in Michael's above words. This makes any objective reading of the stories problematic. Understanding informal learning presupposes more than 'objectively' presenting the experiential stories of trainers. It presupposes identification of the discourses that allow the stories to be told in the first instance. Contextual influences also intersect with the discourses and thus a further problematic arises for the research: how might one, for analytical purposes, separate spontaneous informal learning (as experienced at particular sites), from informal learning that is discursively constructed — given meaning through the constitutive power of language? To address this problematic, Chapters Seven and Eight focus progressively on the context of one industry — construction— and the circulating discourses within it. Chapter Nine then analyses the stories of the trainers at the Sydney 2000 Olympic Games construction site.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Learning Construction: The Industry Context

7.1 Symbolic and material processes of construction: phase two

> Production can suffer because people are at training. If two people are taken out of a team, I can't replace them. They might be learning about a new piece of equipment, but not everyone needs to operate that equipment. The company wants the workers to be multi-skilled, so I go along... With the batch-plant for example, under the old demarcation system I would have needed at least four men to operate it. Now I need three. This is a 25% saving. If this [saving] was compared to the cost of training we are still ahead.
>
> <div align="right">Construction site general foreman 1993</div>

Baudrillard (1988) asserts that "the post-industrial condition" represents a consumer culture in which we consume not products but signs: advertisements, television images, the image of material products, and promise of libidinal gratification. The symbols of products become the objects of consumption; symbols, argues Baudrillard, have value for us. Major constructions, in Baudrillard's conception, would thus represent more than "mere" construction sites. At the Olympic Games constructions, reification of *sign* and *image* is in focus. For the major construction companies in the Australia, these are *the* trophy projects and, as such, the learning of trainers and construction workers are affected in several ways. They experience the conditions of material production *and* the discursive communication patterns surrounding actual building processes.

By attending too much to corporate "significatory practices" and symbolic functions, Casey suggests that "one can ignore the concrete existence of the material world ... and that theorists who have a specific focus on the world of work have tended to (ultimately) represent traditional Marxist views, *or* business and economic interests" (1995: 19).

Mindful of this tendency towards binaries, this chapter emphasises the industry context as a dominant influence on workers, foregrounding an argument that workplace practices remain important social, political and psychological sites of learning. In considering work as a site of learning, it is argued that workers are affected by dominant industry discourses through local discursive (symbolic and communicational) practices *and* by the material conditions of the construction industry.

Case studies of three sites found markedly different approaches to the organisation of work and training, with varying impacts on informal learning. The sites were:

- Sydney's Chimaera Park construction project (representing an approach to work organisation based on self-directed teams and direct company labour)[2];

- a multi-storey government office site in Brisbane's central business district (representing a more conventional, hierarchical work organisation in which engineers, and foremen direct and subcontracting arrangements predominate);

- an army missile-storage facility in New South Wales (representing a rural project which has a combination of self-directed teams and subcontracting arrangements).

The sites were comparable in size: each was a multi-million dollar construction. For each, location, material construction, communication patterns, site "atmosphere", management worker relations, inter- and intra-union relationships are considered, as well as industry-wide influences.

7.2 Boom/bust construction

The building and construction industry contributed 7.8% of Australia's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in 1989-90 (the latest available figures). Of this, 2.4% was from housing and residential construction, and 5.4% was from all other construction. The construction industry services most other industries in Australia. Stoeckel and

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2 "Direct" labour refers to labour employed directly by the principal contractor and project manager rather than smaller subcontracted builders.

Quirke (1992) found that, of the service industries, the construction industry has a far greater influence on the economy than other industries, claiming "a 10% gain in efficiency in construction would lead to a 2.5% annual gain in Australia's gross domestic product after long-term adjustments have occurred in the economy" (1992: 36). The powerful economic discourse about the competitiveness of Australian industry thus concerns construction.

The construction industry is characterised by boom and bust cycles. It moves from an oversupply of skills in recession times to skill shortages in boom times. The workforce is mobile and labour costs are influenced by relative demand and the availability of work. It is also predominantly a small business industry, with easy entry to and exit from the industry for small subcontractors. Indeed, many subcontractors either declare bankruptcy or simply "vanish" in recession times (see figures at 7.2.2). The industry also encompasses a number of large and powerful organisations, including a range of employer bodies, unions and industry associations. There has been a "rationalisation" both of employer and union organisations — seven unions still exist, but are planned for reduction (by amalgamations) to about four — and there are still a large number of employer organisations.

Strategies for award restructuring and modernisation in the industry include removing "outmoded" occupational classifications and changing other classifications to reflect contemporary work practices. There is also an increasing and changing degree of regulation within the industry, accompanied by two dominant discourses about "quality" and the development of "codes of practice". For example, the Construction Industry Development Agency (CIDA) has developed a code of practice covering tendering processes, and designed to promote more co-operative "partnering" relationships between governments, corporate builders and smaller subcontractors. These discourses have powerful effects upon industry practices.

7.2.1 Industry size

TABLE 7.1: Employed Persons in the Construction Industry – Annual Average

Period	Employed Persons ('000)
1983–84	409.8
1984–85	456.7
1985–86	474.1
1986–87	499.6
1987–88	503.8
1988–89	567.5
1989–90	600.1
1990–91	571.3
1991–92	518.2

(Australian Bureau of Statistics: Australian Economic Indicators, March 1993, Table 8-6)

In the national economic register, construction was, in 1991–92, the sixth largest employer of twelve industrial categories, after the wholesale and retail trade; community services; manufacturing; finance, property and business services; and recreation, personal and other services.

Compared with the other eleven industries which have shown modest growth and decline, the construction industry has had the highest relative peak and decline following the boom of the mid- to late-1980s. This last peak and decline was of greater amplitude than all other cycles in the industry since the Second World War. This tends to confirm its image as a boom and bust industry. Comparing employment levels in boom years with more recent employment levels, employment is, despite rhetoric to the contrary, above that of the early 1980s.

7.2.2 Company size and turnover

In 1988–89 (the latest figures), in the private sector construction industry:

- of the 98,059 establishments operating during the year 1454 (1.4%) ceased operation during that year;

- of those 96,605 operating at 30 June 1989
  - 64.4% employed two or fewer
  - 51.1% had no employees (that is "single person" companies)
  - 95.1% of establishments employed ten or fewer
  - 4.2% employed between 11 and 50 employees

- 0.4% of the establishments employed 51 to 100
- 0.3% of the establishments employed 101 or more.

FIGURE 7.1: Establishment Size and Distribution of Employment in the Building and Construction Industry, Australia – 1989
(Source: ABS Cat. No. 8771.0)

Establishment size and employment
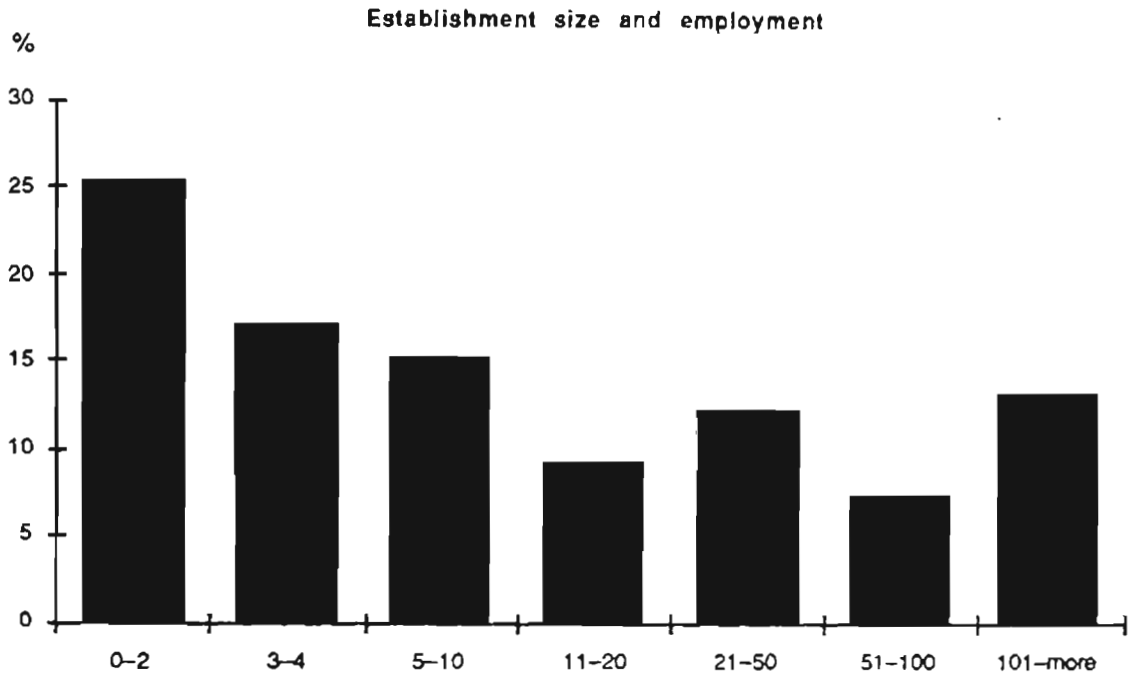
The turnover of the 96,605 private sector establishments operating throughout 1988–89 included:

- 53.9% having a turnover of less than $100,000;
- 87.4% having a turnover of less than $500,000;
- 6.5% having a turnover of over $1 million and 0.3% with a turnover of $20 million or more.

The construction industry is therefore a relatively large industry composed of predominantly small businesses. This structure — small contractors offering specialist trade services — suggests Smith et al (1995), is the single most important impediment to changes in skill-formation practices and workplace reform. Figure 7.2 gives the distribution of employment across specialised trade construction and general construction establishments.

About two-thirds of workers are employed in specialised trades, and one-third in general construction establishments. This means that any attempts to achieve substantial changes to work organisation and multi-skilling in the industry would require significant structural change in the industry. Without such structural change, Smith et al (1995) argue that messages conveyed to workers about the benefits of workplace reform would be largely rhetoric: changes in the distribution of establishment types and in the nature of specialised trade subcontracting would be required for greater worker empowerment or a shift to self-directing teams. This suggests a slow and difficult change process if such substantial realignments are pursued by the larger companies and unions.

Of those private sector construction establishments operating during 1988-89, the majority (76% of establishments and 65.7% of the workforce) operate in specialist trades. The remaining 24% of establishments are in civil, general construction and the residential and non-residential sectors. They make up 34.3% of the workforce with the major employment being in the housing and non-residential sectors (Hayton, Garrick and Guthrie 1993).

FIGURE 7.2: Employment by Type of Establishment, Building and Construction Industry, Australia, 1988-89 (Source: ABS Cat. No. 8771.0)

Employment by types of contractor

%

70
60
50
40
30
20
10
0

General construction: houses
General construction: residential building
General construction: non-residential building
General construction: non-building
Specialised trade construction
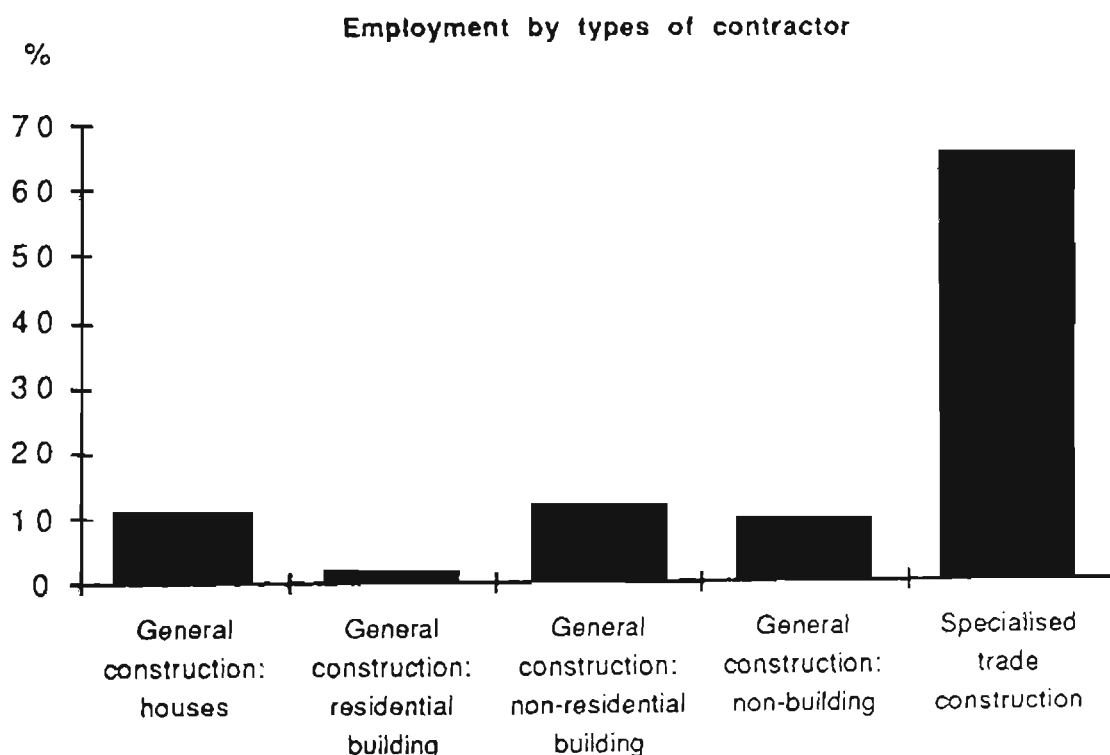
7.2.3 Predominant views of the industry

The building and construction industry in Australia is large and diverse. Like many other industries, it is going through a period of considerable structural readjustment (and associated cultural changes) in the name of competition. These readjustments also reflect changes occurring in Australian society, including micro-economic reform and industry award restructuring.

Allegations of corruption in the building and construction industry resulted in the then conservative NSW government establishing a Royal Commission in the early 1990s. The Royal Commission recommended, notably, the de-registration of the most radical construction union (the Builders' Labourers Federation). The industry has had a tarnished image in the Australian community, often seen as:

- corrupt and full of "rorts";

- fragmented (with a large number of employer and employee organisations);

- inefficient, with a poor level of productivity;

- having workers who are overpaid for their labour and levels of skill;

- male dominated;

- recruiting much of its workforce from those with a low level of formal(academic) qualification and relatively low levels of literacy, English language and numeracy;

- riddled with employer and union confrontation;

- pursuing outdated work practices and job demarcations, and with restrictive practices which limit the abilities of workers to move between states and to work in the most efficient and effective manner;

- poorly managed, running late on projects, over budget and with a poor industrial relations record;

- having a poorly trained workforce (particularly operative workers) and poor career path opportunities;

- unsafe, dirty and physically demanding.

(Source: Hayton, Garrick and Guthrie 1993: 2)

Many aspects of this image may well have some valid bases, but there are some favourable community perceptions. Media attention has come onto one aspect of change in the industry: since 1990 the number of days lost due to industrial disputes has been close to the average for all industries, and fewer days have been lost than in mining and manufacturing (see Hayton et al 1993, Table 4 in Appendix A.)

The momentum for change is due not only to the economic recession of the early 1990s. There is also an increasing realisation among major interest groups that new information and design technologies require change. The Australian Industry Commission (1991) asserts that Australia's major project construction costs are up to about 20% higher than the lowest cost Western nation, and about 50% higher than Asian nations such as Singapore and Hong Kong. Although high rates of pay are frequently cited as a major influence on these costs, the new technologies are recognised by the Australian Industry Commission (1991) and corporate construction companies as being expensive. This recognition has contributed to the drive for reform and, to date, the industry unions are co-operating. In one interview that I conducted with a national leader of Painters' and Decorators' Union, it was suggested that in a shrinking industry [or at least one that is shrinking from its boom high]:

Some of the most important issues are better co-operation, greater productivity, improved quality and better work practices, structural change within the industry and organisational change at company level.

In another interview with a national leader of the Master Plumbers' Association, it was asserted that:

To preserve what is recognised still to be good practice, while promoting innovative and new ways of recognising, developing and enhancing the skills of those involved in the construction industry ... needs to occur in an ordered way — building from existing strengths to greater strengths. It [workplace reform] cannot occur piecemeal, but it needs to acknowledge where the real problems are and address them for the good of the industry as a whole, not just the good of the specific interest groups.

Indeed, underlying the rhetoric about workplace reform appears to be an idealised conception of contemporary construction workers, that of "disciplined, self-actualised, flexible, hyper-adaptive selves" (Casey 1995: 87).

7.2.4 Some international comparisons

Much of the Australian construction system has its roots in the British traditions of industry structure and skills formation processes. David Gann, an academic adviser in construction to the British Government, points out that "over the last 10 years the British construction industry has been through a boom and bust, suffered a loss of jobs—particularly in the untrained groups. It has also been characterised by an increasingly aging workforce, and has had relatively little formal training... In Britain and Australia new technology has eroded traditional demarcation boundaries, leading to increased specialisation and growth in demand for new technological skills" (Gann 1991: 18).

Gann claims that in Britain, the combined effects of technological change and a large proportion of self employment has led to a decline in industry-based training. This claim is because self-employed workers do not have the time to develop new skills as, according to Gann, "they are simply too busy surviving" (in Hayton et al 1993: 73). This, in turn, has led to a decline in productivity and the quality of building. Indeed, construction productivity in Britain is lower than that in France, Germany and Italy. Gann's argument is that the conventional, nationally-based system of skills formation and training has begun to fall apart, supplanted by a more laissez faire system of locally based and non-statutory training. According to Gann, employees and companies in the UK are demanding new technologies and new ways of doing things as, compared with its European competitors, the British industry has been unable to compete adequately. The spectre of international competitiveness thus haunts the British construction industry in much the same way as in Australia.

The construction professions are also constrained by their histories, says Gann. He argues that professional institutions have been based on demarcations between professional areas and have not generally been allowed cross-crediting. This differs from Europe and Japan, where building professions have a more common and generalised education. In Germany, for example, only two professional streams (building engineering and architectural engineering) are recognised. This contrasts with the six or so professional education streams fostered by their respective institutions in the UK. This, Gann concludes, is counterproductive when compared with the German and Japanese models.

Recommendations of the Construction Industry Institute in the United States are similar in language to British and Australian industry reports. Its report (1992: v) asserts that:

- education and training should be viewed as a continuum over a career;

- formal education provides approximately 30% of the preparation needed to perform in a career, and thus it should concentrate on fundamental knowledge and skill development in communications and problem solving;

- beyond formal education, a combination of special training and on-the-job experience should provide the other 70% of career preparation through ongoing individual improvement and adaptation to the changing needs of the industry and of the society at large.

The US, UK and Australian promotion of work-based learning to enhance industry competitiveness is a feature of these international studies (also see Tuckett 1991; Berryman and Bailey 1992; the US Labour Secretary's Commission on Achieving the Necessary Skills 1992). The following case studies illustrate how these construction discourses impact on workers at the local level.

7.3 Chimaera Park, Sydney

7.3.1 The company and the Chimaera Park site

Sydney's Chimaera Park consists of five stages planned for construction over the next decade. It includes three office towers, a five-star hotel and a combined office retail area. Stage one, currently in progress, consists of a 27-storey office tower with a seven storey underground car park, a new link to one of the city bridges, a monorail station and 3500 square metres of public space, including forecourt structures. Thus, it is a civil project with commercial elements. The major contracting company, Phaedrus, carries out design and construction for the joint venture developers Heydigger, Monra and Yoto. The project was procured through an open tender to one of the parent companies (Heydigger) which holds the leasehold to the site. The joint venture developers won the rights to the site on a 99-year lease basis awarded by the State Government[3].

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3   Phaedrus was also successful in securing major construction contracts for the Sydney 2000 Olympic Games. As this is the principal site examined in this study, details about Phaedrus are included in Chapter Eight.

Staffing numbers for this construction varied from 360 to 420. Of this number, 100 to 160 have been direct (Phaedrus) labour. The organisation of work has been based on self-directed teams working in specific areas.

The number and range of subcontractors have varied with the needs of the job, and when tendering, each subcontractor is required to:

> carry out a skills audit of all its employees ... develop a training program for each employee, and in consultation with the employee, focus on improving or broadening his or her skills ... providing a meaningful career path for that employee. (Quoted from the subcontract)

These requirements were a component of a broader workplace reform strategy, with the company having sought multi-skilling at the site. To implement this workplace reform strategy, Phaedrus conducted a "skills audit", identifying the skills required to complete the construction tasks and the training needed. Almost all the construction workers were males, but the skills audit included female office staff. (This gender imbalance is industry-wide.)

The self-directed area work teams reflected Phaedrus's "total quality management" approach. In some instances team budgets were several million dollars, and teams virtually represented construction sites in their own right. A six-weekly cost report went to the overall site manager for "comment", but budgetary responsibility was perceived by the site general foreman to be crucial to "the sense of team autonomy". Each team's project engineer was primarily responsible for the team budget. Teams knew their own budgetary positions and aimed to forecast productivity. An outcome of this responsibility was that the teams developed an interest in returning profits.

Team interest also focussed on industrial relations negotiations at the site. Negotiations were conducted through enterprise bargaining processes which entail consultative committees representing a cross-section of construction workers. At Chimaera Park, enterprise bargaining was termed the "joint development agreement".

The Joint Development Agreement

The Joint Development Agreement was signed by the contractors Phaedrus/Heydigger and the major construction union (Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy Union). The agreement, which emphasises the development and

recognition of skills for all construction site workers, was negotiated after a no-demarcation site had been agreed to at the outset of the project. The negotiation addressed workers' progress through levels of competency levels to higher paid, higher skilled work. Parties agreed to a 10% productivity-linked pay rise over two years, to be paid incrementally (2.5% per six months) dependent on productivity and workplace reform.

The agreement also incorporated quality assurance through specified standards, with work teams required to emphasise "quality". This transferred to workers — in addition to performing tasks — the need to know why they were doing what they were doing and how this fitted into the whole — formerly the terrain of middle and senior managers. Both construction workers and managers stressed that the intersection of training and industrial relations was fundamental to team-based work organisation and culture.

7.3.2 Skill formation and work organisation

Management and unions viewed skill formation as built into the site industrial relations agreements. Skill formation, seen by management as part of its demonstration of commitment to workplace reform, emphasises quality, safety and productivity. Effects of these emphases were inferred by two of the construction workers interviewed as they expressed concern about negative consequences "if the work teams were to be encouraged to compete with one another". The idea of rewarding some teams for their performance was considered by these workers as containing the potential to undermine teams acting co-operatively. Site managers drew on the rhetoric of "the learning organisation" and denied having any interests in promoting inter-team competitiveness.

Once workers' skills were identified through the skills audits, they were allowed to attend formal training activities. There is very little that is self-directed in this, as the process is company led and controlled. The site had a training annexe with a $150,000 per annum infrastructure, including a part-time training manager (three days per week), 3.5 workers in coaching roles and 1.5 coaches from management per week. Coaches developed the training modules and conducted the training activities.

For the financial year 1991–92, over 3300 hours of training were conducted, although this calculation comprised all time commitment of the trainers. TAFE, the main formal provider of technical and further education in New South Wales, was not involved training at the site. Reasons cited by the training manager for its exclusion included (in his words):

TAFE methods are out of date. It has old and slow changing curriculum processes. I've found that the TAFE teachers have not been interested in running site-based training — I've investigated this. Their [TAFE building teachers'] activities are not tailored enough to the specific needs of this job and their [TAFE's] commercial rates are too expensive.

Although outside the scope of this study to research the validity of these comments, they nonetheless reflect an important issue impacting on the site trainers — a poor relationship between on-the-job training and the industry's major formal education provider.

Training took place in a number of ways at the site. At the training annexe, skills were formally assessed. Phaedrus provided certification of the skills when workers successfully completed a competency-based training module. All modules were approved by the National Building and Construction Industry Training Council (NBCITC). Workers were given modules for further reference in their own time, should they wish to pursue a skill further.

The company provided funding for training from within project costs. All training programs except self-directed use of modules occurred in company (work) hours. The general foreman stated that the short-term costs of multi-skilling, although relatively high, bring longer term efficiencies in time management, quality and safety. In addition, one union delegate made the point that multi-skilling, when supported by appropriate training, can make the work more meaningful to many workers. Construction workers expressed hopes that skills acquisition would work in their interests. Perspectives on the potential benefits of multi-skilling differ between management and union.

Acceptance of the training scheme was far from universal, however, with some subcontractors, foremen and more experienced workers wanting incentives to participate. They were not convinced training would help them, and specific trades such as plumbers and electricians were wary of multi-skilling on the grounds that it could erode their conditions — including job security.

Many skill formation practices happen informally by direct involvement with work (trial and error), the observation of leading hands, or skilled tradespeople in action. During this project, there were 200 job rotations (including 160 for direct labour). These were regarded by the training manager as critical to the skill formation process

as specialists acted as mentors for less experienced workers. A formal mentoring system was not considered appropriate to the learning environment.

7.4 Brisbane, Central Business District High Rise

7.4.1 The company and the site

This project is a 33-storey office tower in Brisbane's central business district, built to accommodate a number of Queensland Government departments. The duration of the project — developed by Geilnot Contractors — is approximately twenty months. Geilnot is a national and international contractor with 1327 employees in Australia, about 200 in Queensland. It is a member of the Geilnot Holding Group, whose business activities comprise civil and building design and construction, project management, contract mining, property development, specialist engineering, waste and environmental management in Australia, South-East Asia, and parts of the US. According to its 1992-3 annual report, revenue was $571 million, with $375 million work in hand. The Brisbane site employed between 100 and 250 workers. Estimated cost of the project was $70 million.

A major portion — 85% — of the work was carried out by subcontract labour, the remaining 15% by direct (staff) labour. Some subcontractors further subcontracted elements of their own contract. Occupational groups on this site included the full range of trades and engineers, architects, service consultants, concreters, formworkers, bricklayers, tilers, glaziers, a stonemason.

The project was procured through an invited tender to the Queensland Government. The Geilnot tender was for the design and construction and included a guaranteed maximum sum (with a share of savings to the client should the job come in under the tendered estimate: 80% to the client, 20% to the contractor), and a skill formation strategy based on "consultative processes" with unions at the site and related to other workplace reforms.

These consultative processes involved a consultative committee comprising the project manager, site supervisor, training manager (site engineer), Builders' Labourers' Federation delegate, Building Workers' Industrial Union (BWIU) delegate, Builder's Labourers Federation organiser (from State headquarters), BWIU representative (from State headquarters). The committee met fortnightly for approximately an hour. Minutes of the meetings were recorded by the training manager for distribution to the construction manager for Queensland Geilnot, and the safety officer distributed information about outcomes to construction workers.

7.4.2 Skill formation and work organisation

The Geilnot Contractors' site foreman organised day-to-day work with the subcontractors' foremen, who in turn, organised their own tradesmen. The training manager described the culture and atmosphere of the site:

> It is a tough job both financially and time-wise. Every person on this site is always busy. This is not a particularly bad thing. It is commonplace in the industry at the moment. This is a repetitive high rise and as such it is easier for the workers to see how they fit in to the overall construction procedure.

The training manager presented the tight building timetable as problematic for training, as particular trades were only on-site for short, specific periods. The extent of this problem varied with the subcontractors' specialisations and demands for their services within the industry. However, they were required to participate in some training activities by the contractor, for example, where permits are required to use explosive power tools and oxy-cutting, and in workplace health and safety regulations. The training manager expressed his frustrations about involving subcontractors in the skill-formation strategy, stating:

> involving subbies [in training] is one of my main problems; the time pressures are tremendous, and being a repetitive structure, I have to be sure that the training program avoids unnecessary duplication.

He identified another area that was problematic for his role as training manager:

> We've lost six days through strike action over the previous 14 months, over demarcation issues and attempts by the Builders' Labourers' Federation to establish additional labouring positions than management was prepared to accept. Industrial relations conflict is a tension in this [training] job. They [the company] wants workplace reform, they want multi-skilling — but this is not so easy to implement.

As a consequence of industrial relations tensions, multi-skilling was less prominent compared with the other sites examined. The Brisbane site retained greater specialisation and a more conventional management hierarchy emphasising the directive roles of foremen and middle managers. As such, the consultative processes were more industrial relations posturing by employers, unions and subcontractors than deliberate attempts to generate training and skill-formation outcomes. Indeed, access to training was not always easy, as several of the workers noted. According to one construction worker:

problems exist at the level of the subcontractor's foremen. It's difficult to get released for courses. Unless it [the training] is directly seen as relevant to the head subbies, then forget it; you won't be allowed to go.

The site had a training annexe (a shed) for on-site activities. Participants were allowed one hour of work time, with one hour of the worker's own time required to complete a two hour session. At the beginning of the year a training calendar was posted around the site and the safety officer took the names of those interested. If workers did not think a course was suitable for them, they would tell him and he was then required to provide "honest feedback" to the site engineer. One-third of the workers had taken up the training opportunities which integrated literacy and technical skills.

A subsequent company study (unpublished) of this integrated training referred to the important relationship between the pilot literacy courses and "contextually-grounded language of training". This led to recommendations that "the best way to 'market' literacy courses on-site was to rename them — 'paperwork requirements', 'new regulations', or 'new company policies'". This was intended to reduce the stigma of needing to develop basic literacy skills.

No formal RPL procedures were established at the site, but company certificates were given to workers successfully completing training courses. Responsibility for the maintenance of worker training records lay with the individual. The training manager suggested that an industry "smart-card", managed centrally through the NBCITC had:

> the potential to monitor competence levels across the industry ... but the mechanisms for assessing the progression from one level [in the competence framework] to the next might contain some problems.

He alluded to the spectre of the NBCITC becoming a surveillance apparatus that could be deployed in ways not in the interests of workers, a concern reiterated by a union delegate.

The training manager's perceptions of informal learning at this site included "learning directly from co-workers and mentors, being given different tasks and job rotation". The term "mentor" here generally implied managers — foremen, engineers and experienced tradespeople — providing explanations of technical knowledge to less experienced workers. Mentoring occurred ad hoc through foremen, engineers and

leading hands showing subcontractors and direct labour how subcontract work affects other trades and the job as a whole.

The training manager identified informal learning with "competence", suggesting skills developed through experience could be formally assessed. However, his ethos about training was that it is the worker's own responsibility to participate in learning opportunities and thus build up their "formal" credentials. This, to some extent, reflected the individualistic ethos of the site. He mentioned that this approach can be problematic, as several contentious issues affect learning in the industry:

> sometimes there is the embarrassment of those requiring literacy training ... derogatory comments can be directed at those needing help with language or literacy ... and the question of who should pay for training can be side-stepped.

7.5 Army base site, rural New South Wales

7.5.1 The company and the site

The major contracting company was Seamus Pty Limited, which provides a wide range of construction services throughout Australia and the Pacific Region. Seamus Contractors is a member of the Geilnot Holding Group of companies, whose major shareholder is a German based multinational. Seamus Contractors in 1992 had $624 million revenue and a further $691 million work in hand, and employs 2981 workers.

The site, in the upper Hunter Valley region of New South Wales, consists of 30 storage "houses" for high explosives (missiles), roadways, drainage and pipework (similar to sub-division work). Unusually heavy concreting was involved, costing $17.5 million and taking 50 weeks.

