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Learning and Becoming in Academic Development: An autoethnographic inquiry

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A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Faculty of Education and Social Work
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Abstract

This thesis speaks to the emotional and corporeal world of being in academic development—that relatively new profession and group of academics whose work it has been traditionally, to enhance university teaching and learning. While the purpose, outcomes and impact of academic development work has been variously described, sometimes problematised and now widely written about, there is surprisingly little work that seeks to flesh out, represent and communicate the process of learning and becoming in academic development in ways that hold up its embodied difficulty beyond ideas of utility which very often frames its logic. This thesis attempts to develop and argue a place for that narrative as important to the scholarship of academic development project.

Framed as an autoethnographic inquiry, this thesis is firstly, an exploration of my own learning and becoming as an academic developer. I am interested in holding up, inspecting and interrogating the tensions and contradictions which have surfaced as a result of my practice and my participation in this particular form of academic work. In many ways, it can be read as a neophyte’s story. This focus on its quotidian operations acts as an entry point to a larger scholarly project. In the second instance, I read my experiences and this thesis as emerging out of Ronald Barnett’s (2000) notion of supercomplexity. It seeks out a return to the question of what it means to be in academic development at a time when increasing and contradictory demands are being made of it. So, this thesis is also an exploration that enables me to make visible, a series of questions that take the scholarship of academic development project as a contested field, subject to particular kinds of conceptual organisation and disciplining tactics around its research, practices and values.

My goal in this thesis is to invite reflection on two questions: first, how might the academic development project be different, or otherwise? And second, what new frameworks, concepts and ideas help us to go towards imagining that place of difference? To this end, I offer a series of provocations that seek to engage the academic development project in a range of critical encounters. These encounters are focused on the identity of the project itself; the framing of its research economy; and the availability of ideas about student learning. Taken together, these hybrid-like encounters begin to prize open the narratives upon which the project of academic development has hitherto relied. I argue for an academic development community that not only makes available critiques of itself but one that is also active in their very production. This thesis is an expression of precisely that struggle.
Author’s Declaration

This is to certify that:

I. this thesis comprises only my original work towards the Doctor of Philosophy Degree

II. due acknowledgement has been made in the text to all other material used

III. the thesis does not exceed the word length for this degree

IV. no part of this work has been used for the award of another degree

V. this thesis meets the University of Sydney’s Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) requirements for the conduct of research.

Signature(s):

Name(s): TAI L. RERATA

Date: 4/11/2005
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Chapter 1

Staging the learning and becoming encounter: re-imagining the scholarship of academic development project

‘Um... Professor?’ I say nervously, squeezing past the myriad of others as I manoeuvre my way forward to the front of the seminar room. He doesn’t appear to have heard me. ‘Um... Professor?’ I say again, this time raising my voice slightly. ‘Do you think you might spare a few minutes for a quick chat? I wanted to ask you more about this idea of how academic development might work under the conditions of supercomplexity.’

I catch his eye just as he begins to busy himself with packing away his things. Carefully rolling down the sleeves of his crisp white business shirt, the navy blue suit jacket – the one that has been hanging oddly and slightly askew at the back of his chair throughout the seminar is now misshapen. Up close, it looks woollen and expensive – now on – it just looks large, much too large for his frame. The Professor fixes himself, checks his watch and extends me a hand. He has learned hands, scholar’s hands – just as I suspected he would.

‘Yes sure. I think I can spare a couple of minutes before I have to race off,’ he says smiling that toothy smile. ‘I noticed you scribbling down lots of notes during my talk. It’s Tai isn’t it? Incidentally, I really liked your question Tai.’

I blush – embarrassed, yet I feel proud. I had asked about the possibility of poetry, drama scripts, or fiction ever being seen as legitimate research output for the work of academic development. I had asked him about the sorts of arguments that would need to be made in order to encourage it.
‘Thanks Professor. Yes, that’s right... it is Tai. Tai Peseta. I’m in the Institute for Teaching and Learning, the academic development unit at the University of Sydney. And yes, I was scribbling down lots of notes because I found your presentation very interesting... and really quite provocative for some of the ideas I’ve been writing about in my own work. In fact, that’s what I’d like to talk with you about if you have a sec.’

We each grab a plate of sandwiches from the lunch table at the back of the seminar room and make our way outside. We sit away from the crowd chatting and milling about. I feel lucky and privileged to have the opportunity of a one to one conversation with someone whose work I have been reading for a long time.

‘What I really wanted to ask you about is some of the work I’ve been doing towards my PhD thesis. See... I’m writing about learning and becoming in academic development and the framework I’ve chosen ‘autoethnography’ is about trying to engage with and enact the very pedagogies you spoke about in your talk... you know Barnett’s ideas on supercomplexity; locating it in within discussions about the crisis of representation, legitimation; thinking about how we might make artful inquiry that speaks to our hearts and desires; trying to understand what counts as knowledge in the context of academic development work. And I’ve been translating all these excerpts from my learning journal into forms of narrative and fiction and calling it knowledge... calling it research...’

It all comes tumbling out. The Professor nods as I talk on and I feel both his calm, and his enthusiasm beside me.

‘Sounds like a wonderfully rich and interesting project Tai. I’ve not heard about, seen or read any autoethnographic work in our field – at least not any research that claims itself as autoethnographic work and I imagine that’s because they’re quite difficult to write. Work of that nature also seems to me very hard to sustain. It often involves a great deal of risk and constant self-questioning. Tell me, what kind of feedback have you received around the traps? You’ve given a few conference papers presumably?’
'Mixed, but largely supportive,' I reply with a surprisingly weighty sigh. 'Most developers seem more interested in whether the pieces of fiction I present in my papers are true. They want to know whether this or that really happened, and whether they can trust the knowledge I'm offering them. I understand that, and where it comes from... but it can feel a little frustrating sometimes especially when what I want them to see is really themselves... and to notice their emotional responses and then to ask why. That's the bit that's most interesting for me!'

'Well, I admire you for taking it on,' the Professor says encouragingly. 'In one sense, all research is a kind of fiction or fabrication isn't it? But that's a difficult point for some researchers to appreciate. I certainly couldn't have written a thesis like yours in my day. Even now, I find it difficult to find the time to be creative and imaginative in that way with my own research - despite encouraging it in others. No doubt, you would've noticed that paradox from my talk?'

Yes. I had wondered why the form of the Professor's talk hadn't really matched the ideas themselves. But, his recognition that the work I'd been doing for my thesis has been hard, distracts me from engaging wholly with the substance of his question even while it consoles me. It certainly makes me feel less alone.

'It's actually really useful to hear that Professor,' I say with an enormous sense of relief. 'But what I hadn't counted on... has been all the anxiety. It has really affected my identity as a researcher and my work as a developer. I spend a lot of time questioning everything and defending the 'so you're just researching yourself' argument. And not only am I engaged in writing and producing the actual research itself, I have to argue all the time about its status as research, knowledge and evidence in a field that has to balance ideas about itself against the work it is charged to perform institutionally. I don't see many other academic developer researchers having to mount that same argument and I suspect it's because there isn't really an established tradition of autoethnography. So, I know that what I'm doing might seem a little different, as are some of the frameworks I draw on, and I certainly feel that... but I just wonder... whether you think this is what doing research within
supercomplexity is supposed to feel like? Is this what Barnett means when he says that all learning in the mode 3 context involves dissonance and disturbance? Is that when you know that the research you’re doing actually matters?’

Silence.

I wonder if I have said something untoward or offensive. Was my interpretation of Barnett inaccurate? He puts down his sandwich. I notice most of its contents spill out onto the plate.

‘That’s a tricky question Tai… how you know your research matters. One way I suppose is to rely on the usual kinds of external indicators such as journal articles, peer review processes and the impact of citations… these are all quite standard. Or you can choose to rely on your own sense of what it is you are trying to achieve and how those who read it might now understand themselves differently, or in more rich, emotionally textured ways. Now the two aren’t mutually exclusive of course but you’re coming at it from a slightly different angle. Your rationale is different, so I can well imagine that dissonance has been a huge part of your research journey. Remember too, that Barnett also says that the uncertainties of supercomplexity mean striving for authenticity. It’s about being able to take that uncertainty forward productively. It’s not about trying to get rid of it… denying it. It’s about knowing why you’ve made the choices in your research that you have even if you consider the research itself to be atypical. It sounds to me as if the thesis you’re writing is the only thesis you could have written.’

‘I don’t understand,’ I offer hesitantly. ‘If I’d have known about all this anxiety, I’m sure I would have chosen another path – the path of least resistance or perhaps something a little more straightforward… maybe a thesis on rats and stats…’

The humour doesn’t register with him at all. He turns and looks me square in the eye.

‘You could have chosen a different path Tai but you would have missed the opportunity to explore the issues that really underpin your research.’
I must still be looking puzzled.

‘Let me explain,’ he says with his characteristically open charity. ‘Working in academic development is peculiar precisely because of the institutional positioning of our work. It means we have to work with different ideas about research and those ideas carry very different effects on both our practices and selves. In fact, it can also mean competing visions of what it is that universities do and what higher education means and is for. Your question this morning tells me that you’ve been struggling with exactly that. So, the choice you appear to have made Tai… has been to examine the workings of academic development through a personal exploration, but then to look out at academic development from that perspective – and invite some really very challenging questions of it. Remember, Barnett also writes about the formation of authentic beings with certain kinds of human qualities.

I recognise the paper of Barnett’s that the Professor is referring to. It has to do with the cultivation of dispositions.

‘Seems to me that not only are you trying to invoke particular kinds of human qualities in others, but you are yourself attempting to embody those as well. So, is this one of the central ideas of your thesis?’

The Professor’s astuteness surprises me. I look out over the forecourt, smiling. In my mind, I go over the human qualities my research is attempting to invoke. I want academic developers to be braver, riskier and more critical in their work and research. I want them to engage in the kind of research that causes trouble but that reads with compassion and humour, and that connects with the soul and opens up the senses. I want to explore how we might write our scholarship with an ethic of love at the core of our inquiry. What might academic development feel like, be like, and practise like, if those were our concerns too? What sort of knowledge would we then be making, and what sort of knowledge would we be encouraging others to make about how we can be teachers and learners? This is precisely the kind of research I
have always wanted to do and write. It is these dispositions that I have been working towards as an academic developer.


Supercomplexity as an *Opening*

Under these conditions of uncertainty, *the educational task is, in principle, not an epistemological task*; it is not one of knowledge or even knowing per se. It is not even one of action, of right and effective interventions in the world. For what is to count as a right or an effective intervention in the world? Amid supercomplexity, *the educational task is primarily an ontological task*. It is the task of enabling individuals to prosper amid supercomplexity, amid a situation in which there are no stable descriptions of the world, no concepts that can be seized upon with any assuredness, and no value systems that can claim one’s allegiance with any unrivalled authority (Barnett, 2004a, p.252, original italics).

In his paper, *Learning for an Unknown Future*, Ronald Barnett (2004a) writes about the condition of supercomplexity as the continuous production and circulation of uncertainty. He argues that its challenge is precisely that there is no final resolution. Amid supercomplexity, any one question always produces a “multiplication of answers and further questions”... and that “some of those answers and further questions spring from perspectives, value positions and even ideologies that are mutually incompatible” (p.249). Barnett’s response in part to this conundrum is to turn to a restoration of the ontological. For him, learning for an unknown future is no longer a matter of more or better knowledge, but is now about “learning to live with uncertainty... [...] or to live with anxiety” in itself (p.252). This is the central idea behind what he calls mode 3 knowledge, and the key difference from its predecessors: mode 1 and mode 2 knowledges (Gibbons et al., 1994). Specifically, the condition of supercomplexity is described thus:
It is that form of complexity in which our frameworks for understanding the world are themselves problematic. It is that form of challenge in which our strategies for handling complexity itself are in question. It is a higher order complexity in which we have to find ways of living and even prospering, if we can, in a world in which our very frameworks are continually tested and challenged (Barnett, 2000, p.76).

While supercomplexity is in part intended to express the ‘permanence of impermanence’, Barnett argues that this is a condition of the world that we now find ourselves in – and that it is in fact, akin to a new universal. For those whose work is in the university – engaged in academic work, supercomplexity signals that the character and work of universities is irrevocably changed and changing. Barnett advances the case that none of the traditional narratives which have framed the idea of the university in the past – constellations – as he terms them can now adequately account for its present or future place, its complicated landscape, or its ongoing paradoxical and contradictory engagements with the world. These narratives of knowledge, production, democracy, self, critique and emancipation – narratives that were once relied upon to frame a coherent story of the university, are now limited by their inability to describe the philosophical, sociological and material vicissitudes of what is now a corporate, performative and flexible university – a University of Excellence. This is a university that is now a place of, and for all different kinds of knowledges. It is a university now so proliferated by an abundance of competing knowledges, while simultaneously being a university that is implicated in the production of more and more multiple knowledges, purposes and frameworks for understanding itself, that the story it tells to and of itself appears to be inconsistent. It is now time as Barnett (2000) suggests to embrace the capacities embodied in the constellation of fragility – where notions of uncertainty as an ontological disposition; unpredictability as a lack of confidence or insecurity; challengeability where “the assumptions on which we have depended, but of which we were hardly aware, are – in the same moment – both revealed and found to be inadequate”; and contestability as a state in which explanatory frameworks rival for attention, become core narratives of the university. These, he claims provide us with a rationale for turning away from the narratives with which the university has hitherto been familiar –
stories that are underpinned by the search for knowledge, truth and reason as a basis for the shoring up the legitimacy of universities, towards the possibilities held up to us by the recognition of ignorance. He writes,

[1]et the modern university be built upon the realization that we shall always be behind the game, that the world will always be beyond our full grasp, that all our frameworks for being, understanding and acting will always be challengeable and that we will always live in a state of perpetual conceptual mortgage. Let the modern university not be dismayed by this realization and not see it as an affront to its dignity: let it instead revel in the uncertainty that surrounds us and to which the university contributes in substantial measure (Barnett, 2000, p.63).

And so while Barnett engages us in an optimistic reading of the opportunities afforded by supercomplexity, aware that the university itself has been concomitant in contributing to its very formation, its growth, but also its critique, and that it must continue to do so, the point appears to be that the university must also assume responsibility for providing the resources to help us come to grips with it – for understanding how we can be in it.

There is a certain kind of pedagogical being that is opened out through Barnett’s attempt to think through the implications of a return to the ontological which the condition of supercomplexity both draws our attention to and makes possible. In his paper Learning for an Unknown Future, Barnett sought to flesh out the ways in which university curricula, teaching, and learning might bring students to an understanding of the nature of this condition and still flourish within it. In this work I want to turn away from the primacy of the student learning experience for a moment in order to create a space where academic developers – that relatively new profession and group of academics whose work it is to enhance university teaching and learning with a particular focus on the student learning experience, can grapple with its consequences – where it can re-think how it wants to be. If Barnett is correct, that supercomplexity offers a new set of values for engaging with and understanding something like university teaching and learning, and even academic professionalism,
then I want to ask how the work, nature and scholarship of academic development must operate, manoeuvre and even prosper with notions of instability, uncertainty, unpredictability and unknowability underlying its very fabric? In what ways have, and can discussions about the qualities of supercomplexity feature in the work of academic developers as a matter of regular communal discourse? Under this gaze, what forms of pedagogy – being, doing, knowing, and knowledge production are appropriate for the work and identity of academic development?

Fortunately, Barnett provides a number of conceptual clues for bringing the work of academic development and developers themselves into dialogue with both supercomplexity and the notion of mode 3 knowledge. In his advocacy of a pedagogy for supercomplexity, the language Barnett uses to describe it travels through dissonance and disturbance and appears to end up at something that might be characterised as a loving pedagogy. Education, learning and teaching in this context involves,

[a] language for risk, uncertainty and transformation of human being [that] itself calls for imagination. It may be a poetic language, a language that speaks to human being. It might be a language of love, of becoming, of disturbance, or of inspiration. What is it for human beings to be encouraged, to be brought forth, out of themselves? Smiles, space, unease, frisson, humanity, empathy, care and engagement may be helpful descriptors; but each pedagogical situation sets up its own educational challenges and the imagined possibilities will be sensitive to each setting (Barnett, 2004a, p.258).

I have been trying in my work to make sense of how Barnett’s (2000, 2000b, 2000c, 2004, 2004a) writing on the notion of supercomplexity demands something different of the academic development project. This thesis is concerned with, and responds to that very issue. It is an expression of the way academic developers might begin to deploy the language and dispositions Barnett uses for describing and inhabiting the various contexts which constitute the academic development project. It is a thesis that experiments with the question: what sort of interventions need to be made in
order for the academic development project to be otherwise? It is also a thesis which represents that very struggle.

The ‘otherwise’ in this work could be seen as a repudiation of the sorts of performative and managerialist agendas that have so insinuated themselves on the logic of academic development practice. Writing on ‘performativity’ in school-based contexts and its implications for teaching and the work of teachers, Stephen Ball identifies the good, compliant performative subject as one who “organize[s] themselves as a response to targets, indicators and evaluations, [...] a promiscuous self, an enterprising self, with a passion for excellence” (Ball, 2003, p.215). Further, it is to display an institutional subjectivity that falls in line with

a technology, a culture and a mode of regulation that employs judgements, comparisons and displays as a means of incentive, control, attrition and change — based on rewards and sanctions (both material and symbolic). The performances (of individual subjects or organizations) serve as measures of productivity or output, or displays of ‘quality’, or ‘moments’ of promotion or inspection. As such they stand for, encapsulate or represent the worth, quality or value of an individual or organization within a field of judgement (Ball, 2003, p.216).

Working against technologies of performativity is one sort of reaction to the organisation of its work that academic developers have questioned, been cautious about and rallied against — myself included. Its insinuation upon development work and its cultivation of a proper institutional subjectivity are in fact very real concerns for a good many academic developers (Badley, 1998; Rowland, 2002, 2003; Ashworth et al., 2004; Clegg, Rowland, Mann, Davidson & Clifford, 2004; MacKenzie, McShane & Wilcox, 2005; Manathunga, 2004, 2005a). I want to follow a gentler route. I want to suggest that what is problematic is not necessarily that academic development work sits within this context (this seems a pragmatic reality of its existence with which we must all grapple); rather, it is that a logic of this kind becomes such an effective encroachment that it works to erase what can be imagined about it. My concern is that as a community of practitioners, scholars and
researchers, academic developers have stopped imagining, or rather, forgotten that this is our professional responsibility too – to not just describe how things are to us in experience but also to articulate a sense of what it might be and to begin to go towards it. If amid supercomplexity as Barnett argues, that the university now produces a multiplication of knowledges and narratives, then this seems an injunction to develop new narratives about the work of academic development. It is this exploration of new narratives that form the substance of this thesis. Let me explain.

Curiosities and questions about the academic development project

I came into academic development in May 1998 – first as a part-time research assistant and then in 2002, I was appointed to an academic position. My journey so far has been relatively brief. I had assumed that the work I had picked up as a research assistant would be about providing the typical administrative and research support for a single professional development program. Instead, I found a context that would help me grapple in more complex ways with the nature of teaching, learning and the changing knowledge work of universities. This was not something I either coveted or expected, and learning and becoming in academic development has been tremendously interesting but enormously troubling too. During my time, a number of things have stood out about the nature of academic development work as a field and a set of practices. In what follows, I describe how I came to be curious about them and their featuring as part of the conceptual landscape of this work.

Researching in the research economy of academic development

Like any new academic worker, I have been concerned to understand the nature of research within my community and context – its possibilities, limits, boundaries and how these shift and change. In Ray Land’s (2004) UK based study of academic developers, one of his twelve resultant orientations is that of a ‘researcher’. He presents a picture of the experience of research for developers - its status, elevation
and occasionally, the consequence of its absence. One kind of playing out is an "assumption [...] that the use of educational research findings is what influences research-minded academic developers" (p.69). A second is that "research involvement adds credibility to the educational development function" (p.70). Another is that research moves developers on from the "dissatisfaction with a pragmatic emphasis on 'techniques'" (p.72) to taking up a more scholarly approach. Other sorts of narratives in circulation are those that call for a recognition of practice-related research, or those that suggest that what academic developers offer is a capacity for translation – that we are or ought to be in the service of making pedagogical research valid and understandable to those with whom we work.

In the beginning, I searched for narratives that could describe with nuance, care, texture, richness and complexity, how being engaged in academic development work actually felt. Notwithstanding a number of recent interventions (Ashworth et al., 2004; Clegg et al., 2004; Clegg, 2005; Manathunga, 2005a; MacKenzie et al., 2005), at the time, accounts of the experience and practice in the research literature often appeared to be extended defences of its existence and relevance through showcasing its outcomes, the appeal of its impact and the necessity of evaluation. This is important work but the research economy of academic development seemed also to be structurally organised around these same ideas. With the focus on strategic change, a research agenda that demonstrates the organisational value of the academic development project is a narrative that requires constant attention (D'Andrea & Gosling, 2001; Percival & Tucker, 2004; Gibbs, 2005). That the academic development project sits within this context too is of course, important to recognise. But it is also a context that produces a need for particular sorts of narratives and languages that align with certain kinds of research, data, evidence, outcomes and evaluation. It brings into focus a whole manner of assumptions about what constitutes good, bad, different or indeed indifferent research. It unearths perceptions around the dominance of particular kinds of perspectives and agendas, that together with their discursive and structural organisation provide definitions of the field, and how a field is spoken and practised into existence. It gestures towards the identity of this 'other' (often referred to as 'regular' academics) and their expectations of how change happens for them and what kind of research productions contribute to it. And
it reminds us to reflect on the ways we claim notions of rigour and what we think
data are or can be.

The sort of narratives about academic development work I wanted to read about and
engage with were those that confronted difficulty; that could speak of dissonance;
those that inhabited the mess and complexity of guilty knowledges in the way Sue
Clegg (2005) describes. Writing about criticality and ethical practice in institutional
research, she says: “we are [...] dealing with difficult areas of experience in which
we become complicit in knowing the pain of others” (p.8). I would add that it is not
just the pain of others’ learning, but it also our own that requires acknowledging,
telling and healing. Moreover, there is desire and pleasure – the longing and wanting
for ourselves and others that can sometimes sit uneasily within discourses of utility.
These sorts of counternarratives as I call them in this work – are the stuff and
consequence of the academic development project that is rarely articulated. It may
serve as an afterthought or a reminder to be wiser, more strategic next time. I have
felt the need to think very carefully about the kind of research I want to carry out,
produce, and write about in my work as developer. I have had to wrestle with the
question of how particular kinds of research are seen to matter over others,
particularly as I am attracted to (and probably embody) a conception of research very
similar to that which Angela Brew (2001) identifies as a ‘journey variation’. Here is
the way she describes it:

In the journey variation, the activities in which the research engages, whether
or not they appear to have a direct bearing, are viewed as relevant to the
research because they inform the life issues which underpin the research
questions. Encounters with the data are viewed holistically as transforming
theoretical and experiential understandings of the issues which are the focus of
interest. The researcher grows or is transformed by this. The content or topic of
the investigation is less important than the issues or underlying questions
posed, or the ways in which they dovetail with the researcher’s life or career.
*The researcher is central to the focus of awareness* (Brew, 2001, p.279, my
italics).
While this particular conception sits alongside others — 'domino', 'trading' and 'layer' variations, each with their own focus of awareness, the centrality of the researcher-self, employing its knowing and being as a research project could seem somewhat unusual. Since the work of academic development is very often about researching the learning of others; be it students, academics, departments, or whole institutions — I try to unsettle the predominance of that focus through turning to autoethnography as a framework for this thesis. A turn inwards, to the academic developer self can upset narratives of good, useful and appropriate research. My curiosity around the research agenda of academic development is about imagining that it is precisely these sorts of unruly interventions and disobedient representations that can work to extend the stories it has, and tells of itself. It is also about engaging academic developers more fully in debates about the knowledge requirements of its research community. Alongside doing the work of producing that knowledge, I argue in this thesis that academic developers must also carry a professional obligation to at the same time, trouble it; to understand and unpack what has been made useful about it; and to communicate that trouble to those with whom we work. It is the responsibility of practice amid the conditions of supercomplexity.

The absence of experience: a neophyte's journey

My second curiosity about academic development is born from my own pathway to it: why are there so few young academics in academic development? Why did they all seem to be in other places — in Philosophy, Physics or in History — practising 'regular' academic work but rarely in academic development? Was this indicating anything significant about the field, its work and practice? Logically, it is not such a surprising absence. Career pathways into academic development work appear to be serendipitous and not particularly well mapped, at least within the Australian context. Alan Wright and Judith Miller's (2000) small but international analysis of job advertisements in the field indicate that it is usually teaching experience that counts. They write:
It is clear that the vast majority of hiring institutions wished to engage educational developers who had successfully practised that which they intended to preach, and credibility as a successful university teacher appears to be one of the conditions of employment for many jobs in the educational development environment (p.22).

Kym Fraser's (1999) survey and follow-up interview study of Australasian academic developers' entry into the profession showed that 73% of her sample was aged between 41-55 years, with only 6% under the age of 35. With the perception that experience is the key, it is no wonder that the proportion of developers under 35 is so small. Below are two typical experiences of entry that I have come across in my context. They are intended to showcase the different ways in which experience – not only teaching experience but also institutional experience play out in the journey to academic development. They might be seen as the entry narratives of two academics, each at different stages in their academic careers.