The contract was procured through a selective tendering process in which Seamus gave a warranted price which involved accepting a degree of risk if the job was not finished on time, or finished over budget. This generated a tight time frame for the job, and the focus for training was on maximising learning opportunities rather than the amount of training.

The number of employees involved varied from 60 to 90, including 20% direct labour. Occupational groups mainly comprised formworkers and general labourers, with a little plumbing, carpentry and electrical work. The work was carried out by a number of subcontractors under a principal subcontractor.

7.5.2 Skill formation and work organisation

The training manager said "self directed teams" were developing, but in practice tasks were allocated by a civil foreman and a building foreman. There was no formal consultative committee, but regular open forums were held. This "open forum" approach can be partially attributed to the site's relatively remote setting — twenty minutes drive from the nearest rural town (which has a population of 1300). Several construction workers described this remoteness as impacting on the atmosphere and culture of the job. A subcontractor said it impacted in this way:

> it [the remoteness] magnifies the communication processes at the site because there is not much else around other than bushland!

"An integral part of the workplace reform strategy" was how the training manager described skill formation, citing reductions in restrictive work practices and multi-skilling as "leading to [the company having] a market advantage in the longer term, through developing a more efficient workforce". As a part of the process he conducted a skills audit to identify the skills needed to perform the required tasks. Over the 50 week job, he budgeted for twenty hours of formal training for each direct staff. Participation in formal training beyond the twenty hours was the individual's responsibility.

The construction workers' union delegate suggested that some compromise between company provided time and worker's own time was a critical industrial relations issue because of an essential link between training and the construction. He argued that as a consequence of this link, the company had a direct responsibility to financially support training.

The site project manager explained that this financial responsibility was problematic with tight budgets commonplace in construction. Also problematic for him was ensuring that the subcontractors complied with workplace reform and skill formation practices. In his words, this was:

> an area of weakness in the overall reform process at the site... Some enforcement may be required, using their [subcontractors] liability for safety practices as a device to obtain compliance.

The discourse of safety, in this instance, has a disciplinary effect connected to the discourses of workplace reform, upskilling and efficiency.

The company did not issue its own certificates for completion of training and no formal procedures to recognise prior learning were deployed. The training manager cited the tight budget as a barrier to these training initiatives and to addressing identified literacy and numeracy problems. He suggested that his focus was:

> promoting on site informal learning practices where things are actually happening... In pouring concrete, workers are taught by surveyors and site engineers to estimate the amount of concrete needed. I encourage job rotations to offer workers variety and to reduce "us and them" tensions between unions and management.

A carpenter pointed out that training was closely connected to industrial relations at the site and expressed scepticism about whether assessment of competence would really help construction workers' careers:

> the men at the site are known [to the company] ... there are so few jobs around, the big [construction] companies are calling the shots. The union angle is to at least get our abilities formally recognised. Its better than nothing. Who knows what the future holds for us.

No one was prepared to discuss openly the purposes of this construction. And it would have been out of bounds for me to pursue it. But this silence disturbed me. One construction worker alluded to the taboo in this way:

> We are aware of what we are building here. It's dark and we don't like it. But we are here to do a job. If the Government wants it here, we build it here. If people can get the Government to change its mind, then I guess we don't have a job out here. There aren't too many jobs around are there?

This comment reminds that workplace reform initiatives (and their discursive effects) rest on high levels of structural unemployment, uncertainty and reluctant compliance with government and corporate initiatives. Repeating one foreman's comment: "the company wants the workers to be multi-skilled, so I go along".

7.6 Dominant discourses at the sites

Despite the differences between and variety of approaches to training at these sites, common issues emerged, with dominant discourses circulating around workplace reform and removing demarcations. The drive for economic competitiveness remains *the* master discourse within the industry. The following themes, powerful sub-discourses within the industry, are viewed here as "subject to the ensemble of rules" (Foucault 1977: 133) which emanate from this master discourse.

7.6.1 Workplace reform

The Chimaera Park and Brisbane case studies illustrate the influence on training practices of workplace reform and multi-skilling discourses. A key factor in the success of the tenders of each of these projects was the contractor fixing a maximum price. This meant contractors took the risk of not delivering on time and within budget — a risk traditionally borne by the client. The contractors stated they were prepared to take this risk because of their confidence in the efficiency and reliability of the workplace reform process. Senior managers viewed improvements in work organisation, skill formation and industrial relations harmony as providing a sound basis for unprecedented risk acceptance by contractors.

Contractors believe that accepting greater levels of responsibility for keeping to budget, time and assuring quality will advantage them over competitors (who, for the same reasons are undertaking the similar reforms). Multi-skilling translates to new levels of local responsibility and to ordered procedures for construction and the regulation and distribution of rewards. It is a disciplining process that relies on the removal of demarcations, co-operating construction workers and unions, and a training program aligned to construction imperatives — budget, time-frame and quality assurance to the client.

7.6.2 Work organisation

The pursuit of workplace reform occurred substantially through the organisation of work. The Chimaera Park and Hunter Valley projects aimed to develop company employees through the combination of multi-skilling and team approaches. In these projects, two team-building strategies were used:

a) basing work organisation on the principle of self-directing work area teams. This involved employment of a high percentage of direct labour (particularly at the Chimaera Park project);

b) using fewer but larger subcontracting packages to give scope for reorganising work within each package (for example, the Hunter Valley project with its main subcontractor).

The subcontracting of specialised skills has been for many years the predominant way of implementing the Taylorist approach in the construction industry and was in evidence at the Brisbane project.

The Chimaera Park project retained a high percentage (about 50%) of direct labour, with less than usual reliance on subcontractors. Training for direct labour was designed to the needs of the site, and the desired corporate approach to workplace reform. The two other projects used less direct labour, but the principal contractors expressed support for the development of team skills in their direct labour and, as far as practicable, in employees of the subcontractors.

In each of the case studies, contractors spoke of the importance of retaining skilled direct labour for future projects. This theme is pertinent for the Olympics site, as the promises of "team retention" from Chimaera Park were never fulfilled (see Chapter Eight). As the corporate goal to retain vital skills such as teamwork, problem solving, communication skills and positive attitudes to reform was not reached, it is reasonable to ask whether it had been hollow rhetoric.

7.6.3 Skill formation and competence

The case studies highlight a tension between principal contractors and subcontractors. Principal contractors generally expressed a greater commitment to skill formation than did subcontractors. There were also differences in perceptions of the value of skills such as communication, language and literacy and team-building. Principal contractors perceived skill formation as a key part of the workplace reform strategy, expecting investment in training to provide paybacks in productivity, quality and safety.

Subcontractors spent approximately 1.5% of payroll on structured training. Government, industry body and union leaders believe that a critical barrier to reform processes and improved skill formation is the continued reliance upon specialised trade subcontracting arrangements.

The three sites conducted different types of training: problem solving, communication, negotiation, team skills and total quality management; for subcontractors, there was a very high emphasis on technical skills, with spending primarily on trade apprenticeship training. Many subcontractors were actually spending very little on training other than for apprenticeships.

With regard to the accreditation of training, little use was made of assessment procedures for RPL. Contractors preferred to design their own site specific training programs, and as a consequence did not seek external accreditation. Nonetheless, the discourse of "competence" was in evidence at each of the sites. Tickets certifying specific competencies were a currency circulating amongst construction workers,

some of whom hoped that possession of many tickets would help their employability. Extensive check-lists of skills were the form in which competency-based standards for career progression were registered at each site. Foremen and construction workers expressed strong scepticism about the "validity" of the checklists and the accompanying computerisation of workers' skill records (see Chapter Nine).

Despite this scepticism, measuring competence contains potential to impose meticulous control over what skills constitute "employability". As competency-based standards are currently being implemented within this industry, they can be read as components of the total accumulation of skills required to be a "good employee" — an employee who will do exactly what the corporation specifies.

7.6.4 Industrial relations

The trainers at these sites raised several interconnected questions that affected their roles:

- who gets training?
- how (and why) are participants selected?
- who pays for it?
- in whose time?

These questions arise out of whole work structure issues and are indicative of the close links between industrial relations and training. In-house training programs require resources to develop and run, but the greatest perceived cost (to managers) is the lost time when employees attend in work time. Employers in each of the case studies had specific limits of supported time for workers to attend training programs, but restrictions were invariably lifted when employees attended in their own time. At Chimaera Park and the Hunter Valley sites, most of the training was in work time and at the employer's expense. This was not always so at the Brisbane project.

Discourses of "safety" are prominent in the construction industry. Training in safety, whenever possible, is being integrated with technical skills training, and both are subject to managerial (and disciplinary) discourses about "quality" and "just-in-time" approaches to work.

One characteristic of site-based training in these studies was the integration of learning activities with production. Integration removed critical distance from "the

doing", leaving little space for critical analysis of the discursive influences that shape "the doing". Skill-formation processes were, in this way, highly focussed on task execution. Learning about construction (in a broad sense) was thus circumscribed by the industry's construction of learning. These findings indicate that informal learning does not 'simply happen' at particular sites. It is being actively constituted by the discourses and immediate imperatives of construction. For this study of informal learning, the implications relate to the significance of these discourses for the trainers practising within them. Chapter Eight, which focusses on the discourses of construction, thus foregrounds the trainers stories in Chapter Nine.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Discourses of Construction

8.1 Training at the Sydney Olympic Games site: phase three

> The company wants us to work in teams and be more self-directed. So, we are going to work in teams and be more "self-directed". What else can we do?
>
> Construction worker, Sydney Olympic Games site, 1994

This chapter examines training at the Sydney Olympic Games construction site, focussing on the organisation of work, the workplace reform initiatives of the principal contractor and project manager — the Phaedrus corporation — and the implementation of training practices.

The project involves the construction of major components of the venues for the Sydney Olympics Games to be held in 2000. Construction began in 1992 and has involved a workforce of up to 400 people, 60 directly employed by Phaedrus, and the remainder subcontractors. The presence of a diverse and highly multicultural range of subcontractors at the site is highlighted in the case study. As will be seen, the multicultural composition of the workforce and the large proportion of subcontracting directly impacted on a range of training decisions made by Phaedrus.

Phaedrus is influenced in its training decisions both by policies of the Heydigger Corporation and by factors at the site. The development of local training plans is facilitated by a "learning coach" (David), who is based at the Heydigger head office. David visits the site to work with a range of stakeholders to establish training plans. These plans are then implemented by site personnel. Further input from David is then acquired on a fee-for-service basis. Key personnel in determining training priorities are the general foreman, the project (site) manager and delegates of the main construction unions — the Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy Union (CFMEU) and the Federated Engine Drivers' and Firemens' Association of Australia

(FEDFA). Thus, the power-brokerage surrounding training represents influential discourses of industrial relations and production.

As a project of national significance and undertaken immediately after a Royal Commission of Inquiry into the Building and Construction Industry in NSW (1992), Olympics construction projects face a high level of public scrutiny. To date this has been manifested in oversight by the NSW Department of Public Works, visits by high profile politicians, public figures such as the Prince of Wales, attention from the media and university-based research. With such a high public profile and a recent history of intense, at times bitter adversarial industrial relations, industrial peace is considered by site managers and union officials as an essential outcome of any training initiatives.

The promise of industrial harmony was an important ingredient in Australia's bid to host these Olympic Games. Thus the trainers' roles were, from the outset, configured within a broader discourse relating to Australia's capacity to deliver on its promises to stage the 2000 Games successfully. In this discourse, being a "good host" implies having "good employees" who will manage the project with maximum efficiency. If they do not, local and international media will draw their own conclusions.

8.1.1 The corporate enterprise

Phaedrus is one of Australia's largest construction companies, with projects worth approximately $800 million sold in the 1993–4 financial year. Phaedrus's parent company, Heydigger, has a multi-layered group profile involving three major service groups. These are:

- **retail financial services** including various life and general insurance groups and a major building society;

- **corporate services** including asset management, project financing and infrastructure equity. An international dimension emerged in 1993–4 for corporate services with a multi-million dollar joint venture in Indonesia;

- **property services** including Phaedrus, Heydigger Services, Heydigger Design Group, Heydigger Singapore and a range of development and management divisions. At July 1994 total property managed exceeded A$14 billion, making Heydigger one of the largest independent managers of property in the world.

Phaedrus belongs to the property services group of Heydigger. Heydigger was originally an arm of Phaedrus. As Phaedrus prospered, it saw the need to create a development and finance arm and established Heydigger. This grew to subsume Phaedrus.

Heydigger has recently acquired one of the largest real estate investment advisers in the United States. The total value of real estate under its US management operation is A$10 billion. Heydigger's 1993–4 prospectus states that the corporation acquired its US investment adviser to form a global property investment and asset management group with operations in North America, Europe, South-East Asia and Australia. It has recently commenced operating in Europe.

The South-East Asian connection is of particular relevance to Phaedrus, because of its interest in undertaking construction activities in Asia. Phaedrus recently tendered for major works in Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand and Indonesia. The interest in the South East Asian market has direct relevance to the training undertaken by Phaedrus because the skills currently being developed in the company may in the near future be needed on South-East Asian construction sites. Some examples of such transferable skills currently being developed through training include project management, design, and construction "packages". Skills and knowledge developed on its major Brisbane project, for example, have been transferred to the development of a new large-scale bottling plant being developed in Jakarta. Skills and knowledge thus have to be flexible.

The executive chairman of Heydigger recently stated that the strategic focus of Heydigger (and, by extension, of Phaedrus) for the 1990s would be "in infrastructure and industrial, where the opportunities are greatest." Such opportunities were numerous in 1994–5 for Phaedrus, which won construction projects worth over one billion dollars within Australia. Its Olympic constructions are estimated to be worth $300 million. Phaedrus won the principal contracts from the NSW Government Public Works Department to construct various features of the Olympics site, a classic civil construction involving concrete, steel, and earthworks.

Work at the site is divided into project areas such as road works, building, landscaping and cleaning. At peak times, the site has employed around 400 people. 100 of these are involved in design, engineering, project management, clerical and administrative work. The remaining 300 carry out work in the field involving trades, labouring, driving, and cleaning work. Permanent Phaedrus staff is referred to as

"Phaedrus direct labour" throughout this chapter. The remaining 340 workers are employed by approximately 80 separate subcontractors working at the site.

Phaedrus estimates that 40% of the construction workers are from non-English speaking backgrounds. All but three of the construction workforce is male. Through the study, it became self-evident that training at the Olympics site is strongly influenced by the proportion of workers from non-English speaking backgrounds and the distinction between subcontracted labour and Phaedrus direct labour.

Most of the construction work is undertaken by subcontractors who are managed by personnel from Phaedrus's direct labour pool. These overseers manage project area teams responsible for specific areas such as roadworks or building. Team membership varies from three to thirteen people. The average size of a team is four or five and typically includes a project manager, a site engineer, a leading hand or foreman and one or two directly employed construction workers. Teams are not fixed or mutually exclusive, and some individuals can be members of several teams. Not all teams are active onsite at any one time.

This pattern of Phaedrus personnel overseeing the work of subcontractors represents a significant change of strategy for the company. In the past, construction has been undertaken by self-directed work teams of Phaedrus direct labour. This was exemplified in Chapter Seven in the case study of Chimaera Park. Whereas Phaedrus direct labour comprised approximately 60% of the workforce at the Chimaera Park site, at the Olympics site, it represents only 15%. Thus, the company has shifted from a reliance on multi-skilled teams of direct labour to hiring subcontractors who perform specific tasks. Head office managers see this shift as necessary because they believe project management is more efficient in large-scale construction.

Phaedrus's permanent workforce has been substantially reduced since the 1980s, with the company now employing 200–300 permanent workers compared with 2000 in the late 1980s. One factor contributing to this 'downsizing' has been the impact of the recession on the construction industry. Another has been the shift to the use of subcontracted labour rather than the maintenance of a permanent Phaedrus labour force. The new emphasis on subcontracting has been made possible, in part, by the removal of demarcations within the industry. The new emphasis on subcontracting represents a partial reversion to a pattern of work organisation that had been the norm in the building and construction industry prior to the 1980s. By relying on specialist subcontractors, the company becomes obliged to divide work into project

areas and adopt a project management approach as reliance on specialists (by definition) limits the scope for multi-skilled teams. Nonetheless, Phaedrus has developed a rhetoric of "bilateral improvement" through which it seeks to differentiate itself from other major contractors. This concept relates to the Phaedrus strategy to improve the operations of subcontractors and the ways Phaedrus interacts with them.

The company's approach aims to change the nature of relationships between project management (including site co-ordination) and subcontractors to establish longer-term alliances and to establish a new rhetoric in which "trust and security" are sought between major and minor contractors. Traditionally, such relationships have been transitory and at times adversarial. Construction workers perceive the new arrangements as posing a threat to direct labour and the remaining power of the unions — with substantial justification.

The tendering phase was used by Phaedrus to establish new partnerships with subcontractors. This entailed a reduction in the number of subcontractors it had to deal with by requiring broader subcontracting arrangements than existed in the industry previously. One subcontractor described some of the outcomes of this new approach for his company:

> Traditionally we weren't so involved in design, but here we were required to expand more into design. We would probably have preferred to remain the way we were. We made some money, it worked and we know that. If the industry requires us to change, obviously we'll have to change.

Twelve months prior to this study, Field and Mawer (1993) described attempts by Phaedrus to encourage subcontractors to develop "enterprise agreements" by following Phaedrus's reform initiatives which focussed on developing "consultative" relationships between Phaedrus and subcontractors. Field and Mawer describe this as a "mentoring relationship" between the subcontractors and Phaedrus, which has at times, "been somewhat strained because of Phaedrus' dual role as project manager and learning mentor challenging traditional relationships" (1993: 13).

The designed and implemented new partnerships have a range of effects on work practices and workers' conceptions both of their roles, and themselves (see Chapters Nine and Ten). Corporate work, organisation and culture depart from an emphasis on traditional management hierarchies, construction practices, and distributions of power and control over employees and subcontractors. The designer corporate-

culture is profoundly affected by the capabilities of advanced automation and information technologies — as well as the organisational changes such technologies have enabled. Post-industrial technologies are bringing about the end of the labour process as it has traditionally been understood (see Braverman 1974; in Chapter Three) and conventionally held in the sociology of work.

As Casey (1995) points out, significant changes to the organisation and management of work are being enabled by advanced technologies:

> the new technologies have influenced a reorganisation of the workplace under a new culture that recognises and exploits the end of the Fordist tradition of the labour process. As a result post-industrial corporations are now able to design their own organisational culture more explicitly and carefully than industrial culture was ever planned. (1995: 91)

The orchestration of the new partnerships, the new, empowered team roles, the new corporate culture is, however, never complete — the interactions of the workers in everyday practice can never be fully designed. But as Casey points out, "the pedagogical devices of the new designed cultures are significantly altering the old industrial work culture and shaping post-industrial employees" (1995: 91). At the Olympics site, training is a device used to develop consultative processes with subcontractors, in part, to extend Phaedrus's corporate culture.

8.2 Organisation and management of training

The general foreman and the project (site) manager, in consultation with CFMEU and FEDFA delegates participated in the creation of the training plans for the site, considering as guidelines the construction timetable, construction requirements, the desire for industrial relations harmony and the need to involve subcontractors in training arrangements. Accommodations to the success or failure of individuals who attend training activities are thus, to an extent, circumscribed by these shaping influences.

Smith et al. (1995) argue that Phaedrus is more systematic in its training than many other construction companies, citing as evidence the existence of written training plans, objectives and priorities established at the outset of construction projects. A systematic approach is often not the case in the Australian construction industry. However, various aspects of training at the Olympics site remain ad hoc. Training needs assessments have not been conducted and training activities do not

necessarily correlate with opportunities to practice new skills at the construction site. Also, who gets to go to training is firmly controlled by site-level powerbrokers such as foremen and influential subcontractors.

A training annexe is located onsite. Here, workers can attend sessions related to five major subject areas: (1) construction skills; (2) safety; (3) job-related computer skills; (4) train the trainer/coaching and mentoring; and (5) language, literacy and numeracy. Sessions are promoted as catering to the needs of construction staff and are generally attended by Phaedrus direct labour.

No one permanently onsite has an overall training manager's role. The management of training at the site is influenced by the corporate link between Phaedrus and Heydigger. The training model adopted by Heydigger is focussed on the concept of the "learning coach". It promotes learning from or about a task while actually performing it. Coaches at the site tend to be senior or experienced co-workers, leading hands or foremen. Heydigger (and, therefore, Phaedrus) use the learning coach model to locate "learning" as closely as possible to workplace requirements. This represents a shift away from conventional ideas about formal education and training that rely on a degree of critical distance from "the doing".

At the project's outset a learning coach (David) from Heydigger's central training unit helped establish a training plan for the site. The plan was based on suggestions made by project managers and union delegates, and on the results of a Heydigger survey of consultants and subcontractors. The role of the learning coach was primarily advisory as he had to divide (and cost) his time between the Olympics site and other Heydigger initiatives. Responsibility for implementing the training plan was devolved to site personnel.

Phaedrus direct labour who possess practical expertise act as onsite coaches. They conduct formal training modules related to their own areas of expertise such as materials handling, crane-driving, welding and concreting. Personnel involved include construction workers, managers, engineers, union delegates, first-aid officers and gate-keepers. Selection of staff to act as coaches is made by a range of people who identify those with leading knowledge in specific areas. Those involved in selection include the general foreman, foremen, Phaedrus' construction workers, union representatives and David. Those selected to become onsite coaches are required to complete training courses in coaching and the assessment of competence. David established the "coaching and mentoring" training program which included modules on assessment and module writing.

The presence of a highly multicultural workforce raised specific training needs. These needs, although not formally researched, included language and literacy for construction workers. A language and literacy trainer (Marta) was employed at the site, funded through a grant from the Commonwealth Department of Employment, Education Training and Youth Affairs (DEETYA), specifically through Workplace Language and Literacy funding.

With a high proportion of workers coming from non-English speaking backgrounds and/or with low literacy levels, the issue of how much time should be devoted to English and literacy classes is contentious. The unions argue that all training should be available during company time. Phaedrus has set undocumented but implicit limits to the amount of training available during work time. Thus, for example supervisors may indicate to workers that they cannot be released from construction activities for more than approximately two hours per week. Sometimes non attendance is self-imposed in that workers do not think it is appropriate to ask for time away from construction in order to attend training. "Negative attitudes of some middle managers to training" was cited by David as a key factor in generating this situation.

Participation in training is "voluntary" and sessions — available both to Phaedrus direct labour and to subcontractors — are planned and conducted by Phaedrus personnel. The partnering notion being promoted is symbolised in the "shared" training activities, viewed by Phaedrus management as a way of assisting relationships between the company and subcontractors. However, the subcontractors are required to pay for their workers' attendance — which has contributed to a relatively low participation rate (estimated at approximately 25% of overall attendance) in the Phaedrus training program.

Workers who successfully complete a training module receive a ticket in acknowledgment of their achievement. Employee skills and competence are meant to be assessed biannually by workplace assessors (frequently team leaders) trained in assessment. Biannual assessment has not however been practical because of the constantly changing composition of the workforce at the construction site. Assessment methodologies have not been fixed and are, as one experienced team leader says, "still developing".

During the 1993 calendar year, 188 training sessions were conducted. The total number of training places (participants) in these sessions was 510 (with some

participants attending multiple activities). Approximately 75% attended from Phaedrus direct labour and 25% from subcontractors. Workers spent 1320 hours participating in formal training activities. The costs of on-site training are carefully recorded through the use of attendance sheets. Costings include the time workers are absent from the construction process, as well as payments to consultants and Heydigger's training unit. In 1993, the company spent well in excess of the minimum requirements of the *Training Guarantee Act 1991* on training at the site. Total expenditures on training were not available for this study. Indeed, this was a very touchy subject because the company thinks training is expensive, but industrial relations agreements surround training opportunities for workers. Training has been constructed as an industrial relations bargaining arena, designed partly to preserve site harmony.

Training has been delivered through pre-packaged modules ranging from one to twenty-four hours duration. Curriculum materials used were developed both externally (by Workcover, Backsafe, the Adult Migrant Education Service, the Trade Union Training Authority) and internally (by subject experts at the site). Site experts formed module-writing teams, with writers first required to participate in a module-writing course.

The majority of people who sign up for training do attend. Non attendance can result from unscheduled or unanticipated construction jobs, worker apathy or discouragement by a supervisor. Examples of discouragement include comments from some middle managers about too much time being spent away from construction at training, and the limited value of certain training activities to the construction itself.

Training for managers and supervisory personnel differs from that of construction workers and tradespeople in that it is mainly conducted off-the-job through external consultants. Phaedrus's policy supports managers pursuing formal management qualifications such as Master of Business Administration. Such a degree is viewed by the corporation's Personnel Section as an important supplement to technical qualifications such as engineering and building degrees or trade certificates. Phaedrus provides study time, exam leave and funds to cover university fees (Higher Education Contribution Scheme) for technically trained staff who have project management responsibilities. Trainers provide these staff with information on externally available courses and co-ordination.

Influential in the organisation and management of training, according to several interviewees, are the construction industry's competency-based standards. Most training modules developed by Phaedrus are based on industry competency-based standards endorsed by the National Training Board (NTB). But not all site training modules align with the NTB's descriptions. Workers completing "formally approved" modules can have their skills assessed and accredited against the standards of the National Building and Construction Industry Training Council (NBCITC). Nonetheless, Phaedrus management maintains that such a centralised approach is not always in the company's interests and in some instances, the accreditation of skills is company (and site) specific. Phaedrus has an enterprise agreement endorsing its own competency standards up to Construction Worker level 5 (see Chapter Three, table 3.4, for standards levels). The agreement was intended to enable management to deliver training directly relevant to its own construction sites and methods. Their argument, successfully carried to the unions, was that the skills recognised by Phaedrus would have sufficient credibility for worker transferability throughout the industry without having to rely on national (NTB) or industry-wide (NBCITC) accreditation.

The Phaedrus matrix of competency-based skills is intended to clarify career paths by making explicit the competencies workers must acquire to progress to a higher level. The clarification can be very specific, for instance, to progress from level one to two workers need to obtain a ticket to run a hoist — and this specifies a precise amount of training. For progression beyond level 5, workers require computer skills and more advanced plan reading skills, and competency-based training modules are being developed to match the skills-matrix approach to learning.

David noted that the removal of demarcations was a key factor that had enabled the creation of the Phaedrus skills matrix:

> The industrial relations agenda has underpinned many of the initiatives which have come with training and the focus in the development of the skills matrix was therefore on the 'hard skills'... Skills which were more quantifiable dominated the early thinking about the matrix.

Decisions about who attends training are strongly influenced by foremen who authorise releases from construction activities to attend. Workers understand implicitly that they should not ask for "too much time" for training although there was no firm policy on this. A construction worker expressed the "policy" in this

way: "a couple of hours per week [attendance at training] would begin to stretch friendships if it continued for too many weeks".

No one was sure what "too many weeks" would be, but it was made clear that the culture of the industry maintains somewhat informal arrangements. This informality operates to locate power and control in the hands of the supervisors.

The partnerships between Phaedrus and subcontractors also influence site culture, with subcontractors often pressured by financial constraints and commonly stating that training is a luxury they can't afford. A union delegate accounted for this attitude: "subbies have to chase the dollar hard and often don't have the time or interest in training." "Chasing the dollar hard" was a common subcontractors' image and reflected subcontractors reluctance to allow employees to participate in training activities. A sub text is that many subcontractors do not want their employees to become too skilled as, if they become highly skilled, the employer will lose a good worker. Even worse, they may become competitors within the same limited market.

Because subcontractors employ a high proportion of workers from non-English speaking backgrounds, Marta's presence at the site provided an opportunity for work-based learning — even though the subcontractors' foremen are sometimes unhappy about workers being off-the-job to attend training. For some subcontractors, work communication is almost exclusively in their first language. One subcontractor, for instance, mainly employs Italian construction workers who speak to one another almost exclusively in Italian. Marta pointed out that as this arrangement has worked well for them in the past, workers can be reluctant to undertake additional training in English. Nonetheless, as the onsite English classes are government funded, subcontractors do not have to pay for workers to attend and so some "voluntarily" attend.

The descriptions of site training show that the trainer's role is, at times, configured in an awkward tension between unhappy foremen who want workers "producing", and management (and government) requirements for attendance at funded staff development programs. Attendance is sometimes about ensuring that the "correct image" is being presented by subcontractors seeking to impress the construction managers with their willingness to co-operate, and by management seeking to convince government of its determination to implement government policy.

8.3 Determinants of training

Amongst a range of powerful industry discourses identified in phase two, I have distinguished five determinants of training at the Olympics site that are features of the discursive site-culture practices *and* construction processes. These are: industrial relations; the corporate strategy; the anticipation of future industry trends; occupational health and safety issues; and government interventions including the provision of funding for language and literacy courses. Each determinant is briefly discussed individually, but all impact upon each other. I have not separated as a distinct determinant the new micro-electronic technologies prevalent on-site (personal computers, high-tech walkie-talkies, security cameras) as these affect the discursive or communicational patterns *within* each theme.

Industrial Relations: This study has shown that training decisions are frequently subject to industrial relations considerations. Both managers and union officials believe that the adoption of new approaches to training and learning opportunities is "a big factor in maintaining a positive IR climate."

At the outset of the Olympics job a consultative committee was formed to bring together the interests of unions, management, apprentices and safety personnel. This committee has sought to promote more flexible ways of working, efficiency, safety improvements, on-site training and consultative processes to link productivity to bonuses and conditions (enterprise bargaining). The committee is acutely aware of the need to include subcontracted labour in consultative processes. This is seen by the committee chairperson (the site general foreman) as "vital to improving communication throughout the site". The training connection to IR has produced activities focussed on increasing the skill levels and partnering abilities of subcontractors. One example is a joint course on "enhancing computer skills" for Phaedrus direct labour and subcontracting managers.

The corporation ensured that key union delegates were trained very early in the project in computer technologies. Although they stated they did not really need to use them, this had the effect of enabling unionists to view the benefits to members of the new technologies. But this enabling was at the same time disabling because the discursive and symbolic elements that constitute this learning project included embracing unquestioningly the corporate culture, language and mythology about the new teams, the new corporate family and the new customer-oriented partnerships with subcontractors — who, incidentally, are increasingly less unionised.

Several Phaedrus personnel point out that the union influence within the enterprise bargaining processes has been significant for establishing training opportunities at the Olympics site. Training is a key issue for personnel involved in the enterprise bargaining process because training has been linked to career opportunities, and thus (ultimately) increased remuneration. As part of the Phaedrus enterprise agreement process, the company undertook to identify the current skills of workers, to analyse the career paths associated with those skills and to determine how training could enable workers to progress in their careers. Training courses which directly result from this process include communication skills for construction, presentation skills and negotiation skills.

Training activities represent a pact between the company and unions about what is perceived to be mutually beneficial, a pact which symbolises the totalising tendencies in the new team-based approaches of corporate organisations. Attempts to embrace "partners" into the "team" are also linked to the corporate strategy on subcontracting.