Pathway 1

He’s been teaching for years. ‘Has a passion for his subject like no other’. That was a quote from student feedback. Yet, the last few years, students don’t appear to be getting it. Assessment results are of a low standard and final exam marks the same. It does not augur well for the future of the profession or the reputation of the department. It weighs heavily on his capacity as a teacher. What can be done? What are the options? His students are too important to him. Helped by his friend and colleague – a teaching and learning person, he develops an inquiry. He recalls the advice: ‘read some literature, argue the research case, secure support from the key players, win over your colleagues, find out what they want to achieve, create the conditions, plan it so that it has multiple outcomes, appeal to quality student learning’. He anticipates that the politics of change could turn into the politics of reluctance (Mills & Taylor Huber, 2005) but he’s always been good at galvanizing. At first he’s confident. Then he falters – not once but twice. A colleague accuses him of opportunism – and another of buying into a neo-liberal model of students as consumers. He hasn’t the patience to ask exactly what that means. He retreats for a
while, tending to his wounds. Later, feedback from students indicates that the innovation is working. The student learning measures show substantial improvement. The overall evaluation demonstrates its sustainability. He is pleased. It moves from pilot stage to implementation quickly — probably, too quickly. He presents this work at a teaching and learning conference. The collaborative writing is a new experience. He enjoys it. There are offers to engage in cross-institutional collaboration. A flood of email exchange ensues. The application for funding is successful. A faculty and then university-wide teaching award comes his way. The recognition helps. The monetary reward is small but icing nonetheless. Two papers for publication are submitted — one in a pedagogical journal; the other, a disciplinary-based journal. His Dean recognises his leadership potential — gives him the Associate Dean (Teaching and Learning) portfolio. ‘Finally, some power!’ he thinks. He must revise the Faculty’s Teaching and Learning Strategic Plan by the end of semester so that it is consistent with larger directions and priorities. It’s a big task. It means lots more conversation — possibly difficult ones. He needs the faculty teaching and learning committee on side. He targets new people, good, energetic people. There is polite refusal. ‘Next year,’ one says. ‘When my teaching load is lighter,’ a reply in email reads. ‘Have to finish my PhD first,’ another says over coffee. He knows this story. In order to better understand the institutional landscape, he nominates himself to sit on various working parties: one on e-learning, and the other on evaluation and quality assurance. No one else has volunteered. He is smart, canny even. Things start to happen. He becomes responsible for doing things: coordinating responses to policy discussions, organising orientation programs for tutors, planning faculty-wide days for sharing good teaching and learning practice. A group of early career academics have asked that he mentor them. Those discussions have been a god-send. He is beginning to develop a taste for it. He accumulates more funding and initiates a few projects - some more successful than others. He has another role — a translator. ‘What are all these things: research-led teaching, scholarship of teaching and learning, teaching performance indicators, constructive alignment?’ someone asks him. ‘What is all this edu-speak?’ He responds as best he knows, and it surprises him. In this environment, he can hold his own as a pedagogue. ‘All interesting and good,’ his disciplinary colleagues say, ‘but sorry, no time’. He makes up his mind that they don’t care about teaching. A brief secondment to the central academic
development unit follows. For 3 or 4 months, he talks, listens, argues, challenges, misunderstands and then, he gets it. He is addicted to the conversation, the camaraderie, the time given over to pondering the big questions. He feels intellectually engaged, and transformed by this newness. His disciplinary research is flagging. He hasn’t applied for a single grant. He no longer wants to sustain what seems to him integrated through scholarship but that he experiences practically, as a divide. The challenge of something fresh, something new is intoxicating. An opportunity arises. It passes him by. ‘Too soon,’ he says to himself. Months later, it still hasn’t been filled. He talks it over with his wife, his kids, and a few trusted colleagues. ‘Bad move. You’ll never get promoted’. He hesitates; consoles himself: ‘I can always go back’. But he wants this community. He makes the transition. It is done.

Pathway 2

Her PhD in Archaeology is out for examination so there is time to pause, reflect and take stock. She wants to be an academic – has always wanted to be an academic but can’t carry on through itinerant, casual work. How many people in the world really want to know about Danish shell middens anyway? Her desire is to be tenured – a job in this department – where she can continue on with ease and familiarity. Her case is not helped by cuts; cuts of all kinds. The Chair of Discipline reports the bad news: ‘we can’t justify those third year units with the numbers - students just aren’t choosing that specialty - something has to give!’ Gossip from departmental meetings circulates amongst the postgrads. In the student common room, the frustration is inevitable: ‘by the time we all get academic jobs, if we get academic jobs, there won’t be tenure and we’ll all be fucked!!!’ She’s always tutored in third year. She feels connected to it, its aims and what it is trying to say about archaeology. She is a relentless worker. She puts herself forward for things: devising new marking criteria, developing grade descriptors, filling in for absent tutors, and occasionally the odd lecture. She is told she has a knack for teaching. Her mother teaches young kids with intellectual disabilities. That must be it. She works late hours trying to amass experience. She rarely gets paid extra. A bit of this work has paid off – two co-authored publications with her name on it. She works hard to develop and improve
her teaching. There is feedback from students to prove it. Her interest peaks when at a workshop for postgraduate tutors, she hears: 'how can we change the status of a problem in teaching into a form of inquiry rather than something to be embarrassed about?' And, 'what does it mean to think and practise teaching as intellectual work?' The questions are powerful revelations to her. She wants to know more, learn more. Some manoeuvring by the Associate Dean (Teaching and Learning) makes it possible for her to audit a year long postgraduate course on teaching and learning. She is lucky — it's not the done thing. She applies herself with her usual efficiency and aplomb. Biggs, Ramsden, Prosser & Trigwell, Brookfield, Boud, Brew, Macfarlane, Barnett, and Rowland — the new names crowd around her filling her head with ideas about what it means to be an academic. She finishes with a teaching portfolio. She reads over her teaching philosophy statement and laughs, 'that thing was so bloody hard to write'. A colleague, a mentor — impresses upon her the need to demonstrate rigour within her teaching. She has a better idea of what that looks like now. The portfolio is a catalogue of her academic life. The data, the evidence, the argument must all line up. She reminds herself: this is good practice. This is what's expected these days. She is ready to test her wares on the market. An email from her mentor arrives and in the subject line it reads: 'you should apply for this'. She is curious, hoping for a European posting. She's always fancied Rome; perhaps Prague or Istanbul would be lovely too, although she supposes Denmark should feature on her list. 'Associate Lecturer/Lecturer needed for a Learning and Teaching Centre.' 'Must have PhD (or near completion).’ She crosses her fingers that the amendments are few. 'Postgraduate qualifications in Education or Higher Education.' Yes, she could probably make an argument for that after having done the course. 'Must have teaching experience.' Yes, here and there. 'Experience working with academics in curriculum development.' Sort of - but she would have to make a strong, plausible case. 'Willing to undertake research in teaching and learning.' Yes but it would be a learning curve. The publications help. 'Good interpersonal skills.' Yes, she thinks so. There is nothing about a research track record. She worries but applies anyway — ‘a long shot but I would be silly not to give it a go,’ she explains to her partner. At the interview, they ask about her PhD — when will it be back from examination? They probe about her learning on the course. They talk about what the position entails. Initially, the successful candidate will work on tutor training across the university,
helping faculties set up tailored programs as a response to an institutional audit. At a later stage, there will be opportunities for teaching – teaching other academics. She knows that will be a test. She wonders what qualifications are necessary to teach other academics. They talk about the Centre’s set up, a little about the people, the sort of work they do and why. Some of this is familiar to her – she has done the background research. She has a million questions but asks her three or four best ones. She is surprised at how excited she is. They tell her that there is room for the successful candidate to learn and grow in the position. She feels relieved, her inexperience concerning her. She leaves the interview wanting the job but terrified by the prospect of leaving her home in archaeology. Days later, they offer it to her. She accepts. She telephones her mentor to say thanks for all the support. They chat a bit about changes to the third year units. There is a twinge of loss. Her academic reinvention is about to begin.

There are of course other entry pathways and journeys to academic development work to account for, gather data on and write about (Hicks, 1997; Fraser, 1999; Wright & Miller, 2000). The pathways are never as neat or simple as I have presented, but from observation, there is a resonance. My own pathway has been a fairly self-conscious one. The field of ‘higher education’ and the work of ‘academic development’ is really the only ‘tribe’ or ‘academic work’ – to use Tony Becher & Paul Trowler’s (2001) designation that I have known. Following my teaching degree, I was about a year into a part-time interdisciplinary PhD before I began work as a research assistant. I had had extensive teaching experience with ‘at risk’ high school students in the community sector but relatively little at the university-level – just the single tutorial, for one semester with approximately 15 students. I taught to a script. I did not have a single publication nor had I given any conference papers when I began in academic development. I did not have a track record upon which to draw that could signal my credibility. The totality of this inexperience appears to be quite an unusual phenomenon since a good many academic developers rely on their experience of a first discipline – that discipline in which they were trained, where they first taught and engaged in research – as the basis of an experiential authority, a connection and a rationale for their academic development activities. And from what I can see, ‘experience’ and particularly ‘teaching experience’ counts in academic
development. Even when I made the transition to an academic appointment, my teaching experience was still fairly limited. I had not taught on courses with 100 students let alone those that number into the 500s as many do in today’s context. I had not the experience of marking hundreds of exam papers in short periods of time – and now, I would be responsible for developing academics’ understanding of teaching and learning. An experience of the coal-face context of academic work matters in the academic development project. I raise these issues not to lament the particularity of the experiences I bring to the work; rather it is to indicate that my reading of its community and practice is accompanied by a complex history and biography.

I also bring a kind of youthful ignorance to academic development. I ask questions about why it is organised the way it is: why those particular ideas about teaching and learning; why the move to being strategic now; why are we not more critical; what are the technologies that keep our field and its practices coherent? These questions are not necessarily explained by a youthful outlook – since others have been asking ones of a similar ilk for some time (Rowland, 2001a, 2002, 2003; Mann, 2003; Macfarlane, 2004). But I also began my work with those questions rather than the sort which emanate from a concrete experience of teaching practice. While others come on board with notions that an appropriate vision for university learning might be in ‘assessment’, or ‘e-learning’, ‘graduate attributes’, or even ‘research-led teaching’ – or some combination of all, I have always been more interested in the question of academic development itself; how it theorises and develops a case for itself. I believe that the peculiarity of my own journey drives what it is I wish for my academic development work and context. Spending time thinking about these questions has been central to my practice – in fact they shape it. Many of my questions are perceived as interesting but odd too; essentially off-message, out of kilter and slightly impractical. I do not see them as distractions that require curtailing nor have I assumed that they really can be. Looking backwards and then projecting forwards on his own journey, Graham Webb captures it perfectly:

The fact is that, as I talk to people who see the end of their career in sight, even though it might be 15 years away, they tend to have different priorities and a
different approach to their work than those who see only endless possibilities and an inexorably upward trajectory (Webb, 2004, p.170, my italics).

I am one of ‘those’. I want to engage with what these ‘endless possibilities’ might actually be. This thesis is an exploration of such possibility. I am less interested in contributing to the discourses of effectiveness or impact that currently dominate academic development agendas. I am more interested in creating a space for the notion of ‘possibility’ to rush out into the open. Ian Stronach and Maggie McLure (1997) argue that these departures make it “possible to question the assumptions which a discipline or field takes to be self-evident” (p.3). These are also the sort of departures that the academic development project must continue to welcome as part of its scholarship. Supercomplexity demands it.

*Narratives of learning*

It is a funny thing drawing attention to your race as an academic developer. Since there is not really an established discourse about it in the scholarship of academic development literature, it can be both empowering and insidious in its operations and effects. For some, it is a permanent marker: the ‘thing’, the ‘truth’ that holds up an explanation of your practice. It can guide and explain your interactions with, and to others. Yet there is no doubt that others experience it as confining themselves to merely that truth or explanation. They want to be able to choose, to be slippery, to live in the moment and the context – to in Judith Butler’s (1990) terms, think of themselves as unfinished performative subjects. In this scenario, it is a shifting marker: an identity possessed by anyone that can come in and out of effect depending on political, cultural and material circumstances. At some point, everyone can claim difference. It is just that there are more dire material effects for some, than others.

In an academic development environment, matters of race, gender and class and their discursive intra and inter-relations – what some scholars refer to as the politics of identity, identification and location (Bondi, 1993; Benhabib, 1994; Kruks, 1995;
Hall, 1996a; Clifford, 2000) exist in the form of an absent-presence. Simply put: good, effective teaching and learning must recognise identity/difference in one instance but disavow it in the next. In the same instance that it counts, there is another logic in motion which suggests that it not matter. It is the bind or paradox of all identity politics. This becomes an issue for me because it is exactly the untidy operations of that paradox which pervades my identity as a developer, how I think about what learning is, and how best to develop teaching.

The substance of the matter need not be one of race. But this is where I have noticed and experienced it most acutely. Even in efforts to reinstate an ethic of humanist pedagogy, well-meaning colleagues respond in the following way when I have drawn attention to my racialised self: 'But I don't see your colour at all Tai... I don't see you as Samoan... I just see you as Tai.' On those occasions where my race is important to me, where I have foregrounded it as a possible mechanism for sense-making, I am often surprised by my reaction to comments of that nature. I reflect on why there is a need to efface that aspect of my identity and what the motivation behind it is. That is one kind of learning. Yet in other contexts, where colleagues have drawn attention to my race, or race in general as a possible explanatory framework, my response has been to ask why. What are they seeing that I cannot? Why are they making race matter here? This is what I meant earlier by it being both empowering and insidious. And in the contexts of academic development work, it manifests in other ways too. At a conference for academic developers I attended, two indigenous Maori delegates asked me how the work I was doing was directly benefiting those in my community. 'You mean my university community?' I inquired innocently. 'No, your Samoan community sista-girl,' they replied in earnest. I provided a response but it was a struggle. There were views, expectations of my cultural obligation that I had neglected – that signalled my lack. I have written about the conjunction between identity, pedagogy and politics and its contradictory effects in the context of research student pedagogies elsewhere (Peseta, 2001). In this thesis, I give voice to the pedagogical ambiguity that arises for instance, when a focus on learning bodies comes into the storyline of the academic development project. If there are particular ideas of learning that have been argued to be more appropriate for the institutional performances of academic development work, then I ask how these
might be extended, and what the absence of these dimensions can tell us about the very idea of academic development; its logic, its community – perhaps even, its own identity.

Mapping the thesis terrain

I mention each of these questions and curiosities because they carry a sense of the framing of this work – they set the tenor of the inquiry. While each has its own set of politics and problematics that are incredibly important to the way this work has taken shape and then subsequently unfolds, none should be accepted innocently. Individually and together, they gesture to certain knowledge choices, to the highlighting of specific dilemmas and tensions and to routes travelled and not others. These questions and curiosities are also in constant circulation throughout this thesis.

This thesis is a representation of how we might imagine the scholarship of academic development project differently. It ought to be seen, read and engaged with as a particular kind of autoethnographic inquiry. It assumes that the researcher-self can be an inquiry. It draws on descriptions and theorising of practice from a learning journal – my learning journal – which then become narratively refashioned into pieces of fiction or conversation. So while there is an argument for the learning journal as data, its form and representation is sullied, muddled and reformulated. There is no original empirical investigation upon which to read the researcher-self in this thesis either with or against. There is no final model or taxonomy that offers a neat, sanitised or coherent account of the academic development project. Instead, what I tender in this thesis is a set of provocations that have emerged in the main from my own learning, becoming and practice as a developer. I use this learning and my reflections to ask questions of the academic development project in order to support a process of re-imagining. I invite speculation on what that place of difference might look like. It is a critical return to, and recuperation of, the ontological; a return marked by the spirit and opening of new conditions of inquiry. Each of the chapters goes some way toward that journey.
Chapter 1, Staging the learning and becoming encounter: re-imagining the scholarship of academic development project – this chapter, sets the tone of the work. It frames the inquiry and narrates its background. It articulates the object of study together with the scope, limits and possibilities for the work it performs. It outlines why the inquiry is a necessary one.

In Chapter 2, What is the work of academic development? A neophyte developer in conversation, I set out to describe the detail and context of my practice as a developer. Drawing on the will to creative representation and communication which underpins the autoethnographic framework of this thesis, I illustrate these tensions through a turn to dialogue. The dialogue holds the substantive account – the particular questions I have been grappling with as they play out across the institutional terrain in which I labour as an academic developer.

I turn to a fuller analysis of those questions raised previously in Chapter 3, On shifting ground: making trouble for the academic development project. In this chapter, my interest is twofold. The first is about bringing the academic development project into a productive exchange with those frameworks that challenge it – arguments for instance, that question its agendas, purpose and veracity – that unmask some of the assumptions around a history that has been characterised as triumphant (Manathunga, 2004) and evangelical (Lee, 2005). I interrupt the obligation to that narrative. My thesis joins with the emerging critical voices and moments that are opening up, and opening up in, the scholarship of academic development literature. What I seek to do here is restore a narrative that speaks with equal strength of its contradictory effects. The second concern of this chapter is about communicating the consequences of the contradictory effects of the academic development project upon the work of individual developers – and my own practice in the particular. The focus on its corporeality is foregrounded. How the work feels, and its emotional effects are made to matter. This goes towards a representation of the thesis as a whole which is about differently narrativising what can be said, researched, written and spoken into being about the scholarship of academic development project.
There is also work to do to situate this thesis as an autoethnographic inquiry – and I engage in this task in Chapter 4, *Autoethnography interventions: openings for researching academic development differently*. The chapter itself further explores the notion of a research economy in academic development. It describes the emergence of autoethnography as a form of inquiry. My intention is not to explore the use of autoethnography uncritically. I examine the problem and possibility of the reflexive researcher self; I consider the matter of data and its appropriate derivation from sources other than the Self; I reflect on the autoethnography’s determination to represent inquiry imaginatively – consistent with the experience being written about. From poetry to performance, drama scripts, fiction pieces and the like, the resulting accounts draw attention to the textuality of research – to its written-ness as MacLure (2003) illustrates. This is an aspect of the scholarship of academic development that has yet to be articulated with much force. It is an argument that needs to be made. I make it in part through a turn to those who write about the need to consider a moral purpose for the work of inquiry. Finally, I consider what those who are using autoethnography and its related forms of inquiry have to say about its criteria for quality.

In *Chapter 5, Extending narratives of student learning for the academic development project*, I explore the ways in which narratives of student learning have been made think-able for the academic development project. Through remembering my own learning as a student, this chapter works to recover a narrative of student learning that takes seriously how a focus on learning bodies can often interrupt assumptions about its appropriate development. This chapter also highlights the tension in bringing such stories to light – stories about the learning experience that appear to be ill-fitting for the institutional change agendas of the academic development project. I ask: how does the gaze of student learning – that gaze, which provides the academic development project with a sense of its purpose and coherence learn to ignore some stories? It raises the broader question of what our responsibilities are as developers to shift the paradigms or the ‘conditions of possibility’ for working with ideas of learning.
I am concerned in Chapter 6, *The difficulty of closing an opening: framing academic development as a hybrid encounter*, to reflect on the work of this thesis. I draw attention to the experience of desiring imaginative and creative work for the project of academic development whilst simultaneously grappling with its limitations. It is that in-between limit-space which has led me to consider this thesis as a series of hybrid encounters. What for instance is the effect of always seeking a more complex conceptualisation of the academic development project; of wanting to keep in circulation the question: how does academic development theorise itself?

So, this thesis represents a shift both away from the purpose for the academic development project being located primarily within a logic of outcomes or impact – towards a space that inhabits difference. It does this through an interrogation of the claims which have provided the academic development project and individual developers with a coherent sense of identity and a unity about its work. This thesis tells other stories. It is an account marked by the spectre of difference and the struggle to have that difference be seen, engaged with and valued. This thesis is an example of what academic development might be. It highlights the importance of not only imagining it, but having the courage to go towards it.
Chapter 2

What is the work of academic development? A neophyte developer in conversation

SCENE: I haven't noticed that the usual hustle and bustle of the corridor has quietened. The computer clock reads 8.49pm so it must be that everyone has headed off for the evening. I am in my office – trying to finish a conference paper which I'm due to give in Canada in a week's time. It seemed like a good idea at the time to organise a symposium exploring new ideas about academic development. I've written my paper predominantly as a readers' theatre – which also seemed a good idea at the time, except I'm having a few difficulties tying it all together. Perhaps the trick is not to try and tie it all up – perhaps it's better as a provocation or an exploration rather than an argument for a final set of coherent principles. They're always the kind of papers I prefer.

I'm getting a little worried. Sage said he'd call in at 8.00pm. He's over 30 minutes late and he's usually extremely punctual. Ahhh... I hear him now.

TAI: I appreciate you being here on such short notice. Hope everything's ok with you. I know it was last minute and everything. Thanks. And before you ask... yes, it's work again!

SAGE: What's going on with you and work? What was it that we agreed on last time? I thought you were just going to take a step back and not take it all so seriously. I think I even made you promise. Remember?

TAI: Well... you know I like talking with you... and I'm not very good at keeping promises. And you know there's this thesis I've been plugging away at for some time so it's all related. I'd just like to talk some things through with you. Sound ok?
SAGE: If it’s direction you’re after... I’m your Sage.

*He still fancies himself as a comedian.*

TAI: Well... not so much direction... maybe just an opportunity to talk things over a bit. You always ask me questions that I forget to ask myself, or ones that I’m too busy to ask, or something like that. Plus, I’ve been trying to finish off this paper which has been causing me some grief over the last few days.

SAGE: So, what’s this paper you’re writing?

TAI: It’s called ‘Staging the scene: reflections on academic development as an anthropological encounter’.

*Sage is quiet for a moment and I wait for him to become present again. I hope the title hasn’t stunned him into silence.*

TAI: Is... um... everything ok?

SAGE: Yes, yes... mind just went off on a bit of tangent. Ok, so what exactly seems to be the trouble with work?

TAI: Well...you know I’ve got this job... working as an academic developer in a university. I really love it. I get a chance to think about what it means to be a teacher and an academic and the nature of learning and what it is that universities do, but it’s confusing me a bit. I spend quite a lot of time thinking about how to do it, the ideas that define and limit it, and how we work with our colleagues across the university to make it work. I do it, and the feedback I get is that I do it reasonably well, but I feel constantly troubled by it. When I am talking with my colleagues at work about what it is we do, how we think about it, and what sort of academic being it demands of us, I sort of feel... never completely satisfied. So, a couple of things have been on my mind. The first is really how academic development works at an institutional level...
the vision question. Then maybe we can talk a bit about the ideas that organise the work itself. Does that sound alright?

SAGE: They’re the big issues I suppose aren’t they? I’m assuming from your job title that you go around developing academics – sort of, telling them what to do and what not… making sure they’re doing the right thing, keeping them on track… almost kind of like a superhero academic… saving the day in the event of some sort of teaching and learning catastrophe?

_I motion to Sage to lower his voice but then I realise that I am the only person around._

TAI: A superhero academic!!! Gosh, I wouldn’t say that too loud around here. No… no… it’s not about that at all. I wouldn’t and I don’t think any of my colleagues would presume to be able to ‘develop’ someone else, and in this university, the scope’s actually much narrower than that… it’s really more about teaching and learning, and the ways we can progress it.

SAGE: Um… but shouldn’t they already be developed if they’ve got jobs as academics?

TAI: Well… yes and no I suppose. It might seem like they should be. I think this more recent focus on academic development has got to do with new agendas around professionalism and trying to cope with changes to the idea of what higher education is and how that manifests in the work of universities. In this university, the main work we do is with academics… although we would probably also say that we work at different levels within and for the academic community. If I were to give a standard kind of response, I’d say our role is about supporting academics to think about teaching and learning in order to improve it. It’s quite difficult you know… to get academics who often think of themselves as researchers in the first instance and devote a lot of their time to research – to think about teaching or what being a teacher means, or even learning really, in a more systematic way… and to get them to realise that the way they think about teaching means that there are a whole range of
implications for how students learn. And while a lot of them would say that teaching takes up the bulk of their time – the admin, preparation, the time in and outside of class with students, marking… and all that, it’s only relatively recently that their identities and work as teachers has actually come into focus and it’s mainly as a result of all this institutional work on student learning. Much of that is about being seen to be responsive to what students say about their learning.

SAGE: Hang on… hang on… now you’re going too fast for me … slow down a little. So you mean… in this job you do… your focus is on the development of teaching and learning… right?

TAI: Yeah, that’s right.

SAGE: Because you talk about it like it is different from the development of research. So, if I’ve understood you correctly, there’s a distinction made between teaching and research. Am I to assume that?

As usual Sage’s insights are, pretty spot on.

TAI: Well… yes, in academic work, the PhD qualification is really the research training apprenticeship and depending on your supervisor and the departmental context, sometimes that process can involve a bit of teaching but not always. And because there hasn’t always been a mechanism to systematically develop teaching and learning until quite recently, those two processes don’t necessarily integrate in pedagogical ways. It’s often captured by the phrase you often hear: “just because you’re a good researcher doesn’t mean you’re a good teacher”. But there is a new discourse around the idea of research-led teaching, and there’s even now this idea of teaching-led research (Brew, 2001b). So what we try to do is work with the way academics understand teaching, learning and research in their context, so the nature of how we work then depends on how they understand their context. Maybe a more complicated way of seeing what we do might be to say that we help both individual academics and communities of academics to research or inquire into their teaching and their students’ learning in order to develop ways of thinking about its quality.
You see... most universities seem to be getting more and more concerned about this idea of quality – what it is, how to recognise it, measuring it, having evidence to support it, using it to develop things like performance indicators, or looking at outcomes. These ideas are now being applied to university teaching and learning in ways that they haven’t before... and since ideas about what quality is exactly, are still being played out, it can become a particularly tricky issue for us. There is so much literature on quality now... it’s quite staggering! But to keep it simple, a lot of our work is in encouraging academics to articulate why they teach the way they do – in terms of justifying its impact on student learning, and then introducing them to a research literature in order to develop a rationale for it. When you listen to what they say about their teaching, it often relies on a kind of private or intuitive reasoning based on their own experiences of learning, or based on the teachers that they had ... so while we have to work with that, I think we need to offer points of reflection and challenge at the same time too. It also means that our ‘development’ work needs to operate at several different levels simultaneously. Shall I go on and talk some more about them? You will tell me if I’m going too fast again won’t you?

SAGE: Yes... yes, go on... this is just getting interesting.

TAI: Um... ok. So first, there’s the sort of big meta-questions like... what notion of the university, or higher education we are working with... what is its purpose, and how does teaching and learning articulate with that purpose. It’s an issue about how we develop a culture of learning that is consistent with those purposes. So that for me is about the struggle around things like vision, and how policy, governance and institutional structures get developed in order to guide the university to achieve its purpose. And then perhaps, a second level which is about how we work with the university community to develop practical ways of realising that vision. I would say that we do that by trying to understand how academics interpret their responsibilities as teachers and scholars, the material conditions that lend themselves to those interpretations and also by being attentive to the ways in which they can be challenged. Now, one source of that information is in students’ experience of their learning – that’s where units like ours come in. It’s also about working with groups of people in the university... that could be faculties or departments or groups of
academics with a common interest in say, something like assessment or problem-based learning... our role would be to work with them to grow their understandings of those issues and to develop it into an intellectual curiosity – or to see teaching and learning more broadly as intellectual work.

SAGE: I’ve not really thought about teaching, or even university teaching as intellectual work before. Is there much written about that? Taking that position must surprise a number of the people you work with? Does it? Do you get many strange looks?

TAI: Yes, I think it does surprise some people who might think about teaching and learning as a process to communicate content, or as a set of strategies or techniques to be implemented. In that picture, teaching is primarily a tool. Seeing it as intellectual work though I think is still a relatively novel idea. And perhaps there’s even a third level which is more about developing systems and processes to support the university to promote, monitor, evaluate and show leadership in ways so that that culture can flourish.

SAGE: So, there’s quite a bit to do then Tai?

TAI: Oh yes... we’re never short of work to do. The university community is always putting us to work. Some of the work is about selling the politics of change which can be hard too but I just wanted to give you a sense of the kinds of questions about ‘development’ that academic developers actually face in thinking about their work at both a day-to-day level and I suppose a philosophical level too in a lot of ways.

*I realise again how full-on my work actually sounds when I describe it aloud.*

SAGE: It does seem an intriguing sort of job where you’re always on your toes. I suppose I was thinking about two things while you were describing those different levels. I had assumed that all academic work was pretty similar but the first difference I see is that people who do your work have really got to think very broadly, almost philosophically as you say, about the nature of universities... all the
time. While you do research, teaching and administration... all the standard bits, it seems to me you’re also trying to engage people in a vision of higher education while at the same time there is a specific focus on a constituent part of it which is teaching and learning. That to me sounds a good deal different from what someone who teaches English literature does, or what might happen in a Chemistry lab or what an Engineer might do. Their work might be about introducing students to the debates within a discipline, engaging them in arguing for a position, or preparing them for professional life. The second thing I was wondering about is how you go in managing the relationships you form with people at all these different levels. For instance, if you’ve got all this teaching and learning knowledge that you go round dispensing then what do you actually get back in terms of developing your own disciplinary area?

*What a great question that is!!! I don’t have an answer though.*

SAGE: And by the way... what is your disciplinary area exactly?

TAI: Well... it’s higher education. Some people prefer to describe it as a field of study since it draws on a whole range of parent disciplines but that’s what I’d say our core work is. We work at the level of teaching and learning in order to critically debate and prize open questions about the nature of higher education and academic life. As for your other question... and just by the by, I wouldn’t choose the word “dispensing”... I get back lots of different things that help to inform my practice. All of our disciplinary interactions help to grow our understanding of the experience of higher education. I was reading a paper by Malcolm Tight (2004) which shows that those of us working and researching in the field of higher education are a pretty fractured bunch. We have different ideas about what research is and how to do it, what theory is and what it means to integrate it, what change means and how to work towards it. So, when academics offer their experiences up to us for reflection, it all goes to making higher education a much more complex phenomenon.

SAGE: I think what you do, sounds perfectly noble but enormously challenging. Tell me this - with all the meta-level thinking about universities that you engage in, do
you get the feeling that these are discussions that happen in the disciplines as well – as a matter of course even?

TAI: Well... yes... I suspect they would be going on constantly, but probably without recourse to the literature in higher education. A lot of the discussion would probably be focused on the diminution of resources as a signal of the changing nature of academic work. That is a very real context and overriding perception for lots of academics. In many cases, our focus on teaching and learning seems to challenge the ideas they have about themselves as academics. And there’s been so much literature about the nature of higher education, teaching, learning and universities in the past 40 years that it ought to feature in academics thinking about what it is they do. Many academics I chat with are worried about the increasing corporatisation of university life and so within this environment, thinking about teaching and learning from a student learning perspective can be both liberating and contentious. And occasionally, we wear the brunt of that.

SAGE: Really? Go back a bit to your comments about student learning. That surprises me. Who would want to argue against needing to think about teaching and learning from the perspective of student learning? And more importantly, why would anyone want to?

TAI: It’s not so much a matter of arguing against it. It’s more a matter of being suspicious about the particular sorts of ideas that underpin it, or being careful about the conceptual framework that a university might use to decide how to allocate resources, or how it translates into assessing the performance of individual academics, or other sorts of political agendas it feeds into. It usually gets heated when there’s funding involved. For instance, a colleague of mine who presented some statistical data on the student learning experience here... was called a ‘liar’ by someone in the crowd... and was then accused of producing ‘fraudulent’ research.

SAGE: Goodness me!!!
TAI: And since our work is set up to perform the work of institutional and cultural change, that kind of reaction shouldn’t really surprise me... but it always does. Without fail, it always does. I know I should be better at shaking it off, I know that’s what my job demands of me and that I ought to take a more professional approach but frankly, it’s not always that easy. There’s this phrase I read years ago ... I think it was Roger Simon who said that education both organises and disorganizes subjectivities... and it was Bourdieu wasn’t it... who called education an act of symbolic violence?

SAGE: Don’t recognise the Simon reference but the Bourdieu one sounds right....

TAI: So, I suppose the point I’m trying to make Sage is... that we also have to deal with the contradictory effects of any narrative that is about changing academic work... particularly those narratives which sell it as change for the better. That’s the imperative academic development work is caught up in: ideas about improvement are read as tacit reminders that what you’re doing is not only never enough, but often never good enough and that there’s always room for improvement... and that is always a constant sort of enterprise! It’s the interesting thing about life-long learning! In fact, a title of a paper I read recently made me chuckle. It was called _Sentencing Learners to Life_ (Falk, 1999). But that’s essentially what our work is. We’re in higher education at the same time we theorise it and that kind of dialectic is always problematic. Angela Brew (2003a) calls this academic development’s Janus-face and some of the effect of that positioning is what I was trying to describe earlier. For instance, our development work often implies that academics have a responsibility beyond a disciplinary or professional area that ought to include a care for the institution and even for the idea of higher education itself. And we invite academics to think about extending the traditional notion of academic freedom to include students. We ask them to think about what academic freedom for students might look like, and how they can make it part of their units of study. We remind them to think not only about freedom but academic responsibility too (Nixon, 2003). And we ask... how is it possible to create opportunities for first year students to actually engage in research... not as passive recipients, or as an audience for research, but be actually involved in a curriculum that produces real research
outcomes? All of this means consequences for the way academics understand what their work is doesn’t it? It’s a reorganisation not only of time and work, but also their identities and relationships. There are some who label this sort of shift as the encroachment of neo-liberalism (Davies, 2005; 2005a). Someone like Claire Fox (2002) has called it the ‘new educational dogma’, and yet there are others who recognise that this is precisely the university’s place; that it now actively produces and contributes to that very instability and should continue doing so (Barnett, 2000). And so not only does that manifest in tensions out there, it also shows itself in differences within the academic development community itself.

SAGE: What do you mean… differences? What kind of differences? Differences amongst your academic development colleagues you mean?

TAI: Well, what I mean is… there isn’t always agreement about how we ought to do this ‘development’ work. Even amongst my own work colleagues and in our wider community, there is disagreement about what it means and where the focus should be. While we might subscribe to similar sorts of outcomes, the theoretical frameworks we use to inform our practice can be quite different. Some of our beliefs about academic work are also different, and our convictions about how and where best to develop change are also quite different. Ray Land’s (2001, 2004)orientations maps that difference quite beautifully. There are still some people in our university for instance who think that our job ought to be about ‘fixing’ academics who can’t lecture; or giving them a quick teaching strategy that can easily solve a problem they have. And even though some researchers like Tamsin Haggis (2005) and Sarah Mann (2003) argue against the denigration of practice and for its complexity, there are also those in my context who are suspicious of the sorts of ideas about teaching and learning we’re promoting through discourses of good practice. They think that our focus on the student buys into an economic-rationalist model emphasising a user-pays mentality. In this picture, it becomes inevitable that learning becomes reduced to notions of customer-satisfaction while at the same time, the way and what academics teach is increasingly subject to discourses of the market. So we have to contend with those sorts of views too. I sometimes wonder what teaching and learning might be like if we started with Barnett’s (1990) question: “what’s higher
about higher education?” first, even though I know it’s actually a very difficult question.

SAGE: Ok... so what I am hearing is that ideas about the difference between theory/practice permeate your work too. But that’s no different from a lot of other professionals or practitioners who have particular ideas about what theory is and what practice is. You also said yourself that your work was about working at different levels, so I can’t really see why that’s necessarily a tension.

TAI: Well yes... you’re right. Needing to work at different levels isn’t necessarily a tension. Some literature shows that this is absolutely crucial (Beaty, 1995; Percival & Tucker, 2004; Prosser & Barrie, 2004). The tension for me is more about having a single theoretical perspective drive those conversations. People in our work refer to this as ‘alignment’ and it’s usually regarded pretty positively. It’s that idea John Biggs (1999, 2001) first talked about in relation to elements of the curriculum, but then extended to institutional alignment. What you do is... you aim to bring the ideas, conversations, policies, strategic plans... into alignment. You’re working all the time, to develop a coherent set of ideas about teaching and learning that are consistent throughout the whole institution, at all it’s various levels. It then allows an institution or organisation to make claims about itself – about the things it has achieved and what it has learnt which in the age of quality, audit and excellence, is actually enormously important in terms of status, competition, and capturing a market. It’s actually a very neat, simple, common-sense idea... but also one that is very hard to argue against. I happen to think that it is also limited in its ability to think about itself... and so... so...

SAGE: And so... what... what’s the problem in not being able to think about itself?

TAI: Well... how a system actually accounts for complexity is also pretty important. The danger is always that a very complex phenomenon like teaching and learning becomes reduced to a set of things that just need to be ticked off in order to be considered ‘good’ or ‘scholarly’. For instance, in our institution, academics are asked all the time to account for their teaching in a whole range of ways. Through audit
processes, good practice templates, performance management systems, they not only have to be accountable to a particular view of teaching and learning, their teaching efforts must aspire to it. For instance, they get asked routinely: In what ways are you integrating generic attributes? Where does it state the learning outcomes of your unit? How will you move your assessment from norm-referenced to standards-based assessment? In what ways have you included WebCT in the design of your unit? What are your plans for feedback and evaluation? And so on and so forth. And some departments now have teaching and learning priorities that align with Faculty plans that align with College plans that align with the University’s strategic plan. Now, in a lot of cases, the move to integrate all these elements does have a sound educational and research-based rationale and I think it is in the main, genuinely concerned with some aspect of the quality of the student learning experience. But what worries me in all this manoeuvring, is that it appears to eliminate the element of risk from the whole teaching and learning encounter – it’s as if we’re trying to plan for every possible outcome, every possible scenario and every possible interaction in an encounter that is inherently messy, often irrational and saturated with contradictory and paradoxical desires. I sometimes think that our work is about trying to eliminate the educational value in the worth of that dissonance… you know, what we’re doing is trying to make academics into particular kinds of teachers at the same time we make students into certain sorts of learners. Once all that is in place, then teaching and learning could just be about following a recipe. Now, some academic developers would say that this is a positive outcome of all our efforts. But what it also does is that it secures what teaching and learning can be about. The danger here is also that alternative ideas and their different logics about teaching and learning become marginalised and they struggle to find a place in which to exist because they don’t fit with a set of performance indicators derived from that particular perspective, or they become appropriated into this same meta-structure when perhaps they were intended to sit in opposition to it. There’s this one colleague of mine who keeps insisting that the student learning perspective is epistemologically broad enough to accommodate all manner of theoretical perspectives – that it’s just a matter of unproblematically slotting them in. It’s such a seductive perspective too.
SAGE: Perhaps I’m missing the point here Tai. Surely ‘alignment’ is just a tool to get people to focus on similar things at the same time so that you can actually progress an issue? Why do I get the sense that you’re making it out to be more evil than it actually is?

*Why do I always feel like I’m betraying my institution when I raise these issues? I suppose it’s because it feels like I’m arguing against good teaching and learning.*

TAI: Don’t get me wrong Sage… ‘alignment’ does help to provide a focus. All I’m saying is that’s not all it does. It’s a conceptual tool that also affects what can be legitimately talked about as part of what constitutes teaching and learning. Discourses of best practice reproduce themselves but also forget to argue for themselves as well. Other perspectives then have to sit in relation to that institutional logic. The research outcomes of these other perspectives become positioned as merely intuitive or polemical rather than as evidence, which also means that the kind of knowledge they generate tends not to translate so easily into an institutional language. It always retains a marginal or alternative status, and it always struggles to showcase its utility. Even that argument you hear sometimes about the importance of plurality of perspectives appears not to hold in a context like this because it has no explanation for why some dominate over others in the work we do.

SAGE: Yes… but are you just saying all this because you don’t believe in that particular perspective?

TAI: No I actually have a great respect for this work. It may not always come across in what I’m saying but I still believe there are some very useful ideas here. I’m happy to disclose that. It doesn’t represent all doom and gloom for me. But I think it’s now time to move beyond them and I think lots of Barnett’s work provides a sensible rationale for needing to do so. His ideas about supercomplexity (Barnett, 2000) and mode 3 knowledge (Barnett, 2004a) suggest to me that it is now absolutely necessary to do so. And I guess at a personal level, that particular set of ideas just doesn’t seem to resonate with how teaching and learning actually feels to me. They’re limited at representing joy and difficulty, or things like pleasure, guilt, feelings like
humiliation, grief or even shame. There’s so little room for emotional nuance or texture in it beyond good and bad practice. Here, let me read you something I came across yesterday by an academic called Richard Smith.

*Excitedly, I reach over to a pile of papers and dig out the Smith article.*

TAI: Sage... here’s what Smith (2003) says:

The various kinds of language that we use for talking and writing about teaching and education shows signs of strain.... the language of aims and outcomes... and the idea that quality is something that might be controlled. Then there is the language of management: empowerment, ownership, accountability. There is the worthy if rather solemn and humourless language of ‘reflective practice’: the inquiring teacher who surfaces and criticizes her implicit assumptions and theories, and so on. I say these languages show signs of strain because they completely fail to speak to my experience of being a teacher, at any level at which I have taught, and I know I am not alone in that. Worse still, they feel as if they do a kind of violence to that experience, and silence the voice that tries to articulate experience more richly, sensitively and truly. There is something deeply alienating about listening to—and joining in—talk of ‘performance indicators’ or ‘module delivery’ as if they are the educational reality to which one’s professional and personal being must accommodate itself (p.478).

I particularly like that Smith calls attention to what’s silenced... the things of teaching and learning that can’t be accounted for within these perspectives. The other thing is, a lot of the terminology used to describe aspects of the curriculum - like module delivery - appear to be values neutral, so those who argue for things like that usually forget that they need to continue to argue for it. So, it’s really only half the story to say that it’s the content of the student learning perspective which worries me. It’s more this notion about how a perspective is aware of itself, its effects and how those effects play out in the world... the contexts in which how something can be thought. Ummm... let me see if I can explain it with an example. I was at this
research seminar the other day about non-traditional students' experience of learning at university. The project aimed to collect case studies of successful narratives... you know to counter this idea that these students are necessarily a 'problem'. So it drew on emancipatory perspectives... people like Paulo Freire, Henry Giroux, Michael Apple, bell hooks... those folks. There was this quote that the researcher read out where one of these students is reflecting on her childhood and family background and how she'd thought about herself as a learner. She said something like she was always considered part of 'the smelly family', always 'pointed at', 'never included'... and that she was never touched as a child because she was always cast under that gaze - that she had carried that view of herself into university. These were her experiences of herself and identity as a learner. And at that moment, I just thought to myself... what ideas about student learning are academic developers actually engaged in here? How have we managed to peddle the idea that the student experience of learning is about clear goals and standards, appropriate assessment, graduate attributes... and the like... to the exclusion of these other ideas or conditions? What has made us turn away from those sorts of descriptions of learning? And even if the ideas, terms and concepts we work with are just descriptive markers or placeholders for a whole range of ideas, then it's a language that can't possibly convey the embodied effects of how this student thought about herself as a learner. I kept thinking... what is it about what we do, the way we think about and describe teaching and learning, research and then write and report it... that actually abstracts out this really important stuff - the fleshy and emotionally hard stuff of learning - the stuff that Smith encourages us to be sensitive and true about? How is it that our institutional languages can't actually deal with those things very well? Or, maybe a better question... how does it actually efface those ideas? And why does it do that if it's really the stuff that matters? So, I think that this is part of the work alignment actually does. You have to look at what is absent from the ideas that are being aligned, too. Feminists and psychoanalysts for instance... have long been arguing for a broader conception of learning that incorporates perspectives on desire and the unconscious; critical theorists have been asking us for ages to consider the structural and social elements of pedagogical relations yet somehow, we've managed to promote this idea that those things are secondary, or that they can reside in the detail of the student learning perspective, or that they are individual concerns rather
than structural ones that have actual material consequences. It’s funny how the folks who promote a more focused perspective of learning still want to claim it is a broad church. Now if that is the case, then there needs to be different models, ideas, conceptions and theories about learning, connected to notions of identity, that underpin how a university thinks about student learning. Academic developers need to be at the very forefront of this work. And it needs to include those more complex perspectives about learning in the claims it makes about itself as a learning organisation. But then, how does a system actually represent that? Can it? And if it can’t, what does it tell us about the way we think about systems and how we might re-think them? And even still, how should a system argue for itself?

_I feel like I've been talking Sage's ear off. We both take a moment to allow the quiet to envelop us. I reach for a pen and scribble down some of our conversation. There are lots of ideas here that I need to explore further. The 'systems' one is a pickle I have wrestled with for a long time. We are silent for about a minute._

SAGE: Right, ok. So, a lot of what you do is about shifting academics’ ideas about what teaching and learning is, how they experience it, what it could be. Right?

TAI: Yep, that sounds right-ish...

SAGE: And you’ve also been talking a lot about some of your concerns to do with the ethics of change agendas in academic development... and all this stuff about 'systems’ too. Right? And also the need to keep open, how to think about teaching and learning...

TAI: Yes... I feel a mild reprimand coming on. C’mon... out with it!

SAGE: Well... I’m just wondering what exactly it is about being an academic developer that worries you so much. It sounds like you know what you need to do and how you should go about it. It also sounds like you’ve been doing it long enough now to have developed a bit of a critical consciousness around your practice – you know what it is capable of doing and not doing. I’m just wondering... well... if you
know all these things already... then... why not just account for them in your practice? Why not just be the kind of academic developer you want to be and just let the things you’re not so interested in, fall away?

_Sage has an uncanny knack for getting to the heart of the matter. I hesitate for the longest time before nervously responding._

TAI: I wish it were that easy. Ok... here’s the thing... well two things actually. I want to be able to work authentically, and a lot of the time I actually don’t feel like I’m doing that. The things I believe in as a teacher or educator, get compromised, turned in different directions, or get repackaged for institutional purposes beyond what I intend for them. And I say this even though I know that this is a large part of what academic development must do. Sometimes it’s hard to separate your values from the institution’s values and since our work is so tied up in its identity, in caring for it, wanting it to be better and developing in others this same sense, I worry that I am being seduced into a particular kind of performativity – to borrow the way Ball (2000, 2003) uses it... that I’m developing this weird kind of acritical academic subjectivity, or a subjectivity that is too tied with institutional measures of performance. And more than that... it’s not that academic developers aren’t critical, I know we are and we’re getting better at it... it’s that the critical work is undervalued institutionally. And I sometimes think that academic developers have stopped imagining because we’re all the time just doing for others!

SAGE: But... so... what does working authentically actually mean to you?

TAI: Well, that I act in ways that are consistent with my values; that I maintain some sense of personal integrity; that I do and produce work that matters to my sense of identity and self as an academic, and that I contribute to the work of teaching and learning, and the scholarship of academic development that has criticality at heart... and that I am able to voice my concerns without fear... those sort of things. It’s both about the freedom of being able to do it and the duty of needing to do it. I know this is all very ‘me’ focused but I suppose what’s difficult, is that all the time our focus is turned to developing the ‘Other’ – whether it be students, academics, whole
departments, the university itself, that the idea of working authentically is often reframed to be about showing that we matter to ‘them’. Focusing on ‘us’ is now a luxury we can no longer afford. Does that make any sense? I’ve even heard academic developers themselves use the term ‘self-indulgence’ as code for these discussions about our identity. I’ve heard that so many times at gatherings where academic developers discuss their work. It’s always about getting back to the real work – the work that matters – and that is usually about turning our focus back to ‘them’, whoever ‘them’ happens to be in that moment.

SAGE: Well… that’s a large part of what you do though isn’t it? Your work is defined, measured and assessed through having a demonstrable effect on the “other”. That seems an irreconcilable tension. It seems to me that your work is all the time… about managing that tension.

TAI: Yes, I know. I just feel sometimes that we pretend that it doesn’t exist in difficult kinds of ways too. A colleague once offered me this explanation of academic development work: that what we do is sanitise or make palatable all sorts of questionable changes to universities when really we should be at the forefront of arguing against them. She went on to tell me about a conversation she’d had with an academic developer at her university where when she presented the problem of 600 students in a lecture theatre with a ridiculous staff/student ratio, and was told “you really ought to think about breaking students up into small groups, so that you can think about engagement”. Now, I know I’ve said things like that too so I’m not making a judgment about that piece of advice in the particular, but it also reminded me that we often sweep under the carpet, the material conditions which actually give rise to academics’ concerns about how best to support student learning, and that we’re hesitant to talk ideologically and politically because of our precarious positioning as institutional change-agents. But then I think, perhaps it’s a tension that manifests for me more than others… and I want it to matter more to others because it matters so much to me. Or that I just notice it and want to talk about it more because I’m not quite used to it because this is my first experience of academic work.

SAGE: Perhaps… but…
TAI: And I know that part of my professional obligation is about supporting others. Maybe it's what David Boud (1995) describes as a moral imperative... that my primary role is about supporting academics to think about teaching and learning in ways that will help them cope with and manage all the changes to higher education—the increasing numbers of students with differing skills, interests and abilities; the changes to the nature of academic work; the sort of knowledges that universities are involved in producing or collaborating in. That's the reality in which academic development work has to exist. In that picture, perhaps good and bad no longer mean taking moral positions... maybe they just end up being descriptions of how well academics are coping with change. Obviously, some manage it more efficiently than others... some see change as an opportunity and others as a threat. Some see our focus on academic professionalism as encroaching on what they hold dear about academic life — on their liberty; while others see it as providing relief and guidance. So all these meanings and anxieties about universities and academic life exist in a kind of contested space and academic development work sits somewhere in that context — trying to be useful and meaningful but also authentic and critical as well.

*Sage is kind enough to allow my words and worries to linger.*

SAGE: I don't really know what to say about all that Tai... except to acknowledge again... that this will always be a tension. What's your second thing then?

TAI: Well, it goes back to the idea about the work being defined by a single perspective... well not so much defined... but it's the issue of how a new set of ideas actually permeates the nature of a field and its work. What are the conditions that enable this to happen? I suppose I'm waiting for or trying to contribute ideas that will be part of a critical mass — or a paradigm shift in the Kuhnian sense, or some kind of opening. That would have to be my second thing I reckon... definitely. I often get frustrated that I have to perform this institutional-level work, and of course while some ideas, perspectives, frameworks are more suited to systems level-change, what I really want to do is start to connect academic development work, its research and scholarship to an altogether different set of ideas... ideas that actually excite my
intellect, imagination and curiosity... or that show us something new about ourselves and the nature of our work. When I read the scholarship of academic development literature, my reaction is that it's not particularly imaginative. I read the articles that get published in journals and the writing very rarely conveys how the work actually feels. It's so focused on producing knowledge that defends its existence when what I want for it, is that it causes trouble. Some of that's got to do with the stuff about theorising that I mentioned before... and about being brave in imagining possibility... and some of it has to do with how we write our work up as a community.

SAGE: Well... what are these ideas... these theories? Is this what your thesis is about? Trying to create a space where these things matter.

TAI: Yes, that's a lot of what my thesis is about... it's about trying to unpack the way academic development thinks about itself. So some of the questions I've been asking have to do with the stories academic development tells about itself to others. And, what are the ideas that define the possibilities and limits of the field? What is the field? How is it organised and disorganised? How does it construct itself as a practice, a strategy and a technology? How does it offer itself up to be thought about and engaged with? How does it invite a critique of itself? How do these critiques become concealed, or made transparent within its scholarship? How does the community construct ideas about what useful and useless knowledge is, or about the constitution of research and evidence? How do we learn and who develops us? If we can't trust academics to develop themselves, then how does that translate to our own professional development? Can we be trusted to develop ourselves? That's the kind of stuff I'm interested in thinking and writing about. It all sounds rather big and slightly grand doesn't it?

SAGE: Well, one thing's for sure... you're never short of questions Tai. And to tell you the truth, I'm not actually sure I quite understand the detail of all them.

TAI: That's fine Sage. They take some time to actually think about since they're not the sort of questions that sit easily within a discussion about a purpose, an aim, a set
of objectives or outcomes. I think they perform a different kind of intellectual work... kind of like what McWilliam (2002) calls ‘thinking against’. They’re kind of uncomfortable aren’t they... a bit unruly, which is precisely what I like about them. They’re slippery and they signal infidelity... you can’t quite get a hold of them, or pin them down into something concrete. It’s precisely that quality I admire and exactly that quality that has the seeds of some new thinking... and that for me is pretty exciting.

SAGE: Finally Tai... finally... it’s so good to hear that you’re excited about something to do with work and it’s not all about anxiety. I do worry about you. So where to now? What’s the plan? And you had better say that the first thing you’re going to do is finish this thesis.

TAI: Well... yes, that’s the grand plan. The immediate plan is to work these ideas into the thesis itself. There are really only three or four key ones.

SAGE: I hope you’ve kept on with the idea of it being an autoethnography. I always really liked that.

TAI: Well... yes, I’m still characterising it that way... but that’s about challenging how we understand the work of research across the entire academic development project.

SAGE: Yes, from what you’ve shown me already... I look forward to reading the completed version of that. And then...

TAI: Well then I try to rethink ideas about student learning. You know... see what it does and doesn’t do for how we imagine the work of academic development.

SAGE: Yes, I remember you saying something about putting bodies in before. I hope you’re going to write polite things in that section.
TAI: Well, you’ll just have to wait and see won’t you? And the other is about hybridity. Do you know that term?

SAGE: Doesn’t it have something to do with the states of between-ness, or the middle, or something like that... and isn’t the term hybridity about merging cultures?

TAI: Yeah, that’s it... that’s the idea of it anyway. In some of the postcolonial writing I’ve been reading about, it seems to be about looking for ways of theorising peoples’ experience of identity, movement and settlement. People leaving countries or homes, settling in another and feeling disconnected from both but at the same time trying to make new lives for themselves.

SAGE: So, is that what’s ‘hybrid’ about academic development? Because academic developers are a bit like travellers aren’t they?

TAI: That’s a good way to put it actually. I think that’s part of it. I also reckon it’s a way of trying to unpack the way some developers want the work of development to be both the same and different from other kinds of academic work. And it’s also about a commitment to troubling boundaries and to recognising that they’re boundaries we have to negotiate all the time. And that this constant negotiating has effects... often quite difficult effects. It’s basically the work I’m exploring for this paper I’m giving in Canada in a couple of day’s time but it’s a wee bit undercooked at the moment!

SAGE: All this work seems pretty interesting and pretty intense too. It sounds good though. I’m impressed.

TAI: It is intense. Well I think it’s interesting. It’s what my thesis is about – essentially.

SAGE: With the hybrid stuff... I was just wondering... do you think you write about academic development this way because you know... you’re a bit of a hybrid yourself? You know... there must be some parallels between how you see yourself
and all this transgressing work you think is important. I mean, you are writing an autoethnography...

TAI: Yeah I am but I don’t want to say ‘yes... absolutely Sage...’ I am writing about hybridity because I see myself as hybrid’. But on the other hand, I don’t want to say ‘no Sage, it has nothing to do with that whatsoever’. That question’s always been a bit of a struggle for me. And I suppose that’s what’s interesting about the ways some postcolonial writers have taken it up. It’s precisely that in-between space – the struggle of that space that they describe which I’m realising is the struggle of my thesis. I do have a section... where I try to address it. I should get you to read it when it’s done.

SAGE: You and struggle!!! So, you just need to get on with it then don’t you?

TAI: Yep... pretty much. Before you go... do you feel like doing me a huge favour?

*Sage seems suspicious.*

TAI: Reckon you could read a draft of my paper and tell me what you think? I’d be interested particularly in what you make of the readers’ theatre section. Does it work? Too harsh? Too soft? Not convincing enough? Don’t be backwards in coming forwards now! I know you to be one of my harshest critics.