Company Strategy: At the enterprise level, Phaedrus has three key stated objectives in its competitive strategy: provision of an assured quality of product for clients; improving occupational health and safety practices in the workplace; and increasing the participation of all Phaedrus employees in looking for innovative ways to improve work practices. In practice, these objectives translate into an emphasis on training the workforce in TQM, OH&S, consultative processes and innovative uses of new information technologies.

The competitive strategy adopted at the Olympics site aims to train the workforce through: multi-skilling, improving job flexibility, and addressing skill deficits. One site manager pointed out that this strategy is directly linked to workplace reform. He described the main strategies of the site's workplace reform plan as: organising the workplace into work area teams; providing skill formation opportunities to all on site (including subcontractors); using consultative processes in promoting the involvement of all personnel; and establishing workplace reform "catalysts" on the project. Training-related activities triggered by these strategies include the identification of experts who could become coaches and learning-module writers.

For management, workplace reform aimed at improved efficiency. Phaedrus's broad competitive strategy of workplace reform thus determines many on-site training decisions. They are translated into strategies to improve the skills of each section of

the workforce. This articulates discourses of construction which are not directly about the materiality of construction: for example, promotion of the corporate strategy to facilitate TQM, empowered teams and new partnerships. These are communicational devices designed as corporate practices, and with an important symbolic function — *the image* of the corporation. This is particularly pertinent in the context of a high-profile (trophy) project.

Ultimately the materiality of economic relations of labour, capital, ownership and control "is also mediated discursively" (Casey 1995: 92). Thus the corporate image, or *symbolic economy*, trades in the currency of team, family, sport, and technological, managerial leadership (with a language of excellence and performance). This symbolic economy can be held distinct from (although related to) the discursive practices of the material production. The new partnerships, new technologies and post-occupational work have significant implications for social solidarity, trade union theory and workplace relations in general. Attempting to anticipate such future implications for post occupational relationships between labour and capital is a key feature of corporate strategy and an influence on corporate-training decisions. A more comprehensive examination of this theme is beyond the scope of this study.

Anticipating Future Trends: Economic survival through the recession has forced construction companies to adopt flexible approaches to work practices. In 1987 Heydigger employed human resources consultants were to examine ways for Heydigger to maintain a competitive edge and develop innovative approaches to "organisational learning". Ideas of a "flexible learning organisation" — which includes accounting for global economic, environmental and organisational development trends — are now integral elements of Heydigger and Phaedrus rhetoric.

An important trigger for training decisions has been executive perceptions of need for the company to respond to trends in the construction industry environment. Two examples of this are the OHS and Environment, and Learning Organisation courses conducted for all Phaedrus workers. Management and the trainers themselves, view these courses as aiding the company's ability to respond to industry trends.

Each course carries an elaborate language. In the "Learning Organisation", a set of principles (see Senge et al 1994) translates to flattening hierarchies and encouraging participative decision-making structures. The language is associated with economic rationalism and corporate requirements for new attitudes towards *belonging* to the company — whether it be within the company or in partnership with it (see

Chapters Three and Four). Working towards the implicit objective of "belonging", training emphasises the skills of communicating effectively, conflict resolution, building effective teams (groupwork skills), problem solving abilities, facilitating meetings, coaching and mentoring. The corporate aim, or at least its rhetoric — to develop a competent workforce with the skills and abilities to "tackle" the future — also needs to be viewed against its employee reduction program of the past ten years. The new corporate learning organisation is built upon a foundation of mass-scale retrenchments. When construction workers are pursuing "quality", or "team-building", they have this foundation knowledge firmly in mind.

Occupational Health and Safety: One of Phaedrus's competitive strategies is to improve OHS practices. Training is used to take the enterprise's commitment to site level, with OHS and Environment courses conducted for all Phaedrus workers. David described these as an "integrated training package to ensure all workers are knowledgeable in, and aware of, the company's position on this issue". The OHS training modules were "benchmarked" externally by the National Safety Council of Australia and aim at reducing "class one incidents" (permanent damage).

The increased use of technology and innovative construction techniques at the site has generated a need to provide OHS training for all Phaedrus direct labour, particularly crane-drivers and hoist operators involved in materials handling. Attention to OHS practices relates to the promotion of an overall *culture of quality* at the site. The company constantly compares its improvements in safety standards and favourable statistics with other companies. Improvement in safety was perceived to be an important aspect of the work environment by every person I interviewed. It was also an aspect of the work environment subject to intense scrutiny from government authorities who, although not always physically present, were an absent presence.

Government Intervention: Government legislation was not cited explicitly as a major external influence on training decisions at the site. Indeed, I interviewed the NSW Government's (Public Works) principal industrial relations officer who reiterated the government's intentions to be non-interventionist in relation to training in the construction industry. But there were notable exceptions including the provision of language and literacy courses. These courses were made available through federal government funding and expertise made available through an adult language and literacy agency (see Marta's story in Chapter Nine).

Following the 1992 NSW Royal Commission of Inquiry into the Building and Construction Industry, Phaedrus quickly adopted a new company *Code of Conduct*. This has influenced training initiatives and brought about the introduction of the "Due Diligence" training program, which also focusses on partnering arrangements with subcontractors. Due Diligence training was initiated in head office on the advice of the Heydigger legal officer and is filtering down to site level. It aims to ensure that arrangements between contractors and subcontractors comply with the strict probity requirements now sought in the industry as a consequence of recommendations made by the Royal Commission.

The Federal Government Training Guarantee Levy (prior to its suspension) was considered to have had little or no impact on Phaedrus because the company's expenditure on training exceeds legislative requirements. However, construction managers perceive the levy as having influenced smaller subcontractors. Almost everyone interviewed stated that the requirements of the levy resulted in subcontractors allowing workers to attend the training programs offered by Phaedrus. They believed that without the formal pressure of the levy, subcontractors would not allow workers to participate in training. If this is correct, the levy was not the "impediment" to industry training popularly conveyed by business leaders seeking the removal of "yet another" level of government intervention. The effects of the suspension of the levy upon participation rates in training would make for a worthy research project. It appears that the rhetoric which prizes industry training is not matched by a corresponding rhetoric about who should pay for it.

8.4 Some impediments to training

Chapters Six and Seven argue that trainers' informal learning is influenced by various barriers or impediments affecting their roles — such as "who pays", "in whose time" and "who owns the trainer". These barriers are further refined here, in five dominant categories: the culture of subcontracting; the project's timescale; occupational demarcations; the (lack of) formal accreditation of training; and costs. These categories do not capture all major impediments and are not mutually exclusive, but they were strongly recurring themes at this site. I am not seeking here to prove the validity of the categories and related theoretical propositions, but to offer a description and analysis of training in a complex, contemporary corporate situation.

The Culture of Subcontracting: Phaedrus's reliance on subcontracting arrangements presents a significant hurdle to training, particularly that aimed at multi-skilling.

Subcontractors are wary of sharing their specialised skills and knowledge with others. As one points out:

> With Phaedrus managing the project, if we teach them [Phaedrus workers] our skills, who is to say they will continue to need us ... our livelihood is on the line in this.

Large-scale subcontracting operations also produce a high turnover of personnel at the site. This also mitigates against systematic or formal training.

Project Timescale: Construction timetables are very tight and this creates pressures of compliance on training. A site foreman says that there is little time to plan and develop "fancy training activities." Anti-intellectual attitudes reflected by such comments are one feasible explanation for construction workers reporting feeling uncomfortable about asking to attend training modules. They are always aware of the pressures caused by taking time out from production. Foremen, conscious of time pressures, openly admit to making it difficult for workers to attend some training activities. As one put it:

> There is absolutely no fat in this job; our timelines and budgets are tight. To win any big construction project these days you have to push things to their limit. This is a very high profile job and is therefore affected by the nature of the relationship between Phaedrus and the client [NSW Public Works Department].

That is, the pressures of time, budget and public scrutiny have a direct impact on training. Although it is regarded as important, training is not viewed by management to be at the forefront of the project's priorities. Financial pressures on subcontractors add to this perception, with many subcontractors expressing the need to "attend to bottom lines". This perceived need results in training decisions being deferred.

Overall, in the context of a large and pressured construction project, training decisions are vulnerable to perceptions of managers that time is too valuable to be devoted to off-the-job activities.

Demarcations: In the past, demarcation problems have acted against systematic, career-focussed training in the construction industry by restricting the experience and training permitted to individuals. Construction workers have been reluctant to undertake any training for tasks outside their immediate responsibilities. Demarcation problems are less evident at the Olympics site than they would have been in the past, but traditional boundaries between certified trades (for example,

electricians, plumbers and gasfitters) still exist. This excludes construction workers from training in areas which require a trade certificate to practise. Being competent or proving competence is not enough, as certification, legal, insurance and safety concerns override the desires of construction workers to learn about plumbing, gasfitting and electrical construction.

More complex and historically rooted demarcations also exist between construction workers and engineers. This historic division of labour represents a continued pattern of polarisation within the workplace, reflected by the payment of overtime money to construction workers whilst project managers (frequently working 60 to 70 hours per week) are not paid overtime allowances. Most engineers I spoke to were reluctant to discuss this matter openly. But those who were willing to speak expressed resentment about this difference in payments to occupational categories. This issue of who gets paid overtime is also suggestive of a diminution of the occupational power and privileged status of expert professionals.

With the removal of work demarcations there has been a corresponding dispersion of "knowledge", with the dispersion controlled by upper management echelons. Strict boundaries of occupational difference are beginning to dissolve. In industrial society, occupational designations traditionally referred to a relationship to the material means of production. With the increasing importance of discursive (including knowledge) means of production, occupational distinctiveness in a large corporate workplace no longer matters. Casey argues that "occupational designation still points to a body of skills and knowledges, but even professional occupations can no longer guarantee an exclusive claim to an expert body of knowledge" (1995: 108).

The issue of "dissolving occupational boundaries" influences the entire culture and atmosphere of a site. Direct labour in particular were disgruntled about what this might lead to. One construction worker gave voice to this sense of unease:

> We believed in multi-skilling and the removal of demarcations, we still do. But the union power has been broken. It feels like the big bosses have won what they wanted... Things have reached a new stage ... it seems so hard to find the middle ground. As the bosses now have the upper hand, maybe they just look at the dollars and cents. It never used to be like that; they used to be interested in the progress and welfare of the company workers. Or at least it seemed they were.

Findings at this site mirror Casey's in the Hephaestus corporation, where:

> replacing occupation as a primary locus of class and self-identification in the corporate workplace is team and knowledge. The breaking down of traditional occupational and professional boundaries effects the dissolution of the bonds of social cohesion that their statuses and collegiality provided. For the corporation it enables the dispersion of certain (not all) knowledge and expertise among many people, and the capacity to tap the resources of its employees more deeply. (1995: 108)

This dispersion and tapping of human resources appears to enable the creation of teams in which people share their knowledge and skills, and work co-operatively, but as Casey points out "such sociality in post-occupational corporate teamwork is not natural within the over-riding corporate structure" (1995: 108). Discursive and disciplinary practices of the corporation engender a social cohesion necessary for the most efficient construction. The simulated corporate family, built on the removal of occupational demarcations, displaces identification with occupational groups (even though some demarcations still exist between employees belonging to different unions). It attempts to replace occupational identification with a new belonging — a belonging to the corporation. A feature of this discourse of construction is access to and accreditation of training.

Accreditation: Phaedrus does not formally accredit training. The company had planned to seek accreditation from the NSW Vocational Education and Training Accreditation Board (VETAB) for courses addressing needs identified by the skills matrix, but this has not been pursued because Phaedrus's senior management wants company training internally accredited. They argue that internal accreditation offers workers a useful guide for career progression within Phaedrus and in the industry-wide context. Construction workers interviewed were, however, less convinced about industry-wide validity, foreseeing transferability problems if the Phaedrus competencies do not directly link to NBCITC (industry approved) standards. Further problems relate to the nature of the competency-based skills matrix system. A subcontracting manager describes its limitations:

> The skills matrix is a start; it needs review of course. I don't like all the ticking of boxes, but there are important elements of learning which can happen through practical means. Some things do require ticking boxes, but the overall approach needs to be more interactive, more total.

Several managers and union delegates viewed the lack of direct correlation between Phaedrus and NBCITC skills matrices as a barrier to the recognition of some informal site-specific learning. One manager cited the case of a construction worker who is doing some marketing and liaison work and thus developing skills not identified in the NBCITC skills matrix:

> He gets comments all the time to the effect that he will need to get back on the tools to have his skills recognised. Such comments come to him from other workers and he therefore expresses feelings that the development of skills [beyond those specified in the skills matrices] may have negative career implications.

The Industrial Commission has never formally endorsed the competency descriptions for construction workers for inclusion in the Federal Award. This impinges directly on this issue of skill recognition, and subsequently career paths for Phaedrus employees.

At this stage, competency-based standards for construction workers have only been developed to level 5 in both NBCITC and Phaedrus frameworks, although Phaedrus plans to extend the standards to construction worker level 9. Once this has been done, new in-house training programs will have to be developed carrying the potential to further dissolve occupational boundaries. (Effects on the trainers of competency-based training at the Olympics site are examined further in Chapters Nine and Ten).

Costs: In contemporary training jargon, the relationship between training *inputs* and *outputs* has not been formally evaluated by Phaedrus.[4] Management and trainers cite a number of reasons for this, including an absence of formal evaluations, a lack of monitoring of training outcomes and an ad hoc approach to developing training structures, exemplified by implicit "rules" about who can attend training and release time from construction activities. Some training programs are evaluated, but irregularly or unsystematically, and no one from management has had direct responsibility for training at the site. Also, the culture of informality maintains the power of key foremen and line managers over training decision-making.

There is little opposition to managerial power over training because, as one construction worker put it, "making training too systematic might make it

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[4] Notwithstanding the relatively ad hoc approach to training, the Project Manager (training) estimates that Phaedrus spends 4% of payroll on "structured" training, although a breakdown of figures into internal training and external training was not available.

regimented." There may also be a degree of complicity between management and unions at the site in maintaining informal decision-making processes about training — it suits key powerbrokers, and workers fear undesirable consequences of a more regimented approach.

Specific, measurable benefits of training are also largely judged informally at the site, through word of mouth. This is exemplified in the local debate about the worth of the "tickets" workers receive on completing skills modules. Some construction workers are very pleased to obtain these tickets, but others are highly critical of a training system that allows the accumulation of tickets without workers having to apply their new skills on the job. Virtually all those interviewed considered an important outcome of training to be direct improvements in performance on the job. It is not, however, always possible for "experiential opportunities" to coincide with the immediate jobs of those doing formal training programs.

Both managers and construction workers perceive that the single most significant training outcome is the continuing level of industrial harmony at the site. As this phase of the overall Olympics project rapidly approaches completion, no days have been lost to industrial disputes. This fact is referred to with pride by management and unions, who place it within a history of adversarial relations in the industry. To this end, the company and unions appear committed to a learning path characterised by unprecedented co-operation.

On the other hand, this path continues a process of reification: the reification of the myths of empowered, self-directed teams who are advancing their own and, at the same time, corporate interests. Company reports about the enterprise training effort note improvements in its safety records and new opportunities for construction workers to broaden their skills and to have these skills formally recognised. In the most recently negotiated enterprise deal, wage rises are tied to the skills matrix. This further accentuates the link between industrial relations and training in the construction industry.

Managers also cite the cultural move towards the "learning enterprise". One example of this is the recording of employee skills and training needs in individual "skills passports". Information in the passports is entered into a computer database and will be used to establish a list of identified skills. Through this, Phaedrus plan to link skills assessments and performance appraisals with learning opportunities on the job. But the information could just as easily be used as an information base for any future retrenchment decisions. The maintenance of data on workers thus contains

contestable terrain — but it is not being contested. The terrain is packaged and presented to workers as integral to their own future careers!

Such changes in work organisation have resulted in a greater emphasis on the need for communication skills on the site, and training promotes personal communication, customer/client liaison, negotiation, mentoring and coaching skills. According to an influential union delegate, these activities contibute to "the development of a culture of greater co-operation with co-operative attitudes." Ironically (from a conventional trade union perspective), this has lead to a 35% reduction in staffing levels in site support and materials handling directly attributable to the new culture.

8.5 Contextual influences on the trainers

The formal training opportunities at the Olympics site, as several construction workers pointed out, "never in this industry existed before". Some of the training initiatives undertaken by trainers at this Phaedrus site can be viewed, in an historical sense, as groundbreaking. One manager stated (confirmed by two union officials) that:

> A few years ago, before the Royal Commission into the Construction Industry, you would not have even had a report to write about formal training at the site, as, with the exception of apprentices serving their time, nothing was happening... I hope you acknowledge the developmental stage of training in this industry.

I do acknowledge it, as I acknowledge key discourses of construction which are shaping that development. Discourses include the corporate effects of team and partnership arrangements, indicators of some dissolution of occupational and trades solidarity, TQM, OHS, competency-based standards and costs.

Although many of the outcomes of training at the Olympics site have not been formally analysed, site personnel refer to such benefits as improved safety records, opportunities for workers to expand their skills, reduced industrial disputation and the development of stronger links between the principal contractor and subcontractors. These manifestations of the new culture are also reinforced by construction workers constantly referring to the old culture, the old values and

industry "legends".[5] Indeed, the construction industry has had a decidedly chequered history in relation to managing change, industrial relations and training.

Initiatives taken at the Olympics site are viewed by management and workers as being a tentative (but useful) beginning to expanding the company's skill base and, in turn, career paths. They acknowledge that much work is still to be done to link the company's skills matrix to the National Industry matrix to obtain formal recognition and accreditation of skills. This issue remains largely unresolved, with internal accreditation at present dominant.

Some managers and trade union officials view as critical to the future of training within the industry that the Industrial Commission recognise the National Competency descriptions (NBCITC approved standards) for construction workers for inclusion in the federal award. Without inclusion in the award, both assert that training may become marginalised and fragmented within enterprises. Phaedrus, however, has indicated that it will not wait for a potential Industrial Commission decision. It has emphasised the company's own skills framework and training program in its enterprise bargaining and industrial relations processes.

Other key influences on training at the site include the boom-bust nature of the construction industry, the history of adversarial relations between management and unions, the reliance on subcontractors to perform much of the construction work, high proportions of workers from non-English speaking backgrounds, tight timetabling, budgeting, and careful scrutiny of the job by the Department of Public Works.

This nexus of issues shows the contradictions inherent in describing and theorising about the links between work organisation and the informal learning of the site trainers. Macro-political influences shape experience at the site and, at the same time, learning at the local level is also shaped by individuals. As Bertrand Russell puts it:

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5   The term "legends" is commonly used at construction sites to refer to characters of notoriety. Such characters are known in the industry for having performed 'larger than life' deeds, acts of courage, 'against the odds' opposition to directives or management practices, stunts or having exceptional knowledge of building practices. Both construction workers and managers expressed a sense of mourning for the loss of the many legends who are disappearing from the industry. The reality appears to include redundancy packages and retrenchments.

there is here a reciprocal causation: the circumstances of men's [sic] lives do much to determine their philosophy, but, conversely, their philosophy does much to determine their circumstances. (1946; 1995: 14)

The conflict and domination of local level micro-politics and the economic and political interests at the macro-level are not abstract conceptions, but rather grounded conceptions of meaning. They affect the informal learning of individuals in the terrain of everyday work, highlighting the interconnections of personal experience with organisational structures and social forces. As such, they do not privilege individual agency. Rather, as Connell (1985) puts it, such insights "serve to maintain the elements of choice, doubt, strategy, planning, error, transformation, that are the stuff of practical politics and ideological struggle" (cited in Ball 1987: 279).

The everyday roles of industry trainers have been shown to be enmeshed with power relations. Experience in the construction industry is not consensual, but related to workplace struggles — ideologically, materially and in relation to self-concepts. It is not just careers, money, resources, status and influence that are at stake in the new partnerships, networks and conflicts. The interests of trainers and construction workers relate, amongst other things, to job security, career opportunities, industrial relations, work conditions and the nature of the learning. But as Foucault points out, what is learned is attached to "the ensemble of rules according to which the true and the false are separated and specific effects of power attached to the truth" (1972: 132). Analysis can help "detach the power of truth from the forms of hegemony within which it operates" (Foucault 1972: 133).

The discourses of construction, validated and legitimated through numerous documents, studies and industry norms, have taken on the cloak of "truth" in popular thought and are reflected in popular media. In relation to this industry project, popular thought encompasses, amongst other things, the validity of architectural and engineering judgments, competency-based standards as facts, "imperatives" about the Olympic Games construction timetable, and the "unfair" costs to business of some training expenses. As Cohen puts it, "the Olympic Games have been roped in as the unanswerable argument for [a plethora of projects] including wage restraint and overlooking possible environmental damage in building the Olympics complex" (in The Australian, December 13 1993: 13). Indeed, popular media consistently presents as a "spectre" the possibility of trade union interruption of the Olympics' building time-table and subsequent public celebration.

CHAPTER NINE

The Subtle Power of Informal Learning

Experience and education cannot be directly equated to each other. Any experience is mis-educative that has the effect of arresting or distorting the growth of further experience. An experience may be such as to engender callousness; it may produce lack of sensitivity and of responsiveness... But there is another aspect of the matter. Experience does not go on simply inside a person. It does go on there, for it influences the formation of attitudes of desire and purpose. But this is not the whole story. Every genuine experience has an active side which changes in some degree the objective conditions under which experiences are had... When this fact is ignored, experience is treated as if it were something which goes on exclusively inside an individual's body and mind. It ought not to be necessary to say that experience does not occur in a vacuum.

(Dewey 1938: 39–40)

That learning does not go on "simply inside a person" is manifest in the new Phaedrus corporate culture. Its flattened management hierarchy and semi-autonomous, self-directing teams encourage speaking up and contributing. But employees have to learn the difference between acceptable and unacceptable contributions. There is a subtle power which governs the new corporate discourse of "participation". There is a subtle power to informal learning.

This chapter addresses informal learning through the transcribed stories of the two principal industry trainers at Sydney's Olympic Games construction site.[6] By their very nature, transcriptions are selective. Each of the key questions is far from fully

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6 Briefly recapitulating from Chapter Five, the transcription, for consistency and clarity, uses *italics* whenever the speaker is emphasising a point (i.e. italics in the transcripts indicates the speaker's own emphasis) and **bold** indicates points that I wish to draw to the reader's attention for analytical purposes. In the transcripts, bolded ***and*** italicised indicates the analytic point coincides with the speakers' emphasis.

resolved.[7] The goal of this chapter is to obtain insights into the informal learning of David and Marta.

This project's interpretive perspective shows the impact of their professional roles on their informal learning. The subtle and at times stressful influences of work-power on employees' behaviour inculcate desired corporate characteristics. Properly acculturated and trained employees should, for instance, know automatically the differences between welcome speaking up and "troublemaking speaking out" (Casey 1995: 141).

In promoting this sense of "knowing", the trainers form a part of the site's unstated governance, although they did not entirely agree with this aspect of my analysis on reading an earlier draft of this chapter. (They disagreed with *the level of governance*, feeling it to be less pervasive, but never denying its existence.) My perspective and approach thus depart from a "strictly" interpretive position, as critical and postmodern perspectives are deployed to explore more fully the trainers' "own" stories. For instance, their standpoints on site "governance" are partly attributed to their adoption and internalisation of some of the values and practices of the new culture. In many respects they were identifying with the corporation — their corporate survival, in part, depended on such identification.

Intentionality in learning, the skills trainers require to balance competing interests such as industry demands and educational ideals, and the emotions generated in day-to-day interactions underlie each theme for analysis. The themes are primarily based upon the pre-eminent concerns and strongly expressed feelings of the trainers and include:

- management and industrial relations: the training "chip";
- public face/private thoughts: personal adaptations at work;
- networks, peers and mentors;
- recognition and feedback;
- the pendulum swings: industry demands, educational goals.

These categories cannot fully account for what is encompassed by a term such as "informal learning", but they reflect interactions at the site between the trainer's

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7   The six interrelated questions (identified in Chapters One and Five) central to the transcript analysis, are: 1.What does the informal learning of the trainers at the Sydney Olympic games construction site encompass? 2. What does 'informal learning' mean to trainers? 3. What is particularly important to them about it? 4. What shapes or impacts upon it? 5. Do the trainers shape it themselves? 6. If they do, how?

"self" and "others". To emphasise gender-related issues affecting learning, I have presented separately the stories of Marta and David although their site-based experiences were very closely intertwined.

9.1 Management and industrial relations: the training "chip"

This section considers three interrelated questions: how do trainers distinguish the rhetoric of the Heydigger Corporation "learning philosophy" from its practical implications? How does their experience of applying this philosophy at a major construction site affect their own informal learning? How does the management of the site's training function impact upon the trainers' learning? These questions entail a critical recurring theme — the covert link between training "opportunities" and industrial relations negotiations. In this linkage, the philosophy of the corporation and the management and implementation of training are inseparable, and emerge from the industry's volatile industrial relations history. Training is now, as David put it, one of the industry's industrial relations "bargaining chips".

Establishment of a site-based training program followed discussions and negotiations between the trainers, union delegates and site management. These discussions, suggested Marta and David, exposed them from the outset to the power-based nature of work relationships. Positioning themselves, their professional roles and training practices, within the hierarchies of power was, as this chapter argues, central to their informal learning and an outcome of it.

The Heydigger philosophy calls for economic and political democracy in its workforce. Dusseldorp, a proponent of the Heydigger philosophy, describes it this way:

> participation by the 'doers', in decision on the ground rules of work will be as beneficial as it will be unavoidable ... more equitable sharing of the wealth created in the enterprise will form the apex of the reforms... Heydigger has been my practice ground for testing many initiatives directed at developing economic democracy at the company level ... and the objective of furthering skill formation, a subject that goes to the heart of economic democracy. (1991: 1)

David and Marta's role comprises precisely this final objective of "furthering skill formation", together with the search for practical ideas for training. But experience at the site suggests gulfs exist between the rhetoric and the realities of establishing

and then implementing training activities. With tight time-frames, tight budgets, and intense scrutiny from the builder — the NSW Government's Public Works Department — management did not view training as a particularly high priority. Training was viewed as useful for keeping industrial peace, helpful to some individuals, but *not essential* to the actual construction.

In addition, some age-old cultural practices of the construction industry still applied. For example foremen, middle-managers and influential union organisers tended to dominate the so-called workplace democracy. (Though many at the site said it was not as bad as it had been.) Indeed, why should these power-brokers change when workplace reforms, including training which purports to empower workers, may result in their own loss of status, some allowances, and in the event of economic downturn, possible redundancy? For them, these are powerful arguments to resist change. Part of David and Marta's role is to overcome this resistance.

9.1.1 David's account

David: Learning now has to be woven so much into the production process that they [the workers] often won't even realise that they are learning. It took me a while to really learn about the **primacy of production**. Production is number one. That has to happen at all costs. No matter how important the training or learning is, it mustn't get in the way of that. If you [trainers] do get in the way or interfere, you cause organisational problems and I mean *problems between people*.

JG: You learned that on the site?

D: Yes. I really didn't know beforehand. You just have to experience it to know how important that is.

JG: Did you ever have the sense that training and your role was getting in the way of production?

D: Oh yes!

JG: How was that made apparent to you?

D: They don't beat around the bush in this industry. You hear quickly and explicitly from a foreman, or even from the construction workers involved. They

say things like "I shouldn't really be here ... I'm going to get my arse kicked for this."

JG: How did you feel about this?

D: At the time, I had my own goals to push, and I was pushing site goals too — you know, the performance indicators the site had for training. The training program could have been done in another way — a more co-operative way that didn't effect production as badly. But the problem with doing it less visibly is that it is not obviously learning or training. It is like action-learning that we are really now moving towards.

JG: You have mentioned a number of times the importance of production and there was a period where you felt you, and the training role, were a little bit "in the way". It sounds as though there were some barriers you had to break through to be accepted as a trainer at the construction site?

D: Yes, it was a bit uphill. But trying to get what we did at the Olympics site on other sites is absolutely impossible. You can't recreate it because subsequent jobs do not have comparable budgets. It has to be more *integrated and invisible* now.

JG: Invisible? Do you mean that the learning effort and the role of the trainer had to become less visible, less obvious?

D: Yes. Invisible and integrated ... a part of the culture of the site. It's like a Catch-22 situation in some ways, as trainers need to be visible and have their offerings noticed, but at the same time be invisible.

"Invisibility" is, in part, a game of disguising power and power relations. The game works because the players involved believe they are engaged in meaningful actions — the actual construction of the Olympic Games venues. The material construction itself is visible. The actions required to build it are considered by the players as transcending a mere power-game of making training "invisible and integrated". Yet the discursive practices of the site do represent complex power plays that establish, as David says, "the primacy of production". What he learned through Phaedrus's communicational practices was that, "no matter how important the training or learning is, it mustn't get in the way of production." This affected David's informal

learning because training had always been very important to him, but was now relegated to an industrial relations bargaining chip.

D: You can't look at learning or productivity without understanding what is going on around it. Skill development has become the bargaining chip in industrial relations negotiations. I'm between a rock and a hard place in this. For example, the union is asking the company for a site allowance plus a 10% pay rise. Phaedrus are saying, "no way, but we'll give you more education and training." It feels like it's slipping to the old ways. Management is saying one thing — "go to the next step in your training and learning plans" — but I can't. *I can't even set foot on the next construction site because no one will pay me.* Company structures are an impediment. The cost recovery thing is hugely problematic for the nature of my work.

"The cost recovery thing" means that for any training activity, including initial consultations and concept development time, the trainer's time (and overheads) have to be accounted for financially. This training framework brings with it an emphasis on financial measurement in which training philosophy is determined by the nature of its financial accountability. Trainers' performance is monitored by a financial graph published in-house. According to David this subverts the educational goals of training. It also effected a structural adjustment in the approach to training, as before it had been a corporate overhead with a justification couched in terms of its "intrinsic worth" to the corporation and its employees.

D: Through my training role I have been able to get to know virtually everyone in the company. One thing I have learned is that you can't treat learning separately from the culture and the politics. It's all interwoven together. You can probably remove a fair bit of the actual product from that — the actual building of the construction. But that too is affected by the culture and politics of the organisation. It will continue to be built pretty well regardless. But the development of the company is tied up with these complex issues and power plays.

David's informal learning was affected by the workplace culture and politics as, by his own admission, the interests of the company were intimately tied to his own. For example, David visited the site from Head Office where career aspirations and abilities to serve the corporate philosophy are emphasised. But interpreting and implementing the philosophy at site level was sometimes problematic for the trainers. Head Office expectations and rhetoric were sometimes juxtaposed to site-

based realities. Implementation does not "simply" mean the promotion of skill-formation opportunities and clearer career pathways for workers. Training, with its close connection to corporate culture and management/industrial relations politics, has also developed a role in corporate imaging.

Training opportunities can at once provide both the chimera of career pathways, and the materialisation of skill-formation activities to progress. But progression within Phaedrus — once a major employer of direct labour — was becoming increasingly difficult due to its own employee reduction program and turn towards project management as distinct from project building (see Chapter Eight). The image of Phaedrus that training helps promote is therefore pertinent to the corporation, because for most workers, Phaedrus cannot deliver the promised career paths. Those who "make it" in the new Phaedrus need to demonstrate corporate traits, attitudes and behaviour. David and Marta are, for instance, expected to train workers and indeed model the desired values of co-operation, teamwork and "appropriate" assertiveness. The relative industrial harmony prevalent is to an extent predicated upon the new flexible structures which require team participation and technical and communication skills such as map reading, writing and speaking up appropriately. Ascertaining the appropriate level of assertiveness may carry some risks, as is exemplified in Marta's account.

9.1.2 Marta's account

For Marta, one of the three female professionals at a site with a workforce of 400 men, becoming "invisible" was never an option. Her professional contribution as a trainer however, did face the potential of *being made* "invisible". Her experience of the work culture and the hierarchies differed in several respects to David's. But it was also much affected by what she terms "power bases" in the workplace. In the exercise of power, site managers would clearly state the principal aims of the project: to build the games project on or ahead of time, on or below budget, and to the satisfaction of the client. For unionists, the exercise of power was, in part, about maintaining a voice in the decision-making process and protecting members' interests — although against a backdrop of large-scale redundancies, dwindling union membership and diminishing influence, the exercise of union power at the Olympics site has been largely symbolic. Diminishing union influence had implications for Marta's informal learning:

Marta: I now believe one of the really important things for a trainer to do is work out where are the power bases in the workplace; like who are the informal leaders, who are the people that can get things done for you — how power works in an

organisation. I was not only theoretically predisposed to this, it was through my own experience.

JG: Can you clarify for me how you did experience this?

M: Going back to my last job — it related to intellectual property. I did a lot of work on something — something I devised which became popular. Suddenly I wasn't the author but other names appeared on it. There were political games.

JG: Did that happen in any way at the Olympics site?

M: No. But *power is very important*. For example, when I started, I thought David was my power base on the site. The reality was that the Construction Project Manager was a key power broker. Working that out didn't take long — but it was important. Power is segmented. Some workers with tremendous technical skills have power and influence, but this is not necessarily manoeuvrable.

By "not necessarily manoeuvrable" Marta is referring to an implicit politics of power. Even for those construction workers who possess prized technical skills, a fine line exists between exercising influence within their own sphere of competence and speaking up on broader site and industrial issues. Marta's constant internal negotiation between self and workplace culture illustrates the subtle power affecting her informal learning. One manifest outcome of this negotiation is the attempt at a surface appearance of alignment between the employee and the traits the corporation deems desirable and useful. In Marta's words "gaining credibility" was important to her; it was also "a big personal achievement". But to gain this credibility she first had to learn, as the following dialogue reveals, that "production was all important, and that training was valued in the rhetoric, but not necessarily in practice". To gain credibility she had to prove that she was "useful".

Usefulness implies not only the possession of technical knowledge and skills, but as Edwards argues, the "real use value of knowledge is tied in increasingly complex ways to optimising the efficiency of the 'system'" (1994: 167). In the postmodern condition, optimising the efficiency of "the system", includes producing the image of an appropriate fit between the worker and work culture, particularly on a high-profile site such as the Olympics. Some of the effects of this link between "really useful knowledge" and image were particularly pertinent for Marta:

JG: Do you think the company might have used you and your role for its own imaging purposes?

M: If they did, I don't think it was exploitative. There was an agenda there: "how can we [the company] demonstrate that we are a 'learning organisation'?" But this was an agenda that I was not unhappy to play along with. I felt, in terms of language and literacy, I had a limited impact. But there were changes in other ways.

JG: Can you tell me a little more about those changes?

M: I was organised enough to know that I was being used by the company for image reasons — to have a professional female at the site promoting a "learning organisation" — but I did not feel exploited. I didn't mind; I just knew it was happening... Anyway, I feel that the discourse precedes the change. Many have said the learning organisation and training of staff is given "lip-service", but then what happens is people realise they need to make it work, or that *"lip-service" simply looks ridiculous*. Gaining credibility, in what was for me a fairly alien culture, was a big personal achievement. But I feel as though I could have done more, technically and professionally, but training was not particularly highly valued at the site. *Production was all important*. Training was valued in the rhetoric, but not in practice.

JG: Can you clarify what *you* mean by this?

M: Sometimes workers in industry see the skills of educators as too invisible — you can't see their product. Construction workers, for example, will say — "we have built this and as such it represents our skills, but we can't actually *see* what educators *do*." What counts is intimately connected to what society values and how that is translated through the system you are working in. It is also about *what is visible* — seen and valued.

Marta's comment — "I feel that the discourse precedes the change" — partly reflected her theory about training needing to focus on language and communication practices as a commencement point for change. For instance, her experience of workers telling her "the learning organisation and training of staff is given lip-service", has translated to the observation that "then what happens is people realise they need to make it work, or that 'lip-service' simply looks ridiculous". Nonetheless, what is "seen and valued" can vary considerably when one looks more

deeply into public comments and compares them with private thoughts. "Invisibility", for example, was a recurring metaphor in Marta's story. Together, Marta and I probed what this means to her. She defined success beyond the traditional financial and directly observable achievement-oriented "performance indicators". Her personal definitions related to the alignment of her inner beliefs, values and standards of ethics with her learning and competence in the role. This is not unusual for successful women in organisation development roles, argues Kaplan:

> what the popular literature does not address are the multi-layered aspects of success within the context of a field in which successful women — socialised not to brag or compete with men — admit to difficulties identifying and giving themselves credit for their contributions. In addition they have ambivalent feelings about getting recognition for their work. (1995: 68)

Marta believed her contribution to the construction site was through relationships, through the support she could offer colleagues and the service she provided to those who needed language, literacy and computing skills. What is being argued is that there is a range of modes for "being visible", and a range of dimensions to "being useful" in construction contexts. That Marta may be comfortable with a "support role" played out behind the scenes does not make it less useful or less valuable. What should be at the forefront is not so much the trainer, but one-dimensional views of what is important and what constitutes "really useful knowledge". It is the symbolic and communicational patterns within Phaedrus which marginalise Marta's type of contribution, bringing into question the discursive practices of the corporation and personal adaptations to them.

9.2 Public face/private thoughts: personal adaptations at work

Personal adaptations and resistance to the discursive practices of the corporation are present in informal learning in some form at all times. Some of these adaptations are characterised by discrepancies between public behaviour and private thoughts. Identification with and internalisation of the corporate culture is always incomplete. Internal processes of resistance, not generally observable, remain a critical part of the trainers' response.

Personal adaptations to the requirements of construction site-culture included a range of strategies for self-survival: both outward expression and internalisation of

Phaedrus' values related to a flexible no-demarcation, team and "partnering" environment.

9.2.1 Marta

Marta: I've learned [about] the workplace culture here. This is quite different to what I've been used to. I have had to work out how this fits with my own way of working — power-bases, formal and informal. In other words hierarchies are not always clear. I have had to fit in with ways that I was not used to. Learning is adaptation. If you don't adapt to what is around you, what will you do?

Not to be accepted would make the position untenable. But the processes of adaptation are riddled with conflict, intra and interpersonal influences, autobiographical influences, local level politics and gender issues. The distinction between public and private thinking and behaviour is not so "distinct".

M: My values had to adapt. **Gender issues, racism issues** ... things that might have been important to me... I had to develop a detached position in relation to these... Why I was there was not to impose my value system on that place.

JG: Detached? Did that cause you any angst, frustration?

M: I think I was compromised a bit in what I believe. But part of being a professional trainer is that you learn to separate your own values from those you are working with. You have to have a public face and private thoughts that can be quite different. I would say that over time the things I believed in came to the fore.

JG: Could you give an example of that?

M: I brought in a "Nelson Mandela cake" one day. I was making a statement against racism, although people may not have known what I had thought on this earlier. Also before I came here I had been working with women for many years. I have fairly radical ideas on gender equality I have values and opinions which would be threatening to many men on the site. I am a strong feminist and many of the blokes here would see that as threatening. I've never said anything about that here. It is a question of professional distance.

For Marta, the Nelson Mandela cake was a form of symbolic resistance to some of the workplace practices she opposed. The cake was shared with site managers in

their shed. She viewed direct opposition or confrontation to be quite difficult and perhaps counterproductive. Celebrating symbolically the achievements of Mandela was intended to generate questions about unacceptable workplace practices, but it was also non-threatening, both to herself and the staff who were present. Through it she felt she had made a statement about things which really mattered to her. And she had learnt that this symbolic approach was tolerated by senior personnel.

The "question of professional distance" was also the territory of tensions and dilemmas. Balancing what is important to oneself with what is required at a particular site gives an ethical dimension to informal learning — what ought one to do if one wishes to resist something? Balancing her feminist values with corporate values and cultural practices was an important element of Marta's site-based learning:

M: My feminism is something which doesn't have to be explored in my role. If I was trying to get ahead in the company, that might be very different. I think it would be more of a problem. But I've been able to "skirt" that problem!

JG: So, you've come directly from working virtually exclusively with women [in a previous job] into the construction industry.

M: Yes, it was a shock. It was dramatic.

JG: Could you tell me a little more about that shock?

M: The shock was behavioural. How do you behave here as a woman? When I get up in the morning I wonder what I should wear because I don't want to look like a dag, I don't want to look too sexy, I've got to look professional, but I'm running around a construction site. So, you are constantly finding a line between being a woman in that role; relating to a lot of men that are not used to relating to women and I'm not really used to relating to men because of my background. You have to play certain games for a while. You have to be very careful because you don't know how your behaviour is going to be interpreted. You have to be very careful about how you go about presenting yourself in this context.

JG: Given there are 400 men and three women involved in the actual construction, one could be forgiven for assuming this [gender imbalance] has had an effect on how you would be seeing yourself here.

M: I see myself, in my own terms, as not having been very successful. I don't think that I have achieved the things I could have achieved in terms of range, numbers ... like getting to a greater number of people. Then I began rationalising that one person in a context like this can only do so much... There have also been incidental benefits to the company of me having been here. You can't always predict what the impact of an educator's role will be. I haven't been able to directly impact upon a lot of people here. My role has had indirect effects, simply by me being here. I think having me here represents a changed reality for many of the men. To have a woman on the site who is a language and literacy teacher is new for them. I've been able to be here, get involved with them in a learning capacity without them being threatened by it; without it changing their lives too drastically and without me thinking it might affect them drastically. The role has had pay-offs, not so much in a formal educational sense, but in changing their realities at work.

JG: Has your experience at this site changed your motivation about your professional work; your career aspirations?

M: It has helped me narrow down the choices of things I would and wouldn't like to do. I could never say that I have had a difficult time here. I haven't. I've had frustrations and personal non-satisfaction about what I wanted to achieve, and I've had confusion. But it has not really been difficult. Aspects of it have been personally difficult such as having to deal with racism or gender discrimination which are covert rather than overt. But I was never unhappy. I knew the potential was there for me to be looked upon as a joke; I knew that it would take time. I knew that my success was dependent upon factors outside of my control.

The complexity of feeling in this passage is suggestive of the "philosophic resignation" Sartre (1965) has described. He observed that human beings need to make sense of social life in terms of intimate experience. For Marta, this "resignation" (in defence of her "self") is a passive form of (professional) courage. Although she dislikes the sexist and racist influences that came with such a large construction zone, she says she was "never unhappy" and that "people were incredibly polite". Her role as a trainer was, as she saw it, "in changing their realities at work". This perception represents an internalisation of conflict in the sense that her struggles with the role were also tensions within herself — "I've had frustrations and personal non-satisfaction about what I wanted to achieve, and I've had confusion". But this internalisation of site tensions is an insufficient theorisation of

her experience. For instance, the potential for an accomplished professional to be "looked upon as a joke" is no laughing matter. It is a serious gender issue which David did not face (although he too had major problems in having his professional role accepted as "valid"). The ways Marta dealt with this issue are particularly interesting, briefly recapitulating:

> I don't want to look too sexy, I've got to look professional, but I'm running around a construction site ... a lot of men that are not used to relating to women and I'm not really used to relating to men... You have to play certain games for a while... You have to be very careful about how you go about presenting yourself in this context.

Marta's self-strategy at the construction site resembles an actor ensuring that they have the right costume for the occasion. It would be naive not to realise that the professional women at the site face both overt and covert scrutiny of their clothing and appearance every day. Women in the Australian construction context remain few. Their on-site presence is a novelty; a novelty managed by Marta through careful attention to her presentation of self in everyday work life. In a more conventional interpretive mode, Goffman may have referred to her "arts of impression management" as "a performance" — best understood as a "protective practice" (1959: 208). It was a practice which helped in preserving dignities on both sides, a precondition for her training function at the site. This also carried direct implications for her co-trainer, David.

9.2.2 David

"Success" for David depended on many factors outside his control. David had hired Marta to come and work at the site — a bold move given the gender composition at the site, the unknown reaction of the construction workers and the tenuous status of training there. But in his words he was "always confident that [having a female trainer at the site] would work". The credibility of the training function in the eyes of key power brokers at both Head Office and at the site was more influenced by the move of Heydigger's training unit towards making profit — away from being a corporate overhead. This move directly affected how David felt both about his role and also himself:

JG: From your experience in Heydigger how do you see your own career developing from here?

D: That's a question I've been thinking about a lot lately as I've become a bit tired of being a team of one. There are so many opportunities, but I can't keep going

like this. It's too draining; too scattergun. I need to focus on one company, on one project. At the moment I look at the whole corporation, and it's just too much ... .the structure, the administration and community expectations. There is so much you have to do yourself it removes your focus from your core business. You can become quite mixed up with all the periphery. We all have too much on. It would seem to me that a good career move would be [into] the same sort of function, but with one company — more focussed on skill development for one particular group.

JG: You sound as though you are getting a bit fed-up with it, with the way it [your job] is functioning?

D: It's only the overload. I can see the potential, but can't devote my time to it.

JG: Do you have someone at work you can discuss these things with?

D: Yes, but the problem is that while I have one agenda, the company generally has another. That is to spread our time across all of the companies. Let me put this in context. The Heydigger training unit was last year setup to be a cost recovery, or profit-generating company (as opposed to a corporate overhead). But you spend a lot of your time having to convince people about the sort of money that is required to simply recover costs. A lot of what we are finding is that about 60% of our time is spent on productive work and 40% on marketing and administration. What this does is force the hourly rate up to $150 to $200 per hour just to recover costs. To my way of thinking we are not adding as much value to the corporation compared to being a corporate overhead. The move towards profit making for Heydigger's Training Unit has been a significant philosophical shift in the past year. Perhaps it can still work.

JG: How do you feel about that change in philosophy?

D: I think it could be okay, but the way it is happening makes it difficult. Our time needs to be much more focussed. We have agreed to continue with our experiment until the end of the financial year. We know we are not going to make our financial targets for the year, but the Chief Executive Officer is not too concerned about this.

At the heart of personal adaptations to the requirements of the site is the issue of values. For example, the values that determine the relative status given to jobs

appears to influence the actual satisfaction the trainers felt. Sennett and Cobb argue that "the meanings a person makes and receives about what he or she does, centre on this same issue of the social production of value" (1993: 267). For the trainers, it is believing that their work is a socially valuable activity — assisting workers to enhance their skills, language abilities, to work in teams and with the material acts of construction. Positioning training as a for-profit operation, as distinct from corporate skill-enhancement function, most certainly had a direct impact on David's own sense of purpose and his values base. Essentially he complied with Heydigger, but this compliance left its mark in the form of hidden anger:

JG: Can you comment on how your personal values have affected the way you have experienced and learned from your job in Heydigger? A good way of teasing this one out is by focussing on a dilemma you have experienced where the company has wanted you to do something which you might have strongly disagreed with.

D: My own philosophy on learning is that one can learn almost anything if the need is strong enough. I haven't, as a consequence, put my hand up for any formal training of late. My motivation hasn't been there. It's like where someone is coerced into a learning environment when they haven't wanted to be there. It just doesn't work.

JG: Have you been coerced into something lately?

D: Yes. It's not that I'm against doing formal training of course, but I was required to go in for a two-day 'information dump'. It wasn't a waste of time for me, but I was strongly annoyed at having to do it in the first place. It was two days gone which I cannot recoup. The anger in me has now gone somewhere else. I'll be saying no to formal training programs that I'm thrust into in future.

JG: You still sound slightly angry actually.

D: I am. It's the pressures on my time. There are not simply two days which can be plucked out of a week. Something has to give. Even my relationship with my wife has suffered of late. I'd say this happens to a lot of people. Group norms are a real problem in this company — working long hours and weekends.

Working long hours and weekends, up to 60 or 70 hours per week, was cited in Chapter Eight as "fairly typical" within Phaedrus. Many of the workers commenced

at 6.30 or 7 a.m., and continued until well after 5 p.m. Some construction workers were paid overtime allowances; others were not. But being conspicuously dedicated to the job by working long hours was a part of the Phaedrus culture. Being present at work for long hours is not simply highlighting a collapse of industrial conditions. It is highlighting the corporation's hold over the behaviour of staff. It is a hold best described by Foucault as "the panoptic gaze" whereby "multiple, automatic, continuous, hierarchical and anonymous power functions in a network of relations from top to bottom, from bottom to top, as well as laterally, to hold an enterprise together" (1977: 175).

Foucault (1977) used the idea of the Panopticon as a central metaphor for surveillance practices. The panopticon is a prison in which the prisoners would be unable to know if they were being observed, thus requiring them to behave "properly" at all times. Thus, suggests Foucault, such surveillance results in the internalising of control — the imposition of "self-discipline". The panoptic gaze at Phaedrus has created "group norms" of long working hours and "teamwork". As David noted, "group norms are a real problem in this company". If you do not work the long hours you can be accused not so much of letting the corporation down, but the far worse offence of letting down your own team, your own mates. This panoptic gaze is also embodied in language use. For instance, good-humoured comments such as "good afternoon" would greet workers arriving at the site outside the cultural norm — even though it may still be very early and within award requirements. Such "good humour" is really part of a collective (corporate) story that ensures individuals comply with group norms. No doubt diminished job opportunities elsewhere in the industry substantially fuels this cultural practice.

A part of David's adaptation to the panoptic gaze of the site entailed what he describes as his "phantom-like" approach to the role. Becoming a "phantom" at the site connected with the arrangement of work and its concomitant personal and interpersonal tensions. For instance, there was "the cost-recovery thing" (David's words) in relation to his consulting time; there was his sense of not wanting to "get in the way of production" and there was the purposes for which information about workers' competencies were being used:

D: I don't mind having a phantom-like role. Within Phaedrus I'm confident about this now as they are still using me. I don't get the credit for some things I facilitate, and nor should I, because all I might have done is provide the basics — the right people at the right time and the resources for them to use.

JG: Isn't there a skill in selecting the right people at the right time and in knowing the appropriate resources?

D: Oh yes, skill and a system. I have developed a skills database and I guess I can take some credit for that. The system works well. I try to make sure people know about this system. The system recognises their skills and they get paid for it.

JG: It seems ironic that *you* set the system up, but to be rewarded you really need to come from production and make use of the system to have skills noticed. In the meantime, *you* disappear, phantom-like, back into the corporation.

D: Yes, it highlights something which all salaried staff experience. When you negotiate individual salaries you are at a distinct disadvantage unless you are a real key person in the company, such as a key decision maker, or if you happen to hoard a really key skill that no one else has. The same thing happens to managers who are on salary... Who can really tell what the differences between them [managers] — it is very complex. I'm not sure what the impact of the competency-based standards movement will be on this. I'm sceptical, for example, when it came to down-sizing in our company, the Industrial Relations people began the redundancy program in the traditional way — tainted by who likes whom. Now they have much more information to base their decisions on.

JG: Are competency-based standards being used to assist decision-makers about who should be made redundant?

D: Yes. The information they now have — upon which to make decisions about who goes — is much greater than before. The information base for this purpose used to be quite shallow.

Becoming "phantom-like" indicates a self-strategy based on his experience of corporate change, the exercise of power and compliance seeking processes such as salary negotiations — "when you negotiate individual salaries you are at a distinct disadvantage unless you are a real key person in the company" — or down-sizing "now they have much more information to base their decisions on". What David learns informally encompasses an internal dialogue about his location within the corporate change process and about the role he is required to perform in effecting desired corporate changes. There is no finality to the meaning-making which comes from this internal dialogue. But there is an important challenge to the beliefs and

values to which one subscribes. How much do you accommodate, how much do you resist? How much space for resistance is left? How does one go about resisting the panoptic corporate gaze?

Clarifying their own (values) positions in relation to competency-based standards (CBS) is a critical issue facing David and Marta. Indeed this issue faces most trainers in the contemporary Australian workplace context. Competencies *are* being used as data to inform corporations about their redundancy decisions. And this sharpens the need for trainers to clarify their own roles in relation to competency-based standards. Without clarification, too easily can they become naive utensils of corporate change. For instance the assessment of competence can become a double-edged sword; it can cut one (or one's colleagues) out of a job. Marta and David each had much to say on this matter and its implications for their own careers. (See sections 9.5 and 9.6.)

9.3 Networks, peers and mentors

It may appear ironic that the trainers did not consider competency-based standards for themselves to be particularly important. A major reason cited by both David and Marta as to why competency-based standards did not rated highly was that mentors, peers and networks were viewed as **more significant** for their own learning. "Significant others" were perceived as holding transformational learning possibilities that contrasts with competent behaviour.

This section focusses on how each of these terms — networks, peers, mentors — is used by the trainers. From the following vignettes, the position of mentors or peers in the work hierarchy is less important than their abilities to promote trainers' interests, ideas and plans. Devil's advocacy came from surprising sources at the Olympics site. Construction workers employed in the first-aid hut were one such source for both David and Marta (and in due course, myself). But networks are not always reliable. For instance hearsay is shown as very influential in shaping situated or implicit knowledge/information held about work at the site. Dialogue too has a down side: it can create what Boje describes as "a unilateral consensus" (1995: 1029) — a consensus which silences marginalised voices. David was expansive about the effects of hearsay in Phaedrus:

9.3.1 David
JG: How powerful do you think hearsay and informal networks have been in relation to your own learning in this organisation?

D: *Bloody important!* This hasn't changed in the time I've been here. Hearsay and informal networks are extremely influential. For example the other day, the Chief Executive — I can't say exactly what he said — but it related to the importance of immersing yourself in the culture; he mentioned we *might* be heading into China in the near future, and the sorts of changes the company may be heading into. There are dilemmas in shaping your own career — company strategic directions have a big role to play in this.

JG: Are you suggesting that hearsay is partly about trying to tune into executive politics and strategic directions? Is it difficult for you in a company where corporate or commercial secrets and confidentiality are important cultural factors?

D: Yes. Second guessing is commonplace because a lot of what senior executives say is couched in terms like "this could be possible", "this *might* be a future scenario". You have to work out whether they really mean "could be" or "is". I try to cover all my bases to allow for possibilities.

JG: How do you weight your bases? In other words, how do you judge where to put your energies?

D: I don't really know. The network, the powerful hear-say ... it's complex. I've begun to network with the powerful influences in the corporation — both inside and outside, in the community. This is partly a self-preservation thing. But I don't mind this. I'm starting to see that politics are bloody important.

JG: What about your own network. For example have you ever had a mentor from whom you learned?

D: Yes, informally. It was almost a patriarchal advice giving situation, but he never told me everything I needed to know. It provided the spark, the first step to enable me to go from there. I've learned a lot from a few mentors in Heydigger. They've helped me understand the property culture. Understanding the processes of the culture has been really important in this. This has happened without any conscious effort. Where it happens overtly it has negative side effects ... it feels patronising and turns you off. Well-worded comments from the Chairman also have a focussing effect... I think Brad [an immediate but more experienced peer] and I have learned a lot from each other as well.

JG: Can you tell me more about how you and Brad have helped each other in your learning?

D: Brad has been working on workplace reform since the inception of workplace reform. He was on Phaedrus's original concept team. Body and soul, he was the belief set of the organisation about workplace reform. I think he learned from me a degree of scepticism, healthy scepticism I hope. He has very good analytical skills and I have learned from him in this area. We make a good team as we are complementary. We have become very good friends outside of work too. We don't live in each other's pockets though. We can argue things through without losing our friendship. This has been very important to us. Brad and I actually do some of our best work outside of the office; for example when we go somewhere in the car together. I've learned also from Marta. She has a different view, a different outlook on things and this brings a broader perspective.

Networks, peers and mentors have helped David: "understand the processes of the culture ... This has happened without any conscious effort. Where it happens overtly it has negative side-effects ... it feels patronising and turns you off." It is the incorporation of David into the corporate culture which is encompassed by his comments. With the new team focus, learning with and from peers and mentors (although "well-worded comments from the chairman also have a focussing effect") is being encouraged. In this way the corporation is not overtly dominating every facet of what is being learnt. At the same time, those promoting the new "learning organisations" consider cooperative approaches to contain the organic benefits of team-family bonds.

Deep paradoxes can be found within these constructed bonds. For instance, the overt domination of the corporation has shifted into the territory of covert shaping of internal staff relationships, including through mentoring, peer learning procedures, and learning networks. Employees, such as David, who belong to these corporate networks are now giving more of themselves to corporate objectives than before:

D: Events at home, your whole life impacts on what you are doing at work. I go to bed at about 12 and get up at 6 and don't take holidays any more. I don't have time to think about all this much. I've been feeling tired lately. I feel like I'm setting myself up for a disaster.

JG: Disaster? Do you have any space for reflection, where you can think through what is going on? Do you get any time at work to reflect on this?

D: Not at work. I start on the train, it's about a one hour trip; arrive at work at 7.50 [am].

JG: Can you tell me a little about your train trip in to work every day?

D: I do two things. One of two. I either sleep, if I haven't had enough, or I plan what I'm going to do for the day. I find I can think more clearly on the train. That's why I suggested we meet here at the Olympics site today. We are relatively free of disturbances. We have an open plan office which can drive me nuts. There is no privacy and constant distractions. When you are working under pressure this is a problem. It has its good points of course. In the team situation, someone always wants you. Five minutes here and there, all of a sudden you've lost an hour. You often have to catch up at home on weekends... With the open plan office, it's difficult not to be drawn into other conversations. The time to reflect on what is going on is not there. The train is very important in this. I recently drove in and lost that reflection time on the train and really felt the loss.

Reflection — or more correctly the forces against using it, such as the open office plan, the lack of privacy, constant distractions and "other conversations" — features in David's story. Neither in Head Office nor on the site was there much opportunity for privacy. In the corporate drive for teamwork and "empowered" workers there is an accompanying simulated "team environment". People are actually forced to communicate — by proximity. In dealing with this simulated team environment, David and Marta were thrust together and were quickly required to learn from each other. But they learned different things and in different ways. Marta's story suggests that structural features of the workplace, although important, were not the principal affects on this. She noted various gender influences:

9.3.2 Marta

JG: Can you comment on how your gender may have affected your network at the site?

M: Yes, it has. I've been told things that others have not been told. I'm sure they relate to me differently. I'm not interested in professional networking. I'm more interested in informal or personal relationships. I'm not sure whether gender has

anything to do with this. My experience here has been a positive one in this regard. You ask a direct question you get a direct answer. *Brutally honest sometimes*, but in some ways refreshing. If I had been younger, single and more attractive, I'm not sure. I think it would have been a very different ball game. But there are rules. I think relationships can develop in the workplace context and why shouldn't they. You can't separate the personal from the professional.

Attempting to separate "the personal from the professional" was a challenge for both trainers, particularly given the ways in which workers interact. There is precious little time for any active reflection. Supportive others were very important as a counterbalance to this. For example Marta's support network assisted her to deal with some emotional aspects of the job — what she refers to as "the darker side of life":

JG: Has there been anything in this job which has drawn strong emotions from you, for example, either positive or negative, but a strong emotion?

M: Yes. I've encountered *racism* which has made me angry. But I have an understanding of why it exists, and the framework that it is within. So, it's not something that I have reacted to.

JG: But it has made you angry. What have you done with that anger then?

M: What I always do with anger, I would talk about it to other people who are sympathetic to this type of injustice. So, it doesn't help to react in a direct sense, in an early stage as a constructive way of dealing with it. This is a learned response because: two things — it's where I'm coming from, my values base; but I'm in a work situation. I don't necessarily have to work with such people for the rest of my life, so it is something I tolerate in a professional capacity much the same as a doctor might have to treat someone they don't particularly like. You would still treat that person.

JG: That must have a big affect on you?

M: I think it does. It is de-powering. Having to deal with the darker side of life for anybody is not a pleasant experience. Much the same as a concentration camp. You have to debrief, discuss it. And if it is too bad, you remove yourself from it. You don't want to be too exposed to those feelings.

The disempowerment of Marta is symptomatic of a complex of disguising and using power. Marta as a trainer employed by the company to "treat" language and literacy problems is asserting her "professional distance" to protect her own dignity in the face of the "darker side". Exercise of covert power is functional, in part because Marta believes, as her medical analogy suggests, that through her professional role she can at least do some good: "you would still treat that person". For the construction workers, racism appears to be one way of asserting a form of power from what is the relatively powerless situation of requiring language and literacy assistance. There may well be some testing of Marta in this. She does not have the authority to particularly damage their positions, but she has the power to help them with problems that can (and do) carry social stigma. Maintaining a balance between allowing herself to be tested in order to "help" is subtle and delicate. But as Marta says, she does not want to be "too exposed to those [dark side] feelings".

9.4 Recognition and feedback

> The context of intersubjectivity means that every transaction is not simply a question of communicating information or intended meanings. Every communicative act is also a plea for recognition of the subject by the other, a plea which is routed through the Other (the unconscious). Speech itself can be seen as the means by which recognition is implicitly asked for, although not necessarily given, and according to Lacan can never be fully given. Even the most apparently straightforward act of communicating "facts" has within it this implied plea and an implied positioning of the other in relation to the subject. The other's confirmation of or failure to confirm the ascribed position then "returns to" and determines the subject's position and hence whether the plea for recognition has been heard and responded to. (Usher and Edwards 1994: 71)

There are contested meanings about the role and purpose of training at the site — should it be profit-making? Who ought to pay for it? Should its primary purpose be to aid industrial relations harmony, or something else? How should "competence" be defined, implemented and assessed? What formal recognition procedures (if any) should accompany training? And how should training personnel fit in with the new team and partnering emphases? At the site, these questions, associated with recognition and feedback, are vital to the trainers' informal learning.

Recognition and feedback come formally and informally.[8] As occupational boundaries increasingly dissolve, feedback can emanate from very diverse sources. Increasingly, but not conclusively, the new corporate culture's effort to establish team bonds and emotional commitments among team members is effective in this. As Lasch (1984) argues, "the team-family culture bolsters a fragile corporate self formed under the influence of traditional hierarchies and weakened by the cultural narcissism of advanced industrial society" (cited in Casey 1995: 150). The point is that *belonging* to a corporate family, complying with its processes — including recognition and feedback systems — provides a compensatory effect to the "acutely ambivalent and conflictual self" (Casey 1995: 150). That the employee feels valued and, in this instance, belongs to a major construction project helps eliminate resistance. It helps maintain a corporatised self. It holds the promise of a future gratification. David's experience of the corporate recognition and reward system shows that a part of the gratification promise relates to one's *image*.