*Sage kindly agrees but he doesn’t promise to offer feedback overnight. Instead, he agrees to meet me for a coffee just before my flight. As Sage leaves I realise I can’t go home quite yet. I need to stay in the office a little longer to read over the final section of a chapter for my thesis ‘On shifting ground: making trouble for the academic development project’. This is the chapter where I review the literature about academic development and make suggestions about its logic and effects. It’s also the chapter where I try to be more specific about my own journey to academic development. I print off a fresh version and get to work.*
Chapter 3

On shifting ground: making trouble for the academic development project

There is no reason to think that, in general, university teaching is inadequate. There is no reason to think that there is need to reform, reorganize, and make accountable the sort of teaching that goes in universities. There is no reason to think that courses of teacher training are necessary for university lecturers. There is no reason to think that such training programs will benefit university lecturers or their students. There is no reason to think that there is a need for a professional body to promote the status of university teaching. There is no reason to think that university lecturers need to adopt a new ethic or vision to complement, supplement, or resist the impositions of such a body (Hayes, 2002, p.144).

With an unusual degree of force, Dennis Hayes (2002) advances a view against those whose work it is to develop university teaching and learning – a worker like myself for instance who identifies as an academic developer. His principal conclusion is that the flurry to reconstruct or professionalise university teaching and learning leads to what he calls the therapeutic university. Hayes situates his concern within George Ritzer’s ‘McDonaldization’ thesis – with its focus on forms of efficiency, calculability, predictability and control (Hayes & Wynyard, 2002) as diminishing the very prospect of higher education. The view is not an atypical one. Criticisms of academic or educational development initiatives have long existed behind the privacy of closed door conversations. A good number of these critiques are very often produced by developers themselves keen to learn about better ways of engaging others in the work of teaching and learning improvement. But in the present climate of quality and under the logic of audit, like many academics, I too am becoming increasingly suspicious or perhaps wary of the discursive construction or articulation of academic development work – both by those who are part of the
community itself and those like Hayes, whose critiques continue to circulate around the nature of our work brought on in part by increasing external scrutiny. Views such as these are sometimes taken to be about speaking up against, or back to those encroaching agendas which seek only regulation of academic work – as a recuperation of the scholarly ideal of university life. Those who perform the institutional work of university teaching and learning development then become equally caught up in the making and making over of academic identities. It might be said after all, that the main business of the academic development project is in encouraging academics to take up the mantle of change toward a teaching practice that is at the very least characterised by reflection, research, scholarship, professionalism and an increasing commitment to modes and philosophies of student-centred learning. The development of such qualities and dispositions are often responses to an increasingly regulated higher education sector – one that must deal with a future that is, and has to be, unknown.

This chapter is neither a defence of the academic development project nor an assault against views’ like Hayes’s. Such views must continue to be in public circulation both as a testament to the particularity of an experience of university teaching and learning but also as a mechanism that challenges the veracity and purpose of academic development work. So my aim here is not one of dismissal. Rather, it is an attempt to engage with the logic of these kinds of critiques as an additional resource that supports the academic development community to better connect with the contradictory effects of its work – and as an encouragement to tell those stories too; to include counter-narratives as a legitimate aspect of its work. It is about contributing to the problematic that is the academic development project so that a more self-reflexive practice and scholarship might emerge as part of the way the community narrativises both itself and its effects. In part, this is about stepping back somewhat from a community that too easily claims its work as celebratory, progressive and positively change driven (Peseta, 2004). It is in other words, to advance a more sceptical view of the nature of academic development.

I set out firstly, to locate the tensions and questions of my practice (illustrated in part, in the previous chapter) more squarely within the scholarship of academic
development literature. These are tensions that arise from the specific ways academic
development operates in my context – a context that currently organises development
efforts to be about improving the experience of student learning, since that secures
the final measure of our success. This is an important framework for the field and
scholarship of academic development work. More precisely – how one focuses on
the ‘student’, together with the assumptions made about their ‘learning experience’
and how best to develop it, is often specific to institutional cultures. That is to say,
academic development units go about their work differently. So, my way of
experiencing, looking, and asking questions about the field and scholarship of
academic development comes out of that framing, those expectations and that logic.
It shapes my practice through working on my identity and appealing to my desires as
a developer in ways that instil acquiescence, but also dissonance, resistance and
action. In this part of the chapter, I draw on the scholarship of academic development
literature at large to both situate and challenge my practice and context. I ask
questions of that literature, and that framing. I express what I find to be its curiosities
and absences and I speculate on how the field came to be that way and how
developers themselves have contributed to the limits of that framing. I outline a
number of challenges with which it must grapple.

Second, I am interested in teasing out the embodied effects of that framing – in other
words, to communicate a little of how the practice of this work can feel through the
way it takes up a residence that operates through both emotions and the body.
Davies, Browne, Gannon, Honan & Sommerville (2005) provide some insight here,
arguing that,

[O]ur bodies carry the marks of the diverse constraints within which we labour
and they also contribute to the misery of work through their very corporeal
enfleshed materiality, and through their susceptibility to desiring marks of
achievement and to meeting goals (p.356).

It is a similar point made by Lee and Green (1997).
It is as if the minutiae of how things actually happen in the university — whether it is writing, research, teaching, course development, administration, and so on — are beneath notice, as indeed is the material trajectory of our teaching bodies through the daily course of our academic work... And yet, like 'housework', it must be done — it must be got through (p.13).

A focus on the feel of practice — the ways in which practices and systems organise and discipline bodies to be and perform in particular ways, are narratives that appear to be largely absent from the scholarship of academic development literature. While higher education scholars such as Louise Morley (2003, 2005, 2005a) have written extensively about the notion of a 'psychic economy of quality', and the demands made by the new teaching and learning quality and audit imperatives upon the academic’s body, I have been interested in why there are so few accounts of this same difficulty in circulation for those who do academic development work. Why is it that these narratives do not seem worth writing about, or do not seem to constitute part of its scholarship? What might these sorts of narratives make visible about the work of academic development? Are these taboo narratives - forms of dangerous, troublesome or guilty knowledge that reveal unwelcome aspects of academic development work? Since there is often a tendency for academic developers to efface the undesirable or unruly aspects of their work in favour of reporting on narratives of success or upon instances of good practice in ways that defend and extend its usefulness and relevance, it can mean that the corporeal textures and emotional consequences of academic development work are sidelined, silenced, sacrificed, underplayed, or are more simply, made not to matter in our understanding of the work we do. These sorts of counternarratives of academic developers’ practice often seem to me to be framed as indulgences or distractions from the primary task of improving the learning of others. Certainly, this is one way to read a focus on what these counternarratives might entail. Another is to argue that a focus on the feel of the work, how a body submits itself to it but also acts within it, can effectively open up the field to all manner of interesting and different questions that tell us about ourselves. In moving away from the rush to develop others, we might instead ask how it is we pay attention to our own learning. What ought to encompass the learning of developers? Here I draw on the autoethnographic framework of this work
to offer an incident for reflection – an aspect of my practice. It details an unashamedly emotional response that in some ways works to put a brake on the ease with which we consume or celebrate our own learning. The production of this dissonance, this misalignment, is precisely the work I attempt to capture through focusing on the feel of academic development work. Following Gayatri Spivak, this could be what MacKenzie et al., (2005) refer to as disrupting public rigor through the telling of ‘private’ stories.

Both these conceptual explorations are about bringing the work of academic development more purposefully into dialogue with frameworks that engage with its effects as a problematic. It joins those conversations that ask how developers themselves might cultivate a more critical disposition – one that might then open up what the field of academic development can be about. Following McWilliam’s (2002) invocation of Foucault, these explorations perform the work of ‘thinking against’ as

signalling [an] ambivalence about the truth claims made within this discursive domain as much as [an] interest in how such claims have gained the status of truth (p.289).

This work might also be said to perform the labour of ‘articulation’. Put simply, ‘articulation’ is a way of noticing and arguing how things come to mean, as well as a mechanism for remaking meaning. Taken from contemporary cultural studies scholarship in this context, Jennifer Daryl Slack (1996, p.117) argues that

it [articulation] becomes the sign that speaks of other possibilities, of other ways of theorising the elements of a social formation and the relations that constitute it not simply as relations of correspondence... but also as relations of non-correspondence and contradiction.

In this chapter, the scholarship of academic development is taken to represent that contested terrain. In the next section, I further elaborate upon the questions that have been foregrounded as a result of my practice and context. In an attempt to work
seriously with Barnett’s (2000) notion of supercomplexity, these aspects of academic development require urgent attention. It is also this contested terrain which encourages me to ask awkward questions.

Curious Beginnings

The different power relationships which academic developers of necessity have vis-à-vis their institutional managers mean that they rarely have the authority to define their own agendas. Thus while academic developers have established a discourse on what academic development is and what it is trying to do… this discourse has always to be tempered by the ways in which academic development is defined institutionally, often by those who have other ideas about what academic development can and should do, how it should be organized or ideas about the extent to which it can be held responsible, for example, for changing teaching within an institution. The scholarship of academic development always has to have one face turned to the ways in which others define its role and function while at the same time endeavouring to develop academically respectable arguments which extend those definitions in the interests of increased effectiveness and academic rigour (Brew, 2003, pp.167-168).

I have just entered my fourth year of work as an academic developer. I am still sorting out how I want to be in it – how to negotiate the inherent tensions Brew (2003) indicates above; how we understand its possibilities and limits, what can be practised as academic development in my context and its implications for practice more generally. I do not recall seeing anything about academic development work in the careers handbooks of my final year of study as a secondary teacher and I certainly would not have recognised its existence on the conventional terrain of academic labour as an undergraduate student. And so like many, I have been learning, questioning, becoming and unbecoming on-the-job. Like Lee Andresen’s (1996) dinner party scenario where he meets a couple interested in what he does and they struggle to understand the specificity of academic development work, when I
talk with friends about what it is I do, a few wonder how it is that I can be a developer without really having been an academic proper. ‘Don’t you have to have published more papers than you have Tai?’ one inquires. ‘How can you teach academics about teaching when you haven’t even really taught very much yourself?’ another chimes in. Unlike many academic developers, I am unable to indicate with confidence, precisely “where” I have come from, or “what” my discipline is. I cannot say that I am an ‘historian’ or a ‘physicist’ in ways that signal disciplinary expertise or even that I have ‘10 years experience as a teacher’. I seem to occupy that odd limit-space between expert disciplinary knowledge and some claim to the longevity of a teaching experience. I have a secondary teaching degree with an expectation that I am able to teach across the HSIE Key Learning Area\(^1\), but I chose not to enter the teaching profession so I have little experience of practice. And when I began in academic development, I was 23 and a pretty fresh-faced graduate. I gained an academic appointment at 28. It is usually at this point where I realise that my knowledge of teaching and learning has been quite specific to that context, its curricula, and its view of young people and how best to go about teaching them. I have discovered that thinking about teaching and learning in the context of higher education, with its relation to academic autonomy, research and scholarship, and professionalism is an altogether different task. For a start, teaching is one of only three areas of an academic’s traditional responsibility and it is not necessarily the way they conceive of themselves or their identity. So, to come into a profession where one has a responsibility to develop it, requires a new set of skills, understandings and dispositions that I am both coming to acquire while simultaneously starting to question. I have come to see that my introduction and pathway to academic development work has been a little unusual. My fidelity to a stable academic developer identity is then, rather tenuous.

Describing the detail of academic development work to friends who ask me about what I do is also very difficult. The nuances, subtleties and politics of academic life are not well understood or tolerated outside the academy. ‘Academic’ can still signal the pejorative dismissal that represents a separate-ness from perceptions of everyday

\(^1\) HSIE is Human Society and its Environment. At the time of my undergraduate study, it was a key learning curriculum area. From years 7-12, it included subjects such as Legal & Business Studies, Economics, Commerce, History, Geography, Aboriginal Studies and Society and Culture.
ordinariness. As a second-order practice, "a practice whose subject matter is other human practices" within the academy as Andresen (2000, p.27) claims it is, the work of academic development is prone to both external and internal confusion and criticism. But when I relay some of the teaching work I do in faculties, these friends begin to remember their own experiences of learning at university. I am not surprised. There are the usual tales of lecturers whose handouts dated back to the 1970s; those courses experienced as heavily theoretical when they claim they ought to have been a better preparation for the profession; papers returned with only a number scrawled in red at the bottom on the final page; and memories of those lecturers who seemed to have a public predilection for nubile first year women students more than perhaps being interested in the work of teaching and learning. Tales of inappropriate teacherly desire or the lecherous professor always remind me of how passion, eros and love can circulate in a discussion of learning by being both absent and present. There are also those other sorts of recollections which are more inspiring, more in keeping with the best practice discourses to which my work aspires: the archaeology academic who at a late hour was kind enough to ease the nervousness of someone’s honours seminar presentation; the drama educator who invited another to transform their undergraduate paper on bodies and proxemics into a poster for an academic conference; or the aeromechanical engineering course where students built model planes, flew them and then sold them commercially.

Sharing what you do as an academic developer to those outside the university context generates all these kinds of responses. Occasionally, I detect an undercurrent of comfort or relief in their queries that goes something like this: finally, someone is teaching these university academics how to teach properly; it is about time that there is some course or workshop they can attend to learn the latest techniques that will enable them to lecture better. We tend to talk less about what that ‘properly’ actually means. I doubt there would be a shared view and I regularly lament the lack of opportunity with which I am able to convey both the complexity and difficulty of my work. It’s not as easy as it sounds, I want to say.

Inside my own university community, the work of academic development can be received with equal parts openness, suspicion, and resistance – or simply, just ignored altogether. A colleague of mine jokes that developers are very often failed
academics, unable to hold their own in the normal ebb and flow of disciplinary specialisation. Another suggests that developing university teaching and learning is the sort of work that attracts refugees or migrants, those who have been unable to stay within their disciplinary homes for all manner of reasons (Manathunga, 2005a) – some to do with the precarious nature of academic employment and others to do with the hostile culture of some disciplinary areas. I recall meeting a sociologist at a teaching and learning conference - a recent arrival to academic development work who took me aside at a morning tea break and quietly revealed that in his 8 years in sociology, he had never felt quite so welcome or quite as supported as he had during his time at the conference. Anecdotal tales like these remind me that I have never been particularly convinced by the “failed academics” argument. What is the failure I wonder, in turning our attention to matters of teaching and learning, in arguing that it is worthwhile work that deserves and demands complex and scholarly exploration? It is an argument echoed elsewhere. Rowland, Byron, Furedi, Padfield & Smyth (1998) once made the following observation of developers.

Those who have mastered such technologies have become experts of learning, experts who no doubt populate the Teaching and Learning Institutes, experts whose expertise lacks a subject matter, whose reflection has no more to reflect upon than its own image. Lost amongst their cyclical, circular and spiralling ‘theories’ of learning, detached from any subject matter, they become like experts of love who have no lover; or professors who have nothing to profess (p.135).

Although it is also an observation that has since been challenged (Elton, 2000; Andresen, 2000; Bath & Smith, 2004), these sorts of questions are not very far from my mind. As a neophyte developer coming to grips with the focus on constantly needing to raise the profile of teaching, of making teaching and learning matter institutionally, of lending it some kind of scholarly credibility, of advocating student learning, developers’ battle is often with the status and type of knowledge that is being developed and the agendas it happens to feed. Another developer colleague working at a different institution simply says that she ‘teaches the teachers’. This is what she tells taxi drivers when they try to make conversation by inquiring
innocently after her profession. ‘You mean high school teachers?’ they ask. ‘No, Professors,’ she says. ‘University lecturers,’ she clarifies. ‘It’s just easier that way Tai,’ she assures me when I reflect on all the other things we do that are slightly at odds – both practically and conceptually, with her definition. I have heard others say that they work with the university community to improve student learning outcomes. This is entirely consistent with the mission statement which characterises the work of my own academic development unit – the Institute for Teaching and Learning (ITL). In the ITL, we “work with the university community to research, enhance and assure the quality of student learning experiences and outcomes”.

But more and more, it seems that whatever short-hand description academic developers choose to settle on, few capture the flavour, feel, intricacy and variation of the work itself. And even as the impact and outcomes of academic development work have by necessity become increasingly visible under the logic of quality and audit, that this might constitute scholarly work is still a mystery for some. I ask myself: how can I communicate a more complex narrative?

**Being shaped by institutional contexts**

Over the years, there has been a good deal written about the necessity of explicit schemes to support those academics new to university teaching at a range of different levels. Examples in the literature abound (Blackwell & McLean, 1996; Clark, et al., 2002; Smith & Bath, 2003; Dearn, Fraser & Ryan, 2002). Universities too, are beginning to organise themselves more strategically so that they are better informed about both the academic’s experience of teaching, and the student’s experience of learning. In many cases, it is academic developers who do the work of planning, coordinating, organising, researching, responding, bringing together and communicating what this work ought to be, developing a rationale for it, making arguments about how best to implement it, and supporting their academic colleagues to engage with it. There are now workshops, seminars, short courses, mentoring networks - both generic and disciplinary-based, accredited programs, strategic

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2 Information about the way the ITL organises its academic development work is available at [http://www.itl.usyd.edu.au](http://www.itl.usyd.edu.au)
projects, that all work to shift the status of teaching from primarily an intuitive craft to a critical and engaged form of professionalism. And there is an accompanying literature to suggest why it is important to do so (Nixon, Beattie, Challis & Walker, 1998; Nixon, 2001, 2003; Walker, 2001; Barnett, 1997). Developers’ work is often about making public a theoretical basis; its effects on student learning and its contribution to the idea of a university. There are appropriate and critical institutional pedagogical conversations to be set in motion - conversations that draw on research, that are evidence-based and informed by what has been written and said about the work universities must do to prepare students to live for, and engage productively in a supercomplex world. At the same time, academic developers have been agitating for resources, support and infrastructure that reward and recognise the quality of these efforts. Reformulating promotions structures that take account of teaching and learning; putting in place a set of teaching performance indicators tied to funding; and encouraging academics across the disciplines to publish pedagogical research in order to turn their innovations into scholarly output, have been just three of the many institutional strategies in my context that contribute to this work.

In part, these initiatives have been helped by a renewed focus on the notion of scholarship and more specifically – the idea of the scholarship of teaching and learning (Boyer, 1990; Hutchings, 2000; Kreber & Cranton, 2000), the experience of it (Bass, 1999; Hutchings, 2002; Cottrell & Jones, 2003; Kreber, 2003; Taylor Huber, 2004), together with how to develop it (Trigwell, Martin, Benjamin & Prosser, 2000; Kreber, 2001). It is now relatively commonplace for universities to engage in institutional level conversation about teaching and learning improvement, quality and enhancement. In the Australian higher education sector, the recent establishment of the new Carrick Institute for Learning and Teaching in Higher Education³ has drawn new attention to matters teaching and learning.

This focus on teaching and learning has been accompanied by renewed attention to the scholarship of academic development project. And while its increasing sophistication and complexity is now being recognised – for example, in all its institutional, strategic and organisational change manifestations (Land, 2001, 2004;

Johnston & Adams, 1996; Blackwell & Blackmore, 2003; Baume & Kahn, 2004; Clegg, 2003a, 2004; Taylor, 2005; Fraser, 2005); within its research and scholarship (Eggins & Macdonald, 2003; Badley, 2001; Brew, 2002; 2003a; Conrad, 1998); in ideas about the field itself as a profession or disciplinary area (Andresen, 1996; Bath & Smith, 2004; Rowland, 2002; Boud, 1995) and through discussions of its ethical and critical bases, together with its identity (Isaacs, 1997; Andresen, 1996; Fraser, 2001; Webb, 1992, 1996, 1996a, 2004; Gandalfo, 1997; Taylor, 2005), much of this work says little of the neophyte experience of learning and becoming in academic development, particularly when the work itself constitutes the first experience of academic life and when there is no other first discipline of academic practice upon which to draw. Often, the empirical investigations of the experience of academic development work are carried out with senior educational developers as evidenced in Land’s (2004) comprehensive set of orientations, or with Directors of Units (Hicks, 1997), or more commonly on aspects of leadership and the necessity of planning for organisation and strategic change (Johnston, 1997; Percival & Tucker, 2004; Fraser, 2005). The absence of this neophyte dimension – as a dimension of academic development work worthy of inquiry may be for several reasons. The first may be that academic developers usually move into this work following considerable time spent developing expertise in a first disciplinary area. Their teaching excellence may already be recognised in this context through institutional awards or teaching and learning project grants. They might already have a history of being published in pedagogical journals within the discipline, or be someone who has assumed a mentoring or leadership role within this same context – perhaps an Associate Dean (Teaching and Learning) or Chair of a Faculty Teaching and Learning committee. It may be that this new institutional knowledge, expertise and know-how then becomes transferred to a new responsibility rather than the cultivation of a whole new academic subjectivity per se.

A second reason for the absence of the neophyte experience from the literature is evident in the case put forward by Debra Bath & Calvin Smith (2004) – that the underlying nature of academic development work is now much like any other, and that by implication, there is no special case to be made or status to be accorded to the specificity of its work. Continuing to mark it off as different only continues to make
it different. Making the point that higher education ought to be seen as the academic developer's tribe or disciplinary area, and that developers have long engaged in the three traditional domains of academic work: teaching, research and service, although in perhaps a slightly different balance, Bath & Smith (2004) claim that there is now enough similarity or overlap to contest the notion that academic development is suspect, not real academic work. To return momentarily to Rowland et al.'s (1998) observation, that we are no longer "professors who have nothing to profess", they argue that there is now a recognisable and substantial body of knowledge that is both offered up and critiqued; that academic developers do engage in rigorous debate and discussion of the methodological and theoretical frameworks underlying its teaching and learning work; and that there are the usual symbols and artefacts of research and scholarship such as professional bodies, journals and conferences to indicate the formation of a community of practice. In many cases, the award degree programs on offer contain a special higher education designation signalling its distinction from 'education' proper and its emerging maturity as a field. Where the developer does not hold an academic appointment or the development unit is not structurally positioned academically, and Tony Harland & David Staniforth (2003) describe the difficulty of this, the key according to K. Lynn Taylor (2005) is the maintenance of an 'academic disposition'. Here, the neophyte academic developer experience might be understood in terms of inhabiting an academic subjectivity appropriate to the conventions and limits of the disciplinary area and its playing out within the culture of the institution. It is now simply a matter of getting on and doing the work of teaching and learning development required by the institution as a result of the changed and changing conditions of higher education.

Both arguments regarding the absence of the neophyte experience from the literature hold in a general sense. In many ways, it is about just getting going, yet it is precisely this will to practice that designates its difficulty. Let me first say that I am not against the experience of academic development being illustrated by those who have and claim experience, or by those who recognise it in others. 'Experience' appears to be the default and desired position for all academic work. It is what counts – it brings rewards and gravitas. In many ways, I covet the wisdom and acumen that only longevity carries; these developers' tales of success and woe; their reading of how to
manoeuvre within complex institutions such as universities; and how best to get things done. I too, bear a longing and desire to learn from them – from those who were responsible at the outset for recognising and articulating the intellectual promise of teaching and learning for developing a vision of higher education. My goal is not to deny the import of this work. Rather, I want to imagine what new directions might be opened up through attention to a neophyte’s questions, that experience and its attendant imagining. How might the texture and feel of this narrative prompt us to look again at what actually constitutes the field of academic development and its boundaries? For instance, if we think of ‘experience’ as Mas’ud Zavarzadeh (1992) does, where he says,

... there is no such thing as “experience” in culture; what is made sense of as “experience”, is actually an “experience effect” that is constructed, by means of a theory of the real (a theory that legitimates the ruling social order), in discourses of ideology (p.30),

then we can see the ways in which a fidelity to some experiences over others might also limit what can be thought and imagined about what academic development is, and what it can make possible. Part of this is in unpacking the ways academic development builds a narrative of itself, and the ways it then shares those narratives with others in order to articulate or establish its usefulness within the contexts in which it operates. For me, it also means locating a consideration of the experience of academic development more squarely within the narratives that critically question it, or that frame it as a contested activity. While some of this already exists (McWilliam, 2002; Rowland, 2002; Mann, 2003; Clegg, 2004; Clegg et al., 2004), I want to extend slightly differently on those conversations. It is not only asking how we can practise it differently, but is also about growing our ideas of what can be researched about the experience, written about it, and then how we choose to write of it as a contested activity. How do we indicate to those in our university communities that the academic development project operates on contested terrain and with what consequence?
The short history of the scholarship of academic development has already established itself as useful. For newer academic developers like myself, whose introduction to academic life and practice is academic development, I seek a space that fosters experimentation as an orientation to this work. A developer colleague wrote to me recently of a desire he had to write odes and sonnets as a way of describing his itinerant academic development life. He is a literary sort of fellow, with knowledge of the classics and prone to flights of fancy that result in wonderful 'what if' moments. We engaged in email conversation about how it might be possible to frame those textual productions as research outcomes. Although there are few examples of this work in the scholarship of academic development literature, there are discussions within 'education studies' and 'qualitative research/interpretive inquiry' at large that invite us to consider for instance, how notions of 'artfulness' (Neilson, Cole & Knowles., 2001; McIntyre, 2001; Eisner, 2004, 2005; ), poetics (Glesne, 1997; Cahnmann, 2003; Hansen, 2004; Behar, 2005; Faulkner, 2005), and perhaps even the ambiguity of 'love, desire and eros' (Hull, 2002; Todd, 1997a) might also feature as part of what academic development must do work. The space I am suggesting welcomes the uncertainty of those sorts of productions. It designates a genuinely open and speculative space that not only grapples with the very idea of academic development itself but also experiments with what we choose to tell of it; what it might be; and how it might be otherwise. In essence, it is a public space that shifts the boundaries, or that keeps elastic the possibilities for academic development by incorporating ongoing critique and the production of counter-narratives as a key part of its fabric. This is the kind of opening that I want to argue ought to be germane to the intellectual growth of the scholarship of academic development project, together with an orientation to those who first enter the field. This thesis is an expression of such a space.

Contradictory narratives of academic development

To first inhabit the world of academic development is really to become oriented or acclimated to a set of ready-made propositions regarding the nature and scholarship of university teaching and learning, and how best to research and develop it. In itself,
this is not particularly unusual. In my context, the effort of academic development work is best captured in Ramsden’s (2003, p.5) often cited epithet “the purpose of teaching is to make student learning possible”. Excerpts like these have exerted a powerful influence over academic development in my own, and in other contexts. Together with Biggs’s (1996, 1999) notion of ‘constructive alignment’ and the idea that we no longer teach but that instead we facilitate learning, these concepts constitute the terrain which narrativise my context. They operate as canons which enact a particular view of teaching, learning and its appropriate development. These are usually the things that an academic developer must know something about since they work in part to systematically and cogently organise how the field and its practices appear. They develop a common framework and language, and stake out a unique sense of identity so that others can locate and theorise their learning about teaching somewhere – in something of substance. Like any other academic worker, the neophyte developer must have some familiarity with the conceptual landscape of their field and the construction of its key arguments and tensions in order to legitimately participate and contribute to it. In this sense, academic development work, like any other, is still regulated and policed through a form of disciplinary specialisation, no matter how open those borders are to change, or claims about itself as change-able. Nigel Blake (1997) makes the same observation about the organisational mode of knowledge in universities:

[n]otwithstanding openness to interdisciplinarity, the basic units of the university still tend to be its disciplinary groups. And the autonomy which disciplines typically claim for themselves is not just social and institutional, but epistemological autonomy. They claim their own domain of interests, methods and methodologies, concepts and theories (p.152).

But not only is it the conceptual field itself - work defined as Blake suggests by the ‘domain of interests’, ‘methods’, ‘methodologies’, together with particular ‘concepts’ and ‘theories’, academic developers must also be particularly mindful of the way the institution in which its work is located, actually reads its usefulness and keeps both open and closed opportunities for intervention and action. Clearly, this institutional focus is an essential and productive locus of change. It is a sort of truism that
academic development has needed to become more strategic in order to operate and manoeuvre more effectively inside the discourses of managerialism, particularly since it might be said that the proper role of academic development is in fact a pedagogically interventionist one. Its role is to highlight the consequence of teaching and learning change and non-change within the broader landscape of higher education. Thinking about my own context, I am reminded of Webb’s (2004) salutary words:

"[p]art of growing up as a developer is learning the importance of authority in supporting change, and the importance of stakeholder and relationship management. From outside, the necessity of devoting time and effort towards this seems obvious, but it remains fascinating to see even developers who recognize the importance of authority struggling to come to terms with its consequences (p.173)."

While Webb’s (2004) observation nowadays is probably a moot point, its effects are not. Academic development is continually being reinvented, and those who do this work are workers caught up in that reformulation. The movement has been away from supporting individual staff (both academic and general) toward what Richard Blackwell and Paul Blackmore (2003) describe as strategic staff development situated in the context of organisational learning, risk management and accountability. Here, the ongoing development of the institution or the university itself, together with the individuals and communities in it are required to newly engage with teaching and learning ideas around life-long learning, quality and continuous improvement. It has also meant a greater emphasis on research as the basis for evidence-enhanced change, and there are numerous examples that attest to the necessary articulation and affordances of this move (Biggs, 2001; Prosser & Barrie, 2003; Cowan, George & Pinheiro-Torres, 2004) for ensuring the quality of the student learning experience.

Land’s (2001, 2004) work is probably the most comprehensive articulation of the effect of institutional cultures and the strategic nature of change upon organisation of academic development work at a range of different levels, including that of the
individual practitioner. In my context, at its simplest we work to enhance teaching practice for student learning; at its most complex this work and our efforts, intersect with contexts, systems, policy formation and implementation processes, quality assurance and national agendas, and their interpretation through disciplinary and epistemological regimes. In this sense, the complexity of practice comes to bear on the field itself in ways that characterise it as both mobile and closed. Concerned to map the variation in the way academic developers both experience and enact their work within different organisational cultures and against notions of change, Land’s (2004) notion of “orientations” is helpful here, suggesting that they are,

analytic categories that include the attitudes, knowledge, aims and action tendencies of educational developers in relation to the contexts and challenges of their practice, but they are not innate personal characteristics of developers, and are not fixed. Rather the term is chosen to imply a way of making sense of a given situation or set of tasks that subsequently informs and influences action (p.13).

He then goes on to describe a study in which he identifies twelve orientations to academic development derived from interviews with developers in the UK context (Land, 2001, 2004).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Orientation</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Operational focus/level</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Managerial</td>
<td>Concerned with developing staff towards achievement of institutional goals and mission</td>
<td>Institution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Political strategist</td>
<td>Principally aware of shifting power relations within organisation and wider HE environment. Aligns development with agencies most likely to yield dividends</td>
<td>Academic development unit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(investor)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Entrepreneurial</td>
<td>Fosters innovative practice related to needs of world of work and employers. Often involved in income-generating, partnership approaches</td>
<td>Employers, other external stakeholders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Romantic</td>
<td>An outreach approach concerned with personal development, growth and wellbeing of individual practitioners within the organisation</td>
<td>Individual practitioner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orientation</td>
<td>Description</td>
<td>Audience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Vigilant opportunist</td>
<td>Takes advantage of topical developments and opportunities in a strategic way as they arise within the institution or environment</td>
<td>Academic development unit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Researcher</td>
<td>Sees most effective way of influencing colleagues' practice as being through presentation of compelling educational research evidence</td>
<td>Discipline or community of practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Professional competence</td>
<td>Brings staff up to baseline level of skill competence in aspects of teaching and learning</td>
<td>Service to student body</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Reflective practitioner</td>
<td>Seeks to foster culture of self—or peer evaluative critical reflection amongst colleagues, to help them cope with uncertain and ambivalent organisational environments</td>
<td>Individual practitioner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Internal consultant</td>
<td>Works with departments or teams in observational/evaluative/advisory capacity, often on longer term basis</td>
<td>Department/course team</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Modeller-broker</td>
<td>'Trojan horse' approach of working alongside colleagues to demonstrate good practice or innovation. 'Do as I do rather than 'do as I say'</td>
<td>Individual practitioner/Department</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Interpretive / hermeneutic</td>
<td>Dialectical approach of 'intelligent conversation' with colleagues in which balancing different views, relation of local to wider perspectives, part to whole, etc, leads to critical synthesis and production of new shared insights and practice</td>
<td>Individual practitioner/Department</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Discipline-specific</td>
<td>Predicated on notion that colleagues are driven by subject-specific 'guild' culture, hence development only effective when going with grain of disciplinary needs. Development can be seen as 'situated learning' within a disciplinary community of practice</td>
<td>Departmental colleagues/wider 'guild' or discipline</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: Orientations to academic development practice (Land, 2001, p.6)

Since these orientations are not intended as characteristics of individuals but are context dependent, academic developers will inevitably move in and out of these orientations, sometimes with ease, other times with difficulty. Perhaps like the academic new to university teaching, who with enthusiasm uncovers some sense in
notions of deep and surface approaches to study or in the SOLO taxonomy\textsuperscript{4} as a way of naming their practice and desiring improvement, or at least efficiency gains in their teaching roles, the orientations serve as useful naming moments. We too, look to see ourselves in these sorts of models so that we might name the developer we are, desire after, or in fact eschew. We draw on frameworks like Land’s (2001, 2004) to test ourselves against the values we hold as developers, against the vision of teaching and learning we strive to uphold and our ideal of the university that informs our practice.

When I first came across these orientations, I saw myself in some combination of the romantic, reflective practitioner and interpretive/hermeneutic developer. Interestingly, each sits at the level of the individual practice. Perhaps my inexperience at the institutional level gives me away here, or makes me into a yet to be fully formed developer but there are always several aspects of my developer identity and practice that come in and out of focus. One is my neophyte identity – the developer that is still coming to know; that ventures hesitantly, all too aware of the boundaries and limits of her knowledge. In some ways, this is the developer still wrestling with the power of her own agency and how it might insert and assert itself. It is the developer who covets the reassurance, certainty and cosy safety of performative compliance – but where “her critical intelligence must be put on hold until some unspecified future – [where] it must find its own (appropriate and appropriated) spaces” (Davies et al., 2005, p.354). Another is the academic developer who must assume the position of knowing – the credible expert, the one who can read institutional pedagogy and its mapping onto changing national and international agendas with a sophisticated and critical aplomb, and upon whose reading others can reasonably rely on as a basis for their own changing understandings and achievements in teaching and learning. This is the developer who seeks pleasure from engaging with others, who galvanizes different communities and cohorts of the university into action through a seductive blend of authority and collegiality. It is the developer concerned with outcomes and impact. And there is yet another – the academic developer who seeks to transcend, who wants to find for herself the questions and conversations that will sustain the intellectual and critical impetus of

\textsuperscript{4} SOLO is the Structure of the Observed Learning Outcome taxonomy taken here from the work of Biggs (1999).
her practice. This is the transgressive developer whose desire is to go beyond, to ask questions, to trouble the very idea of academic development itself as the ultimate expression of critical being and action (Barnett, 1997). Each of these different selves comes into play, and each overlaps as part of the complexity of the every-day livedness of academic development work.

These different orientations also give us some opportunity for sense-making (Taylor, 1999) – to celebrate when some aspect of our practice or context that we have invested in produces joy and pleasure, or to mourn when it results in pain or anxiety. Writing on performative fabrication and ethics in academic development (MacKenzie et al., 2005) here is the way two of my academic developer colleagues describe the latter:

As bureaucratization and management bore down, my sense of authenticity as a professional eroded. I no longer had the requisite control of decisions that affected my practice. I had no time to think, to step back and reflect and there was little in the higher education literature that addressed my experience. I had a ‘problem without a name’. I realized that, I too was beginning to sound cynical, something that I had always felt was poisonous and counterproductive in the academy, not to mention unprofessional. I could no longer bring cheer and optimism to my practice. I knew that, for me, this was ethically unacceptable. Without the means for understanding my experience, I became increasingly anxious and alienated and finally had to leave (MacKenzie et al., 2005, p.3).

I myself feel increasingly invisible in my role, and the shape of the academic development agenda I put forward is perceived by many administrators and faculty to be irrelevant or at least insignificant in the larger scheme of their concerns. Miscommunication is more frequent. Whereas before we could find a common language to address areas of difference, now it is as though we are speaking in different languages even when we address common issues of interest. There is more talk about teaching and learning than in the past, but the assumptions underlying the conversation are frequently at odds. I find myself
saying of my colleagues that “they just don’t get it” and I imagine they are saying the same thing about me! Though I have always considered myself to be a pragmatic developer who puts my clients’ needs first, it is more difficult to feel a real connection with others as we all spin our ways towards achieving our performative goals (MacKenzie et al., 2005, p.7).

While it might be tempting and ultimately too easy at one level, to read the devastating sadness in these academic developers’ narratives as primarily an issue of professional competence, as a misreading, as resistance, or perhaps as an example of the misalignment between the expectations of the developer and the culture of change in the institution, Taylor (1999) reminds us that all change also involves ‘loss’ and with that, comes grieving. Davies et al. (2005) explore how this sense of grieving is often felt, inscribed and enacted through the body.

Increases in efficiency are seductive. They are experienced as desirable, even pleasurable, at the same time as they are harmful to our embodied and emotional selves, catapulting us into loss of joy and loss of capacity to act on the very work we are passionate about (p.358).

In her paper *Changing the academic subject*, the display of such loss and grieving represented in the narratives of Mackenzie et al., (2005) are understood by McWilliam (2004) as an effect of new modes of organisational change technologies – in particular, what she terms ‘rationalities of risk’. In giving rise to a logic of audit and a culture of quality assurance, academics become made over into risk conscious individuals, and universities into risk-managing institutions, “guarding themselves against the risk of failure” (McWilliam, 2002, p.4). A different knowledge then comes to bear on the ways academics are required to engage in their relationships and daily work. She says, “the management of risk demands knowledge of risk, and knowledge of risk produces new risks for the organisation and its personnel” (McWilliam, 2004, p.154). On this reading, the ambivalence and perhaps even the regret associated with loss and grieving, its non-rational character, come to be seen as signs of “being fearful of change, being conservative and [an ambiguity about being] unable to take the heat” (Morley, in Blackmore, 2004, p.391). At a grander
scale, this might translate into organisational ill-health. They are to be quelled, controlled, redirected and managed into speedy reconciliation. The rush to reparation however, leaves aside the role of grieving (and its associated emotions) in change.

Thus anger and hostility can signify recognition of, and engagement with change, rather than simple denial or refusal. Anger with others precedes re-formulations of the self. Conflict allows for issues of disappointment to be raised and shared, thus affirming the fact of loss while not disallowing the possibility of a new sense of self to emerge (McWilliam, 2002, p.13).

For MacKenzie, one of the authors in MacKenzie et al. (2005), it meant leaving this work but eventually returning. Later in the narrative, she writes, “my doctoral thesis is devoted to a renewal of this connection” (p.8). For Wilcox, another of the authors in MacKenzie et al. (2005), it means continuing to suffer within a system which sidelines the languages which give her work meaning. At the end of her narrative, she asks several questions of her work as developer. “Is authenticity a useless/impossible ideal? What price do we pay for our efforts to maintain authenticity? What does it mean to be ethical? Is there room for ethical decision-making in the performative university?” (p.9).

As academic developers fashion themselves into institutional leaders and change agents bought on by the necessity of an increasing devotion to the new actions and languages of strategic priority setting and its associated effects, this role can mean that they are rarely afforded the time or opportunity themselves to grieve, let alone to grieve publicly without the accusation of indulgence or under the spectre of ‘usefulness’. After all, there is too much work to be done to develop others’ learning. Much of the time, I suspect there is often an expectation that developers move quickly to rationally analyse where it all went wrong, where it fell down, to cut their losses, neuter the disappointment, revise the strategy for engagement and change in preparation for round two. And like all academic work nowadays, developers’ own work is not immune from being subject to discourses of continuous quality improvement. In some ways, we are expected to model these developments, to showcase the appeal of such change and to celebrate its effects on claims about
quality. Our bodies and emotional states are required to keep apace with this work of change since it is our responsibility in part, to usher it in, to see it through – or more crudely, to implement a policy, a system or decision that may not be of our own making. The difficulty of this work is rarely gestured at, or invited to surface as a public narrative. Disobedient narratives rarely are. For Chris Shore and Susan Wright (2000), this is because we are constituted as part of the very problem; we work to shepherd in precisely a kind of uncritical change. Witness their following observation.

Central to the development of new political technologies in higher education has been the creation of new categories of experts including ‘educational development consultants’, ‘quality assurance officers, ‘staff’ development trainers’ and ‘teaching quality assessors’. These specialists fulfil (sic) four main roles. First, they develop a new expert knowledge and a discourse which create the classifications for a new framework or template of norms, a normative grid for the measurement and regulation of individual and organizational performance. Second, their grid and expertise are used in the design of institutional procedures for setting targets and assessing achievements. Third, certain of these experts staff and manage the new regulatory mechanisms and systems, and judge levels of compliance or deviance. Fourth, they have a therapeutic and redeeming role: they tutor individuals in the art of self-improvement and steer them towards desired norms (p.62).

I recognise myself in this – not only in my conversations with developer colleagues, but in the work of my unit. While it is not the language we would use to describe ourselves, nor is it the language we would use to describe ourselves to others, what is interesting is that it appears to be a language that others use to describe their experience of the work we are charged to perform and very often lead. It seems that our role here is twofold – it is not merely that we work to service these new tactics of quality and audit, it is that
This process often goes under the name of ‘empowerment’. It contends that audit ‘enables’ individuals and institutions to ensure quality and improve performance not by imposing external standards of conduct, but by allowing people to be judged by the targets they set for themselves. According to this perspective, audit is an open, participatory and democratic process whose benign objectives are surely beyond criticism. However, what the language of ‘efficiency’, ‘effectiveness’, ‘best practice’, ‘self-management’ and ‘value for money’ disguises is that audit culture relies on hierarchial relationships and coercive practices. The self-directed, self-managed individual is encouraged to identify with the university and the goals of higher education policy: challenging the terms of reference is not an option (Shore & Wright, 2000, p.62).

Under this sort of gaze, academic developers’ own grieving appears disallowable. Shore and Wright’s (2000) analysis, while enormously thought-provoking, is almost unforgiving - as if developers themselves do not carry with them critical questions about the work they perform, or any attempt to embody an action-oriented criticality. It is as though there are no contradictory effects of this work or possible forms of resistance. I am reminded here of two studies that paint a more complex picture of the effects of quality and audit imperatives within the academy. Based on interview data from the British context, Morley’s (2005a) gendered analysis appears to suggest too, that in the case of teaching and learning, “women are also gaining a new visibility as a consequence of the creation of a new cadre of quality managers” (p.411). Morley argues that like most organisations “[t]here are gendered sites of opportunity, modes of possibility and constraint” (p.427). Frank Worthington and Julia Hodgson’s (2005) account of the way quality technologies play out in the academy is neither simple nor linear. Their detailed analysis of the forms of peer exploitation (which I describe later in the chapter) are perhaps more recognisable and felt. In spite of these contradictions, academic developers usually still assume the institutional responsibility for selling the politics of change, and there are traces and fragments of blame to be apportioned under the design of risk and its associated technologies. “It threatens all professionals because it gives them processes for deciding what action to take and at the same time provides the means by which they
can be found to have done the wrong thing” (Ericson & Hagerty, 1997 cited in McWilliam, 2004, p.154).

Unearthing counter-narratives like those above in MacKenzie et al., (2005) can help to remind us about the production and circulation of forms of propriety that insinuate themselves on the logic of an academic developer’s practice. It works both powerfully and simply. If as Blackmore et al., (2004) contend that

academic development is both a scholarly field of study and a domain of practice [...] and that] practice is enacted through specific actions and activities [...] as well as being] underpinned by an approach which embodies scholarship and critical practice (p.18),

then it is worth giving some attention to the five broad areas of work and action they identify. The first is that academic development performs the work of interpretation. This might be thought of as acts of translation and communication. The various communities and constituencies which comprise the university – often assumed to be at odds, or to work too much in isolation, or with idiosyncratic or inefficient styles of communication, become galvanised because of a need to make collective sense of the new languages and new systems that govern their work. Academic developers, Blackmore et al., (2004, p.2) argue, “can play a vital role [in] helping to translate the language of one culture of discipline into the language of another”. The second area is the role of academic development as a change-agent. It is forward looking change – facilitating the identification of possible futures and assuming the mantle of leadership itself and then developing that capacity in others – toward that better future. The third is the provision of practice. This is the traditional role that academic development has played historically in supporting the professionalism of teaching, and in particular, supporting those with little experience. Next is the work of counselling. With notions of reflective practice underpinning academic development, Blackmore et al., (2004) recognise the work of testing out ideas, or acting as a sounding board for those seeking conversation and feedback. Finally, academic developers assume a very central role in what they term institutional evaluation,
review and critique. They take this to signal “a critique of the institution and where it is going” (p.2). Supporting these broad areas of work are aspects of scholarship:

- Investigating aspects of academic development practice by using and developing models and theories
- Evaluating the diverse academic development functions
- Communicating with the higher education academic development community
- Publishing research on academic development
- Developing institutional staff who have responsibilities related to academic development
- Critiquing academic development as both a field of study and a domain of practice

Written by developers, these are largely the narratives which describe the official work of academic development. In the main, they represent broad, recognisable statements regarding the work of individuals and the structuring of its community. What intrigues me is not necessarily the categories in themselves, but the way we interpret and action their meaning. In particular, I am interested in what is unable to be represented and said, or, even ‘thought into existence’ about academic development work and the contexts of its operation. In Blackmore et al., (2004), while there is a concern for critique, there is little sense that these same of ideas might also carry potentially insidious effects on changes to academic work. In narratives like Shore and Wright’s (2000), the will to quality is a large part of what academic developers do. They argue that it brings into focus a new morality consistent with what Morley (2005) calls a psychic economy of quality assurance – that “academia has now deeply internalised the performance culture to such an extent that we now regulate and define ourselves in relation to dominant performance indicators” (p.83). My own experience is that academic developers have responded to these sorts of challenges with the following internal conversations: that we need to be better at clarifying and where possible, quashing the misperception that our work is in any way consistent with destructive change agendas; that we need to develop more deliberative and democratic strategies for engagement; and that we need to better communicate our work as a form of scholarship or intellectual inquiry. In other
words, it is about demonstrating that this too is academic work, justified through a commitment to learning – to a University of Learning, to borrow from John Bowden and Ference Marton (1998). It is on one level, a commitment to the academic work of ongoing professional development within a self-reflexive learning organisation battling with the conditions of change. Yet on another level, it is also the work of disorganising, organising and reorganising academics’ subjectivities in ways that Morley (2005) argues that,

[i]n the economy of quality assurance, learning and (audited) organisations require a lifelong process of up-skilling or re-skilling. It is questionable what subject positions are available for academics when identity is constantly in flux and creativity is being replaced by productivity (p.83).

How then, does the academic development project work to manoeuvre itself across these set of contradictory narratives while simultaneously, continuing to claim a coherent purpose for itself? While academic developers seek to distance themselves from too close an association with the various forms and technologies of neo-liberalism, this continues to be one of the persistent interpretations of the experience of our work (Smith, 2003, 2005; Standish, 2005; Shore & Wright, 1999, 2000; Hayes, 2002; Fox, 2002) and a worry that consumes a good many academic developers (Peseta, 2004, 2005; Manathunga, 2004, 2005a; MacKenzie et al., 2005). There is a need I would suggest, for developers to begin to construct more self-conscious narratives that work to intervene, cut across, and that seek more systematic forms of disruption. Even in our liberatory moves to engage the university community in open and democratic forms of dialogue5 – attempts which showcase a ‘variation’ in understanding and to embed local ownership of teaching and learning initiatives within disciplinary cultures, it is still us who drive the agenda. We can still be relatively unreflexive about the degree of control we exert over the event itself.

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5 At the University of Sydney, a common strategy for progressing teaching and learning change has been through the use of Working Groups. These groups are organised around key strategic projects (usually in line with the institutional priorities around teaching and learning) and comprise of senior academics from each faculty who act as representatives of the Dean. They are not formally constituted as part of the university’s governance structures so can claim some independence in that sense. Perhaps they are best seen as a conduit through which teaching and learning issues can be communicated both upwards and downwards across different levels of the university community within an advisory capacity. Further information is available [http://www.ital.usyd.edu.au/projects.htm](http://www.ital.usyd.edu.au/projects.htm).
(terms and terrain), and in many ways, we continue to hold knowledge and dispense it – despite our attempts to be and act otherwise.

All this goes in part, to exploring the issue of “how something... can and must be thought” (McWilliam, 2002, p.289). In this context, the way a ‘thing’ is problematised – how it is to be thought about, taken up and interacted with, is part and parcel of the experience to be analysed. What this does in effect is highlight “the space of the field [as] itself an object of inquiry” (McWilliam, 2003, p.61). It brings into focus the conditions which make developers themselves into specific sorts of academic subjects and development work into a specific sort of “knowledge object” (McWilliam, 2003) – a knowledge object at least, that seeks a justification of itself through a turn to learning. This is how the field and its practices become available, knowable and actionable to us. What if any, are the propositions, scripts or narratives upon which the very existence of academic development work must rely? And further, what are the emotional and embodied consequences of this sort of engagement for developers themselves and their own development? Extending on Clegg et al., (2004), I explore two in particular. The first is the idea of a moral necessity for (teaching and learning) development and the second is that academics have hitherto been deficient at developing themselves. With the aid of the autoethnographic framework which structures this thesis, I introduce a tale of my practice and context taken from one of the programs of academic development in which I am involved – a program that supports the development of research higher degree supervision. The description itself is a re-working, or re-presentation of writing (or data) taken from my learning journal – written a day or so after the event. My aim here is to communicate a sense of what the experience and work of academic development can feel like in the context of making available a new morality, together with a new form of academic subjectivity or professionalism that is both taken up and critically questioned by those with whom we work.
A tale from the field: ‘I’m here to help!’

At a workshop for research higher degree supervision, a colleague and I invited along two supervisors who had successfully completed the Development Program for Research Higher Degree Supervision⁶. Following the customary structure: ‘this is who we are; tell us a bit about who you are’; ‘here are the learning outcomes for today’; ‘introduce yourself and your context to others at your table’; ‘tell us your issues’; ‘here is what the university says’; and ‘here are some ways of making conceptual sense of those issues along with a few practical strategies’, we had arrived at that part of the workshop where we describe the structure of the Program, offer our educational rationale, and gesture towards its pedagogical effects for supervisors. There are benefits for students too we hasten to add, hoping that our student-focused discourses alone will indicate the worth of our intention. This is where we hope to convince others of its merit – essentially, that completing the Program will make these participants over into better, more efficient, more critically reflective, student-focused supervisors, cognisant of the literature on supervision pedagogy and able to articulate a scholarly basis for their practice and ongoing development. This after all, was the point, and the two supervisors we asked along were our evidence.

The first of our successful supervisors – a Professor, had been supervising for some thirty years. He relayed with requisite passion and care what he had learned about himself as a supervisor – doubts, troubles, foibles and all. He spoke too of an initial unease; a scepticism about what the Program might teach him, or rather what he might learn. He wondered aloud whether it was just another example of academics’ time being encroached upon by institutional quality assurance agendas that would only generate more work, that offered little reward, and that would only place more pressure on him to be efficient and more available to his students than he already was. It was an observation that seemed to resonate with many of the participants. He said he knew that some supervisors would do the Program just to ‘tick the box’ in order to be included on the university’s new supervision register. Then he asked

⁶ Further information about the Program is available at http://www.itl.usyd.edu.au/postgrad. With my colleague, I have written about the context and detail of the Program in a paper by Brew & Peseta (2004).
participants to raise their hands to indicate their motivation. Just over half, admitted that their reasons were instrumental. That didn’t surprise me. They needn’t be sheepish about that. It was a reality we had to contend with and it needed to be acknowledged openly. Only one or two mentioned that they’d heard about the Program through another who was either doing it, or had completed it. The feedback was that it was useful but that it had taken up far too much time, and time of course, is the one thing academics are constantly bemoaning that they never have enough of. I had heard it before – the same outcome could be achieved with less effort. They asked our Professor how much time he took. ‘Six months,’ he said. ‘But it depends. It depends on why you’re doing it and what you want to get out of it’. He reminded those at the workshop that he had been interviewed some years ago for a case study project on good supervision practice. One participant said he was impressed that a Professor would make the time to complete the Program. He guessed that the Professors in his own context were probably unaware of the Program’s existence, let alone the idea that there was an academic literature on supervision development. In fact, it was those Professors who were partly the problem, he suggested. While students were complaining about their supervisors’ level of availability, and their sometimes patronising and dismissive attitudes toward their work, these supervisors were not required to complete programs for professional development. It was the young ones who were left shouldeing the burden. ‘Yes, there are the usual politics. Talk to your Postgraduate Research Coordinator,’ our Professor offered reassuringly with calm and wisdom. ‘It’s that person who is exactly the problem,’ this participant explained, being careful not to reveal too much. ‘One of these supervisors is the Postgraduate Coordinator?’ There was clearly a story that needed telling there. All I could see was that the case study process could support that very interrogation.

Aside from an expression of understanding and regret, our Professor adroitly avoided engaging too much with the difficulty of this participant’s context. Instead, he continued to encourage those at the workshop to see the Program as an opportunity to go beyond that, to embrace it as an opportunity for learning. He offered his reflections about being an academic on his way out of the university system, due to retire soon, and how that was changing his view of supervision. He talked about wanting to support his younger colleagues in developing systems, processes and a
culture that would hold up care for the research student experience as paramount, and what it might mean if that was the starting point for university policy. He was now interested in leadership. This Professor had spent a lot of time on university-level research committees arguing for precisely that. But there needed to be some reward for academics he stated firmly, looking over in my direction. ‘I’ve talked with Tai already about this,’ he said. For him, his time left was now about showing the right kind of academic leadership in which research education in his faculty might flourish. It meant developing a collegial culture of research supervision that fostered students’ own leadership and team work skills. These were the sorts of things he wrote about in the case study he produced as part of the Program.

The second supervisor — was a Lecturer relatively new to supervision. She made no bones about her inexperience to the role. She seemed to wear it like a badge that designated her ‘sameness’ with them. She began by leading us through an activity — almost as an apologia, saying it was the educator in her. I welcomed her spirit of creativity. She had mentioned to me at morning tea that she was going to be doing something a bit different today.