9.4.1 David

JG: Who notices your learning?

D: *Who notices?* Yes, good question. Mainly *me*, although with the performance appraisal system there is an opportunity to talk about [individual staff] development. But we usually don't focus on development we have gone through in the past year. It is usually about development we are going to go through in the next year. It rarely comes to fruition to be quite honest — because you can't really foresee the learning opportunities ahead. The game changes so rapidly... Ideas are our business, but we work in a business environment where our performance is presented each month on a graph, for everyone in the team. The graph shows your target incomes and how much you actually achieved. This can be demoralising, when, for example you are developing a concept, an idea and not bringing in an immediate return. But you are being measured in dollars and cents terms. This *doesn't* reflect what we are really about.

JG: I'm still unclear about who notices your learning. There was a tremendous amount you learned out at the Olympics site. You and I have talked a lot about that. Who draws on your knowledge about what happens in a site like that? Who knows what you are "really about"?

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8   In this section I am not interested in distinguishing between recognition and feedback, though I acknowledge that they encompass a wide variety of practices. It is beyond the scope of this study to examine the details of this variety. The discussion and analysis here focus on corporate uses of recognition and feedback in shaping the informal learning of the trainers.

D: The people who notice are only those who have a network with me — mostly people in Phaedrus and parts of Heydigger.

JG: So, what counts to people in Phaedrus and Heydigger about the fact that you were based at the Olympics site and have learned a lot about it? What counts in terms of what is noticed, recognised and rewarded for having developed that knowledge base?

D: *Rewarded!* That is stretching it. The way I know that people have noticed is through my continued involvement. For example, people who are looking at rewriting aspects of the company's training program, or even starting one, always call me. They didn't call me before — they would just do it. So the involvement is important.

JG: Will this result in any increased remuneration, for example, when you negotiate your new salary package?

D: No. The system isn't set up like that. I'm a third party — employed by the Heydigger Training Unit. The feedback doesn't get back to my boss from Phaedrus. It might be my own fault really. I don't play the political game. Perhaps I should get people in Phaedrus to put something in writing about my own performance and then hand that on to my boss. I probably should do that, but it's not in my priorities.

Although a formal performance appraisal system is in place, David's experience of it is that it "usually doesn't focus on [individual staff] development". The official appraisal has little bearing on salary negotiations; to an extent it belies the powerful influence of informal feedback processes. The question of "who notices" skills and abilities is directly linked to what he calls "the political game", which David does not feel comfortable with. Although it is "not in his priorities", there is an underlying anxiety about how his performance is recognised, expressed in his comment that "being measured in dollars and cents terms does not reflect what we are really about".

This anxiety serves Phaedrus well by, on the one hand weakening criticism — for instance of the marginalisation of some aspects of training relative to the primacy of production. On the other hand, it channels disagreement into the production process itself by encouraging team members to "brainstorm" and "think critically" to solve

problems in the name of consensual interests: team-interests. Team interests have an astonishing alignment with executive expectations about production deadlines, budget projections and keeping the client happy. But complying with this agenda does not eliminate the individual's anxiety about performing. Nor does it alleviate the tension which accompanies the displaying of the trainer's "monthly graph" to other staff. The graph, as David mentions, shows how performance is measured "in terms of target incomes and dollars and cents terms". Its display generates considerable consternation about what happens next in workers' careers, and whether they are making the correct moves in the present.

JG: Where do you see your career heading now?

D: I can see the glass ceiling very clearly. There is a perception that people with trades backgrounds are limited in the kind of work they can really do.

JG: What about with your training background?

D: There is another box there too. That is that trainers are in the training box. But consultants are an altogether different animal — usually with tertiary qualifications. I may be getting tertiary qualifications now, but the fact I didn't do this straight after school says something in people's minds. So, there are barriers there that I do not have the political skills to get over or through. I'm chipping away, but to be quite honest I'm not really motivated to deal with that stuff [office politics]. I tend to focus on a project and attempt to do that to the best of my abilities. Where I fit into the pecking order doesn't really matter, generally — up until the point where I get really pissed off, whether by lack of recognition or by something else.

JG: That's been happening to you lately, hasn't it?

D: Yes. I've been putting it down to a cyclical thing. That is, consulting work is very cyclical. I always feel happiest just after I've made a sale on a major job. After that, when it comes to implementation I'm on a steady slide downwards — it often bores me to tears. Until someone pats you on the head — you know how these cycles work, it's a natural phenomena.

JG: You have learned something about this phenomenon though, haven't you?

D: Yes. I think it has a lot to do with recognition. People often say status doesn't matter. *Status bloody well does matter!*

JG: What makes you say that so strongly?

D: For a long time I did not have a title on my business card. Others do. But I didn't. What is a bother sometimes is to see yourself referred to in relation to others, in a way you disagree with.

JG: Is it to do with positions in the work hierarchy and the perceptions of others about where you are in that?

D: Yes. A linguist might say that words are chosen to represent a perceived reality. People are given titles which represent the way their roles are perceived. Heydigger has always been meant to be a flat, non-hierarchical organisation. But it is not of course. What we do with language represents power structures. The titles of positions, for example, signify a social and cultural structure. They're secretive about salaries. But we all know what each other gets. I can say that they do not regard me as senior project manager material — *I'm well below that* in terms of money.

Titles, money and status have been conventional reward systems in the modern workplace and remain powerful influences in Phaedrus and Heydigger. David keeps "chipping away" but by his own admission is not really motivated to deal with office politics. "Where I fit into the pecking order doesn't really matter, generally — up until the point where I get really pissed off". His self-strategy when he gets "pissed off" is of interest here. Confronting directly the politics which can make him angry is difficult, in part because this informal political territory is precisely the terrain of "career gate keeping". The inability to deal directly with this source of anxiety leads to the displacement of his anger, including into harder work and longer hours. The informal reward and recognition system functions to this end. The promise of future gratification; the promise of *being someone* in the hierarchy does count. As he says, "people often say status doesn't matter. Status bloody well does matter!" I asked David to clarify how this matter of status affected him in his training role:

D: Having good presence and a profile with the chief executives is very important. Image and presentation are now very important features of the training

landscape. Perhaps I don't fit that mould. What I have learnt is that you can't separate learning from the politics and culture of the organisation.

JG: It sounds as though you feel strongly about that. Can you elaborate on what you mean by this?

D: Yes. Learning is mixed in with the organisation's beliefs, and traditions — the hierarchy and its values system. The structure, the administration and also the community expectations are all factors in that. Community and industry expectations.

JG: It sounds as though a lot of pressure has come onto you and the purpose of your role.

D: Yes, the push within the Heydigger Training Unit to spread its employees across the entire corporation, as opposed to focussing in one area, has been a bummer. I've been happier since being allowed to focus on Phaedrus. I also have a lot more responsibility and there is a title that goes with it. I'm now entitled "National Skills Development Manager" within Phaedrus.

JG: Is that title now on your card?

D: No. But it is an identifiable thing; the title. I'm not a fringe-dweller any more. I still have the ability to walk between management and construction workers. I have affiliations with both. But I've got a name now. The Heydigger people actually had a nickname for me before. It was *"The Phantom"*.

David's nickname neatly captured part of his self-strategy for survival at the site. Indeed it became his own metaphor to describe his "phantom-like" developmental role. His role, as mentioned earlier, tended to be made invisible. It was a role which "must not get in the way of production". These were his own words. Nonetheless, his corporate role was to assist workers to become better problem-solvers, better team members, even better thinkers. Such a role is presented by Phaedrus as unproblematic — almost "civic-minded". After all, it is intended to help workers develop transferable employment skills, and it has the support of the trade union movement.

From Foucault's work on discipline (1977) and technologies of the self (1988b), David's experience of recognition and feedback and his Phantom-strategy can be

read as a form of "disciplinary truth". Foucault argues that the methods of discipline and punishment used in western cultures have shifted dramatically over the past several hundred years, from ritual punishment delivered publicly by the sovereign, to an internalised, self-monitored technology of the self. Within this self-technology, individuals discipline themselves — in accordance with the norm. The norm at the Olympics site was for training opportunities to be available but "out of the way", and the normalisation David experienced was thus not an overt form of repression. Rather, as Foucault explains, "normalisation occurs through comparison, ranking, judging, measurement, differentiation and setting the limits in relation to the 'Norm'" (1977: 183).

David said his "performance" was "measured in dollars and cents terms". This was a part of his "examination" which Foucault refers to as an instrument of discipline that combines the techniques of surveillance and normalisation. David's official examination took the form of a corporate "ritualised ceremony of power which claims to establish an objective truth about the individual" (Foucault 1977: 183). This was an "objective truth" David never felt comfortable with because he believed such instruments for assessing performance did not accurately reflect the elusive yet critical aspects of teaching and helping others to learn. Through David's performance review, the subject was made "visible", while power was hidden. The subject, through this form of measurement is both "subject and subjected" (Foucault 1977: 184).

David said his early experiences with Phaedrus made him feel like "a fringe-dweller". He worked very hard to gain acceptance, however, and his performance was rewarded with a new title. Bestowing an important sounding title — "National Skills Development Manager" — was corporate recognition. He did not get in the way of production, his graphs looked good and the title did not cost Heydigger additional money. Within this story, the corporate image presented to the public — of the team-based, non-hierarchical, objective (and thus fair) management system — appears to be precisely that: *an image*. Contrasting with this "good corporate citizen" image is another reality. Read from a Foucauldian standpoint, David's story highlights an individual's experience of the disciplinary regimes of the corporation, panoptic "group norms" and corporate technologies for regulation (and compliance) — titles and financially based performance reviews.

9.4.2 Marta

Marta's experience of recognition and feedback was less tied to internal company reward systems, procedures and directions than David's. Marta, subcontracted to the site, was not as directly "owned" by the company as David. Intrinsic/extrinsic motivations and rewards, gender factors, personal history, self-perceptions, values about what constitutes "success" or "failure" and career aspirations variously appear within the dialogue. But from site-based recognition and feedback, she sensed the potential at one level to be "looked upon as a joke". At another level, feedback confirmed to Marta her "adaptability" — an adaptability Phaedrus ultimately approved of:

JG: Do you have a supervisor or manager here at the site?

M: No. The whole Heydigger philosophy is that if you take something on, you assume the whole responsibility for it. There is a different delegation system to a lot of conventional workplaces.

JG: At this site, who decides what counts? How is it established what learning is important here?

M: At the moment it is an individual thing. Individuals can select what they want to learn and just nominate what they want to do. Some things are decided by their immediate supervisors who say "in your next performance appraisal I think you should have done XYZ". Then it's given some hierarchical worth. In terms of them getting future jobs they may know that some things are recognised externally. At the moment, it is haphazard. But I think in relation to learning, the onus is on the individual.

JG: In terms of your own learning, who notices what you are learning?

M: No one, unless it is made explicit. No one unless I make it explicit. But no one notices. Making a change or trying a new strategy will not be noticed unless you make it explicit yourself.

JG: Is there anyone or anything you would like to make aware of the experience and learning you have in the construction industry?

M: I expect that when I leave, people will make their own judgments. That's our Western World, isn't it? You have to die before people say good things about what you've done. This relates to feedback and recognition. But we are operating in a way where these things don't necessarily come naturally to Australian culture as such. It's something new to our generation as well. Our parents' generation would rather have died than said anything good about you while you were there. These are learned ways of operating. My parents, I know, thought I was wonderful, but they never told me so.

JG: Has your own learning here influenced the way you see yourself? For example, how you see yourself in relation to your professional role here and the adaptations you have had to make to fit into the site.

M: I think what it has done is confirm my adaptability in a sense. I don't feel that I have failed, so I feel I have succeeded and the reason I have succeeded is that I have been aware of the factors which would enhance success.

JG: Can you tell me what success here means? How do you know if you have been successful?

M: *Feedback.* Informal and formal feedback on the fact that people perceive me as contributing in a positive rather than negative way. These are my indicators: feedback, people wanting to participate, wanting to relate and so on. I knew the potential was there for me to be looked upon as a joke; I knew that it would take time. I knew that my success was dependent upon factors outside of my control. The job has only served as a vehicle to clarify things for me (about my career) which were not directly related to this job... I'm basically motivated by things which are tied to **the client service**. In playing the role that I've played, you represent the side of learning as distinct from the side of industry. As a teacher in the workplace, you carry a responsibility which is to take learning into industry, of providing a service which doesn't let down what is your primary agenda: that is to take education into industry. So, I'm motivated by people saying, "yes, this has worked", because enough common ground has been found between industry needs and educational desires. I am motivated by outcomes whereby the educational service satisfies people. I think both sides could do a lot of harm if you're only concerned about your own agenda. Again, it's the diversity which can lead to successful outcomes.

Marta viewed her primary agenda as "taking education into industry", but finding enough "common ground" was not so straightforward. The recognition of her work tended to be, as she put it, "haphazard". Feedback about the construction agenda was not. This one-sided clarity had the effect of acculturating Marta. The new corporate culture was demonstrating its willingness to accommodate a female trainer at the site. It was demonstrating, for instance to the client (the NSW Government), to trade unions — and even to sceptical university researchers — its abilities to integrate all its employees regardless of gender, age and race. But the success of this integration was set up as depending on *Marta's* adaptability. In relation to what learning was considered important (and who decides) she states it is "an individual thing".

Her learning, however, was not such "an individual thing" as she may have suspected. It was part of the discursive practice of Phaedrus. For instance, she felt the potential was there for her to be looked upon "as a joke", a protojoke she was determined to refute. Her response was built upon a professional desire to succeed. She was working in relatively uncharted professional territory for a feminist whose training background was primarily with women. In her words, what she actually learnt from this was a notion of success "dependent upon factors outside of my control". Factors such as the "delegation system" Marta referred to which was meant to devolve decision-making to the teams. This system generated a sense of pressure, of felt experience. The operatives who are meant to be making decisions (including herself) have to interpret "haphazard" feedback filtered through the new Phaedrus culture. To an extent this feedback explains Marta's varied descriptions of her own success (for instance see Marta's comments about "not having been very successful" in 9.2.1).

The acculturation of Marta into Phaedrus is significant because, more than ever, common grounds between "industry needs" and "educational desires" are being sought. Trainers such as Marta and David are at the implementation point of those grounds. The Commonwealth Government, through its National Training Reform Agenda, promotes the recognition of work-based learning and a competitive market place of training providers; industries through new industry-led accreditation agencies, and the Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU) are seeking these common grounds. Yet this powerful alliance provides no panacea for the complexities facing our education systems. Industry's insatiable demands for competitiveness provide the master discourse. At the local level, Marta's experience of this discourse — translated discursively through Heydigger's Phaedrus sub-culture — led to a certain type of "adaptability" in which her learning about the

"pendulum" (Marta's metaphor for educational goals) is swinging, at the moment, towards the needs of industry.

9.5 The pendulum swings: industry demands, educational goals

The new linkages between industry and education centre on a discourse of "competence". Competency-based standards are intended to widen the scope of vocational education and training. Notions of competence are now extending throughout the education system, reaching children in elementary school, intended to serve "national interests". Through this approach, learners are tied into a centrally determined, predefined set of outcomes. The goal of learning becomes "competence demonstrated in specific ways — nothing more, nothing less" (Usher and Edwards 1994: 115):

> The emphasis on performance is a part of the "no nonsense" management style of discourse that has become so powerful since the 1980's ... it does not make sense to be managed "inefficiently" or "ineffectively". We require "value for money" and "quality" of goods and services. If this is obtained through effective and efficient management, then all to the good. (Usher and Edwards 1994: 112)

The trainers at the Olympics site were on the front-line of implementing competency-based training for workers and then seeking its formal accreditation. Although they were required to implement it for others, they did not particularly value competency-based standards for themselves. Their experience of the competency-based standards framework, as a symbol of the industry–education interface, highlighted dissatisfaction with the framework. These "front-line" dialogues revolved around the issues of trainers' changing roles; difficulties in capturing the rich diversity of individuals' practices; and concerns that competency-based standards are too "narrowing".

Marta, for example, expressed serious concerns about the inability of competency-based standards to promote and reflect diversity in learning and practice. She was particularly concerned about predetermined goals framing the principal learning outcomes. She saw anything critical, theoretical, abstract or simply not directly applicable to immediate tasks as not particularly prized in a competency-based framework, and perhaps inadvertently denigrated. Quixotically, she also made a case that, in some instances, the codified, predetermined approach to learning outcomes helps in the recognition of informally acquired skills.

9.5.1 Marta

JG: Are you aware of the competency-based standards for industry trainers?

M: I know they exist. I have seen them some time ago.

JG: Have they been in any way helpful to you?

M: Not really. Training is such a very two-way street. The trainer may have all the competency standards, but it is *genuinely* recognising what a learner is bringing into the situation which is important.

JG: Can you tell me a bit more about your experience of this "recognition problem"?

M: Yes, it comes back to who judges what is important learning and what is not important learning. If they know that its not an accredited course and no-one out there really cares about it, then it will make a difference. What is the point of workers putting effort into something that isn't going to have any formal recognition?... Formal education is partly about social restructuring. Having had opportunities to study at university reminds me when working at a site like this, where people haven't had such opportunities and haven't taken that path in life, I've become aware their skills and learning is undervalued in society. I see that as a big issue.

JG: How have you felt about this issue here, at this site?

M: I feel about it at a personal and a political level — which says that I don't treat people who don't have formal learning in a way where they are treated as inferior, which I believe happens a lot. So it impacts very much on my personal style and my teaching. It motivates me because I believe all people can learn — at different speeds, I guess.

JG: Have you experienced any antagonism here to the fact you have a formal education, academic qualifications?

M: Not antagonism, but embarrassment on the part of the participants. People who have had problems with literacy or language have often had their esteem tied to their learning, particularly where assessment is attached. I can see why you've asked that question. Yes, I've had people being embarrassed, and

antagonisms in other areas. People who take a stance against you without even knowing about your personal stance. This takes time.

JG: What strategies have you learned to help deal with this?

M: You have to value what people do know, rather than judge them on what they don't know. A lot of cross-cultural training has helped me in this. People always bring a lot into a learning situation. You have to work from that premise.

JG: How are such trainer skills recognised? How would the possession of such skills in a trainer be noticed in this workplace?

M: I think with learning and teaching there is always a temptation to use your knowledge as a power base. So, if people misspell something, for example, you do have the power to point that out to them. I think the way in which you do that indicates to the person that it is not necessarily a power differential. So I think they just know. To an extent you have to de-power the role of the trainer in order to empower the learner. I think this is a very important issue. People learn when they are motivated to learn, and they won't be motivated to learn if they are threatened. The predisposition to learning comes from people believing they *can* learn — which relates to how they are treated in the learning context.

Formal learning is very rigid in the way it deals with people's learning. It has to be tied to institutional requirements. People have to be trained in a certain way; knowledge is transmitted in a certain way. People however learn in different ways. You shouldn't place a judgment on how people learn. If you are looking for competencies there, you are looking for important approaches to how people see others who have not learned formally. There is a pendulum which swings between formal education and the informal learning which goes on at work.

JG: At this site, where do you think the pendulum is balanced? For instance, where does primary responsibility for learning reside — with individuals, organisations, formal institutions, your training program?

M: I think it is trying to be shared. The organisation is trying to promote itself as a learning culture. Individuals want to show they are keen to learn, but whether they meet in the middle, I don't know... I tend to be usually in a teaching rather

than a learning situation — which is problematic because you never look at your own learning needs.

JG: Problematic?

M: You often identify your own learning needs because you face a problem and then realise you need to do something about it. I'd like to go out in my own business, but I don't have the emotional skills required to make it work. I don't know how to go about learning these skills. They are not technical but emotionally based. If I was to delve into this I think I'd be dealing with really deep things. Maybe I don't need that. I'm not driven to succeed in that risk-taking thing. I'm not motivated in that area. I'm not good at identifying my own learning needs. I think the people who are around you are very important in shaping what your learning becomes.

JG: Is there anything about your experience and learning at this site which is really important to you, that we perhaps haven't touched on, or have not gone into far enough. Would you like to comment on this?

M: This might come back to the formal/informal learning thing. I know I've learned an enormous amount here. I've learned about the way people do things here. But I don't feel I've learned anything new. No, that's not quite right. It's more like the layers of learning were re-experienced ... in a new cultural context. It was like re-layered knowledge. So, it was like "here it is again", I've come across this before but in a different context. Like learning how to behave. You've learned it before, so it's not a new experience. It's a relearning of something you've actually known. It's not that the challenges were not great enough. Not at all. I've learned a lot about negotiation, about the company, about life on building sites. All that is new. But in the overall experience, I don't think there is anything about myself that it has faced me with. A lot of it has been relearning information about the way things work. It's re-applying strategies you already know, locating those strategies in a new culture.

From my experience I would have to say that industry can harm education if it is only an industry/production agenda which is being pursued. Many in industry think educational goals are *too social,* and often educators think industry is too focussed *on production* and business bottom lines. Finding the right balance is important, but not so easy.

Marta's use of the metaphor "re-layered knowledge" — "like the layers of learning were re-experienced, in a new cultural context" — is linked to her search for knowledge of her self. For Marta, a principal challenge of her learning was whether it "faced her with anything new about herself". A Foucauldian reading of this challenge raises the issue of the relationship between knowledge and power. Foucault seeks to show how the inculcation of a "discipline of self-control" has generated an imperative to seek "knowledge of the self" (Hutton 1988: 131). In Phaedrus, everyone is called upon to monitor her or his own behaviour. For Marta, the technologies of self-management related to "re-learning information and re-applying strategies you already know — in a new culture". The notions of "re-learning" and "re-applying" skills in a new context is redolent of Foucault's argument that "we continually reshape our past creations to conform with our present needs — a pattern of creation and constraint that is ceaselessly repeated" (Hutton 1988: 137).

For Foucault, past experiences are lost in the maze of formulas humans have created to classify them:

> we discover our identity not by fathoming the original meaning of behaviour precedents, as Freud taught, but rather by deconstructing the formalities through which we endlessly examine, evaluate and classify our experiences... Whereas Freud asks 'how our past experience shapes our lives in the present', Foucault asks 'why we seek to discover truth in the formal rules that we have designed to discipline life's experience'. (Hutton 1988: 136)

The "rules" at the Olympic Games site that had disciplinary effects on Marta are embedded in her comment: "many in industry think educational goals are too social, and often educators think industry is too focussed on production and business bottom lines." In finding the so-called "right balance", the trainers relied on the industry's competency-based standards to objectify what workers were learning. But as shown in Chapter Eight and section 9.1, implementation of the standards was subject to an ensemble of industrial relations considerations. These were sometimes at odds with Marta's personal standpoints on education goals, which were related to notions of "social justice", "equality of opportunity" and "anti-discrimination". In her site-based training "negotiations", such goals were overwhelmed by Olympic construction imperatives.

It is precisely these types of ideological and theoretical matters that are not adequately expressed in the language of competency-based standards, because, as this study makes clear, site level interpretations privilege conceptions of knowledge and understanding equated to *getting the job done*. That is, according to common site rhetoric, "*done* on time, under budget and with the 'quality finish' that will satisfy the client". In this analysis, it is therefore little wonder that Marta senses the pendulum has swung in favour of work-based learning in the present (post-industrial) juncture.

9.5.2 David

Framing what is "right" occurs significantly through the theoretical perspectives one holds — whether they be implicit or developed through formal education. David's informal learning at the site, coupled with his formal trade background, has led him to the conclusion that "nothing must get in the way of production". David brings with him a formal trade and technical and further education (TAFE) background. This has a direct impact on his theorisations about learning in the workplace. Briefly recapitulating his words:

D: Coming from my TAFE background, I had in mind a combination of formal and informal learning. **Learning to me now has to be woven so much into the production process** that they often won't even realise that they are learning. It took me a while to really learn about the primacy of production. Production is number one. That has to happen at all costs. No matter how important the training or learning is — it mustn't get in the way of that.

JG: Have the competency-based standards had any impact on your work? Can you comment on how they have affected your professional role — for example, do you use them?

D: They are irrelevant to me. Partly because I no longer see myself as a trainer. I'm in a skills-management role and systems development really. Regardless of what the standards were, I probably would not pay attention to them.

JG: Why is that?

D: Why...?

JG: For example, most workers in Australian industries now are going down the path of competency-based training, and there is a set of standards for trainers?

D: It may be that the company no longer calls us trainers as such. The training that the Property Company does is integrated into everyone's job. From ASF3[9] onwards, training is a part of your job. It's a good point — I probably should go and get a copy of the trainer standards to see if there is material that could be integrated into that.

JG: Do you work under a set of more generic competency-based standards that apply to your role?

D: No. Our role is relatively undefined. It might be helpful to have clear CBS [competency-based standards] — as, like many jobs in the company, the roles are quite boundaryless — you can make them [the roles] as big as you want — and this can become a problem, as some people's jobs become too big. CBS could be used to provide more of a focus. Maybe they could narrow some parameters [of jobs] to more manageable proportions. But I don't know that you could ever get a set of CBS that fitted each individual. Even within the company at the moment, we have five project managers [training] and we are all so different [and] bring such different qualities to the job and how tasks are performed.

The Heydigger corporation is devolving the training function "into everyone's job". As David points out, "training is a part of your job from ASF3 onwards". This new, supposedly seamless-web of corporate training (or "learning opportunities", as Heydigger promotional brochures put it) leads to a view of CBS as being "useful". David saw CBS as "irrelevant" to him personally, partly because he doesn't see himself as a trainer any longer — "I'm in a skills-management role and systems development really". But he says they may be "useful to provide more of a focus [for the] boundaryless roles in the company". This "useful focus" argument is common in the managerial discourse which supports CBS. The National Skills Framework and its accompanying competency-based standards are seen as "useful" to the corporate emphasis on teamwork, peer learning, self-directed learning and the integration of training "into everyone's role". The "usefulness" of the Skills Framework and the CBS, however, extends far beyond the simple clarification of roles, occupational or career pathways and skill formation requirements. It begins to re-frame what is recognised as knowledge.

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9   The levels of the Australian Skills Framework are described in Chapter Four.

For Lyotard (1984) the distinction between the modern and postmodern conditions of knowledge rests in the purpose of knowledge. Lyotard argues that, in modernity, the production and dissemination of knowledge was justified on the grounds that it contributed to the pursuit of truth and/or the liberty of humanity (in Edwards, 1994: 166). In an era of postmodern doubt and uncertainty exacerbated by environmental degradation, nuclear testing, global warming and continued exploitation of third world countries, the "metanarratives" which legitimated "truth" and "liberty" are unsustainable.

The criterion of optimising the efficient performance of the system has thus become increasingly a basis for conceptualising what *is* important knowledge. At the level of personal experience, David's mini-narrative exemplifies this precisely: "nothing must get in the way of production ... and training must become invisible, woven into production processes". His story is immersed in the organisational grounds which are framed, at the macro-level, by corporate uncertainty. This macro-level framing of competency-based standards by major industry groups, big unions and governments presents them as a useful device for creating a sense of greater certainty, and developing new grounds for industrial relations negotiations. Indeed, the use of competency-based standards and training as grounds for industrial relations is less volatile than conventional remuneration and hours/conditions bargaining that has characterised the building and construction industry (see Chapter Seven). The connections between industrial relations and training are meant to clarify career pathways, skill formation processes and assessment procedures. Through these processes and procedures learning becomes an *observable commodity*.

A more observable, measurable notion of learning is meant to help the overall business environment. As a favourable by-product, competency-based standards are meant to assist workers clarify what they need to learn to advance in their careers (or, at least, this is the line accepted by unions). Codified sets of standards, benchmarks and competencies are managerial answers to corporate dissonance in the context of the flexible accumulation of capital. But they are artifacts in response to doubt and uncertainty, and in alignment with the master discourses of economic competitiveness. (See also Chapter Ten.)

9.6 The mini-narratives of David and Marta[10]

The stories of David and Marta from the Sydney Olympics construction site make clear the complexities which surround the term "informal learning" and the contested notions about the roles and purposes of industry training. The links between management, industrial relations and training, and the broader industry-education interface are shown to directly impact on the trainers. Their stories also highlight the influences on informal learning of felt experience, emotion, self, unconscious desires, motivations and autobiography. The search for a stronger understanding of informal learning suggests that there is no underlying 'truth' about it, no unifying or reducible pattern which might enable greater prediction or certainty.

This is not a matter of going back to the trainers to gather more data, or to further check personal meanings. It is not a matter of checking further Marta's references to her upbringing in South Africa, her feminism juxtaposed to a male dominated environment, her implicit theories about practice at the site, the ways these have been influenced through her formal education, or her experience of what she called "the darker side" — racism, gender stereotypes and oppressive behaviour. Nor is it a matter of re-checking David's experience of philosophical dilemmas between working to achieve a profit in the training program and providing less measurable developmental opportunities for workers; or his personal sense of "impending disaster" with neither space for privacy nor time for reflection, his "phantom-like" role in the face of "the primacy of production". Any attempt to systematically reduce informal learning to enable its measurement would be thus constructed upon narrow assumptions at best and false philosophical premises at worst.

The economistic drive to identify and label workplace learning to boost its productive potential is highly influential; as David put it (reflecting the Heydigger philosophy), a drive to have learning "woven into the production process" and to have that learning formally accredited. The underlying philosophy of this workplace learning has serious epistemological and ontological shortcomings. When viewed in relation to the goals and values of critical pedagogy (Anyon 1994; Freire 1972), transformational learning (Mezirow 1991; Boud and Walker 1993), or "traditional" formal education of "the whole person" (Stevenson 1994), a range of shortcomings is identified. When further viewed against postmodern ideas about learning through

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10   The term "mini-narrative" is used here in two senses: to contrast with the "meta-narratives" which have historically given modern science its epic purpose — the pursuit of a transcendent 'truth'; and, to "recognise the meaningfulness of individual experiences by noting how they function as part of a whole" (Polkinghorne 1988: 173). (Also see Chapter One.)

"dialogue across difference" (Burbules and Rice 1991) and hearing "different voices/different worlds" (Usher and Edwards 1994), contemporary approaches to work-based learning appear very narrow.

This is not to say that aspects of informal learning cannot be promoted through the organisation of work, aspects of training, and participation in workplace democracy. Even though the notion of informal learning is not so easily domesticated, the trainers accommodated much that was required of them in providing "production-oriented" training. This accommodation has a relation to what Gee terms "the new hegemony in the workplaces of advanced industrial societies in which workers actively choose coercion ... to avoid ending up in a dead-end and low paid 'service' jobs" (1994: 14). A never-stated underlying coercion in Phaedrus exists, implying that "if you don't like what you are required to do, then get out!" As Soja (1989) put it, the space for resistance to the competitiveness narrative is being "compressed".

The trainers were required to deal with power relations at the site. Periodically, conflict between personal values and workplace directions resulted in Marta and David experiencing dilemmas and some desires for resistance. These desires for resistance related to opposing dominant workplace expectations of and managerial purposes for training. As Marta and David both say, it is a "brutally honest", at times ruthless environment in which resistance can quickly lead to the termination of employment — highlighting the need for trainers to be aware of what they are doing and why. But achieving "intentionality" is never easy. As Brew explains, there are moments "when one's reality is completely upturned [and] the level of unlearning acute... A new jigsaw has to be formed" (1993: 93). The mini-narratives have illustrated how causes and effects of resistance produce strong emotional responses, and informal learning may be found within this terrain of "dealing with" or reflecting upon emotional experiences.

Yet the links between dealing with emotional experience and the trainer's intentionality in their own learning remain cloudy. Learning reflexivity and the abilities to abstract and objectify experience — to reflect upon and learn from it — are extraordinarily complex phenomena involving critical and individualistic issues. At the level of the person, "emotional readiness", implicit/informal theories held, capacities to interpret or finesse experience (meta-cognition), formal education, gender issues and personal beliefs are at stake. At the structural level, the organisation of work, the materiality of construction, the recognition, feedback and

reward systems of the corporation apply. Informal learning is inseparable from the dialectical relationship between the social and the self.

An implication of this dialectic for the status of these mini-narratives is that if personal experiences are to have any influence on the theory and practice of adult education and training, they need to be submitted to different forms of critical review. As previously pointed out, speaking up on matters that provoke strong emotions is subject to power formations, the "panoptic gaze", and a history of hyper-male culture. For instance, David was required to attend regular meetings with both senior management and Phaedrus' foremen who unequivocally spelled out expectations of compliance with production schedules. Not only does his (trainer's) voice become marginalised, but it is not the place for showing emotion.

Emotion played different roles in David and Marta's learning. Although the study did not plan to make comparisons between their informal learning, an incidental observation was that Marta was particularly adept at describing emotion, a capacity which reiterates a central theme of Belenky et al (1986) — that emotional awareness is linked to women's "different ways of knowing". Marta viewed reflection and self-understanding as integral to her learning at work. More so than David. But the assertion of Belenky et al — that women have different ways of knowing — is not adequately explained by gender theorisations alone. David's position at work was quite different from Marta's in that he was directly employed by the company and Marta was not. David's licence to shape the training program was more circumscribed by this. As he states, he had "virtually no time to reflect on how the job was impacting on his emotions". This contributed to the build up of his anger described earlier. Despite the fact that much has been written about feminism, and about masculine and feminine characteristics, as Kaplan puts it "there is not one person that I know of who has the whole deal wrapped up. We will be working these issues, if we care to, for our lifetimes" (1995: 73).

The notion of "situatedness" and the critical role of emotion in learning show the flaws in the current drive in the National Training Reform Agenda (made explicit through the discourse of competency-based standards) to account for and "recognise" informal learning. For example, the National Training Board's "categories one and two" standards for trainers (see 1.4.2), represent a stark contrast to the open-endedness and complexity of learning outcomes found in this study. Indeed, tightly bound, neatly compartmentalised, observable "elements" and "units" of competence — ripe for measurement and, as the study suggests, surveillance — are only one aspect of informal learning and they do not represent its

principal characteristics: individuals' abilities to "adapt" to a site, "felt experience", the self-strategies of resistance and accommodation, negotiations of personal values with work requirements, and the presentation of oneself in the everyday. These relate to the broad, shaping influences of workplace culture — its politics and power relations, the management of the training function, the links between training and industrial relations, the networks, peers and mentors, and the significations which come from recognition and feedback.

Informal learning therefore can be read as something "radically other" than contemporary theorisations of education–workplace links. A more radical interpretation should not be read as bad news for supporters of RPL and work-based learning, but supports gradual development and the evolution of a more ambitious, more complex consciousness than contained in contemporary skill or competency-based training.

PART III:

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

CHAPTER TEN

Retheorising Informal Workplace Learning

Much contemporary moral philosophy has tended to focus on what it is right to do rather than on what it is good to be, on defining the content of obligation rather than the nature of the good life; and it has no conceptual place left for the notion of the good as the object of our love or allegiance or, as Iris Murdoch portrayed it in her work, as the privileged focus of our attention or will.

(Charles Taylor 1989: 3)

10.1 An impoverished notion of informal learning

The data and analysis presented in this text lead to a rethinking of existing definitions of informal and incidental learning with implications for notions of work as a "learning environment", "competence", and the links between informal learning and formal education. Pursuit of an understanding of trainers' informal learning raises philosophical and practical issues of autonomy, intentionality, language and discourse, and the purposes of work and education. Not surprisingly, the representational apparatus of phenomenology has highlighted the "life-world" experience of the trainers, showing the impoverishment of existing operational definitions of informal learning.

Contemporary definitions tend to accept uncritically "the grounds" upon which informal learning is often based. Learning at work now consists of so-called "authentic" settings for the development of "really useful knowledge". Knowledge and skills are being redefined as competencies, competencies which serve well the strategy of "flexible accumulation" of capital. Employer bodies and national training authorities intend informal learning to comply with observable competency-based standards. This form of identification can make learning more manageable and the recognition of prior learning more precise. But as previous chapters have shown, such views of informal learning do not match the complexity of the phenomenon.

Rather than relying on the discourse of phenomenology, however, the analysis draws on critical and postmodern theories of adult education and training. These theories assist in "reading" ambiguity and the complexities (and possibilities) of local networks. Postmodernism's respect for the power of discourse to influence subjectivity counterpoints the interpretive approach, also exposing multiple readings of informal learning.

Contemporary workplace training practices have been framed by human capital theory, which posits workers as "economic subjects". Human capital theory is itself a subject of the master discourse of economic rationalism. Existing terms emanating from this discourse therefore tend to be one-dimensional. Despite its grounding in modernism, the economistic view of informal learning is not aligned with the goals and classic liberal social values of Enlightenment education. Current uses of the term "informal learning" are aligned with the espoused needs of industries and businesses: to become more productive, more efficient and therefore competitive as we plummet corporate-head first towards the 21st century.

It is premature to abandon per se Enlightenment goals (in education) despite their flaws, and in spite of the contradictory conditions of postmodernity. Nonetheless, some re-configurations are in order. Informal learning can and should mean more than "competence", its human capital version in corporate and academic worlds and discourse.[1] Otherwise the insatiable marketplace with its accompanying economistic metanarrative will determine what constitutes valid knowledge and learning.

10.1.1 Training and "economic subjects"

The trainers of this study experienced a number of dilemmas and professional tensions, in part, because of their relative powerlessness at particular sites. Paradoxically, trainers are central to a powerful discourse in education policy. This discourse, "synonymous with the hegemony of the political and social order" (Kegan 1995: 323), tends to obscure, even obliterate, other understandings of education in favour of economic ones. Rhetoric about human capital, resources, measurable outputs, productivity, efficiency and bridging the gap between education and work

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1   Barnett points out that operational (or corporate) competence is linked with "know-how, outcomes, economic strategies, experience, organisational norms and better practical effectiveness" (1994: 160). Academic competence on the other hand is characterised by "know-that, intellectual fields, propositions, metacognition, disciplinary knowledge, truthfulness and a search for better cognitive understanding". Barnett argues both are flawed.

characterise this discourse.[2] Hart relates this to current debates about work and education in which the balance between the two is based on a three-dimensional view of "the economy", or of what drives the economy:

> all economic decisions are determined by a worldwide structure of economic competition; the need to compete on the world market requires a constant increase of productivity (measured in abstract indices of input/output); and this competition also requires an ongoing drive to reduce labour costs. (1993: 21)

Operating within this framework, the project for industry trainers appears clear: to "train" human capital in the right kind of skills — "the skills employers want" (Carnevale, Gainer and Villet 1990). The training reforms in Australia and throughout the OECD nations, based on new "partnerships" between education and industry are meant to align with skills employers want. The needs of business and industry to become increasingly "competitive" is a (the) paramount concern.

Competency-based standards are being introduced for workers in most industries to facilitate business and industry needs to access flexible workers, trained in the "right" skills. These provide guidelines and tools for training, leaving little room for ambiguity about the function or purpose of training. The "standards" are what Carnevale, Gainer and Villet argue are required "to help American business to keep or regain its competitive edge on the world market" (in Hart 1993: 22). Hart points out that within this human capital perspective, the welfare or interests of the workers is seen as *entirely merging* with this purpose.

Expectations of the Sydney 2000 Olympics site management for the training function reflect economic and production imperatives. Worker interests were regarded as entirely merging with these. Such management expectations had deep effects upon the informal learning of the trainers at the site, exemplified in the trainers' experiences of their roles, purposes, power relations, recognition and feedback, and the education/work-based training dichotomy. That "nothing must get in the way of production" (including competency-based standards) was an injunction David and Marta learned very early in their tenure at the site.

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2   Philosophy and sociology are two disciplines currently targeted for cut-backs and even departmental closures in a number of universities which cite, as principal rationales, the 'funding crisis' and the need for 'interdisciplinary approaches to match changes in industry'.

Although Marsick and Watkins (1990) chide those who focus extensively on the maximisation of profits, they have articulated a powerful conception of informal (and incidental) learning which owes its theoretical justification to human capital theory:

> human capital theorists present what may be the most compelling argument for a focus on informal learning in the workplace. Human capital theory refers to the productive capabilities of human beings that are acquired at some cost and that command a price in the labour market because they are useful in producing goods and services. Thinking in terms of value as a return on investment in a cost-to-benefit ratio, education is seen as a major means for organisations (and individuals) to increase the net worth of the worker's skills and abilities. (1990: 205)

They argue that the "human capital benefit" of employee training is enormous. But equally clear is the cost to a vast segment of the workforce who are denied access. "For them, informal learning represents an alternative delivery system which may help them compete more successfully" (1990: 205). This human capital framework for understanding informal learning, despite its apparent popular acceptance, has shortcomings.

Critical social theorists such as Anyon (1983), Hart (1993) and Welton (1995) point to inherent flaws in the capitalist economic structure. They assert (drawing on Marx), that built-in class divisions are barriers to equal participation and ownership. A critical perspective interprets the "mobilisation" of informal learning as a form of collusion between training and management to "cool out the aspirations of the disenfranchised" (La Belle 1982, in Marsick and Watkins 1990: 207), and ultimately to serve capital interests.

Marsick and Watkins reject this critique however, on the grounds that the US needs to greatly increase the flexibility of its human capital base or face turbulent, even violent upheaval in becoming more economically productive. Their theory has influenced much that has been written within HRD on informal learning. But its "human capital" reasoning is based upon two major assumptions which require scrutiny.

The first assumption is that in relation to contexts of rapid change, it is primarily workers who have to change to lift productivity by becoming more skilled and flexible — with informal learning offering "an alternative delivery system" (Marsick

and Watkins 1990: 206). Human capital theory holds that individuals are essentially responsible for their own professional training, and in this way the workforce can become more productive and competitive. This should not go unchallenged: there are integral linkages between informal learning, the purposes of work and the ways in which work is organised and conducted. Marsick and Watkins acknowledge this, particularly in their subsequent work on "building learning organisations" (Watkins and Marsick 1992; 1993), but the onus for flexibility in response to rapid change, currently conceived as workers performing more effectively and efficiently, cannot lie exclusively with individual workers. Changes in the work, rather than the worker, are required, accompanied by a notion of informal learning that is more than a "delivery system" to enhance competitiveness.

A "holistic" approach to learning at work, involving changes to work structures and patterns to include learning organisations, team approaches, quality circles, TQM and so on, may not result in "improved informal learning". The issue is the relationship of the individual to underlying questions such as the usefulness of the goods being produced or constructed, the treatment of employees, the uses (and abuses) of the natural environment and resources. Such questions underpin the personal adaptations of trainers to the requirements of their work roles and seriously challenge conventional, taken-for-granted notions about work, its relationship to progress and development and the tensions between "learning for work" and "work for learning".

In relation to taken-for granted-notions about work, Marsick and Watkins acknowledge that the *attitudes* of workers to workplace training constitute "a kind of incidental learning that is highly tacit" (1990: 207). In effect, this includes the internalisation of capitalism in trainers and learners and relates directly to the adoption of a processing orientation which, according to Barnett, implies that the *learning task* at the site is to "interpret, assimilate and reproduce the sense data that comes their way" (1994: 173).

Clearly, trainers are not employed to question the way things are done. They are hired in the interests of capital and labour efficiency which, by definition, gives them an instrumental, input-output orientation. An unduly challenging mind can (and does — as found in Chapters Six and Nine) lead quickly to expulsion. Human capital representational methodology accepts this limited view of informal learning, in part because it embraces workplace "givens".

There is, however, a strong dialectical relationship between the individual's tacit or felt experience and production imperatives. The internalisation (and reproduction) of capital interests does not necessarily equate to acceptance of the underlying values and aspirations of capital. Internal "negotiations", described in Chapter Nine, show that attempts to construct corporate culture create personal, professional and ethical tensions which deeply affect trainers' "life-world" learning.

The second assumption of human capital theory is that conventional *notions of work* are also "givens". This premise directly relates to the core of the global economic system:

> that production is, above all, production for profit; that nature is dead, malleable matter entirely at our disposal; and that the immense social and environmental costs of our way of production can therefore be externalised, and [therefore] do not figure into our calculations of growth and development. (Hart 1993: 26)

Hart argues that normative assumptions about work need to be challenged. The trainers at the Olympics site referred frequently to "the primacy of production" and, with little time for reflection, this imperative was indeed a "given". As Chapter Nine argues, for professional survival both David and Marta had to adopt very low profiles to ensure that training was not perceived to be "in the way of construction". For David this meant a "phantom-like" approach to the site. For Marta, who was highly visible at the sight because of its dramatic gender imbalance, "invisibility" took the form of a more marginalised, back-room training function. Although she says that she was never unhappy about that function, and that people were "incredibly polite" to her, both she and David held doubts about what is "truly" important and productive work that did not match dominant site conceptions about training and learning.

Their views were not measured exclusively against the profit interests of capital, or construction meeting its tight timeframes. They related to the trainers' personal values and beliefs about the purposes of their work and, in turn, to their life interests and the aspirations of participants in their training activities. Nevertheless their resistance tended to be symbolic. Despite the subtle power of informal learning, with much being predicated by "the site", intrinsic matters and life beyond their immediate locations remained. The influence on informal learning of the Other is embedded in their language:

JG: Is there anything about your experience and learning at this site which is really important to you, that we perhaps haven't touched on, or have not gone into far enough. Would you like to comment on this?

Marta: This might come back to the formal/informal learning thing. I know I've learned an enormous amount here. I've learned about the way people do things here. But I don't feel I've learned anything new. No, that's not quite right. It's more like the layers of learning were re-experienced ... in a new cultural context. It was like re-layered knowledge. So, it was like "here it is again", I've come across this before but in a different context. Like learning how to behave. You've learned it before, so it's not a new experience. It's a relearning of something you've actually known. It's not that the challenges were not great enough. Not at all. I've learned a lot about negotiation, about the company, about life on building sites. All that is new. But in the overall experience, I don't think there is anything about myself that it has faced me with. A lot of it has been relearning information about the way things work. It's re-applying strategies you already know, locating those strategies in a new culture.

From my experience I would have to say that industry can harm education if it is only an industry/production agenda which is being pursued. Many in industry think educational goals are *too social*, and often educators think industry is too focussed *on production* and business bottom lines. Finding the right balance is important, but not so easy.

These words do not reduce human actions and learning to the competent performance of skills to the prescribed levels of the industry standard. They represent a questioning that is a part of Marta's internal balancing of educational ideals with immediate industry demands. A notion of informal learning that can encompass the processes involved in judging the merits of competing interests is different to the human capital notion. It is not solely about enhancing the interests of an abstract "capital" which is simultaneously meant to benefit the individual, but also about ethical considerations and dealing with difference. If understandings of informal learning are to move beyond the straitjacket of economic rationalism, they will need to focus decisively on the balance between educational ideals and industry demands.

10.2 Rethinking informal learning

Marsick and Watkins differentiate their version of informal learning from Tough's earlier (1982) definition. Tough focussed solely on what he called "highly intentional" changes, by which he meant:

> first the change must be deliberately chosen and intended. That is, the person clearly makes a decision to change in a particular direction. Second, the person then takes one or more steps to achieve the change. The person does something specific, rather than passively letting the change occur with no effort at all. Choosing and striving are the two key elements: the person chooses a particular change and then takes action to achieve it. (1982: 20)

The Marsick and Watkins view plays down the extent of intentionality. They hold that "informal learning can be planned, but includes learning that is not designed or expected" (1990: 214), referring to unexpected outcomes of informal learning as "incidental". Both definitions are limited and thus limiting. Tough emphasises the voluntary, purposeful nature of self-directed learning. This conception privileges individual autonomy to a degree which does not sufficiently acknowledge the social conditions shaping that privileged self. By way of contrast, Marsick and Watkins emphasise the unintentional, unanticipated learning that is "often influenced or triggered by a chance encounter with a person or event by a need *imposed* on the person by the organisation" (1990: 215). They also include a "collective dimension" to learning in organisations:

> people do pursue their own learning, but our research shows that the natural work groups, through which they learn, influence the learning process and outcomes. Thus we believe we should talk about two different kinds of self-directed learning, which are probably somewhat interdependent, when we talk about learning in group or organisational settings: learning directed at self-development, and learning by an individual in the pursuit of collective needs within a group or organisation. (1990: 215)

Their definition has much to commend, but contains at least two significant flaws. Firstly, it does not sufficiently acknowledge the representational effects of the human capital theory of learning, to which it owes its justification. Following Foucault (1980; 1988c), Derrida (1981; 1982) and Lyotard (1984) this can be read

as a serious deficiency. For instance, actors are not central to the processes of signification; as participants in discourse, we use words whose previous uses carry meaning which goes beyond our intentions. Foucault points out that discourses have a political nature — controlling what kind of talk occurs and which talkers speak (1988c: 131). Foucault also points to the intimate links between learning and the notion of truth as being a function of the political construction of knowledge, arguing that "in societies like ours, the 'political economy' of truth is characterised by five important traits" (1988c: 131). Paraphrasing Foucault, truth is:

- centred on the form of scientific discourse and the institutions which produce it;

- subject to constant economic and political incitement;

- the object, under diverse forms, of immense diffusion and consumption;

- produced and transmitted under the control, dominant if not exclusive, of a few great political and economic apparatuses;

- the issue of a whole political debate and social confrontation ('ideological' struggles). (1988c: 133)

Drawing on Foucault's representational apparatus, human capital theory can be read as a symbol of power relations. When applied to informal learning, human capital theory thus represents political and economic interests in preparing workers to meet the labour requirements of a market economy. What lies close to the surface in this application of human capital theory to training practice is operational competence; a competence that does not unduly challenge conventional views about the underlying purposes and effects of work. It is therefore not about understanding, challenging and critiquing. It is about getting the job done as efficiently as possible.

Human capital theory is not a representation of "other" voices, such as more marginalised or disenfranchised people. These are, however, the very people informal learning is said (by human capital theorists including Marsick and Watkins) to aid.[3] Marsick and Watkins claim that human capital theory provides "the most compelling arguments related to increasing the net worth of the worker's skills and

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3   While I do not bring the voices of marginalised or disenfranchised groups into my own text, I have not claimed that I am doing so, nor do I claim informal learning in the workplace (as currently conceived within HRD) will necessarily benefit disadvantaged groups.

abilities" (1990: 20), and in this sense their argument is absolutely consistent. Their representational framework, however, has been harnassed within the "field" of HRD with some unintended (political) outcomes and uses made of their theory.

The Sydney 2000 Olympics site provided an example of an unintended *educational* outcome derived from the human capital approach. To facilitate Phaedrus's "team" approach to work organisation, workers were encouraged to "respect diversity". Training was offered in support of the notion of "respecting others". In the process, and under the weighty influence of production pressures, "respecting diversity" was reduced to one of the required competencies for the construction activity. Respect for the other "simply" became one of the needed skills — accomplished through informational training. This "learning" may well represent an important educational advance in the context of the construction industry, but it is superficial. It is really about the acquisition of production-related skills. This skill-formation approach to learning contrasts with more critical approaches to education or, as Kegan put it, "learning that reflects on itself, holding a 'leading out' from an established habit of mind" (1995: 232).

The second problem with Marsick and Watkins's (1990) definition relates to the differentiation of informal from incidental learning. They define incidental learning as a "byproduct" of some other activity such as sensing the organisational culture, or trial and error experimentation (1990: 211). As such, incidental learning is never planned or intentional as it may be with "self-directed" learning or where help is consciously sought. As incidental learning can occur as a result of involvement in intentional informal learning, they suggest it can be interpreted as a subset of informal learning. That is, in any informal learning there are taken-for-granted assumptions which underpin actions and influence the learner's intent, degree of motivation, commitment and emotional involvement. The key distinguishing feature for Marsick and Watkins' is that informal learning is intentional, incidental learning is not. This distinction thus has the effect of separating "planned" informal learning from beliefs and values which may surface within the "incidental". Such a distinction produces a false dichotomy. Indeed, "corporate selves" are being fashioned through *felt experience* of the designer cultures.

Informal learning, as Marsick and Watkins use it, contains a contradiction, it "can be planned, but includes learning that is not designed or expected. Incidental by definition, includes the unexpected" (1990: 215). With regard to both terms, they agree that learning is, at least in part, prompted "by the needs of the organisation and sometimes by the direct command or request of others". But the separation

(albeit interwoven) of informal from incidental carries implicit assumptions about what is important, or "what counts" as most important in workplace learning. It is not so much the unexpected, incidental side-effects which are prized. It is the planned, intentional learning, represented in mentoring and coaching schemes or self-directed approaches that contribute to the organisation's mission, which is prized. Putting this definition into practice therefore privileges "the doing" within informal learning, rather than "the questioning" which is implicit in learning from mistakes, involvement with others, experiencing hidden agendas, the politics and power relations of organisational life.

This definition of terms has an inherent contradiction: that self-direction is celebrated within it, but only insofar as it relates to the needs of the organisation or, as Marsick and Watkins say, "the direct command or request of others". In contemporary corporate life, it is not really "self-directed" learning at all. As the construction worker at the beginning of Chapter Eight commented: "the company wants us to work in teams and be more self-directed. So, we are going to work in teams and be more self-directed. What else can we do?"

Marsick and Watkins deal with this definitional conundrum by including "the collective dimension of learning in organisations" (1990: 214), in which individuals can pursue their own learning, but where work groups influence the learning process and outcomes. This leads to two different kinds of self-directed learning at work (which, they say, "probably are somewhat interdependent"): "learning directed at self development, and learning by an individual in the pursuit of collective needs within a group or organisation" (1990: 215).

This framework, too, is underpinned by the notion of an autonomous self actively making decisions about "self-development" and experiential learning needs. As I have argued earlier, this assumption should not be accepted as a given as the dominant approaches to experiential learning are being challenged by new insights concerning the nature of human communication. The ambiguity of experience, and theory; is based on the uncertainty of human agency.

Kosmidou and Usher (1992) problematise this uncertainty as part of "the dialectic of self and society". Usher (1989) in particular has been critical of the dominant conceptions of experiential learning, especially the humanistic theorisations of autonomy and subjectivity which underpin Marsick and Watkins's definitional work. Usher points out, that the idea of the "subject" being conceived of as an entity or a "self", which is "real" and located in the natural world is dubious:

the humanistic theorisation of subjectivity posits an essential inner core —
a true self unique to each individual, which is permanent, coherent and
known to the individual... The conception of the autonomous subject is
very powerful, because many of us share the assumption that because
'reflection' goes on in our heads it is unique to the knowing, rational self
which is the source and the condition of legitimacy for both the process
and product of reflection. (1989: 27)

The trainers' informal learning in this study suggests that what is needed is an
understanding of "the subject" that is in the active sense of "shaping" and the
passive sense of "being shaped": a dialectical approach to informal learning.

10.2.1 Learning the (post)modern malaise

Power relations are rooted deep in the social nexus, not reconstituted
"above" society as a supplementary structure whose radical effacement
one could perhaps dream of. (Foucault 1982: 222)

Informal learning is more than a product or outcome of the material acts of work. It
involves the complex interaction of self with the communicational or discursive
practices of the workplace. One might begin to view informal learning and its
linkages with formal education in relation to the nature of the workplace. Drawing
on Usher and Edwards's (1994: 153) framework, "con-text" provides a setting for
"pre-texts" (culture and interpretive traditions) and "sub-texts" (professional
paradigms, discourses and power-knowledge formations) which construct 'what
counts' as informal learning. As Chapter Six shows, the planned training activities
that take place at work, or for work, comprise what Casey (1995: 78) calls "the
manifest curriculum of work". This is accompanied by the *hidden curriculum* of work
that socialises adult workers. As this project has shown, much more is learned than
the material and physical acts of *doing* production. The construction of the facilities
for the Olympics is not only of buildings and infrastructure. Chapters Seven, Eight
and Nine conclude there are other forms of construction taking place: learning
constructions related to workers' selves. Workers learn to work *within* and *against*
the corporate drive for "acculturated" employees. Their accommodation and
resistance entail powerful forms of informal learning that are rarely opened for
discussion.

Accommodation to a dominant pre-text of learning at the site — instrumental competence — is manifested in a range of ways detailed in Chapters Eight and Nine. The associated sub-text — the assessment of competence to enable workers' on-the-job learning to be "formally" accredited — is a part of the reward system that complements this accommodation. Learning associated with resistance, however, appears to be more private, more internalised (such as David's adoption of the "Phantom" role), and outwardly largely symbolic (such as Marta's Nelson Mandela cake).

This shifts resistance in the new workplace away from a union-based opposition to dominant workplace expectations and management directives and towards a simulated solidarity based on corporate teams. Workers are wary that resistance is more likely to be punished than rewarded unless it results in outcomes that contribute to the company's performance objectives. Rather than resisting, workers are learning to speak-up "appropriately" in the new "empowered", self-directing corporate team context. Even this has been shown to be problematic (particularly exemplified in Michael's story in Chapter Six, where his expressed views on workplace reforms contributed to his own retrenchment).

In the pursuit by employers, unions and individual workers of recognition of informal learning, it is predominantly the visible and instrumental that is rewarded at the level of workplace implementation. Competence is most certainly one of the discourses shaping contemporary industrial training practices. Trainers, who invariably double as "assessors", are expected by their employers to acknowledge "competent performance" and not the learning associated with resistance or interruption. The latter has traditionally belonged to the critical distance allowed by formal education. But this critical distance is being eroded in the formal assessment of competence, which valorises a certain kind of doing — the observable.[4]

Further, access to training and the formal accreditation of skills acquired on the job are now industrial relations bargaining chips. Industry needs training and formal assessment. The notion of formal assessment of workplace skills is being pursued by unions and employers in a mutually beneficial compact with which formal providers of education are expected to comply. Compliance is being sought by state and

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4   This 'valorisation of the observable' can have the effect of separating professional judgement from practical knowledge. Aristotle helps us understand this separation by distinguishing *phronesis* (which contributes to ethical virtue), and *techne* (which implies a skillful means of "getting there") (in Beckett 1993: 8).

Federal Governments through TAFE colleges and universities.[5] Despite the compliance-seeking on the part of the major funding instrumentalities, there remains a very fragile research base to inform the alignment of work-based learning and education. What little research there is has largely been commissioned by the sources promoting the alignment.

A critical base from which to view this alignment is now urgently needed because training practices teach employees the competencies necessary to perform the job to the pre-set standards of the industry. This represents an impoverished notion of learning which, even so, has colonising effects on the lifeworlds of worker-learners. This is manifest at the professional level, where managers and team-leaders are being trained in how to practise the valuing of diversity, how to work in teams, how to communicate and negotiate more effectively. But this training reduces these skills to the competencies required to perform their work tasks. This may offer advantages for workplace communication, but there is much more to "knowing" about these topics than narrow skills based training entails. Knowing, or understanding, may well be unvoiced. Indeed, as Beckett (drawing on Aristotle's *Ethics*) argues, what is at the core of professional practice is:

> the expression of the judgment of understanding [which] gives practicality
> to the wisdom ascribed to someone who has acted rightly, or as Aristotle
> says, 'soundly' or 'well'. (1993: 10)

For construction workers, training practices, following head office expectations and requirements, are sanitising the culture. Beneath the surface is a culture once characterised by "legends", smoke-filled rooms, unsavoury sexist posters and calendars, shouting matches between unionists and bosses and between rival unions.[6] The construction workers' lifeworld (and image) is being cleaned-up; its practices are being adjusted. Construction unions are losing membership and power. It is now a lifeworld in which the corporation rhetoric seeks from its members commitment to the new partnering and team arrangements: the new "corporate family". Training is expected to facilitate this corporate family which is, in turn, expected to lead to greater participation, energy and output. The new team-

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5 Some opposition remains in universities to the introduction of competency-based university education, although some adult education and training faculties have adopted competency-based standards in undergraduate courses.

6 I am not wishing to convey a romantic picture of the 'old' culture here. It involved, as the Royal Commision (mentioned in Chapters Seven and Eight) found, embedded corruption, racism and sexism. The new 'sanitised' sites are attempting to redress some of these problems.

partnering approach is meant to be highly competitive and penetrate new markets such as those in Asia.[7]

Even with the competency-based approach to training and assessment, workers are learning more than the skills and competencies that are necessary to perform the job. They are experiencing the "normal" stresses of the new corporate-partnering and team requirements. The new "corporate family" has an emotional effect on the lives of workers and on the broader community.

LaBier (1986) and Casey (1995) show that the informal learning experiences of corporate workers affect all aspects of their working and emotional lives. This effect was noted by all the trainers of this study. Yet contemporary management and training and development literature continues an almost exclusive coverage of building learning organisations and "family-style" participatory structures. This coverage glosses over deeper issues such as the *emotional toll* upon selves. The new partnerships, the family-style learning organisations, seek to absorb more and more of the worker's self into the organisation — the organisation which, above all else, must perform competitively — at peak efficiency.

The social structuring of work — the new designer work-culture — is significant for psychological functioning as it profoundly affects people's views of reality. Weber's (1958) classic *Protestant ethic and spirit of capitalism* recognised such views as emanating from reciprocal relations among work, occupation, personality and religiosity. This reciprocity is exploited in contemporary corporate practices through "real world" corporate and industrial practices and discourses, and results in individual tensions including conflicts between personal values and professional demands. Further, what people do and learn in their work carries over into other spheres of their lives. Their cognitive functions, values, priorities in life and conceptions of themselves are a part of the "lessons" of work.

It is therefore, extraordinarily unhealthy to remove the distance between contemporary workplace learning and formal education. Yet this shift underscores the Australian national training reform agenda, an agenda running throughout OECD

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7   The New York Times (27th October, 1995) reported that the largest single construction project in the world currently revolves around the new Hong Kong aiport and its infrastructure. The report noted that no serious environmental impact studies were required for development, and construction occurs "around the clock". The report was attempting to explain why US construction firms had failed to win any significant building contracts there, and concluded that such [western] firms would, in future, need to "tune-into the cut and thrust of Asian ways of doing business". Training of western construction experts to "cut-it" in this context will need to be very flexible indeed, with ecological and ethical bases for development thoroughly tested.

nations, which seeks consistent nomenclature of occupations and occupational competence. Workers are expected to fit themselves into the technical logic of this discourse. Competence is, after all, rational and, say its proponents, can be fully explained. As such it is the embodiment of modern learning. It is also an important platform of the recently established Australian National Training Authority (ANTA).