To showcase her learning in the Program, she had bought along four different kinds of mirrors, all odd, and of various shapes and sizes. The first, she held up in front of her face. This was fine, she said looking purposefully into it with the flair of theatrical display, but was ultimately limited in terms of a professional approach to supervision. It was simply about reflecting on herself to herself as a supervisor and besides, she could only see her face — what she called one part of the whole. The second mirror she told us, as she asked a workshop participant to hold it aloft from behind, was about inviting a new perspective on her supervision — one that might signal challenge. At this point, she mentioned that she’d shared her draft case study with a colleague in her department for feedback, and that it had been an anxious but rewarding learning experience. They had since begun to talk regularly about the strategies in their supervision, and had taken to meeting for coffee every so often. She asked a second participant to hold the third mirror to her side. This angle of reflection represented the scholarly literature on supervision development — a representation of the field or set of conversations where she could now begin to
locate her praxis. She mentioned Barbara Grant’s (2003) model of a supervision palimpsest to be very helpful in unearthing her feelings about the power dimensions in supervision. The fourth, she asked another to hold at her other side. This mirror was her student. She then talked for some time about the array of tools and exercises in the Program that had given her courage to solicit feedback from her student. She was adamant: it was not about giving students what they wanted but about using their experience as a form of data that could inform her decision-making about how best to intervene when it was necessary. For this Lecturer, her learning on the Program was about the provision of different and critical perspectives in which to understand and continually theorise her work as a supervisor. In her words, it was the ‘dialectic between the subjective and objective’ aspects of her practice that had been most illuminating in the course of preparing her case study. While each of those mirrors had performed different work, she insisted that it was still up to her to assess the scale of their contribution in order to arrive at an appropriate sense of balance. Now, she expected her students, both present and future, to work with her to shape the nature of the relationship too. They would help her to be a better supervisor.

As this Lecturer resumed her seat, I couldn’t help but feel proud of the way she had invited participants into her learning journey as a supervisor. She in particular, had refrained from the usual talking-heads approach; she had thought carefully about what she wanted to say and how it would best reveal herself as a learner. While they were two very different tales of learning, I had hoped that the variation would at least travel across different disciplinary areas and levels of experience. And as I surveyed the room, keen for an immediate sense of how they were received, I had the distinct impression that we had offered too much – much more than what these supervisors had signed up or bargained for. But I would have to read the workshop feedback in order to know this for certain.

Now as workshop facilitators and coordinators of the Program, my colleague and I could only have been pleased that both these supervisors had spoken so highly of the value of their learning. They had both engaged with the process in ways that could be
described as demonstrating an ‘extended abstract’ understanding of their learning. They had portrayed their learning in rich and complex ways; they had connected it to an interpretation of the institutional context and their responsibilities as supervisors; both had praised the quality of our feedback which helped to cement and lend credibility to our expertise; they had agreed that reference to the scholarly literature had moved them to consider why a more theorised approach was important; and they had even offered us some feedback for improving the process itself. One said that some aspects of the Program often appeared repetitive; the other suggested that we ought to develop a similarly reflective process for research students themselves – one that would be a mandatory part of their candidature and completed in partnership with their supervisors. It would be one way of orienting students to their own responsibilities in the relationship and to understand the way supervision fits more broadly within an academic life. In essence, these two supervisors had done precisely the work we had asked of them. The next step in the workshop was only to open out what had been said (and demonstrated) to a broader discussion. What had our workshop participants made of these particular testimonials? What value did they attribute to this kind of learning about supervision? Were they convincing enough accounts? What questions might these workshop participants ask of us and how would they choose to put themselves to work in the Program? Would I be handling 10 or even 20 new registrations by the end of the week?

Almost immediately, I notice a hand shoot up.

‘Don’t get me wrong,’ a young woman academic asserts confidently from the back of the room. ‘You all seem like really nice people and everything… but I guess I just don’t buy that what this Program is will help make me into a better supervisor. I mean… it’s an incredibly long process and many of us just don’t have the time. There’s no support whatsoever in my faculty to do this. I just don’t see how I’m going to have the time to do it and I already have students to supervise. And are all those stages of reflection really necessary? You really need to re-think this.’

7 The idea of an ‘extended abstract’ understanding of learning is taken from Biggs’ work on the SOLO taxonomy. He says “the essence of the extended abstract response is that it goes beyond what has been given [...]. The coherent whole is conceptualized at a higher level of abstraction and is applied to new and broader domains” (Biggs, 1999:39).
The tenor of her inquiry immediately annoys me. I remembered this woman from when she had signed in early that morning. She had asked me rather abruptly whether there would be a certificate at the end of the day and appeared irritated when I explained that completing the Program involved the production of an extensive case study of an aspect of her supervision practice. She had assured me that a senior colleague in her department had said that she need only attend today’s session in order for her to become an accredited supervisor. When I suggested that both her and her colleague’s understanding of the Program was actually incorrect, she left the room dialling her mobile phone and arrived back again late, after we had made a start. I did think it rude.

‘Well... the way you do the Program really depends on what you want to get out of it. This is the point that one of our supervisors made,’ I start to say. I want to sound upbeat and chipper. My goal here is to cover up sounding annoyed and to regain my composure as professional and scholarly. ‘If you’re interested in engaging with the question: ‘why do you supervise the way you do?’... then yes, I would argue that each stage of reflection is absolutely crucial. One of the things we’ve discovered in running the Program is how important ‘writing’ is for exploring your supervision and clarifying the issues you’re worried about, or alternatively, that you might want to work on. In fact, our experience with the Program suggests that a supervisor can attend any number of workshops such as this one and remain relatively unmoved in their view of supervision. And because academics rarely write systematically about their supervision practice and receive feedback on it, this Program is set up to do just that. What we have noticed is that it has been the process of receiving and engaging with the feedback we provide which seems to be so crucial in extending supervisors’ conceptions of supervision.’

It seemed to me an okay explanation. I notice a few of the participants smiling, nodding, looking engaged, so I continue on.

‘But don’t forget you can also use the Program as a series of discrete resources. You’re free to browse the modules and download the parts of the Program that are
relevant to you at wherever you’re at. You could use some of the tools in your supervision meetings as a way of beginning to open up a conversation with your students. You might like to read one of the case studies of good practice, make a post to one of the topics in the Discussion forum or begin the conversations that you want to have. You don’t really have to do the case study part unless you want to, or unless you’re seeking to meet the conditions of the university’s new supervision training policy.’

I do my best to paint the completion of the Program as innocently as possible. We have already made clear that we run the Program on behalf of the university and the decision was not ours that it be made mandatory for new supervisors. In fact, the decision had been taken at a senior level with minimal input from me or my colleague. This is one of the tricky things I find about academic development. Decisions that get made at the university level and then reinterpreted through faculty systems and processes are often wrongly attributed to us. But I know already that most of the supervisors here are required to complete it so that they can begin to supervise students, or in some cases, take on more students. It has only really been a year since the Program was included as part of the university’s accreditation process as a mechanism for implementing the new supervision training policy. I repeat this again to distance myself from discourses of ‘managerialism’; from accusations of adding to ‘their’ workload; and to signal its sound basis in research and scholarship. I do it too, to protect myself from any further misperception. What I really want to say is that I think it’s a really good Program.

‘But... where’s the evidence?’ she continues to ask. ‘Where’s the evidence to say that it actually makes a difference?’ Her question puzzles me somewhat. I wonder what sort of evidence she is looking for and what she means by it.

‘Well, it is partly in the testimony of the two supervisors that we’ve just heard from. Would you say that their learning is a form of evidence for what the Program aims to achieve? I mean if you ran this Program, what kind of evidence would you be looking for... what would convince you that a supervisor had learned something meaningful about supervision?’
She dodges the last part of my question. I am not surprised. In my state of being perturbed, it just slips out. It is a very difficult one to answer — one that I continue to struggle with myself and that is still being played out in the supervision development literature.

‘Yeah, I suppose. But you could have just paraded a series of supervisors up here who only had good things to say about the Program.’ There are others at the table that are now in agreement with her. She continues to hold the floor. ‘What I mean… is numbers. Solid numbers,’ she says.

‘That’s very true. Yes, we could have done that but we thought it was more important to address the experience of the sorts of things that supervisors learn by engaging in the Program. That’s where our focus has been today.’

I’m not sure she understands what I am trying to get at and nor I am sure anymore what she is trying to say. We are talking past each other. I wonder after her disciplinary area. Is she new to the university? What’s going on in her context? Why doesn’t she respect the credibility of the Program? Would any of those things explain it? I try a different tack.

‘Ok, what sort of numbers would you need? And what would the numbers represent?’ I ask trying to draw her out.

‘Well, can you at least tell us how many supervisors have finished the Program?’

‘At the moment we have about 360 supervisors registered and we have had about 30 supervisors complete it… which means going through the whole case study process that we have just outlined. One of our goals now, is to develop a process where supervisors who’ve finished the Program can actually help us with the provision of feedback to those who are still going through it. This is our way of trying to build a learning community of supervisors who are interested in the scholarship of supervision. We’ve even been entertaining ideas about a joint publication of some
kind.' I include the notion of a scholarly outcome on purpose: it's that idea of turning what academics already do into something publishable.

My tone has taken on a decidedly matter-of-fact quality about it. The inevitable question about numbers! Put that way, the numbers we work with are never particularly convincing but they are truthful and accurate. 30 out of 360 with about 12 currently going through the process means a less than 10% completion rate. Less than 10%! They are the kind of numbers that I have discovered, worry senior management, and that often generate suspicion about what the delay is and why we (and they) are unable to move them through the system quickly, more efficiently, expeditiously. There are developer colleagues in my unit too, who have expressed the same worry. Is the Program too long, too cumbersome, too scholarly, not pitched at the right level, unwieldy, hard to understand? Should the Program be made shorter, or changed so that supervisors can finish it quickly, and without fuss? Given the issue of workload, have we demanded too much? Given the need for the university to demonstrate 'quality', is the idea of writing a thick description of practice, too much quality? We know that one of the reasons why it takes the considered time it does, is that supervisors engage with the Program differently. Their sense of time is different; the way it unfolds in support of their learning is made differently available, opening and closing for many in unexpected ways. For some, the Program is to be done quickly, in a relatively perfunctory manner. The approach is a pragmatic one. Get in, get out, get the certificate! In some cases, it has been made part of the conditions for continuing appointment. Yet we also know too, that some supervisors take the reflective and learning dimension of the Program very seriously. Even though time is precious, they enjoy inhabiting a new kind of thinking and provocation. They use the Program to reclaim aspects of their learning that are lost in the busy-ness of the every day administrivia of disciplinary teaching and research. When supervisors tell us for instance, that their progress is consistent with where their student is at in their candidature, then completing the Program quickly, in a linear way, with a pragmatic focus appears to make very little sense. We also know that some supervisors are completing it in disciplinary groups so that the experience of learning about supervision supports a mentoring and collegial model of
supervision. The last two strategies don’t really equate with the drive for measuring completion in any straightforward way.

‘Yeah, but the numbers are still so small Tai,’ she repeats back with a note of alarm in her voice. ‘That should tell you something about the experience of it shouldn’t it?’

At this point, my more experienced colleague intervenes. Not knowing what else to say, at that moment I am ever so grateful for it. I scurry back to my chair, feeling somewhat defeated.

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I wrote of this interaction and my response to it in my learning journal. What I represent above are private reflections. It is a commentary about my own experience of that event more than anything else. As I indicate in the description, it got under my skin. At the time, I remember thinking to myself, ‘this is not the time to get into a debate about the nature of evidence Tai, or the value of educational research,’ but in truth, I was bothered that I had not managed to convince this supervisor that the learning we were offering her would likely result in a professional, scholarly and research-based rationale for her practice. While it would have been easy to cast her as some recalcitrant, unruly supervisor, resistant to discourses of professional development or to the possibility of extending her learning; and equally too easy to frame the other two academics – our successful supervisors within the security of a victory narrative, as properly consuming the discourses of learning on offer; to my mind, neither acts as a sufficient enough examination of the complexity in what it was that I desired for their learning. For this individual supervisor, I could not hide my disappointment in her. I could not hide that I wanted this new development knowledge to matter to her, that I hoped that she would come to eagerly desire it for herself. Similarly, I could not conceal my unfettered joy at the wonderfully ‘thick descriptions’ (Geertz, 1973) of learning about supervision offered up by our two supervisors who had spoken about their experience of learning on Program. The former, because I have a conception of my practice as making room for the ambivalences that those ‘Others’ bring with them; and the latter because, while their learning sits both properly and critically within the discourses that reveal the worth
of my professional practice, there is also that sense of unease that accompanies it. And the unease is this: that I may well be performing and contributing to the work that Davies (2005a) calls “accomplishing [the] appropriate neoliberal subject” (p.32). Following Land (2001), I have been keen to ask how the work I do contributes to both domestication and critique, and after Davies (2005), I want to engage with a practice that takes seriously the questions she compels academics to raise.

- How can we as teachers, as scholars, as students and as members of the public, learn to catch ourselves and each other in the act of taking up the terms through which dominance and oppression take place?
- How might we catch ourselves mouthing the comfortable clichés and platitudes that together we use to shape that same world that we shake our heads at with sorrow and resignation – or that we secretly in our darkest hearts applaud?
- How might we put to one side our own safety and comfortable certainties and ask impossible questions that exist outside of the already known, the already asked, the comfortably conservative universe that shores up our certainties and keeps the world a safe place – for us?
- How are we to resist engaging in neoliberally induced surveillance of ourselves and each other, surveillance that limits, that holds us neatly packaged within economic and utilitarian discourses?
- How can we dare ask, in the face of that discourse and its constraints, the questions that unsettle, the questions that disrupt the certainties and securities, the questions that honour a passionate ideal of the academy where intellectual work is without fear, where it does not know, necessarily, where its questions might lead - passionate work that recognises no boundaries that might prevent its development and where it also cares passionately about its effects? (Davies, 2005, p.7).

*Development as necessary and development as good: securing a logic of quality through a moral turn to learning*

The primary role of quality assurance in higher education is to create a culture of continuous organisational and professional self-development and self-
regulation that will provide a better value-for-money service that is compatible with the needs of the global (post)modern knowledge economy and learning society. Louise Morley points out that the use of the terms “enhancement”, “development” and “improvement” invest quality with a morality that is hard to contest (Worthington & Hogdson, 2005, p.98).

I want to return for a moment to the scene of my practice I described earlier – my learning about research supervision development. It is a program that supports both new and experienced supervisors to learn about the pedagogy of supervision; to learn more about themselves as supervisors in a systematic rather than ad hoc way; to unpack their conceptions of both teaching and research in order to explore their intersection; to think about the effects of their own experience of being supervised; and to study how that experience plays out within the organisation of their supervision of students. Through a combination of online independent study, a set of stand-alone web-based resources and a number of face to face workshops, the program is underpinned by a set of criteria for good supervision practice.\(^8\) Supervisors work towards the completion of an individual case study that must take account of those criteria – criteria that are derived from an analysis of the literature on supervision development pedagogy (Pearson & Brew, 2002). As a result, individual supervisors can claim that they have performed sustained scholarly work on themselves. The university can simultaneously claim the Program as a mechanism for ensuring quality supervision at an institutional level. It can also claim that students will be the beneficiaries of a scholarly and reflective supervisor – at least one who now knows what it means to be mindful of the student learning experience and can theorise the play of their supervision both within and against it. The individual supervisor prepares for a new kind of learning alongside a community of other supervisors, while the institution looks to assert this learning as a will to improvement. This may operate to secure its distinction from other universities who have no such Program. Its claims begin to falter however, when academics take too long to develop themselves so that the student learning experience and timely completion is ultimately compromised as a result.

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\(^8\) The criteria for good supervision practice can be found at the Program website at [http://www.iti.usyd.edu.au/postgrad/study/criteria.htm](http://www.iti.usyd.edu.au/postgrad/study/criteria.htm).
One reading of the Program and the work it performs is to acknowledge that it can provide support for academic decision-making in a period of flux and enormous change to higher education. Those changes are now well established. According to Barnett (2004b, pp.62-63), they include globalisation, the arrival of digital technology, the new forms of connection and expectation between higher education and in the wider society, agendas of participation, access and equal opportunity, competition, the increasing marketisation of higher education as a provider of knowledge services as commodities, together with state-sponsored quality evaluation systems and mechanisms. Supervision, like all academic roles, must now learn to exist within the challenges that these changes have made permissible. It might be argued that Programs like ours are largely about the easing of that transition, and of making the move to embrace a new kind of academic professionalism.

Academics new to supervision usually have only their experiences being supervised as students upon which to base their practice. My experience of being involved in the Program suggests that supervisors rarely turn to the literature on supervision development to frame a rationale for their practice but that some do when there is a particular problem or challenge that a new technique or tip might be able to solve. Changing and diverse student cohorts mean that they too, bring different expectations of what the supervision relationship ought to entail and how it might best help them to learn. Students have individual learning needs too, that require attending to. There are also competing discourses of research to contend with; institutional pressures to publish and in some disciplinary areas the imperative for commercialisation. Each of these contexts impacts on a supervisor's conception of their identity and practice, and development knowledge can be seen as a kind of pedagogy that effectively provides a rationale or framework for reflection, analysis, priority, action and evaluation. It can also offer moments or glimpses of sense, particularly where it functions to build new communities of knowledge through shared values and an ethical basis that takes supervisors toward the efficiencies inherent in best practice. For a good many academics, it is a welcome imperative that supports a more efficient management of both themselves and their students amid the ongoing instability of that change - what we might think of as being and knowing in
a supercomplex world. Writing on the context of staff development in the mid-1990s, Brew puts the inevitability of development knowledge thus:

[t]raditionally, higher education has been allowed, indeed expected, to get on with its work irrespective of the world in which it is situated. It was left to academics to decide on the nature of the educational experience of their students. Higher education was viewed as broadly separate from the economic activity of the nation. This is no longer so. In recent years, universities have been forced to take greater account of a number of outside influences. For many reasons, universities are no longer free to go their own way (Brew, 1995, p.2).

Development knowledge also suggests that in spite of the rubric of best practice, learning must essentially be an unfinished project. Learning for everyone is now lifelong, infinite and no longer confined to particular institutional settings. All situations are learning situations. There is always something to be mined, or an experience to be had, that lends itself to the prospect of learning. The unpredictability of change means that we can never fully know it all, and never know enough. We are likely to always be behind, and likely to require new knowledge to be able to prosper within it precisely because of that unpredictability. While a disciplinary reputation might work to discursively secure a supervisor’s claim to research expertise and excellence, this same supervisor may well encounter unforeseen challenges to do with any number of elements that arise in the name of learning: the quality of a student’s writing may require them to develop new knowledge beyond their own research area so that they become cognisant of the ways students’ understand and approach the act of writing itself; it may be that some students are parents requiring a supervisor to be flexible with their expectations of time management; it may be that a supervisor comes up against institutional structures that pose an ethical dilemma to their conception of supervision or research and so look to develop a more nuanced knowledge of the politics of the organisation; or it may be that they are obliged to intervene in situations involving conflict and so will look to school themselves in various theories, models and tools of conflict management. What development knowledge permits in this narrative is a momentary security in how to cope with change. There
is usually something that can be done, or learned that can ease the burden of change. It is essentially about disciplining change or manoeuvring in ways that reveal how things can be done better, more effectively and efficiently. The disposition for and towards learning is now firmly entrenched in the minutiae of an academic’s working life. At the end of our Program for supervision development for instance, the uncertainty of change is to be expected rather than feared. The knowledge that students bring with them to their research is something to be drawn out and nurtured rather than neglected. Our Program provides only the beginning point for the provision of a conceptual framework that will need constant attention, constant vigilance, constant monitoring. Academic developers then, appear masterful as workers who can see and detect change coming from a mile away. This is what our focus on learning guarantees. It is very often our knowledge, our reading of the teaching and learning scene that informs the shape of that change.

Even though the development of research higher degree supervision is much newer than efforts to support university teaching and learning, the scholarly literature works too, to discursively arrange the research student learning experience so that a supervisor’s ongoing development is perceived to be both needed and necessary. It is the danger of students not learning that a supervisor must guard against; not learning at their maximum; not producing quality research; not completing on time; or that a supervisor may be willingly or unwittingly working to impede a student’s progress, that also demonstrates development’s necessity and ongoing investigation. Our program issues an invitation to research supervisors to study the question: ‘why do you supervise the way you do?’ In some cases, supervisors tell us that they supervise the way they were themselves supervised. In other cases, supervisors tell us that their practice has been a reaction against their own experience of being supervised. Their focus is now on ensuring that their students are protected from either benign neglect or over-supervision. There is an appropriate balance to be struck – somewhere. In part, development knowledge works to support the discovery of where that balance might be and to identify the factors that shift it throughout the course of candidature.

And so, with the knowledge and panic that students may not learn, virtually every aspect of the supervision relationship is being theorised, studied, interrogated and
empirically investigated where possible. Some of these include the challenges of the examination process (Johnston 1997a; Winter, Griffiths & Green, 2000; Mullins & Kiley, 2002), the importance of writing and feedback (Caffarella & Barnett, 2000; Kamler & Thompson, 2004), inducting students into a culture of research (Deem and Brophy, 2000), roles, expectations and the question of balance (Hockey, 1994; Leder, 1995; Delamont, Parry & Atkinson, 1998), or the question of (in)appropriate power and desire (Lee, 1998; Bartlett & Mercer, 2000; Grant, 2003). These are only a few examples of the slippery terrain that must be understood and negotiated so that students’ learning can flourish. Each of these dimensions, with their focus on its productive and unproductive effects on students, highlight the ease in which unprofessional pedagogy can surface so that development knowledge is warranted and wanted – made attractive through its appeal to efficiency and quality. This may seem a paradox of sorts: at the same time development knowledge makes visible ineffectiveness and then seeks to understand and correct it, these very same aspects of the learning experience, what Lee and Williams (1999) refer to as ‘noise’, are neglected.

As these kinds of narratives take effect and become imprinted as part of the learning and development landscape, it should come as no surprise that students themselves are assuming the mantle of writing about the insufficiency of their experiences too, and in many cases in collaboration with their supervisors as a form of reflection on the experience (Perry & Brophy, 2001; McAlpine & Weiss, 2000; O’Leary, 2001; Collins et al., 2001). Often, this experience of empowerment, of engaging the student voice, or indeed having it spilling over can speak volumes to the risk of the un-or underdeveloped supervisor and, of the university that does not adequately support the research student experience. As Catherine Manathunga (2005) has recently argued, “turning the light on a private space” that is research supervision development, contains both possibilities and dangers. It shows up the inadequacies of what is currently being done while demonstrating with some urgency, what still needs doing. It is often the student experience of learning that signals the ongoing role and responsibility of development. As one senior manager put it recently at one of our program workshops: “we don’t it for us, we do it for them”.

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Development knowledge in this sense appears to rely on all the elements that Worthington and Hodgson (2005) ascribe to it in the opening quote to this section. In our Program, supervisors must never be allowed to think that their knowledge is complete. They must continually work on themselves through meticulous self-examination, monitoring and scrutiny. They must continue to act and navigate the murky waters of an institutional terrain that operates in contradictory ways. Supervisors must seek continuous feedback, perhaps even 360 degree feedback: from their students, colleagues, external bodies such as employers or professional associations, in order to assess their impact and effect. Put simply, they must care whether they have an effect. Relentlessly, they must ask themselves whether the intention of their practice is consistent with others' experience of it and if it is not, they must work to understand why; and if it is, be encouraged in the pursuit of data and evidence that can support their claims in the name of rigorous evaluation. In the case of our Program, there is also the additional emphasis on writing about this work, subjecting it to processes of peer review, publishing it, bringing it into view as a final enactment of scholarship (Brew & Peseta, 2004). At the very least, development knowledge should contain some recognition and reward as a transaction that academics themselves can recognise and then want to aspire to. There has been many times where I have encouraged colleagues with whom I work to include a view to publication in the framing of their teaching, learning and research supervision initiatives. Occasionally, it often surprises them that this work actually constitutes scholarship. I often find myself assuring them that research in and for the learning society can assume many different forms. And indeed, there is even more learning to be done in order to map the outcome of their practice to an appropriate scholarly conversation.

McWilliam (2002) suggests that these self-development practices might also be usefully considered as the development of 'enterprising knowledge'. She argues that the hallmarks of an enterprising disposition appear to articulate with the language and purposes of development knowledge within an agenda of broader neoliberal reform. There is the need for 'effective communication', an emphasis on 'negotiation', the importance of 'planning' and 'organising' is stressed, as are the attributes of leadership, energy and creativity. There are some resonances here with
parts of my academic development practice. There are activities and tools in our Program that invite supervisors into a discussion about not only why effective communication is important, but also the things that are important to communicate. In past workshops, we have invited colleagues from other parts of the university to facilitate sessions on conflict management and resolution, or on the sorts of skills required to be a good negotiator, or to recognise the way that the role of the supervisor will inevitably shift over time. Drawing on anthropological works of "development", McWilliam (2002) maintains that this is one of the three characteristics of development knowledge – it is that "models are those which are 'generalisable' or appear to offer greatest predictability or the semblance of control over events" (p.290). Citing an OECD\(^9\) report, McWilliam (2002) illustrates how these qualities come to encompass the work of an enterprising individual. It is worth quoting at length.

An enterprising individual has a positive, flexible, adaptable disposition towards change, seeing it as normal, and as an opportunity rather than a problem. To see change in this way, an enterprising individual has a security borne of self-confidence, and is at ease in dealing with insecurity, risks, difficulty and the unknown. An enterprising individual has the capacity to initiate creative ideas, and develop them individually or in collaboration with others, and see them through into action in a determined manner. An enterprising individual is able, even anxious, to take responsibility, and is an effective communicator, negotiator, influencer, planner and organiser. An enterprising individual is active, confident, and purposeful, not passive, uncertain, and dependent (p.291).

While I would argue that many academic developers would want also to add research-based, scholarly, with a capacity for critical reflection to this list, these set of qualities, attributes and dispositions are not entirely anathema to the work academic developers perform, even if they are not intended in effect. In our Program for supervisors, challenges in the supervision relationship are framed as opportunities for scholarly inquiry and investigation. Supervisors, no matter the disciplinary area

\(^9\) OECD is the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development.
are encouraged to experiment, be innovative and creative for instance, with group models of supervision or with thinking about metaphors to describe their practice. We emphasise the importance of negotiating boundaries so that students too can participate as enterprising colleagues, aware of and able to act within these very same conditions of learning. If as McWilliam seems to imply, that these kinds of knowledges function as a script for the 21st century academic, then it is no coincidence that technologies of quality and audit sit alongside it.