If one looks deeper, however, the instrumental rationality of Weber's (industrial) iron cage of bureaucracy is discerned in the OECD movement on workplace learning. In the post-industrial scenario, the systematic fashioning of western workers' learning is associated with science and technology which are viewed by multinational corporations (and national governments) as holding the key to ongoing competitive advantage over the tiger economies of Asia and, more generally, the developing world. Boje chillingly describes the implications of this scenario (for learning) as:

> embedded in a seamless web of instructional apparatus where we are taught to be 'politically correct' bureaucrats. The learning occurs in the minute-by-minute interactions and the spaces along the hallways, lunchrooms and e-mail networks. The iron cage of the bureaucratic teaching machine is so ubiquitous and [seemingly] benign that the prisoners of modern learning no longer see the bars, the gears, or question the learning agenda. (1994: 447)

Boje's "bureaucratic teaching machine" can be readily linked with Foucault's ideas on the exercise of power, which is not "a naked fact, an institutional right, nor is it a structure which holds out to be smashed: it is elaborated, transformed, organised: it endows itself with processes which are more or less adjusted to the situation" (Foucault 1982: 224). "The situation" under scrutiny here is the merging of informal and formal learning which systematically produces instrumental outcomes in which learning no longer requires critical distance, dialogue and critique. This version of workplace learning cannot be accepted at face value. Critical distance, dialogue and critique cannot be expressed in the contemporary training jargon of "observable competence" that tells only about surface detail — the surface that is noticed in the ever onward spiralling competitive race.

At the environmental level, evidence is mounting daily that this competitive race is ecologically unsustainable. As Kegan (1995), Casey (1995), Gergen (1991) and LaBier (1986) variously assert, it also evokes a modern "madness" through the tension between work and emotion. Its symptoms, says Casey, range from "mild

distress, feelings of self-betrayal, stress and burnout to acute psychiatric disorders and irrationality" (1995: 81). This is the (post)modern malaise.

Designer work cultures promote a precise alignment of a person's values, attitudes and abilities with the needs of the organisation. Any traits that might impede work, or are unnecessary, are suppressed or eliminated. Corporate talk about a "celebration of difference" is purely that: talk. Rather, attributes of toughness, aggressiveness, decisiveness and building-competence are truly prized. These attributes relate well to the pursuit of grand construction and the exercise of power, and determine what is noticed within construction — what counts — as learning.

What counts at specific local sites is expected to count as credit within formal education programs. If it does not, the formal institution may be regarded with scorn: too academic, out of touch and so forth. In some cases this may well be so, but the contemporary alignment of workplace learning with formal education is based upon some unhealthy premises. The postmodern malaise described above is being translated into formal education by processes of recognition of prior learning (RPL) that (at present) rely too heavily on relatively narrow competency based assessments at work.

Against this, new links between informal learning and formal education (which entail, inter alia, assessment of competence, accreditation of work-based learning and mechanisms of RPL) are given new meaning. The hidden curriculum of work entails the colonisation of lifeworlds in favour of corporate interests, objectives and competencies. This operation can be exposed through the promotion of dialogue and scepticism about underlying assumptions related to work and development. Dialogue requires hearing the full spectrum of "voices" affected by development. This means, therefore, not only access to the dialogue, but sensitivity to the claims of minorities or people who have been marginalised. Dialogic processes will not work, however, if they are simply politically expedient or pragmatic acts. Effective dialogue presupposes exploration of social, political and economic issues should not privilege one particular perspective. It also presupposes time for systematic reflection so that a deeper consideration of "possibilities" for action, including transformative action, can be encouraged through formal education programs *and* at work.

In relation to education and training, state policies are increasingly "designed" to increase productive capacity and market competitiveness and not to foster or

nurture individual development or a healthier "life-world" as advocated by Horkheimer and Adorno (1993) who claim:

> the whole sophistocated machinery of modern industrial society is nature bent on tearing itself apart... Men [sic] have become so utterly estranged from one another and from nature that all they know is what they need each other for and the harm they do to each other. Each of them has become a factor, the subject or object of some practice or other... A world divested of illusion in which men, following the loss of reflection have again become the cleverest of animals and are busy enslaving the rest of the universe. (1993: 253)[8]

Underlying conceptions of *the person* and of work as a *learning environment* — in which values are oriented towards improving life-worlds and conditions for human dignity — must account for the ever-present possibility of replacing one oppressive discourse with another. As Usher and Edwards put it, this means recognising that "any reconfiguration is provisional and open to question" (1994: 213).

It is the ends to which experiential learning is being utilised that are at issue in this text. It follows that there are grounds for the development of an ethics to help guide the practices of industry trainers — beyond contemporary corporate requirements. Any development of "the person" or of a broader "common good" should be more than an incidental effect of informal learning. Telling a "better story" about learning in the workplace is suggestive of an ethics that would be mindful of the potential to establish new forms of oppression. The ethical issues associated with *taking stances* will deeply affect any dialectical notion of informal learning, and of workplaces as learning environments.

10.3 Rethinking the workplace as a "learning environment"

The construction industry provides for several reasons an ideal vehicle for examining the concept of "work as a learning environment". Reasons include the industry's intimate links between capital interests and labour relations, management and work

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8   Although Horkheimer and Adorno were contemplating the human condition at the height of world war two, as I write these notes, nuclear tests are being conducted in both the South Pacific and China, and the war in Europe (Bosnia) continues. It thus seems reasonable to ask whether indeed anything "enlightening" has been learnt by the "great powers", or whether they are still locked into the same master-discourses that lead to earlier cataclysms; discourses of nationalism, imperialism and economic domination. Horkheimer and Adorno's observations certainly retain plausibility when applied to our own era of economic rationalism.

organisation, industrial relations and training. Such industry influences now constitute the grounds of "valid" learning. But the "validity" of work-based learning rests upon philosophical instabilities that are frequently unacknowledged. Pre-set competency standards exemplify this instability. At one level, they represent (in theory) measurable learning outcomes that are meant to enable career progression and clarify what employees need to "master" for that progression. The desired worker-competencies are embodied in extensive checklists of skills for construction workers. At site-level, the lists are deployed in the implementation of competency-based training. This dimension of learning hinges on a positivistic behavioural psychology, and conventional positivism contains the discredited notion of a value-free social science. This objectivist illusion is meant to posit the working framework of competency-based training as resisting sociological and ideological inquiry. The competency standards framework performs this trick by rules of inference being transformed into "facts", social values into mere "inputs" and irreducibles into "givens".

As this study has shown, doing the job is only a part of the story. Workplace *givens* are not necessarily the proper objects of investigation which may well include a reality of sexism, racism or exploitation that is distinct from task performance. The so-called *facts* about learning, currently expressed in competency-based norms, cannot adequately represent the occupational influences on the processes involved. Nor can they capture the *character* of one's evaluations, beliefs, practical judgments, opinions, and ethics — the phronesis — of one's knowledge. These features of human work and learning cannot readily be reduced to the measurable forms desired by industrial relations negotiators, managers and educators who remain faithful to cognitive psychology and positivism.

In an industrial context such as construction, the desired form of learning is based on measurable, itemised elements that can be linked to remuneration, and excluded (or eliminated) if not conforming with the required nomenclature. The itemisation of adult workers' learning thus includes a socialising effect. It is a reductionist socialisation in which work — as a communicational or discursive practice — produces not only material constructions, but "acculturated employees" (Casey 1995: 78). The discursive practices, and not just the materiality of what one does at work, profoundly affect not only the individual worker but, more generally, human relations.

It is thus symbolically appropriate that the principal site for this study was the Sydney 2000 Olympic Games site. The contemporary Olympic movement is itself a

symbol of the contradictions and paradoxes of postmodern life: the notion of friendly sport between nations has become a commercially exploited product (and image) through which strong and wealthy nations demonstrate (through global media coverage) their supposed "superiority" over poorer nations. The rhetoric of "going for gold" in this context is often a subtext for jaded ideological "games" or an outlet for the expression of intense nationalism. Although the official rhetoric claims that the Olympics is about participation and sharing between nations, it is really *winning* that is most important.

At the construction site, Phaedrus executives used the expression "going for gold" at inductions for construction workers. What it actually meant at site-level was building a quality construction on time, under budget and without industrial disputation. This was a bottom-line operation par excellence. Big dollars were (and will be for some time) at stake. Economic considerations were never "invisible" as were some aspects of the trainers' learning.

10.3.1 "Invisibility" and learning: some critical and postmodern standpoints

The current valuing of informal learning is partly influenced by a philosophy of experience that holds there is no single point of judgment for what is right or wrong in learning. At the Olympics site, the philosophy of experiential learning is applied instrumentally, its characteristics, as Chapter Nine expounds, relates to the primacy of production. Absolute priority is given to "solving problems", "competent performance" and "assessment" based on observable outcomes. Learning needs to be directly aligned with the requirements of construction or else is considered dubious or even subversive. Learning in this context needs to be "concrete". Making sense of the world through asking and reformulating questions such as "why are we doing this project? how might it affect people? how will it impact on the natural environment, and indeed the eco-system? do we really want this? are team approaches to work organisation as desirable as the rhetoric suggests?" are completely out of bounds. These questions traditionally characterised formal or "academic" education. They are out of vogue in the drive for productive links between formal and work-based learning because they are interruptive, and interruptions are "bad news". The "productive links" between formal and informal learning are subtextual in the discourse of industries having to become more competitive in world markets.

It was, however, experiences of ambiguity, doubt, confusion, conflict, shifting priorities and allegiances that characterised the trainers' stories in this study.

Personal adaptations were constantly required to comply with workplace "imperatives". Informal learning was partly about *corporate survival* within the hierarchies of (structural and implicit) power. The trainers' accommodations tended to be in public. Their displays of loyalty to Phaedrus were "visible". Resistance tended to be a "personal" affair characterised by an internal dialogue. Marta's "Nelson Mandela cake", a symbolic gesture, was one of the few instances of public resistance to racist tendencies, both at the site and more generally within the construction industry. More typically the trainers referred to their need to become "invisible".

This metaphor of invisibility shows that the highly prized instrumental learning available in the workplace tended to force critique and resistance underground (and dispersed). The colonisation of informal learning through new corporate approaches to work organisation and management appears to have the effect of suppressing critique and resistance. Yet this suppression is a part of the experience of *belonging* to the corporation. This dialectic of suppression/belonging has the effect of privileging what is visible — competent and observable performance. Personal values and beliefs about equity and ethics thus have to be suppressed in order for one to belong to the benefits and reward systems of the corporation. *Reason's dream* of a democratic, developmentally educative workplace, a "critically reflective" learning environment as argued for by Welton (1995: 4), is implausible in a contemporary corporate context.

Chapter Three examined notions of "scientifically managed" workplaces, enterprises characterised by "flexible specialisation" and "learning organisations". It was pointed out that the learning organisation has superficial attractions that have lead to its popular adoption by corporations and enterprises, but it held no overriding theoretical claims for an educative workplace that encompasses larger concerns for "the processes of social democratisation" (Welton 1991: 11). It is intimately connected to the underlying capital ethos of productive growth, sharing the same overall framework of assumptions about what work is, what drives the economy and how "progress" is defined. Hart, following two powerful currents of critical thought — Frankfurt critical theory and several varieties of feminism[9] — argues convincingly that positive suggestions for what constitutes good or educative work "cannot solely be based on an analysis of existing workplaces, thus relying on conventional notions of work" (1993: 20).

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9   Hart's work has been associated with a "womanist" stream of feminist thought which, inter alia, examines how power distorts relations between men and women (Welton 1995: 8).

She argues that troublesome issues relating to social hierarchies and divisions, forms of exploitation and alienation are reflected in complex and varied ways in general social ideas such as "what constitutes good or bad work, glamorous or dirty work, and highly skilled or lowly skilled work" (1993: 20):

> to perform a critique of the concept of work itself means to step outside the framework that defines the parameters of the current debate on work and education; to assume a broader more comprehensive perspective; and to call into question the values, assumptions and myths out of which this framework is constructed. Relocating one's point of departure has several advantages. First, it relieves the pressure of making a choice between a more 'pessimistic' and a more 'optimistic' interpretation of current changes and developments. For instance, in the current debate on the future of work, much energy is spent on deciding whether work is going to be more skilled or more de-skilled, with considerable evidence marshalled in favour of both positions. However, by examining the broader social context that gives rise to the division between skilled and unskilled in the first place, one can identify its underlying logic and its relationship to a myriad of social divisions that not only determine the socially constructed meaning of skills, but also provide mechanisms for distributing opportunities for developing or practicing those skills. (Hart 1993: 21)

Hart's standpoint is flawed because of its assumption that by stepping outside "the framework that defines the current debate", by adopting a more critical framework, one can avoid a new set of oppressive consequences. This argument is that a broader, more comprehensive view allows for an analysis:

> where questions concerning social divisions along lines of sex, race/ethnicity, or nationality can be fully integrated with class. In other words, questions raised by women, people of colour, or Third World people are not merely added to an otherwise gender-neutral, colour-blind, 'general' analysis, but they provide its very foundation. (Hart 1993: 21)

These are issues with which many adult educators (including myself) have deep sympathies. But it is the "foundational" proposition which carries its main flaw. A foundational approach to any debate about workplace skills contains the elements of metanarrative (Enlightenment) notions of freedom and empowerment. As such, this type of empowerment is co-implicated with liberal individualism. A

consequence of this is that, as Peters and Marshall put it, "critical pedagogy still participates in the tradition of liberatory politics which depends fundamentally on a social ontology privileging the individual as an agent of all social phenomena, signification and knowledge production" (in Usher and Edwards 1994: 219). Hart implicitly, through her emancipatory liberal individualism, invests in a paradigm of consciousness and agency. The philosophical justification of this paradigm rests heavily upon the notion of a rational "knowing" (individual) subject who experiences "false consciousness" caused by exploitative social structures. This justification is trapped in a discourse of "true" or "false" consciousness — a binary logic which is philosophically unstable and perhaps in absolute contradiction.

The logic of false consciousness has been a theme in the modern tradition in which the "self" is conceived as historically specific, and socially and culturally patterned. Marx, Durkheim and Freud each held, variously, the idea that the self is a social construction shaped by institutional processes (Casey 1995: 3), whereas Goffman (1959: 240) argues that the self is not a fixed entity but constituent upon "technical, political, structural, cultural and 'dramaturgical' perspectives"[10]. Taylor's influential study further proposes that the self is ephemeral, contingent on "connections between senses of the self and moral visions, between identity and the good" (1989: x). Postmodern ideas about tensions between social production of identity and the existential project of self creation posit 'the self' as subject to dynamic and multiple configurations, discourses of language, power, difference and plurality. For Foucault, his objective (in relation to the subject and power) was "to create a history of the different modes by which, in our culture, human beings are made subjects... [Including] the way a human being can turn him- or herself into a subject... We have to know the historical conditions which motivate our conceptualisation" (1982: 208—9). Anyon, refers to Derrida to make the point that:

> discourse does not (language does not) reflect either human consciousness
> or an external 'reality'. Poststructural and postmodern theorists define
> (helpfully) language in ways that attempt to free linguistic meaning from
> the determinism of structuralist definitions, in which meaning is fixed by
> pre-determined binary opposition. (1994: 119)

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10 Goffman adopts a symbolic interactionist approach to demonstrate the importance of the "dramatic" way people represent themselves to one another — hence the dramaturgical or "staging the self" perspective. This perspective highlights techniques of "impression management" as a way of "ordering facts ... and the identity and interrelationships of the several performance teams which operate in the establishment" (1959: 240).

Freud's [1915] (1966) psychoanalytic theorisation that subjectivity is not specifically constituted by consciousness is dramatically extended by Lacan (1977). Lacan's theorisation of the symbolic order of language and culture decentres "the ego". Consciousness for Lacan is "Other-determined" in a way that is radically different to the subject of scientific and humanistic psychology — the very subject which underlies Hart's critical-feminist position that seeks to replace one dominant voice with another. Lacan's notion of consciousness differs in that meaning is not a function of an autonomous individual subject, but "is a function of the connection or relationship between *signifiers*" (Lacan 1977: 150; cited in Usher and Edwards 1994: 65).

"Signification" here is not a function of the rational-conscious individual, but a product of language and culture. Lacan's conception of self privileges signs, symbols and images. The key point for this study (particularly when Lacan is read in conjunction with Foucault's archaeology of knowledge/power) is that modernist assumptions linking intention, meaning and truth are highly questionable. The postmodern challenge is to the conception that meaning and intentions can have an existence separate from language and intersubjectivity. Postmodern theories of language, discourse and power seriously disrupt the philosophical tenets upon which the "consciousness paradigm" depends.

Hart's critical conception of work as a learning environment seeks to substitute "the truth" of women's reality for modernity's patriarchal idea of truth. According to Lemert, this position represents "an aggressively radical assertion of women's truth as the foundation for feminist action" (1995: 81). In Dorothy Smith's words, "the critical force of these methods is contained in ... enlarging women's powers and capacities to organise and struggle against the oppression of women" (1987; cited in Lemert 1995: 81). This view of a women's "truth", or "truthful experience", foregrounds politics (and Hart's 1993 and 1995 ideas for emancipation) by linking workplace practices at local levels with political action at the macro-level.

This linkage resonates with some of the findings of this study in that "different voices" at the site tended to be marginalised. It happened to Marta. Although she states "she was never unhappy", she had to accommodate to the production imperatives of the site at the expense of personal values about racism, sexism and 'transformative' possibilities of adult education. As Chapter Nine details, Marta and David developed a range of self-strategies for professional survival at the site. Indeed, the study raises the importance of the conceptualisation of *resistance*, and it leads to a departure from Hart's critical/feminist standpoint.

Strategies of transgression and interruption — as distinct from "emancipation" or "liberation" — appear to be based on stronger theoretical grounds for trainers practicing in the corporate environments I have described. As shown, the space for resistance in contemporary corporate practices is limited by the intricate web of discursive communicational patterns and enveloping work organisational structures and systems. Overt resistance will be viewed as "subversive" and quickly eliminated. Hence Foucault's assertion that critical analysis must work from forms of resistance to modernity:

> rather than analysing power from the point of view of its internal rationality, [my method] consists of analysing power relations through the antagonisms of strategies... [For example] there are two meanings of the word *subject:* subject to someone else by control and dependence, and tied to his [sic] own identity by a conscience or self-knowledge. Both meanings suggest a form of power which subjugates and makes subject to. (1982: 211–12)

If, as Foucault asserts, modernity covers its own contradictions in the veil of subjectivity, then that veil can hardly also serve to expose the truths it hides. Resistance and transgression for Foucault, therefore, begin with oppositions, strains, differences *within and against* the dominant ideologies of modernity. It follows that a postmodern standpoint on resistance and interruption does not automatically exclude or marginalise instrumental learning. Rather, it holds that a search for alternative approaches to what might constitute "valid learning" is at stake, whereby differences (within and against) are more highly valued. Although there is some common ground between this postmodern standpoint[11] and Hart's radical modernist position, Hart's strategy, based on its existing philosophical justification, leads to the replacement of one dominant discourse with another. For Foucault, because modernity was constituted with the support of the ideology of the historical Subject — from "enlightened consciousness to the free political thinker to economic man" (Lemert 1995: 84), such a strategy is inherently deficient.

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11 Lemert points out that there are currently three broad positions in a complex debate in the theoretical space where once ideology [unopposed] stood. Each position acknowledges that 'truth' might no longer serve as a normative standard for thought or action. These positions are: (1) Radical postmodernism which abandons the very idea of truth; accordingly, the problem of ideology is relieved. (2) Radical modernism which seeks by several means to retain the idea of truth and thus retain ideology as at least a rhetorical cover for more complex riddles. (3) Strategic postmodernism which attempts the trick of destroying modernity's foundational quest for truth by revising without completely rejecting modernity's categories (1995: 78).

This study of the informal learning of workplace trainers found their questioning of and resistance to workplace imperatives modified by the discursive practices of the corporation. This circumscription has been affected by the corporate strategies of encouraging more participatory decision-making structures, partnering arrangements and team structures that are supposed to "enable" employees' ideas and contributions to be valued and utilised by management. Instead of opening communication patterns, the new discursive practices, the designer corporate language and culture, bind its "designer employees" (Casey 1995) ever more firmly to the company's goals and production targets. Thus, new forms of closure are effected, and there is little space left for critical reflection and even less for resistance, although these are never totally eliminated. A consequence for the "transformational" dimension of learning appears to be that one of its central tenets: *praxis* — which entails action-reflection-action — is eroded as a workplace learning method.

Against these findings, Hart's (1995: 124) suggestions for radical social transformations including — "the overall humanisation of the workplace" — appear as noble, but wishful thinking. Indeed, "given existing power inequalities, and the state's role in mediating, supporting, engendering and reproducing them" (Usher and Edwards 1994: 220), it may be over-optimistic to expect that informal learning within contemporary workplaces might hold seeds for a qualitatively better future. But it is clear that current conceptions of both informal learning and of workplaces as learning environments are being 'framed' by their location within discourses of market economics and human capital theory.

What the stories reveal is that there is much going on with informal learning beyond its deployment within human capital (and experiential learning) discourses. Once informal learning is objectified to comply with competency-based standards or measurement, it is reduced, marginalised, thus becoming a site of tension — a problematic. The stories reveal this problematic as that which is excluded (as well as that which may be included) in any classification framework, exemplifying Foucault's (1982) point that opportunities for resistance are offered in the contradictions and ambiguities of modern discipline: "discourse can be both an instrument and an effect of power, but also a hindrance, a stumbling block, a point of resistance and a starting point for an opposing strategy" (1982: 101).

POSTSCRIPT

The Ethical Dimension of Informal Learning

> The problem is not to recover our "lost" identity, to free our imprisoned nature, our deepest truth, but instead, the problem is to move towards something radically Other ... we must produce something that doesn't yet exist and about which we cannot know how and what it will be.
>
> (Foucault 1991: 121)

In this text I have tried to create new understandings of what informal learning can be "read as". In particular my story has unfolded a more dialectical approach to understanding informal learning. What has emerged from this study is not a set of recommendations or an alternative model for practice. Nor does this postcript summarise key findings of the study. Rather, for me, what has emerged is the significance of the ethical dimension of informal learning, a significance heightened by the neglect of ethics as a central issue in the contemporary alignment of workplaces and formal education.

Thus, in my reflexive moment, it is the ethics of informal learning — the practical wisdom of Aristotle's *phronesis* — which becomes compelling. Phronesis contains an internal notion of 'what one ought to do', a teleology that can yet be deployed in non-totalising ways and related to local, contextual judgments. It is in the sense of my 'afterthoughts' that some suggestions are made as to how the ethics of informal learning might be addressed in future research and training practices.

In the workplaces using competency-based standards to measure performance, this study has found that the pre-defined nature of competencies can remove elements of

professional judgment. They can be prescriptive. Skilled workers can thus be denied aspects of judgment, with technical requirements emphasised. What 'counts' as 'valid' informal learning has been shown to be tied to discursive communicational patterns, power relations and particular types of workplace imperatives. Analyses of informal learning in contemporary corporate conditions thus require openness to knowing and demystification of the practices of industry trainers. As Foucault put it:

> what we need is a new economy of power relations — the word economy being used in its theoretical and practical sense... [In which] the role of philosophy is to keep watch over the excessive powers of political rationality. Which is rather a high expectation... It consists of taking the forms of resistance against different forms of power as a starting point. (1982: 210–211)

Foucault questions the way in which knowledge circulates and functions — its relations to power — focussing on problems of the present time and of what we are, in this very moment:

> the political, ethical, social, philosophical problem of our days is not to try to liberate the individual from the state, and from the state's institutions, but to liberate us from the state and from the type of individualisation which is linked to the state. We have to promote new forms of subjectivity through the refusal of the kind of individuality which has been imposed on us for several centuries. (1982: 216)

Foucault (1982) reminds us that dialogue and argument have been historically shaped. They may well be central to progress in the life-world but can easily slide into the exercise of power through an emphasis on operational competence. How, for instance, can workplaces with a precarious harmony of union and management relations hope to engage in practices of dialogue and argument without slipping back to well-worn paths of conflict and contestation?

One would have to be sceptical about the practical potential of dialogue and argument in industrial settings unless new forms of democratic interaction were established, and much research is needed on this topic. Some tentative efforts have been made in the direction of workplace democracy at the construction sites studied. There appears to be greater worker autonomy (related to the removal of restrictive demarcation practices) and more team work arrangements. But these efforts are

largely means of refining operational competence and efficiency. They are also power-led through strongly established hierarchies of engineers, middle-managers, specialist-trades contractors, trainers, construction workers and labourers. As such the "democratic developments" and new roles for "team-members" are actually located in new bureaucratic forms and locked into corporate knowledge/power. Interrupting this configuration will not be easy. But it is not hopeless.

For Foucault, hope remains insofar as there is an inseparable relationship between:

> power and freedom's refusal to submit... At the very heart of the power relationship, and constantly provoking it, are the recalcitrance of the will and the intransigence of freedom... Rather than speaking of an essential freedom, it would be better to speak of ... a state of permanent provocation. (1982: 222)

Within the state of "permanent provocation", Barnett points out, *nothing can be taken on trust* ... ideas, statements, symbols, ethical stances, institutions and ideological stances — the totality of one's experiences, both immediate and mediated — must come under continuous scrutiny" (Barnett 1994: 181). By definition, this is a process which can have no end. We learn from our mistakes, from trial and error, from having previously built something; but the purposes of projects, the criteria of "mistakes" and what constitutes the "learning" are all strictly reviewed. In this conception of learning, profitability and Truth (derived from disciplinary-based knowledges of construction) are displaced as the principal tenets by aesthetic values, sensitivity to others, ecological sensitivity and ethical principles.

"The Truth" about "good" construction becomes debatable. This does not exclude wealth creation, personal incentives, orderliness, predictability, codes of practice and so on. These values suggest that attaining a consensus about what is important in construction (in any industry) will never be easy. In some cases it will be unattainable. What is ultimately at stake here is some conception of a common good. As Barnett points out, "the common good cannot be defined a priori, but has to emerge out of, and be challenged by, open dialogue and critique" (1994: 183).

Such a theory implies ethical, environmental and political considerations that contrast to the lip-service given them at the moment. This is a pathway that seriously challenges conventional notions of work, progress and development (and of work's implications for learning and education) by raising radical questions such

as: Growth for whom? Construction of what, and why? What are appropriate goals? What represents enough growth? What are the costs? Who (or what) is bearing the costs? Implicit in each of these questions are social goals related to "what" is learnt and "how" it is learnt and the ways people effectively resist the various hidden-curricula of the workplace.

The cult of "modernist efficiency" embodies one of the grand narratives of the new work order. It is one of the totalising stories which Kegan (1995) suggests requires interrogation. The so-called superstructure is now an elusive global electronic complex in which production is not necessarily material. Image, symbol production, consumption and decentred work practices are now a part of our postmodern world — aptly illustrated by the hyperreal Olympics Games site (which was formerly the NSW State Brickworks, an abattoir and a garbage dump). For these reasons, theoretical development related to workplace learning needs to include the notion of multiple, fragmented and competing discourses even though such inclusions will present new and unpredictable mental demands.

Trainers' work and informal learning is subject to the ethics and values of the corporate culture. Even though the study has shown that there are ethics located within their practice which may differ from the corporation's, the trainers are not the autonomous individuals within the so-called empowered, self-directed teams — as the corporate rhetoric implies. They are subtly "engineered" to perform the desired corporate ways and they are not always aware of the social engineering that is taking place. This finding at the Sydney 2000 Olympics site is also echoed in Casey's (1995) study of the Hephaestus corporation in the US, and Boje's (1995) study of "Tamaraland" (also in the US). Trainers' informal learning has been shown to be influenced by production imperatives, discursive work practices and their industrial environments, with foci on efficiencies and competitiveness resting on unsustainable notions of "progress" and "development".

Furthermore, the contemporary corporate training function is shifting from specialist practitioners to the flexible new multi-skilled others who now have to pick up "training skills". The roles of specialist trainers and staff developers are also changing. In the corporations studied here, these now embraced strategic planning, facilitation and corporate development — with correspondingly fewer specialist training jobs. David's new title "National Skills Development Manager" signifies a move away from what he called "straight training" to "facilitation, planning and development" (see Chapter Nine). It is unclear, however, whether this new titled role makes him, in Foucault's terms, a more "active subject".

These movements are directly related to the principles of operational efficiency. They are outcomes of the application of human capital theory to workplace learning, now expected by corporations to happen continuously — at the point where workers are *doing* the job. For Dusseldorp, this means linking education directly to work:

> all successful economies treat the preparation of young people for work as a serious economic issue. Yet Australian approaches to link education and work hedge around the main issues. How can we learn *to do* work, not just learn *about* it? How can we develop competence and recognise it? These are the issues that will determine our economic future. (1991: ii)

Dusseldorp's interest in promoting continual learning — at the point where workers are performing their tasks — leads to the merging of training functions into the duties of line managers, experienced mentors and peer coaches. But there is a worrying absence of any critical research base on the implications and outcomes of collapsing specialist staff development or training units into "line-functions". Also, the preparation of young people for work is more than an economic issue — progression to a broader notion of workplace learning surely must carry deeper implications than this. It should include challenging "real-world" assumptions about the primacy of production and immediate economic imperatives, openness to meanings of other discourses and possibilities in "other ways" of knowing.

Industry training practices may thus benefit from a move away from mechanistic or organic metaphors of organisational learning and the quintessential modern notions of modularised competence, to discursive metaphors. Contemporary training practices have been framed, as this text has argued, by their contexts, professional paradigms, discourses and power/knowledge formations. Present orientations focus on "the doing", *the techne*, and on driving-up efficiencies. To counterpoint this drive, and its potential to move us further into a world where everything is regulated in advance — the totally managed, technological world economy with a competent workforce — a more reflexive approach in developing ethical practices is suggested. Indeed, Horkheimer and Adorno warn that this 'regulated' world is upon us:

> the fallen nature of modern man [sic] cannot be separated from social progress. On the one hand the growth of economic productivity furnishes the conditions for a world of greater justice; on the other hand it allows the technical apparatus and the social groups which administer it a

disproportionate 'superiority' to the rest of the population. The individual is wholly devalued in relation to economic powers, which at the same time press the control of society over nature to hitherto unsuspected heights. Even though the individual disappears before the apparatus which he serves, that apparatus provides for him as never before. In an unjust state of life, the impotence and pliability of the masses grow with the quantitative increase in the commodities allowed them. (1993: xiv)

Horkheimer and Adorno argue convincingly that under existing conditions, all cultural values are purchased and re-sold in a sell-out of culture; they are reflected in "a simulated extension of the spirit ... doled out to satisfy consumer needs" (1993: xv). Under existing conditions, the role of education, training, and more generally the links between informal and formal learning, face a massive challenge. This challenge could be assisted, this study suggests, by developing the ethical dimension of informal learning through education and workplace training practices that are more decisively centred on phronesis.