It is not only academic developers who preside over the sort of learning specified by the necessity that this development knowledge represents. The key is that its formulations become inscribed on to the routine and mundane practices of academic work in seemingly ordinary ways – in ways which normalise the very systems that render it meaningful, and that according to Marilyn Strathern (2000) produce the appearance of consistency with academic values and what academics purport to value (learning, freedom, responsibility, openness, transparency). The primary effect here is that contestability appears irresponsible, irrational and generated from fear. There has been a range of commentary on the self-sustaining and legitimisation narratives of the learning discourses of quality and audit. Morley’s work (cited in Blackmore, 2004, p.391) reminds us of the fine line between reprimand and improvement, and that in order to validly critique the logic of audit one must first be seen to have gone through it, mastered it and to have come out on the side of quality. To be against ‘audit’ is to refuse critique and to appear unavailable to the prospect of continual learning. To repudiate ‘audit’ is to be against transparency, it is to be complicit in those practices that conceal the self from public inspection. Shore & Wright (2000, p.58) remind us further that as academics “construct [and reconstruct] themselves as professional subjects”, on display under regimes of surveillance, measurement and calculability such that the practices that go along with development knowledge are far from innocent: “they embody a new rationality and morality... designed to engender amongst academic staff norms of conduct and professional behaviour. In short, they are agents for the creation of new kinds of subjectivity: self-managing individuals who render themselves auditable” (Shore & Wright, 2000, p.57).
The point is that development knowledge in the context of these systems and logics make learning inevitable by developing it into moral imperative. Once the necessity to learn and the moral responsibility for learning is identified and established, formal academic development programs assume an increasingly important role in that picture, particularly when the outcomes of this learning are used to forward, claim and provide an evidentiary basis for, and because of, institutional quality agendas. As a result, developers’ work is often discursively caught up in the play of moral languages and technologies that describe the knowledge it has both of itself, and then makes available to others. The danger is, as McWilliam writes (2002), that

[i]t is a relationship which is inevitably constituted by the developer’s knowledge and categories. The resultant unequal power relationship is rendered less problematic – apparently more equitable – when the developer insists on the importance of ‘communication’ between the developer and the developee [...] ...because development is always predicated on the idea that someone is knowledge-able while someone else is knowledge deficient, such communication cannot be a conversation among equals. The developer’s knowledge is already assumed to be what leads to progress, not the knowledge of the developee (p. 290).

I would agree with McWilliam’s observation here, and that while much of the scholarship of academic development literature attempts to honestly acknowledge the difficulty and effect of differential power, a good deal of it also assumes that it can be, or ought to be reconcilable through recourse to an ethical commitment to understanding the ‘other’, brought about through collaborative learning partnerships, or through efforts at negotiation, critical reflection, and by being open, transparent and flexible. In part, this appears to be about evening out the potential for miscommunication so that development work operates to embed itself as both an effective and permanent feature of academic life. Alan Jenkins (1996), and with Mick Healey (2003) for instance have written passionately on the need for academic developers to take seriously the disciplinary identity and context of their colleagues. They write about valuing staff’s disciplinary concerns, about locating and producing disciplinary-based pedagogic literature, and about situating development work within
a disciplinary-based context because it is the way, academics in the main, define their professional identity. Writing on the need to consider 'the departmental context and culture' as a mode for organising development activities, Graham Gibbs (1996) points to a number of models in operation where whole academic departments (developees) negotiate both time and a focus for their teaching and learning development activities in partnership with a central unit (developers) so that planning is localised and the achievement of outcomes are properly embedded. At the 2003 Cambridge Conference on academic development, the whole question of 'engagement' served as its focus, and various chapters in the resulting publication (Elvidge, Land, Mason & Matthews, 2004) seek some form of better engagement. Breslow, Drew, Healey, Matthews & Norton, (2004) write about engagement in terms of awakening an 'intellectual curiosity' for teaching and learning; Jacques, Kahn, Qualters, Sayers & Wynyard, (2004) frame it as a question of formulating appropriate relationships; Ashworth et al. (2004) understand it primarily in terms of complex identity questions. Many of these perspectives do a wonderful job at illuminating the complication of what it is developers do and the ways they seek to engage others in the work they perform. The issue that I am still left pondering however is that learning appears to be both the problem and the answer of academic development. Moreover, it is that the learning we offer contains both the threat and joy of academic professionalism.

_Academics unable to develop themselves: the bind of development knowledge_

In Davies' (2005a) paper _Winning the Hearts and Minds of Academics in the Service of Neoliberalism_, the final section reports on an interview with an academic — a Professor with responsibility for leading a research centre in what is labelled an 'elite Australian university'. Like others, this academic recognises and can articulate both his doing and undoing under the agendas of change taking place within universities. His story is not atypical. For instance, he speaks of the past excesses of academic autonomy and freedom but he worries that the contemporary regulatory mechanisms have gone too far so that it impacts unnecessarily on the quality of his work. But he also seeks to be recognised for what it values. Autonomy is differently constituted in
the present than in the past, he reflects in the interview. He speaks of the entrepreneurial aspects of his role and its taking away from the pleasurable pursuit of sustained intellectual inquiry together with its effects on the forms of knowledge available for student learning. He says,

... I don't spend anywhere enough time in the library, reading the works of other people, I go to conferences but I go to conferences as a speaker, so I am not there at the conferences where I could learn from other people, I am not reading their works enough, I am not doing any independent research, so my ability to inform students of the world around me has diminished as a result...
(Davies, 2005a, p.33, my italics).

The psychological impact on his research is telling. It is as Davies (2005a, p.34) states that, "he is sure his research is not garbage and he worries that it is garbage". The point that Davies is keen to draw out here is that narratives like these work to restore a set of assumptions about the need for development knowledge as a way of curtailing some natural tendency to disorder and chaos in the working lives of academics. The point is not that this might be true for individual or groups of academics; it is that this truth is then translated into a system of reason about the nature of academic work more generally. The implication is that academic life now needs to be subject to a new kind of observation, a different sort of gaze where one has an eye on oneself, that same eye on colleagues, and is then subject to a range of other, external eyes. She says,

[i]here are three different threads of reasoning woven together here: a systematic reasoning – we can blame the Oxbridge system for making us into inadequate lazy academics (thus we need systematic change); a reasoning about the nature of individual human subjects who are naturally irresponsible, being corrupt and exploitative if left to their own (de)vices (thus we need systems to control them); a new systemic argument – the neoliberal system is necessary but it may have gone too far.... It (this trio construct a new ascendant morality (Davies, 2005a, p.33).
Davies' (2005a) 'threads of reasoning' would undoubtedly ring true for a good many academics at this time. I see them operating upon the discourses which frame the development knowledge of my work and practice too. I have heard them invoked by colleagues of all persuasions throughout the university – primarily as reasons not to embrace change. The first, I recognise immediately in my capacity as a new academic worker, one who entered the academy with little knowledge of the ideal, history or the aspiration of an Oxbridge system. Drawing on additional sources, Elaine Martin (1999) describes that time thus:

The life of an academic thirty or so years ago was undoubtedly a pleasant one. Classes were usually small; we are told by Halsey (1992:99) that, on average, staff taught classes of between five and twenty students. The students in those classes were well prepared for university education, and, on the whole, were seen to be committed young men and women keen to learn and advance social progress. The teaching commitments of staff were for less than of the weeks of the year and rarely exceeded eight hours per week. These university teachers would have rarely published more than one article every two or three years (Halsey 1992: appendix 1, part 10b). They had no necessity to make themselves accountable or to justify what they taught or how. The profession was prestigious and confident. Neither society nor government seriously questioned their standards and values (Scott 1995:71-2). Once appointed to an academic position, an academic staff member was there for life (p.7).

Even if this portrayal is both historically typical and a caricature simultaneously, the move away from it in part, signals the work of and role for academic development. The implications of opening out access to greater numbers of students means larger class sizes, new cohorts of students with different levels of ability, increased pressure on resources, a changing relationship with the state and a renewed focus on accountability – are all dimensions of work that academic developers have written about and attempted to address in their advocacy for new forms of academic professionalism (Nixon et al., 1998; Nixon, 2001, 2003). But when the characteristics, symbols and materiality of that much sought after Oxbridge system are invisible, no longer viable, untenable and perhaps even simply unthinkable to a
generation of new academics, then there is in a place an obligation to just get on with it, to cope in the best way you can, in the only way you know how. There is usually no time to ask how things might be different, or to understand how it came to be this way and so this is one way that assent takes hold. It brings into being an inevitability while camouflaging its historical specificity. In a 2003 keynote address, Alan Luke opined that “his” generation - that “older” generation of academics appeared to spend a lot of time looking backwards (presumably to a lost Oxbridge system) while newer entrants to academic work (whom he referred to as the Level As & Bs)\(^\text{10}\) had only the work of getting on with it. He claimed that this backward looking would always limit academics from productively moving forward. But as Davies (2005a) forcefully argues, it is not the hankering after the purity of a pre-neoliberal time or those halcyon days that is problematic in these accounts of remembering; rather it is that it contains a logic that sets up the present as the only proper corrective and moral intervention to a “reality” of its previous excesses. That past was inefficient and wasteful whereas the systems of the present promise an efficient allocation of resources where quality is widely understood and can be made to work in the service of academic values; it is that that past has been memorialised, romanticised and there is no place or time for that kind of dreaming now; it is that there were those who took advantage, who exploited the academic freedoms of the past; whereas now, we think about how and to whom we must be accountable as a moral obligation and responsibility; and in relation to teaching and learning work, the present focus on student learning outcomes transcends the tendency to a pedagogy that was characterised by a model of the ‘sage on the stage’ – the performing teacher. It is the existence of this ‘mythology’, whether accurate or not, that according to Davies (2005a) comes to signify a set of propositions about why academics need developing, what sort of developing, and with the assistance of market discourses such as lifelong learning and its drive towards flexibility, what institutions must do in order to secure it. All development knowledge then appears to be framed within the problematic of this same logic.

\(^{10}\) Level A and B academics in the Australian higher education sector correspond to Associate Lecturer and Lecturer levels respectively.
The second of Davies' (2005a) ‘threads of reasoning’, follows neatly on from the first – that systems of control and monitoring are needed to curb a tendency that academics, left to their own devices will be naturally idle and unproductive. I wonder about this. It does not feel right at all. As I go about my work across the university, when I bump accidentally into colleagues rushing from one post to the next, when I inquire after them, the first response I am most likely to get back is: “everything is just so hectic at the moment, Tai”. Busy-ness, I have discovered, is the default position of academic life. The second is a lamentation about the lack of time or a speculation on where time to do the work they need to do or feel passionate about doing, has gone. In this scenario, it is not merely the absence of time; it is also a position on those unnecessary activities that fill it up. This manifests in the injunctions to “just say no”, or in reminders to “be strategic with your priorities”, or “decide how much time it takes before you start and stick to it”. The third, is often an apology that they have not yet had a chance to finish (or probably start) something that they had promised to do on a teaching and learning initiative in which we might both be involved together. I used to notice this rush to explain quite a lot. I often felt like I was beginning to represent some reminder of guilt, some symbol of what it is they have yet to do, that in spite of their eager flirtations with teaching and learning development knowledge, they had not managed yet to integrate it or transform themselves into the critically reflective teacher that had been the outcome of what we had been working towards. And as I willied them to stop for a moment, to chat for a bit so I could ask after them – how they were getting on more generally, I wondered why they would usually reply with a ‘work’ response rather than tell me about the new shrubs in the back garden, or some band or film they had seen over the weekend, or regale me with an account of their child’s birthday party. I came to suspect that academics left to their own devices would often still be beavering away at marking, teaching, writing research grants, revising curricula, travelling to conferences and participating in seminars, or responding to emails late into every evening. Time, it seems is one explanation as to why academics find it difficult to engage wholeheartedly with the particular kind of development knowledge we offer. In our Program for supervision development where supervisors enthusiastically register to complete the online independent study pathway following a workshop or conversation with me, a year later, it is ‘time’ they tell me, that has prevented them
from completion. This desire for more time, different time and a slowing down of
time, so that more can be done and achieved both qualitatively and quantitatively,
should also be read against any assumption of a natural tendency to idleness or
uselessness.

In Martin’s (1999) survey of over 160 Australian and UK based academics, inquiring
into the changing nature of academic work there is little evidence of either idleness
or unproductivity. It is less the quantitative findings that interest me here, rather it is
the areas of concern Martin identifies as predominant experiences of academic work:
lack of consultation, the invasive instruments of accountability, the
(in)appropriateness of vision and leadership, and the desire for the better valuing of
people that seem to come to the fore. In Craig McInnis’s (2000a) national survey of
over 2500 Australian academics, the desire and pressure for quality given sector wide
changes, continues to contribute to overwhelming workloads. Exploring teaching
quality specifically, McInnis’s (2000) analysis reveals that academics’ efforts at
improvement are affected by a number of complex factors (for example: teaching
outside of their disciplinary area of expertise, research commitments, lack of up-to-
date equipment/technology, student numbers, variation in student ability) but that
these are mediated by levels of appointment, institutional type and field of study
differences. My reading of both these set of findings is to acknowledge the fact,
effects and consequences of over-productivity, since these seem to me, indicators
that academics remain heavily engaged in their workplaces.

With a good deal of research (see McInnis, 2000a for a summary) suggesting that
academics are labouring for longer hours, under more trying working conditions,
with less job security, the assumption of idleness does not appear to add up. Writing
on the work of academics in an Australian cultural studies and humanities context,
Ruth Barcan (2003), suggests that accusations of idleness appear to be rooted in both
the processes and products of academic work. It is how academics spend their time,
what on, and for what outcomes that lend themselves to a suspiciousness that
regimes and mechanisms of quality seek to have some say in. She also argues that,
It can refer to inefficiency and ineffectuality, lack of effort or outcome, or misdirected effort (i.e. irrelevant, inappropriate or valueless outcomes). It is increasingly likely to refer to a lack of an obviously pragmatic application, to teaching that doesn’t train students for the workplace, or to research that has no immediately evident commercial application. It may also refer to work that has a politically unacceptable output (p.364).

As she continues on, it is not that academics are idle but the work some are engaged in is misdirected and so requires redirection. This redirection can come in the form of new knowledges for the academic workplace. According to McWilliam, Hatcher & Meadmore (1999), it is about remaking the academic for corporate times through establishing a new kind of propriety. In the work academic developers do to enhance teaching and learning for instance, this sense of redirection might often be framed as an integration of research-based and scholarly knowledge emanating from the field of higher education. A university teacher characterised by the values of academic professionalism; who can see merit in the need for learning outcomes; who can incorporate generic attributes within their curricula; who takes a more considered approach to assessment and develops standards and grade descriptors for students’ learning; who develops a scholarly and inquiring disposition to their teaching and its effects; who participates productively rather than with resistance in institutional structures so as to shape appropriate pedagogy, might be seen as the proper outcome of this redirection. The university teacher that chooses otherwise or who remains wary or ignorant of these opportunities, and the institution that does not organise itself for this kind of learning is of course, what academic developers like myself, work to counteract. Of necessity, the university must now see itself as a learning organisation (James, 1997; Martin, 1999) and arrange itself, its workers and its pedagogy to be consistent with it.

The third ‘thread of reasoning’ Davies’ (2005a) identifies is caught up in a more ambivalent notion of the effect of technologies of audit and quality – that is, it is both needed but now needs to be tempered appropriately. Still operating under the logic that academics left to their own devices tend towards a form of idleness, this speaks of the continuing contradictory effects of development knowledge and its practices.
Yet in Morley's (2005) interviews with academics and managers, she found that for some,

the auditing of teaching and learning has produced new entitlements and empowerment for students. In terms of staff, it has provided new forms of visibility for areas of work that were traditionally undervalued in the academy...[for instance] some new job opportunities for women, as they work their way into positions including quality managers and teaching and learning coordinators (p.85).

For others, the effects are both pernicious and ambivalent. In Worthington and Hodgson's (2005) interviews with academics, what is emphasised in these efforts is a 'culture of institutionalised distrust'. It is not, they claim, that academics resist quality per se; it is that local and specific forms of self-regulation, of thinking about and enacting quality appear devalued and come to be seen as inefficient, or misaligned, without the guidance of rational and scientific knowledge that is generated and judged externally. This local knowledge is what McWilliam (2002) has called 'folkloric' knowledge. Its disappearance, she argues, is made manifest through new forms of competitive collegiality and peer review.

Exploring the enactment of resistance in the UK-based Subject Programme Review (SPR) process, Worthington and Hodgson (2005) highlight four roles that in their view can be regarded as essentially exploitative, and that demonstrate various levels of ambivalence and distrust in what were purportedly designed to be collegial activities for evaluation and improvement. The first role, the devolver, designates the responsibility for coordination of quality processes to junior colleagues while senior colleagues remain uninvolved, disengaged and unhelpful. In their analysis, it is often senior academics who actively denounce the 'fuss' of the process in the absence of leading it. The shirker, the second of Worthington and Hodgson's roles, typifies those non-contributors who then go on to present the public appearance of involvement. Shirkers voice public opinions that preparation for teaching and learning audit should require minimal effort. Yet their lack of engagement to produce curriculum material and documentation on time for example, means that those
responsible for the planning and coordination efforts often find themselves doing it on their behalf. The third and fourth roles they term the *ditherer* and the *deceiver*. They describe them thus: "recalcitrant subjects deceive others into believing that what is required of them is beyond their understanding and capability" (Worthington & Hodgson, 2005, p.104). In these scenarios, academics resist the quality process through willingly and knowingly claiming ignorance, but then at the expense of their colleagues, go on to enjoy the benefits of continuing to be uninvolved. In the main, this appears to translate to time dedicated for research. Here is the way one of Worthington & Hodgson’s (2005, p.106) interviewees put it:

> Quality is management’s problem not mine. I do what I have to before the inspectors arrive, but I’m not spending every minute of every day thinking about it. I leave that to the idiots in the department who’ve taken it on. If they’re daft enough to worry about it, when it’s the university management who as far as I’m concerned are paid to worry about it, then that’s their problem. If they want me to do that they can pay me for it.

Anyone with intimate knowledge of university life and its politics will no doubt recognise each of these roles, and the potential for deleterious consequences on the formation and sustenance of collegial relationships. They will recognise the characters: the non-contributors, the dissenters, the collaborators too, but particularly those who are burdened (often alone) with the responsibility of carrying the success of the quality process, hoping that it will result in a rating, an assessment, a set of recommendations, some new information for improvement that accurately accounts for the effort.

My purpose here in illuminating narratives of these kinds is not to show development knowledge or academic development work up as some faulty imposition upon the working lives of academics. It is rather, to understand how the assumptions around change; teaching and learning change particularly are caught up in the context in which development knowledge sits. The academic development project is not an innocent or neutral practice. It has effects – in my view, often quite difficult effects for both developers and their disciplinary counterparts. Both perspectives need to be
narrativised into the public domain as an opportunity for further exploration and scholarship.

In the next chapter of this thesis, I make precisely this move. I map a different research texture for the academic development project – one that seeks to move beyond the current trends that are concerned to showcase impact and outcomes. Rather, I consider the following question: how might academic developers think about, do and carry out research in ways that reveal how the work itself can feel?
Chapter 4

Autoethnographic interventions: openings for researching academic development differently

The language of research must serve to render the object not as the researcher sees it in experience, \textit{but as a research community would have it}, as represented by so many data whose validity can be checked and referenced. These checks, these references, maintain the language of the tribe, and thus control the development of its vocabulary (Clough, 2002, p.83, my italics).

Peter Clough’s astute observation raises three pressing questions for me about how the work of research features within any community of scholars and practitioners, including that of academic development. First: what does it mean to want to think, carry out and write research that might be located outside the boundaries of how your research community would have it? Second: how do we know where those boundaries are, when and how they shift? And third, what is to be said of the usefulness of these attempts?

This cluster of questions emerge largely as a result of my turn to autoethnography as a way of describing this thesis, together with my attempts to grapple with its claim to knowing and knowledge within a field that at once seeks out, produces and valorises particular economies of research. It appears to be an economy Brew (2002) describes thus:

Developers will only have credibility in a research context if they can hold their own as researchers within their own field of study; i.e. higher education. A key requirement is that developers engage in research that is professional and rigorous in execution, presentation and dissemination and that is credible in whatever ways count in their institution. For example, if research grants give credibility, then developers should go after research grants; if publication is the
name of the game, developers should be publishing; if there is a demand for
data then developers will need to be focused on providing it, and so on.
Developers may have a role in critically questioning these ways of defining and
measuring research and they may additionally provide a critique of the very
nature of research and scholarship. It is however, naïve to assume that such
critiques have credibility unless they are presented in the context of some
personal research experience and achievements (p.117).

One would be hard pressed to find fault with the notion Brew proposes. If the
purpose of research is to teach as she (2002) suggests it is, we might ask: what is it
that we purport our research to be teaching, is that enough, and what sort of
researchers does this demand us to be? If as she argues, that “there is a need for
academic developers to reassess their relationship to research, [...] that it has to
come centre stage in the practice” (p.112), then we might ask further, what kind of
researcher-subject it relies on? And what sorts of research questions lend themselves
to this sort of authority? It might also be to ask, what is absent in this particular
enactment? What aspects of the research experience must be silenced in order for
notions like credibility and authority to hold sway in the context she paints for the
work of academic development?

Notwithstanding the pragmatic and necessary importance of the framework she
outlines for the research agenda of academic development, I found autoethnography
late one evening in the quiet of the university library. I was searching for a
methodological framework that encouraged me to write richly of my experience and
practice as an academic developer, as itself an act of research. And I was seeking
both a scholarly argument and a turn to the writing of it in particular, that might
value this ‘self-knowledge’ of its own accord - neither as a contaminant to that Other
(Krieger, 1991), a supplement to it, or an escape from it. With its concomitant focus
on writing, representation and communication, autoethnography can seem at once
both a comfort and a risk. Much of the literature portrays the struggle for its
scholarly recognition (Ellis & Bochner, 2000; Sparkes, 2000, 2002; Holt, 2003;
White, 2003; Ellis, 2004). What one becomes aware of in choosing a framework
such as this, is the array of regulatory mechanisms at play in what constitutes not
only how we research, but what can be researched. I straddled that in-between place: aware that my choice to work with autoethnography came to be perceived as intellectually brave; that my turn to modes of narrative and fiction writing was often coded by others as breaking new ground in understanding the knowledge of what the scholarship of academic development might be, while simultaneously being suspect. Nothing reminded me more of this than the accusation that I was "just researching myself". After all, what could be more untenable, or unreliable than a single, self-reflexive account of academic development practice, told by the researcher herself about her own practice, framed as an autoethnography and influenced by writings around narratives of self? In my context, could the researcher-self ever be enough?

There are of course, larger questions about the nature of research at stake in the performance of suspicion and celebration. Educational research takes place in contexts defined by institutional and political constraints, conflicting values and competing ideas about how to even frame the problem being investigated. This is a relatively common scenario for those of us grappling with the discursive construction of theory/practice dilemmas and the assumption of a straightforward and linear translation of research and evidence to policy settings. At a time when evidence-based practice is gaining momentum, it remains a vexed discourse in educational research for all sorts of well documented reasons (Clegg, 2004, 2005; Davies, 2003; Elliot, 2001; Thomas, 2004), not the least of which is the evidence chosen to matter, what that excludes and how contexts and purpose produce an appeal to certain kinds of evidence and therefore particular kinds of knowing. There is however, another kind of tendency present within discourses of educational research – one which Clough (2002) describes thus:

There are, for argument's sake, two contrary directions in educational research at this time, and they suggest movements in polarized directions. The one, for argument's sake, largely takes its terms and instruments for granted, and all that remains is to gather data to feed those designs which are given with the instruments – for example in many large-scale funded programmes; this is a process, then, of addition, and it is an endless process. The other – for argument's sake – is that more recent occupation of educational research with
the researcher themselves, and their very insertion in the process of research; this activity endlessly problematises terms and instruments, and so is a process of subtraction; of taking away, that is, the methodologically impure, the ideologically suspect (pp. 81-82, original italics).

This chapter and my turn to autoethnography could be located within the second of Clough’s directions. I explore several methodological questions that have sat alongside me as this work has taken shape, and how they have come to insinuate themselves on my desire to create a different texture and energy towards a renewal of the scholarship of academic development project. First, I examine the emergence of autoethnography as a knowledge producing endeavour - one that sits within larger discourses regarding shifts within qualitative inquiry – and ethnography in particular. Through a piece of dialogue, I consider how autoethnography has come to be visible, available and taken up as a way of doing research. I also report more fully on my own journey to understand how it features in my context and indicate the struggle of both its visibility and viability.

Following the dialogue, I then review some of the methodologically contested terms upon which autoethnography relies – particularly reflexivity – as a trope that often works to position autoethnography as occupying two very different kinds of positions: as virtuous in its attention to writing, revealing and unpacking the hegemonic or ideological processes of research production; and dangerous in its determination to trouble or blur the distinction between the Self and Other, often realised and argued as an acritical return to the self in much ethnographic writing (Ryang, 1997; Gans, 1999) – a self that produces problematic research – largely personal and often difficult to know how to read, engage with or critique. It is the charge of self-indulgence or narcissism that seems to be the most repeatedly evoked as illustrative of this latter category – as if something were at stake in the inclusion of these sorts of knowledges within the proper education and social science work of the academy.

Second, I address the issue of what constitutes the matter and substance of data within an autoethnographic inquiry. In this work, data is not located in the sort of
empirical study which collects and mines the experience of Others – interviewees, participants, informants or respondents as they might often be put. Rather, I use a learning journal - that recognised and popular device for reflection, in order to consider my learning about academic development. I describe the process of maintaining a learning journal, interpreting my own experience of the process both with and against the scholarly literature about learning journals within the higher education context. My goal here is also to unpack how this particular technique has come to be thought of as enacting an appropriate kind of reflexive manoeuvre. To this end, I draw on Wanda Pillow’s (2003b) notion of reflexivity as ‘confession, catharsis and cure’ in order to advance a more careful and critical account of the intersection between reflexivity and learning journals, and the resultant claims made of its research.

Third, I address autoethnography’s focus on writing and communication – the explicit written-ness and re-written-ness of research, or its textuality (MacLure, 2003). Linda Brodkey (1996, p.30) asks why “one of the pleasures of writing that academics rarely give themselves – is permission to experiment”; Laurel Richardson (2000, p.924) invites us to consider “how do we create texts that are vital? That are attended to? That make a difference?” and in her book The Vulnerable Observer: Anthropology That Breaks Your Heart, Ruth Behar (1996, p.16) tells us that “when you write vulnerably, others respond vulnerably”. She reminds us too, to look for, see, and write of the poetry in our work (Behar, 2005). I have been interested for some time in the way academic developers consider the movement between the research itself and the production and creation of the texts that go to its representation and communication. Many of the texts, the accounts of practice I come across in the literature lack the spirit and vitality of the conversations which take place in the academic development community – the wonderful laughter and surprise of our practice; very often its sadness, longing and regret of the institutional agendas we may be charged to perform; and other times, the joy and celebration of collaborative successes – when some aspect of university teaching and learning has been shared. Simply put: much of the research produced about academic development just doesn’t read the way the work actually feels. Arguing that “research wants to, needs to, forget its own written-ness” (MacLure, 2003, p.106), I
turn to the literature in arts-based inquiry (Neilson, 2002; and with Cole & Knowles, 2001; Eisner, 2004, 2005) to argue for increased attention to crafting texts that transcend a simple reporting of the experience of academic development – towards a communication of its pulse, or feeling. Essentially, this is an imperative to attend to the artfulness of our research when we turn to the act of writing it, and to suggest that these are the kinds of interventions that work to differently narrativise the field.

Finally, I consider how this thesis might be read both with and against some of the scholarly discussions regarding the assessment, evaluation and purpose of autoethnographic work. This for me is really the issue of how we come to trust the knowledge that is offered up in autoethnographic inquiries and the work we want it to perform. It is fortunate that those who write and produce this work are themselves grappling with these questions – questions regarding its quality (Garratt & Hodkinson, 1998; Bochner, 2000; Clough, 2000). Others like Richardson (2000) have even offered up the notion of ‘crystallization’ as a substitute for the more recognised idea of ‘triangulation’. Thomas Schwandt (1996) has called this the project of ‘criteriology’. I make an attempt to situate the knowledge work of this thesis as an autoethnographic project, drawing on those discussions.