PART IV:

GLOSSARY, APPENDICES, BIBLIOGRAPHY

GLOSSARY

The purpose of this glossary is to clarify the ways technical terms and philosophical phrases are used in this text, highlighting common concepts in interpretive research and postmodernism.

Adult learning

Brookfield (1986) espouses six basic principles of effective practice in facilitating adult learning:

- Participation in learning is voluntary; adults engage in learning as a result of their own volition. Circumstances prompting learning may be external to the learner, (eg. job loss, change) but the decision to learn — is the learner's. Hence, excluded are settings in which adults are coerced or intimidated into learning.

- Respect among participants for each other's self-worth underlies all facilitation efforts. This does not exclude criticism, but statements on behaviour which belittle others should be absent..

- Facilitation is collaborative.

- Facilitation aims to foster in adults a spirit of critical reflection.

- Self-direction and improvement is fostered.

- Learners and facilitators are involved in a continual process of activity, reflection, new activity and collaborative analysis.

In this study, these principles are examined critically, as they can be misleading. In the context of "work-based" learning for instance, subtle and discursive corporate influences and political coercion often apply. The underlying assumptions about "self-direction" and learner "autonomy" are shown to be flawed. Even so, the above principles remain often taken for granted within liberal/humanist adult education

practices, and exemplified in much of the work-based learning (human resources development) literature. In HRD, a broad range of people make decisions about learning programs and their design. Learning in the applied, or instrumental sense is often about the acquisition of competencies that can be applied to one's work. Nadler (1992: 104) applies a taxonomy to the HRD field to distinguish major types of work-based learning programs, viz:

- Training — learning related to the present job of the individual;

- Education — learning related to a future, but defined job for which the individual is being prepared;

- Development — learning for the general growth of the individual and/or the organisation.

Such distinctions represent false dichotomies as they are interrelated, but Nadler (1992: 106) argues there are different models for learning appropriate to each category. For example, that the "training model" must be related to the job as it is actually being done by the individual. Present performance on the job and "observable" outcomes are essential parts of such a model for adult learning.

Being

"Being" is the most central concept of Heidegger's hermeneutic phenomenology. Being does not describe an entity or ultimate ground but rather it is a term that represents Heideggers's ontology:

> Being is always the Being of an entity, and so to ask for the Being of something is to inquire into the nature or meaning of that phenomenon. (1962: 29)

Heidegger's professed aim is to let the things of the world speak for themselves. He asks: What is the nature (Being) of this being? What lets this being be what it is? "Being", in the Heideggerian sense, is a fundamental term of the interpretive research process.

"Being-in-the-world" is a Heideggerian phrase that refers to the way human beings exist, act, or are involved in the world, for example, as parent, as teacher, as man, as woman, as child, as trainer and so on.[1]

Critical theory

Critical theory has identified itself with the Marxist legacy of attempting to forge a dialectical synthesis of philosophy and a scientific understanding of society based on:

(1) an appeal to a widened notion of rationality;
(2) a resistance to all forms of domination;
(3) an orientation to praxis;
(4) the centrality of the concept of emancipation.

Critical theory is now usually identified with the past work of representatives of the Frankfurt School, and with the work of Jurgen Habermas (Van Manen 1990: 176). In *Knowledge and Human Interests*, Habermas (1971) distinguishes three forms of knowledge and associated cognitive interests: the technical, the practical, and the emancipatory. Each of these, "knowledge interests" are seen to be rooted in primordial human activities: work, symbolic interaction, and power.

It is the empirical-analytic sciences which Habermas identifies as expressing the technical interest; the practical interest is seen to be incorporated in hermeneutics of the human sciences; and the emancipatory interest is served by the critically oriented sciences. Habermas's critique of modern society is based on a critique of instrumental reason, which is seen as governing dominant social science — through which society understands itself — and by way of which society legitimates it's oppressive economic, political and social practices.[2]

In education, research based on critical theory aims at promoting "critical consciousness", breaking down institutional structures and arrangements which reproduce oppressive ideologies, and removing social inequalities that are sustained and produced by social structures and ideologies.

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[1] Also see Emmanuel Levinas's *Time and the Other* (particularly pp. 39—57) for a repudiation of aspects of Heidegger's ontology of 'being'.

[2] Also see Foucault's (1982: 218) critique of Habermas's "transcendental" tendency.

Deconstruction

Deconstruction, the term most familiarly appropriated from Derrida's texts, gains its rationale and purpose from the characteristic of language and texts. Deconstruction, although oversimplified here, can be described as:

> The name given simultaneously to the stress created in texts (between what they want to say and what they do say) and to the detection of such gaps. A deconstructive reading attends to the deconstructive processes *always* occurring in texts and *already* there waiting to be read. (Payne 1993: 121)

Deconstruction is conventionally understood as a strategy for reading texts. On the other hand, as is clear in Payne's quote, there is more to it that this since deconstruction or a "deconstructive process" is already present in texts. It is because of the existence of this process that a deconstructive reading can take place.

Payne argues that Derrida's account of language, rather than controlling meaning, defining it, making it present, "is inundated by signification" (1993: 121). Thus, closure and openness, dissemination and the fixing of meaning, contingent and certain knowledge, limiting the unlimitable, are all dual aspects of the process of marking off, of boundary setting.

Hermeneutics

Hermeneutics is the theory and practice of interpretation. The word derives from the Greek god, Hermes, whose task it was to communicate messages from Zeus and other gods to the ordinary mortals. "Hermeneutics is necessary when there is possibility for misunderstanding" (Van Manen 1990: 179). Schleiermacher (1977), opened up the idea of hermeneutics as a theory of "technology" of interpretation, especially with respect to the study of sacred (biblical) and classical texts. Schleiermacher's program was critical (as the struggle against misunderstanding) and romantic (in desire to recover the particularity, or animating genius of the notions of authors' thoughts) — "his aim was to understand an author as well or even better than he or she understands himself or herself" (in Van Manen 1990: 179).

The emphasis for Dilthey (1985) was not the fundamental thought of the other person but the world itself, the "lived experience", which is expressed by the author's text. Dilthey's hermeneutic "formula" is:

- *lived experience:* the starting point and focus of human science;

- *expression:* the text or artifact as objectification of lived experience;

- *understanding:* not a cognitive act but the moment when "life understands itself".

Heidegger (1962) more radically 'de-psychologised' the notion of understanding. The notion of hermeneutic understanding for Heidegger was not aimed at re-experiencing another's experience but rather the power to grasp one's own possibilities for being in the work in certain ways. To interpret a text is to come to understand the possibilities of being revealed by the text. Heidegger's hermeneutics is described as an "interpretive phenomenology" (Van Manen 1990: 179).

Gadamer (1975) asserts that in interpreting a text we cannot separate ourselves from the meaning of a text. The reader belongs to the text that he or she is reading. Understanding is always an interpretation, and an interpretation is always specific — an application. For Gadamer, the problem of understanding involves interpretive dialogue, which includes taking up the tradition in which one finds oneself. Texts that come to us from different traditions or conversational relations may be read as possible answers to questions. To conduct a conversation, says Gadamer, means to allow oneself to be animated by the question or notion to which the partners in the conversational relation are directed.

Hermeneutic phenomenology

Hermeneutic phenomenology tries to be attentive to both terms of its methodology: it is a *descriptive* (phenomenological) methodology because it wants to be attentive to how things appear, it wants to let things speak for themselves; it is an *interpretive* (hermeneutic) methodology because it claims that there are no such things as uninterpreted phenomena. The implied contradiction may be resolved if one acknowledges that the (phenomenological) "facts" of lived experience are always already meaningfully (hermeneutically) experienced. Moreover, even the "facts" of lived experience need to be captured in language (the human science text) and this is inevitably an interpretive process.

Human science

The term "human science" is derived from Wilhelm Dilthey's (1987) notion of *Geisteswissenschaften*, in which human (mental, social, historical) phenomena require interpretation and understanding whereas natural science involves external observation and explanation. "We explain nature; humans we must understand", said Dilthey, who sought to develop in hermeneutics, a methodological basis for human sciences. According to Dilthey we can grasp the fullness of lived experience by reconstructing or reproducing the meanings of life's expressions found in the products of human effort, work and creativity.

Hermeneutics and phenomenology are involved in all the disciplines of the humanities and social sciences that interpret the active inner, cognitive, or spiritual life of human beings in social, historical or political contexts. That is, human science is the study of meaning: descriptive-interpretive studies of patterns, structures and levels of experiential and/or textual meanings.

Human science research is the activity of explicating meaning. The orientation of all human science research is more closely aligned with the critical-hermeneutic rationality of the humanities and philosophy than with the positivist rationality of empirical-analytic or behavioural cognitive science.

Intentionality

The term "intentionality" indicates the inseparable connectedness of the human being to the world. Brentano, and later Husserl, argued that the fundamental structure of consciousness is intentional, and every conscious experience is bi-polar: there is an object that presents itself to a subject or ego. This means that all thinking (including imagining, perceiving, remembering) is always thinking about something. The same is true for actions: grasping is grasping for something, hearing is hearing something, pointing is pointing at something. "All human activity is always *oriented* activity, directed by that which orients it. In this way we discover a person's world or landscape" (Van Manen 1990: 181).

We are not reflexively conscious of our intentional relation to the world. Intentionality is only retrospectively available to consciousness. Or as Merleau-Ponty said, "the world is revealed to us as ready-made and already there" (1964: 43). It is not possible to experience something *while* reflecting on the experience, for example, our experience of anger may dissipate when we try to analyse or reflect on it.

"Specific intentionality" refers to the directedness of thinking and acting here and now. "General intentionality" is when we are being directed to the world in a certain way, for example, as man, woman, child, mother, father, teacher, author, and so forth.

Lifeworld

The idea of the lifeworld *(Lebenswelt)* — the world of lived experience — derives from Husserl's (1970) posthumously published *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*: [the lifeworld is] "the world of immediate experience, the world as already there, pre-given, the world as experienced in the natural, primordial attitude, that of original natural life" (1970: 103-186). Husserl makes an historical and phenomenological distinction between: (1) our theoretical attitude to life, borrowed from the Greeks, and (2) our natural pre-theoretical attitude to life on which all theorising is based, and from which all theorising is ultimately derived. Husserl uses the term "natural" for what is original and naive, prior to critical or theoretical reflection.

The theoretical attitude that western intellectual and scientific culture borrowed from the Greeks must be recognised as a new (historically speaking) and distinct style of life. In contrast, the natural attitude of the lifeworld is always "pragmatic," always directed at the world "toward this or that, being directed toward it as an end or as a means, as relevant or irrelevant, toward the private or public, toward what is daily required or obtrusively new" (Husserl 1970: 281).

Plato and Aristotle attributed the origin of the desire to know (philosophy) to simple wonder at things being the way they are. While wonder is a natural occurrence in everyday life, modern theoretical attitudes can turn us into non-participating spectators, surveyors of the world. Paradoxically, the theoretical attitude of modern science often silences our sense of wonder, which Merleau-Ponty relates to "the demand for a certain awareness, a certain kind of attentiveness and will to seize the meaning of the world" (1962: vii-xxi).

According to Husserl, each lifeworld shows certain pervading structures of styles which need to be studied. Heidegger (1962) gave the idea of lifeworld structures an existential thrust by speaking of phenomenology as the study of Being — the study of our modes-of-being or ways-of-being-in-the-world. Wittgenstein's (1982) notions of "form of life" and "language games" can be understood as a linguistic approach to

the idea of lifeworld. Van Manen points out that more recent formulations associated with "the project of phenomenology also seem to have turned toward more semiotic directions" (1990: 181).

Phenomenology

Immanuel Kant (1964) used the term (in Chapter III), to distinguish the study of objects and events as they appear in our experience (phenomena) — from objects and events as they are in themselves (noumena). Phenomenology can be referred to as the study of phenomena.

In *Phenomenology of the Spirit*, Hegel (1977) formulated phenomenology as the science in which we come to know *mind* as it is "in itself", through the study of the ways in which it appears to us. With Husserl, phenomenology became a descriptive method, as well as a human science movement, based on modes of reflection at the heart of philosophic and human science thought. For Husserl phenomenology is a discipline that endeavours to describe how the world is constituted and experienced through conscious acts.

Phenomenology must describe what is given to us — in immediate experience — without being obstructed by pre-conceptions and theoretical notions. Husserl advanced a transcendental phenomenology, but in his last major work — *Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology* — he formulated the notion of "the lifeworld" as the everyday world in which we live in the natural, taken-for-granted attitude. This notion of the lifeworld has become associated with existential phenomenology (not to be confused with the life philosophy of existentialism), which aims at describing how phenomena present themselves in lived experience, in human existence. For Heidegger (1962), phenomenology is ontology — a study of the modes of "being in the world" of human being.

Postmodernism

Postmodernism (Lyotard 1984) views as "incredulous" Husserl's notion (derived from Kant) of the "transcendental", and Heidegger's aim to "let things of the world speak for themselves" — on the grounds that we do not, and cannot, speak for "ourselves". Humans are historically and culturally "inscribed" — our voices are not "of ourselves", but represent our historical situatedness and our inscriptions. Postmodernism, as a philosophy, thus represents a profound counterpoint to the

ontological assumptions of hermeneutics and phenomenology. Paradoxically, much within postmodern philosophy has evolved out of phenomenology.

Norris (1993) claims that postmodernists are erroneous in rejecting the "transcendent" on the grounds that much of this rejection derives from Foucault's "misreading" of Kant. Norris argues that Foucault:

> demotes the claims of "transcendental" reason (or critique) to the status of a merely localised episode in the recent history of thought. [Foucault also] identifies truth — for all practical purposes — with that level of contingent events or shifts in the order of power/knowledge relations which can best be revealed through a jointly "archaeological" and "genealogical" approach. Insofar as the Enlightenment project survives, it does so in a sharply delimited or relativised form, as an impetus to the kind of investigative thinking — the inquiring-back into its own genesis and historical conditions of emergence — which can offer no hold for the truth-telling claims of old-style "universal" reason. (1993: 37)

Burbules, however, points out that:

> postmodernism is not a specific theoretical position itself, but an intellectual trend that comprises several quite different philosophical theories. Some of the characteristics of post modernism are "the rejection of the Enlightenment: it is about the infusion of power into our theories of knowledge, language and ethics; it is rationalistic; it offers a radical social constructiveness; it privileges difference over commonality; it is about the discursive constitution of social (and natural) reality; it stresses a de-central view of the subject and the fungibility of identity. (1995: 2)

Many writers including Usher & Edwards (1994); Smart (1992); Featherstone (1991); Nicholson (1990); and Couzens Hoy (1989), argue that it is not particularly useful to construct an all-encompassing definition of "postmodernism" — suggesting it is more useful to look at the family of terms such as "postmodernity," "postmodernisation," "post-structural" and "the postmodern."

Bauman (1992) argues that in contrast to "modernity": "postmodernity is marked by a view of the human world as irreducibly and irrevocably pluralistic, split into a

multitude of sovereign units and sites of authority, with no horizontal or vertical order either in actuality or in potency" (cited in Usher & Edwards 1994: 12).[3]

Reflection (and critical reflection)

Mezirow (1990) says reflection is "an examination of the justification for one's beliefs, primarily to guide action and to reassess the strategies and procedures used in problem solving". Critical reflection is distinctive in its focus on the validity of the presuppositions which underpin those belief structures.

Critical reflection, say Boud and Walker (1992), is "reflecting on the presuppositions which we hold about ourselves and the world and which limit our freedom and constrain our actions". It thus involves coming to recognise the assumptions that give rise to these "constraints" and developing an understanding of the ways they were acquired. As such, critical reflection is connected with emancipatory education. Mezirow's (1990) idea is that critical reflection includes an organised effort to precipitate or facilitate the reformulation of the meaning of one's experience — which he refers to as "transformative learning".

Boud and Walker's (1992) presuppositions of critical reflection distinguishing it from reflection as follows. (My notations are included):

1   We do not simply see what is there but perceive each situation according to our own prior experience. Here perception is not conceptually neutral but is structured by our personal foundation of experience.

2   Society and cultures create norms, values, beliefs, structures, language patterns and categories within which experience is understood. Kemmis saw reflection as not a purely internal psychological process, but action oriented and historically embedded ..."like language it is a social process and as such is political and shaped by ideology" (1985: 143).

3   Historical and cultural influences are internalised as part of our personal foundation of experience. Not only are socially constructed events interpreted as natural realities, we internalise these influences. By accepting their legitimacy we give these social influences power over ourselves. Mere

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3 Implications of various postmodern ideas for adult education practice are elaborated in *Postmodernism and Education* by Usher & Edwards (1994).

recognition of this process in itself may not be powerful enough to bring about change. The power it wields over us will not necessarily be removed because the process is recognised, but it can remove the conviction that this is the only way to look at things.

4   The effect of internalising the influences of society is that we may be in a state of false consciousness, wherein we accept as true things which may not be true; we may accept that what is in the interests of one group in society is normative for the whole society; we may accept beliefs that seem to be in our interests but are not; we may accept social descriptions as "facts"; we may accept things which, with better information or insight, we may see as false. Boud and Walker (1992) point out that the concept of false consciousness is problematic as it implies a greater or "knowable truth", or at least a different truth more in line with one's social and economic interests. There can be no external arbiter of what is false, and an individual will only be able to give limited direction to critical reflection.

5   Our freedom is inhibited by the limits set by the assumptions we internalise.

6   There are ways of criticising and evaluating our beliefs so that we can become more aware of the constraints imposed on us, for example, by examining the assumptions underlying the constraints and their origins. Brookfield (1991), reminds that awareness that assumptions and constraints are socially created does not mean they are easily removed.

7   Critical reflection explores the personal and social framework within which one works, rather than just working within it. Critical reflection is not an empirical observation as one might find in the natural sciences.

8   Personal interests can emerge from critical reflection if one obtains a clearer vision of the issues involved.

9   The process of exposing false assumptions can lead to restructuring the social situation. Critical reflection thus has an action orientation.

Boud and Walker (1992) argue that within our historical and cultural situation, certain attitudes and presuppositions have been internalised which help individuals deal with obstacles in "positive" ways. This is at odds with much that has been written about alienation (in the traditions of critical social theory) and with

postmodern doubts about identity formation in post-industrial conditions. (See Chapter Three).

Reflexivity

What is going on in this research? What kind of world or "reality" is being constructed by the questions asked and the methods used? What epistemologies are carried within the research? These are important questions to reflexivity. Usher and Edwards (1994: 149) refer to it as the "sub-text of research".

At its simplest, reflexivity claims that since the activity of the knower always influences what is known, nothing can be known except through those activities. According to Usher and Edwards, this leads to a key question — "what kind of "problem" is reflexivity, indeed is it a problem at all? They suggest that by foregrounding how we construct what we research, reflexivity is no longer a problem but a resource:

> It helps us to recognise that we are a part of rather than apart from
> the world constructed through research. More than this, however,
> by becoming aware of the operation of reflexivity in the practice of
> research, the place of power, discourse and text, that which goes
> "beyond" the purely personal is revealed. (1994: 149)

"Going beyond" the personal means more than being up-front about one's values and beliefs however. Ashmore (1989), Lather (1991) and Usher and Edwards (1994) argue that the notion of reflexivity relates to an author's autobiography — marked by the significations of gender, sexuality, ethnicity, class, race and so on. Usher and Edwards argue that these significations are "socio-cultural products that are part of a practice of writing with effects upon both the form and outcomes of research" (1994: 149). They refer to this as the *con-text* of research.

A reflexive approach to research does not automatically imply a subjectivist position. Rather, it foregrounds the implications of the personal within the practice of the research. From a postmodern perspective, Usher and Edwards argue forcefully a case for the use of reflexivity in educational research:

> Even when we have some confidence that our research is useful or even
> emancipatory, we are still "objectifying", still speaking *for* others in the
> name of doing good by them. We are still attempting to mould

subjectivities in a modernist way, still attempting to bring about changes in the name of "progress". Thus an awareness of reflexivity enables us to interrogate our own practices of research, in terms of how they can become part of dominant and oppressive discourses through a "reflexive" acceptance of neutrality of research, and in terms of how we, as researchers, are implicated in such discourses despite our best intentions. (1994: 152)

To understand reflexivity is therefore to acknowledge that research is always more than understanding, interpreting or finding out about any "pre-existing" world.

Semiotics

Texts or signs, and their structural relationships, are the subject of study for semiotics. In semiotics, there is no innocent, pure or pristine experience of a real external world. We "encode" our experience of the world in order that we may experience it — there is no neutral text. This encoding produces certain styles. Barthes concludes that writing is all style, a highly conventionalised activity. Barthes' deconstructive writings represent moves to expose how modern society "codifies reality" in its own image (usually through mass media). Once this reality is produced, one proceeds to believe that it is the only reality possible.

From a semiotic viewpoint, any social behaviour or practice signifies and may be read as a text, as a language. For example, nobody merely talks; every speech-act displays a complex of; messages through the "language" of gesture, accent, clothing, posture, perfume, hair-style, facial manner, social context, etc., above, behind, beneath, beside and even at odds with what words actually say. Similarly, everything around us systematically communicates something meaningful to us, and one can thus speak of "the world as a text."

Derrida (1976) provides an influential approach to the semiotics of writing. In his "grammatology" (science of writing) he argues that our logo-centrism and our tendency to treat oral language as primary over written language commits us to a falsifying "metaphysics of presence". It is based on an illusion that we are able, ultimately, to come face to face with each other and with things. According to Derrida, this belief in "presence" expresses a yearning hope that, in spite of our always fragmentary and incomplete experience, there is reason to insist on the existence of a redeeming and justifying wholeness, an ultimate notion of one-new,

essence, ground, or a faith in objective reality. As reader-interpreter, Derrida practises a deconstructive analysis of the text: a double reading which has the effect of showing the ways in which the argument of a text calls it's own premises into question.

Symbolic interactionism

Symbolic interactionism is a theoretical perspective in social psychology, originally connected with Mead (1967) and the Chicago School. Its foremost proponent has been Blumer (1969), who understands social reality as a complex network of interacting persons, who symbolically interpret their "acting" in the social world. The methodological rule is that social reality and society should be understood from the perspective of the actors who interpret their world through and in social interaction. Its application is generally in studies of role behaviour and perception.

From a symbolic interactionist perspective, human beings tend to act on the basis of how they believe other people behave toward them. Their self-perceptions and feelings tend to be mediated by how they think others see and feel about them. In education this principle has been illustrated by studies showing the so-called "Pygmalion effect" of teachers' perceptions of children and the effect of those perceptions on the children's sense of self and academic ability. In short, symbolic interactionists study the functional relationships between how we see ourselves (self-definition), how we see others (interpersonal perceptions) and how we think others see us.

APPENDICES

Appendix One: Protocol for the "Grounded" Interviews

Learning about the job
- What it entails
- Productivity

Prompts — Can you describe your job and what it entails?

What out-put (productivity) is required?

Can you describe your most difficult work tasks?

How do you deal with these?

Can you describe any of your experiences in the job, either good or bad, that particularly stand out? Give an example.

In what ways did you learn from this experience?

What do you rate as your most significant learning achievements in this job?

What changes in the way you work, or perform the job, have resulted from your on the job learning?

Can you identify the learning at work which has been most important to you? Any specific examples? Why has this been important?

Learning about the organisation

- Commitment

- Job satisfaction

- Team relationships
  - power, politics, status
  - networks
  - mentoring
  - role modelling

- Philosophy, mission, goals, rules, roles and

- How they are interpreted, negotiated and modified.

Prompts — Has your experience and learning in this role influenced your motivation? Or your expectations about your career?

Are there any barriers such as organisational norms which, for example, interfere with (or impede) your learning of work? Can we discuss these?

Do you have much time to reflect on your workplace learning?

Can you describe your experience of reflection about your work?

What sort of things have triggered your "best" learning at work. What was it that made this your best learning?

Can you describe any learning achievements of colleagues which you particularly admire or appreciate?

What is now sought are stories about your workplace learning. Think about the last time you had to solve a problem, or deal with a complex situation, where you felt you did not have the necessary knowledge or skills. How did you go about learning what you needed to know? Who, (or what) in the organisation helped you? Did it work? Why/Why not?

Can you describe what you have learned about the way you learn from experience in this job? Have any techniques or methods been more or less successful then others?

Are you aware of the competency based standards for workplace trainers? What role (if any) have these played in your work? How is your own learning noticed and rewarded (what counts for you)?

Learning about oneself

- Confidence

- Identification with the organisation and progress with it

- Dealing with authority

- Coping with ambiguity, failure, competition, rejection, unfair treatment

- Coping with personal problems at work

- Changes in values, belief system or self concept

- Dealing with discrepancies between personal and organisational values

Prompts — Have your personal values (and philosophies) effected your learning at the site? Discuss how, in what ways — identify any values dilemmas.

Has your informal learning influenced your self-perceptions in relation to your professional role (e.g. the way you see yourself within your role in the organisation)?

Can we talk about the possible gender influences upon your experience (and learning) at work? For instance, have you experienced "gender" as an issue at work?

Can we talk about any significant events in your personal life which may have influenced your learning at work? Can we talk a little about your own background?

How do you identify your own developmental (or training) needs?

Appendix Two: Protocol for Phase Two Interviews

1)   **The Company**

- Organisation and management structure
- Scale of business ($ turnover per year)
- Type(s) of work undertaken
- Stated mission/philosophy

2)   **The Site**

- What is being built?
- Nature of construction?
- Budget?
- Building timetable and its effect on training:
- How was the project procured (tendering and role of skill formation)?
- Number of employees and occupational groups involved in this construction project?
  - proportion of day labour and sub-contractors?
  - number and range of subcontractors?

3)   **Work Organisation and skill formation**

- How is work organised at the site?
- Is there a workplace reform strategy? If so:
  - history of, and current workplace reform initiatives
  - consultative processes
  - extent and nature of support by: senior management, middle management and unions (and which unions are represented at the site)
- Describe the "culture" of this site? Include:
  - morale
  - union-management relations
  - cooperation and openness amongst employees (eg between teams)

- How does the company define skill formation?

- How are skill needs identified?

- What are the major skill needs at this site?

- Proportion of employees involved in formal skill formation (training) activities?

4) Formal Training Arrangements

- What are the current on the job and off the job skill formation practices for:

    - permanent (direct labour) employees

    - casual employees

    - managers/professionals

    - subcontractors

- For each of the above:

    - who delivers?

    - how delivered?

    - how assessed?

    - certification?

    - RPL?

    - how funded?

    - how managed?

    - what is the cost?

    - what are the benefits?

    - triggers for training decisions?

    - impediments to training and learning?

(For discussion with those involved with training).

5) Informal Learning (Practices)

- What does informal learning mean to the trainers themselves?

- What is regarded as informal learning at the site?

- Is informal learning at this workplace recognised?

- How is informal learning at this workplace recognised?

- Are there links between the formal skill formation (training) program and informal learning at the site? For example:

  - does this link with the nationally approved competency standards framework for the industry?

  - how?

  - which types of informal learning are important?

  - why?

  - who says so?

- What would trainers, coaches and mentors like to see happen at this site to encourage skill formation generally, and informal learning specifically?

Appendix Three: Protocol for Interviews at the Sydney 2000 Olympic Games Construction Site[4]

A: *The Enterprise*

1. Organisational Structure

   Sample questions and issues to explore...

   - Company annual report and other publications (if necessary).

   - Can you provide a general description of the structure of your organisation or contractor?

   - Report on:
     - size
     - relationship to parent company
     - main suppliers and customers
     - key workforce data (numbers, structure, etc.)
     - composition of workforce (male/female, NESB, age etc.)
     - key financial data (profit, turnover, etc.)
     - productivity and quality performance.

2. Strategic Focus

   Sample questions...

   - Could you outline a brief history of the enterprise

   - Who are your major competitors

   - What are your current competitive strategies

   - To what extent is the enterprise focussing on overseas contracts or export markets

   - To what extent is deregulation/international competition affecting your competitive position

   - To what extent is training seen as providing a competitive edge for the organisation?

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3.   Nature of the Construction

Sample questions...........

- Obtain an overview of the construction processes and their various elements? Timetable, budget.

- To what extent are construction processes automated?

- What has been the level of investment in new technology in recent years?

B: Human Resource Issues

4.   Workplace reform strategy

Sample questions...

- Outline your recent and current strategy for workplace reform. Does it include the following elements:
    - work organisation?
    - multi skilling?
    - new technology?
    - award restructuring?
    - training?

- What do you mean by "flexibility" in the workforce here?

- Have construction workers become more multi skilled in recent years? In what ways; how?

5.   Work organisation

Sample questions...

- Do construction workers tend to work for sub-contractors or in (direct company labour) teams at this site?

- To what extent do you people work in teams a this site?

- How are the teams (if any) organised?

6.   Industrial relations

Sample questions...

- What is the general state of relations between management and union/employees here? Discuss.

- How has this changed in recent years?

- What did you get from award restructuring

- What arrangements do you have for consultation here?

- How has enterprise bargaining gone at this site?

- What have you got from the process?

- What do you hope to achieve in the future

C: The Organisation and Management of Training

7. Formal learning arrangements

- How many training specialists work at the site?

- Are the training specialists part of operational units or a separate specialised unit?

- What in-house training facilities are available?

- What is the management structure for training specialists?

- Who within the organisation makes decisions about who receives training and what type of training?

- Is competence assessment based on a skills matrix?

- Does this matrix relate to industry wide standards?

- How are skills assessed and recorded?

Approach to the organisation of training (systematic or ad hoc?)

- Is there a written training plan?

- Are formal needs analyses conducted?

- Are training programs documented? How?

- What curriculum materials are used?
  - are the training programs based on competency standards approved by the National Training Board?

- Are employee skills and competencies assessed? How? When?

- Are employee skills and training needs recorded? How?

- Is there career paths and career planning for employees?

- Are training programs formally evaluated?

- Do you record the costs of training? How?

- Do you assess the benefits of training? How?

- % of payroll spent on "structured" training: ...%

- % on internal/ % on external training: Internal: ...% external: ...%

- How will training help achieve the current competitive strategy of the enterprise?

- How important is training and workforce skill levels to the enterprise's competitive position?

- What plans, if any, do you have for raising skill levels of the workforce?

- For each of the following groups, is your training strategy aimed at multi-skilling and job flexibility, increasing skill levels, or addressing skill deficits?
    - management and supervisory
    - technical/professional
    - trades
    - operators
    - other (specify)

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5   Note: This thesis crosses a number of disciplinary bounds and fields of practice. I make no pretence of suggesting this bibliography comprehensively addresses everything that has been written on informal learning in psychology, sociology, adult education, organisation and management development, training and human resource development, social science and indeed philosophy. It contains work that I have drawn upon in the course of writing this text although not all items are cited in its final form. Items appear in strict alphabetical order.

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