I came to be interested in these sorts of interventions precisely because I had been struggling for some time with how academic developers might research and write their scholarship and inquiry differently and with credibility, at a time where the spectre of usefulness was being defined and deployed by an institutional and performative gaze that required the production of certain kinds of knowing and knowledges. What is it about the labour and organisation of academic development that effaces such expressions of difference; that very often stifles our ability to creatively represent our work when we come to write of it? Is it simply that our field can not afford to do research or write in this way? Or better still, is it as Davies (2005, 2005a) claims, that the flurry to the language of strategic prioritising and institutional agendas of managerialism have so effectively encroached upon our work that it has efficiently neutered our capacity to imagine, describe, write and communicate the complexity, difficulty, responsibility, jouissance and poetry of the scholarship of academic development project? This is not as Daphne Patai (in Pillow,
2003b, p.176) suggests, about “academics engaged in the erotics of their own language games”. I want to insist that openings and interventions of these kinds do matter. In academic development work, they matter even more so because of their very insertion into, or repudiation of the normative modes of performativity (Ball, 2000, 2003). This was the kind of conversation that I wanted to begin to have about the scholarship of academic development – to consider how new discourses of research would help to move toward it being otherwise.

The emergence and visibility of autoethnographic inquiry

SCENE: I am sitting with friends and colleagues – a group of academic developers by a large, open bay window in a relatively deserted student café. It’s been a humid day so the onset of a cool breeze brings welcome relief. Even though the café is slightly grubby – the coffee is consistently good and the brownies even better. Ahhh... chocolate! There are four of us today – Lucy, Max, myself and Anita. We meet here every 6-8 weeks to chat about our research and various other academic development goings-on, both within our unit and across the university – and to reconnect. These catch-ups are ritual now. Anita is relatively new to our unit and has asked to come along because our Director has suggested that she think about doctoral work. She wants to get involved in developers’ discussions of research to test out her understandings, to make some order of the conversations in the field and to explore possible questions and projects. We talk in turns for a bit about our work: how strategic projects are going, any interesting teaching and learning faculty collaborations, forthcoming conferences, who in the university is being difficult – is halting progress on change, together with our assessment of this year’s winners of the University Teaching Excellence Awards. A few of the recipients are known to us – they are good, passionate, even excellent teachers who deserve some recognition. Soon, the conversation turns to our own teaching – particularly to the participants in the Graduate Certificate course in which we all co-teach. The session on methods and methodology comes up and I re-tell the story of a scientist in the group who asked whether it was important to know the difference between methods and methodology when thinking about pedagogical research and inquiry. There are
Further questions, points of clarification from Anita – and even a silly impression from Max, mimicking the expression of horror I wore that afternoon. Obviously, my poker face needs substantial work but I don’t mind. The camaraderie between us is relaxed and comfortable, and it reminds me that Anita wants to chat more specifically with me about this thing called ‘autoethnography’ I’ve been working on.

ANITA: So… will I start us off talking about our research… ‘cos I have a question. [She pauses, waiting for acknowledgment that it’s ok to start]. Ok… so I notice from the summary sheet here Tai that your research is about academic development, and how it might be different. Is that right? It also says here that it’s an au-to-eth-no-gra-phy. I’ve never heard that term before… it’s a bit a mouthful isn’t it?

Hearing my name sort of brings me to attention. It intrudes on the thoughts I’m having about my journey to autoethnography and how I will portray it to Anita. What first: its openings, joys and celebrations, or the constant self-questioning, difficulties and anxieties… the accusations of self-indulgence and the implicit questioning of its impact, its usefulness? Perhaps they are part of the same struggle, the same narrative. I glance down at the handout that contains the strange and disembodied description of my research. It reads and feels virtually unrecognisable now. I had written those words long ago just as I was getting into the possibilities of autoethnography for writing about student learning, university teaching and academic development – and even then it seemed a risky enterprise. I recall easily the feelings of uncertainty about whether the field – in whatever way I had constructed it was ready for the kind of research I was proposing. I really had to ask myself if I was even ready to write it and how I would be received as a researcher seeking admission into a particular community of scholars that had canons, rules and rituals much like any other. It is one thing for a community to indicate that it is open to new research, it’s another to publish it, and yet another, to value it.

Looking over at my colleagues now clumsily spooning sugar into their coffees, I am reminded of change – the sort of change their work and ideas represent; that communities of learning aren’t static; that conventions are opening out and that boundaries can be permeable, or at least made different – that the community of
academic development has changed and is changing in the same ways that the
professional work of academics is being reformulated through attention to teaching
and learning. I recall too that a good deal of my initial nervousness had dissipated
after I stumbled across Clough’s (2002) accounts of Rob, Bev and Lolly, school-
based accounts of difficulty – as both narrative and fiction... and in educational
research! I’d been quite taken with the vulnerability of his writing. Each account was
complex and difficult but breathtakingly visceral, and each spoke of what research
could be – of its power to illuminate, to affect, together with its capacity to capture a
livedness that was both urgent and gentle. He never sought to explain away their
lives in primarily a theoretical fashion, nor did it seem that the accounts were at the
mercy of some larger ideological service like much of the higher education research
I knew. He had this uncanny knack for letting its circumstance and context sit with
you. For some reason, Clough’s writing had got under my skin. It inhabited me ...
when I didn’t expect or want it to. It compelled me into feeling... and for the longest
time afterwards, I wanted to write like that, like him, Clough – to borrow his words
and ways and to superimpose them onto mine. Later, I realised, I had to find my own
voice rather than seek the desire and pleasure of another’s. But where are the
exemplars for research of this kind ... that describes what it is academic developers
do, are, think, feel, when they work across their university communities with
academics and students around teaching and learning? Where is the research that
describes the hurt and pain of the corridor conversations about authenticity, ethics
and performativity? Where is the research that speaks equally to the poetry of our
work, the joy of our and others’ learning? Why wasn’t anyone writing research this
way? What exactly was at stake? And why is it now that when I read research, when
I spend time poring over texts, data and evidence, I no longer just want to know
things: I want more. I want to feel the experience that is being written about. I want
to be moved by it. I scribble myself a note to update the summary sheet.

ANITA: So, I guess you’ve been carrying out interviews of some kind... have you
Tai? How many did you do? You would’ve had to have about 15 or maybe even 20
to make it a valid sort of study... where you can say something really meaningful. I
assume you’ll be making some policy recommendations to the university, or perhaps
even to HERDSA\textsuperscript{11} about teaching and learning development and the way new academic developers get oriented to the field... y'know that sort of thing? [Anita hesitates before asking the question that I imagine has really been on her mind]. So, um... you all probably know this already but... what exactly is au-to-eth-no-gra-phy anyway?

\textit{The way Anita says 'autoethnography' the second time – rather too slowly and slightly too purposefully, bothers me. It was a corporeal bother – it got me in the guts as if it were some kind of pretend word – a way of doing research that I had effectively just fabricated. While I knew this feeling well, I doubt she knew the effect of her question. There's methodological literature and tonnes of it, I want to declare as if that alone would immediately perform its legitimacy.}

TAI: Is it ok with the two of you if I take some time to respond to Anita’s questions? Not more than 15 minutes I promise. If I take longer, feel free to shut me up... intervene... tell me I'm raving again. I know there’s a bit to get through this afternoon and everyone should have an opportunity... not just me.

\textit{Lucy and Max nod, smiling. They're such sweeties. I don't know how I would've survived without their conversation. Max however seems unaware that a light milk moustache has taken hold of the top of his lip. I don't mention it. Neither do the others. The three of us grin, knowingly.}

LUCY: Yeah sure. It’s ok with me. It’s been awhile since you’ve spoken at length about your research anyway Tai. It will be good to hear how you’ve been thinking, writing and engaging with it lately – and anyway... I think your research opens up a whole series of interesting tensions and spaces for all of us and our own research.

MAX: Well that’s certainly true about what Tai’s doing – although... I see them more as spaces for contest.

\textsuperscript{11} The Higher Education Research and Development Society Australasia (HERDSA) is the professional association for those interested in enhancing university teaching and learning. Further information at \url{http://www.herdsa.org.au/}.
I shoot Max a cheeky look. I know that he knows what it means. 'Thanks you two,' I offer sarcastically.

TAI: Um... no actually... there are no interviews in my research Anita. It was quite a deliberate move. I really wanted to explore the whole idea of how we go about research and writing in academic development as well as researching it a little bit differently.

I wondered if Anita was already thinking – my god, what kind of kooky research is this? I wanted a chance to explain, to be more precise, and to offer a justification. And I wanted to be gentler.

ANITA: Oh right... ok ... my impression from some of the key texts and publications in the field has always been that most academic developers did either interviews or survey research – well at least in Australia anyhow... you know... the CEQ stuff. At my old unit, that was the sort of research that got talked about a lot... and funded... so it was mostly statistical stuff like factor analysis and qualitatively... it was variations on phenomenography – case studies, that sort of thing. Oh... there was someone who was doing work on metaphor but I couldn’t ever really follow it. It was a bit messy! And whenever we did work or gave presentations in faculty teaching and learning committees... we always took along the latest SCEQ data so that academics could see the patterns of change in students’ experiences of their courses and where they might devote energy toward improvement ... like in assessment, or with first year students saying that the workload was too heavy... Yeah... it was mostly statistical data and excerpts from interviews to support the numbers. I think the latter was to placate some of the more qualitative people, but it was important to have that balance.

LUCY: Well... you’re right to point that out actually Anita. There is a lot of research in the field that draws on those two methods – and phenomenography is uniquely

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12 The CEQ is the Course Experience Questionnaire. A summary can be found in Ramsden (2003).
13 The SCEQ is the Student Course Experience Questionnaire, an adaptation of the CEQ developed by and used at The University of Sydney. The SCEQ collects data on students' experiences of learning at the course degree program level. Further information available at http://www.itl.usyd.edu.au/sceq
positioned exactly because of its pioneering work around the student learning perspective. So it does have a hegemony of sorts. I think it does interesting work. But it would be wrong to continue to say that that's all there is now.... I'm thinking particularly of Coralie McCormack's work at the University of Canberra. She has used collaborative narrative and fiction to articulate processes of institutional teaching and learning change....and although it was still interview-based, the research process and the analysis took a different form. She gave a paper on it at the qualitative research conference I was at in July. And then there's that quasi-theoretical work of the CAD Collective.\(^{14}\) I just joined their list-serv actually. They seem a weird lot - all over the place. One minute you get stuff on Habermas, in the next they've moved on to feminism, and then immediately after, someone's chimed in with a discourse on performativity and rhizomaticity! Very interesting stuff but it can be a bit hard to follow. But personally, the emergence of spaces like CAD is one of the fascinating things about academic development. If you look at what it is they're trying to reclaim, some of it is around the way we do research as developers, what research is, does, and what it's for. That's the thing about phenomenography I think - it speaks to a particular way of doing research and the production of evidence that institution's like universities can (a) cope with and (b) use to advance an agenda. That's its strength... that's what developers do... we move things forward... we get involved in change - hopefully the good kind of change.

MAX: [interrupting] Yes, but I wonder about that. If you talk with phenomenographers, some of them have a very strange conception of how it relates to wider debates going on qualitative research. There was this one phenomenographer I interviewed about a month ago who couldn't really articulate its philosophical basis or had even considered critiques of it very much. It was like... she knew what phenomenography was... and the folks who were asking critical questions of it... didn't... so on that logic, was able to relegate their questions to a periphery while valorising her own. Lovely woman... and really interesting academic development work unit. I wouldn't mind a spin there on study leave. I'm

\(^{14}\) The Challenging Academic Development (CAD) Collective is a recently formed group of academic developers from the UK, Australia, Canada & NZ, who are interested in exploring the question 'how does academic development theorise itself?' Discussion exists in a list-serv form - with further information at http://mailman.ucc.usyd.edu.au/mailman/listinfo/itl-cad. Also see Peseta, Hicks, Holmes, Manathunga, Sutherland & Wilcox (2005).
actually writing that interview up right now... as a case study paper for ISL.\textsuperscript{15} Oh... that reminds me... Lucy did you manage to put your hands on that conference paper by that Swedish guy you mentioned?

LUCY: Yes... it’s in my office... but Max... hang on... go back... that woman was just one phenomenographer from your sample... you couldn’t say that was across the board. I’ve had some of the best philosophical discussions with phenomenographers too! Amazing and really generous conversations actually. It makes me think about how academic developers actually embody the theoretical perspectives they believe in... sort of, how they are as people. Sometimes I see the parallels so clearly but I guess like anything... phenomenography has amazing variation too. By its own definition, it has to... doesn’t it?

\textit{As Max and Lucy talk on and become decidedly more animated, I detect Anita’s sense of distance from their conversation. I am aware that the simpatico between them can sometimes seem intimidating. She could only manage a tentative ‘yes... I think so’ when Lucy asked more specifically after the research agenda at her old unit.}

TAI: Um... let’s see... shall we get back to Anita’s original question rather than segue too much into discussions about what phenomenography does and doesn’t do?

\textit{I raise my voice just enough to be heard over the top of their conversation, but they continue to talk on – debating the relative merits of whether phenomenography has a special relationship to institutional research in academic development work. This is an exchange I’ve heard many times before so I leave them to it and turn directly to Anita.}

TAI: You should know Anita... that that’s a favourite pastime of theirs. It happens every time we get together like this, so don’t worry too much about it. I think it’s one of the only times they get to talk about this stuff, and they share a passion for french

\textsuperscript{15} The Improving Student Learning (ISL) Conference is a key gathering for academic developers, scholars and researchers of university teaching and learning. It is organised yearly by the Oxford Centre for Staff and Learning Development, Oxford Brookes University, England.
theorists... so maybe if you and I talk a bit about autoethnography and its connections with research in academic development ... then that will help to locate your question about the absence of, and the issue of interviews, as well as Lucy and Max's comments about institutional research. We'll leave them to it for a bit. They'll come around soon enough. Does that sound ok with you?

ANITA: Yep, yeah... sounds ok with me.

TAI: I'm keen to hear too about the sorts of questions you've been playing with as well. Ok, let's see... perhaps the first thing to say about autoethnography... is that it invites you to re-frame what research is, to think about what it can be and how we might write and represent it in all its possibilities. To put a kind of philosophical hat on for a moment, some researchers say that autoethnography is part of a response to ideas about crises in the human sciences – representation, legitimacy and praxis... those sorts of ideas. Um... are you familiar with those terms... do you know them?

ANITA: Yes, but only in passing. I've not read very much in particular. I suppose I should ... shouldn't I if I'm going to be doing doctoral work? I guess it'll be in a research methods seminar right?

TAI: Yeah probably... but how far you go into it will depend on how you see your research and what you want it to do...so... let's not spend too much time unpacking what's involved in each of those terms right now... except to say that they work to throw into suspicion notions of truth, validity, reliability, representation, generalisability – all the things about research that we've invested in, cherished and have put faith and trust in as something that has given us confidence about knowing and knowledge in the world. I am in two minds about how seriously developers take the whole 'crisis discourse' in their work, or in their research... but maybe that's because higher education teaching and learning and the scholarship of academic development are still in relative infancy. But I do know that I find a lot of the writing to be not particularly imaginative... and that's one of the things working with autoethnography makes me look for in research these days. Anyway... there are
some really neat chapters in the thick blue Denzin and Lincoln qualitative handbook which describe it far better than I can.

ANITA: I'll have to follow that reference up with you Tai... and think more about this whole idea of crises. Sounds quite crucial...

TAI: There's lots of other good stuff too - to read... we can talk in detail about that at another time... but I'll try and address your question as best I can. So... one way people who are interested in autoethnography have responded to that set of suspicions has been to research and write about their own experiences as a way of inviting deep engagement and reflection on some aspect of life - whatever it is that's being researched. I think... this sort of research seeks to move people... it wants people to feel things not just know things. In fact, Carolyn Ellis and Art Bochner (2000), two North American scholars who to my mind have written the most convincing accounts of autoethnographic inquiry, say that it's also about using a form that allows readers to feel the moral dilemmas, that invites them to think with a story instead of about it, and to consider how their own lives can be made a story worth telling. For some reason, I've memorised that bit... but I couldn't quote the page number if you asked me now.

*Anita laughs and seconds later, I see why. It is a bit sad.*

TAI: Anyway... Ellis and Bochner (1996) also say that researchers, well ethnographers more precisely... can't stand above or outside of what they study. For them, autoethnography is heavily caught up in the politics of location and being located - that even when you are studying some aspect of an 'Other', or a culture of some kind (in my case, that would be academic development)... that you are yourself, always implicated in and with it. Their emphasis I think in autoethnography is on how the researcher-self is located in that continuum and the ways researchers' own experiences can act as a connective frame for the other two. But like everything else in academia, it's often called different things depending on how and where you enter into the literature and the different disciplinary genealogies you follow. For instance, in teacher education, it seems to sit within traditions of reflection and self-
study (Loughran, 2005) and ideas about practitioner research (McWilliam, 2004b) but I suppose I became more interested in following how it came out of the critiques of anthropology and ethnography’s intersection with cultural studies, so the discussion’s a bit different there again. Some of it’s about the ethical and conceptual difficulties involved in researching, writing and representing the Other – the politics of it… y’know… who has permission to research, to tell stories, to what audiences and to what effect… and how that can also work to exclude… that sort of thing. Others also started to ask whether they could actually ever get to the ‘truth’ of a culture – even in their role as participant observers… and became concerned that their ethnographic accounts were reinstating the very colonial discourses they were trying to disrupt… and searched for some way of writing about this in their texts (Clifford & Marcus, 1986; Behar & Gordon, 1995). Some anthropologists now do what’s often called native ethnography where the researcher researches some aspect of life in which they are themselves implicated in, and have some personal investment in, rather than distant from. Some people were trying to get at the idea that anthropology didn’t need to be exotic or in out of the way places for it to be meaningful… and so that was largely about contested versions of culture… the question of what is actually worth studying and why… and so the boundaries around different disciplinary areas started to open out. Some realised that their own cultures and homes provided equally fertile ground for study – so you got an explosion of ethnographic accounts that didn’t pretend to be neutral at all: things like homelessness, experiences of ageing, illness and death, school classrooms, sexualities, refugee and migrant communities, genres of music… some of these were kind of urban ethnographies in a way. In fact, I’ve just been reading an ethnographic account of the Sydney Hip Hop scene by a colleague in Performance Studies. It makes for very interesting reading and what’s more interesting is how he weaves himself, his story, into the text. Oh…. but first… you should definitely read Behar’s book *The Vulnerable Observer*…. the first and last chapters are especially powerful as commentaries on some of the stuff I’ve just been trying to get at. I can lend you my copy if you like.

ANITA: Yes, maybe I will read it. You get very excited about your readings don’t you Tai? Ok…. I can follow most of what you’re saying so far… in a rudimentary
sort of way even though I’ve got loads of questions. The first is... are there any other studies of academic development that use an autoethnographic approach? And if there are... what do they look like?

TAI: Um... no... not that I’m aware of... well... none that actually names it as a framework. Actually, if you think about it... and most of the academic developers you’ve come across... well... how would you respond to the idea that you might translate data into fiction, poetry, or a play script as a way of re-presenting interview transcripts... say? This is partly what autoethnography is on about too – it asks you to think creatively and imaginatively about the way research is written and represented in order to create the feeling of the experience. Ellis’s *Final Negotiations* is a classic! Wonderful read... and beautifully written. There are lots of others too!

ANITA: Well... ok, but can we go back to your initial question? Frankly, I’d think that it was abit weird, maybe even unethical that you tampered with data. I’d be a bit apprehensive and wonder why you just wouldn’t quote what your participants said in a verbatim way, I suppose. And I’d also think... how is this going to be useful in helping academics be better teachers... teachers who care about student learning? Would they buy the analysis? How would a ‘poem’ necessarily make them buy into the analysis? I’d also ask if it was convincing enough to provide evidence that would help academics make informed decisions about changing to more student-focused practices that foster deep approaches to learning. I suppose I’m asking whether it’s grounded in something that can be trusted or believed... in science or reason... aren’t I?

TAI: Exactly! That’s precisely one of the things that I really love about autoethnography. It doesn’t deny what you’ve just described. Instead it asks me as a researcher to consider really carefully how I might bring my readers into an engagement with the story I’m trying to tell... and it invites them to reflect on the specificity of their own practice and contexts so they can see themselves in my story. It’s about saying that the things that move us to change, to reconsider aspects of our lives and practice are not always the sole domain of ‘reason’ or ‘science’. What autoethnography does is that encourages me to play with the forms that might elicit
or aim to represent a more messy, or lived notion of change... y'know... say from a teacher-focus to a student-focus if you like... as well as making central my own voice, context and experience. It's not a denial of science or reason... it’s not about peddling falsehoods. It recognises that there are other ways of knowing that must be allowed to exist using different ways of thinking about research. You should also read Brew’s (2001) work on conceptions of research... she talks about four conceptions: trading, journey, domino... I can’t think of the other one right now... but she’s written about the experience of research rather than the idea of it through the usual qualitative or quantitative... social science/literary dimensions and she uses phenomenography too in that study.

ANITA: But hang on... hang on.... then... aren’t you then distorting what participants say... if you change their words in ways they didn’t intend? You’re misrepresenting the data!

TAI: But isn’t all research a distortion or a fiction of some kind? And I don’t mean an untruth here... I mean all research has to be put together, or fashioned. Ellis and Bochner (1996) say that there’s a difference between ‘making something’ and ‘making it up’... and I really value that distinction because it reminds me of my responsibility as a researcher to be faithful to my own reflections, the contexts I write about and the way I go about it. It brings out the fact that choices have to be made in all kinds of research and that researchers still have to do the work of selection, and transcription... they still have to choose the methods, themes and excerpts from the data, situate them in a literature... do the work of writing and interpretation. Even in grounded theory, there’s still a requirement for a narrative that holds the coherence of the research together. You’ve still got to do all that in autoethnographic work too... but data doesn’t have the status of an innocent. It’s not ‘raw’ or ‘unsullied’ and then gets interpreted... as some methods textbooks would have it. It can’t speak meaningfully in and of itself. It comes to us in one form and then is put to work by us in a different form. It has to be made to make sense as part of a narrative structure... or according to the argument that you’re looking to develop. What’s the word I keep reading about lately.... a palimpsest... that’s it! Perhaps the new textual forms for meaning-making in the human sciences that autoethnography is part of... really just
has the effect of making that explicit... and that can make people a bit uncomfortable. Well, I guess the other thing that some researchers have done is to return their representations back to their participants as part of developing an ethical disposition.

I pause for a moment so we can both draw breath. I don't feel we've been at loggerheads. Anita is right to be asking me questions, but conversations like this always tire me. Defend... defend... defend... always defending! I reflect on Behar's salutary words... 'an anthropology that doesn't break your heart just isn't worth doing anymore'. This is how I feel about a good deal of research in teaching and learning, and academic development. If this is the research I want to do, write and pursue then I wonder how I'll be able to make it seem not so against the grain? How I can create space – room – for this kind of research to breathe amongst all the other kinds we do? How can it be nurtured and nourished? What are the conditions which can lead to its visibility? I try a different tack.

TAI: Anita... the other thing I really appreciate about autoethnography is that there's always vigorous debate about what constitutes a balance between the study of self, other and culture... which means that as a way of doing research, it is constantly under contest. It's always being challenged by people who say that it fails because it can't move satisfactorily from the particular to the general.... or that it's only representative of one experience... or that it's out and out self-indulgent... that it seeks to reify the researcher's experience at the expense of something else – that's a pretty common one. The accusation of narcissism really turns a lot of people off it. I think some researchers are just afraid of writing about their own experiences.

Andrew Sparkes (2002) has written lots on that issue and there are others who argue that the subjectivity of the researcher can't be expunged no matter how much data we collect, or how precisely we follow the rules of method. But even that's contested now in all this work around reflexivity and voice and how we ought to be careful about claims to authenticity (Pillow, 2003b). So autoethnography has really had to develop a thick skin and scholarly self-consciousness about itself and its assertions about what it is and does. But in the process, it has opened up a whole new set of questions and arrangements about the nature and purpose of research. I get the self-
indulgence thing quite a bit, usually followed by the question of relevance and then, by that pejorative dismissal ‘well that’s just your experience Tai; it’s not like that for everyone’. That’s my favourite because it’s the easiest to believe. I chose to focus in on my own experience of being an academic developer… you might say it’s a focus on the ‘self’ part of the balance because I couldn’t see any research in the field that really takes the ‘self’ of the developer – in all its theoretical complexity particularly seriously… as a thing that warrants study. But there are some inroads being made here, even though there is still some work to do to connect that scholarship to much more complicated conceptions of ‘self’, and have that respond to the more recent challenges around reflection and reflexivity in teaching and learning.

ANITA: God Tai… I’m not entirely sure I know what you’re talking about now…let alone how to teach it! Isn’t reflexivity just a fancy word for reflection?

TAI: Um… no, I don’t think it is. Others might say it is… but I think it’s actually on about something different, broader perhaps, less descriptive, more troublesome. Listen… don’t worry so much now … that will come with reading and in the talking with others that you’ll get into… but I suppose the point I want to make is that autoethnography really welcomes the possibilities of the researcher-self, but it’s not a naive reception. The work I’m trying to do is about paying attention to my own experience as a developer – because I want to see knowledge generated through my ‘self’ as a resource to be worked with… but also to be problematised too. My ‘self’ is not some kind of contamination that ought to be expelled or expunged in some way, and maybe too, it is one that can stand alone. It’s not about saying that my experience could ever represent the ‘field’ in any real way, but it is about saying that attention to the specificity, detail, the construction and discourse of an experience can challenge, provoke or inspire reflection on your own… in relation to the field, or the culture being studied. Anyhow … I was having enormous trouble figuring out how to do that.

ANITA: Trouble … doing what?
TAI: Getting rid of myself from my research.

The image, I suspect is a strange one to consider. Anita offers me a crooked smile as if to acknowledge its oddity. I remember a very early methodological seminar I gave years ago where I was encouraged to aim for a less ambitious project – one that was less therapeutic and much more systematic. I reach for the comfort of my tea in order to console myself of that memory but realise quickly that it is now too bitter and lukewarm to provide the kind of solace I require. Max and Lucy have now moved on to his beloved Deleuze and Guattari and I listen awhile to their talk of ‘folds’, ‘rhizomes’ and ‘liminality’. I’m still trying to understand what it is about the absence of interviews that causes some people so much difficulty. Is it that interviews are usually considered the educational researcher’s sine qua non? Is it that appropriate data is only located in another’s experience? Is it because educational research needs a direct line to Otherness, or the ‘researched’ in order to say something... anything meaningful about itself? I make a mental note to think more about this – whether academic development demands all the time or requires for itself, an eye on the Other: students’ learning; academics’ understanding of their own teaching and learning practices; the ways departments make decisions about the organisation of teaching and learning; the way universities organise its pedagogical work through policy. It’s Brew’s (2003a) idea of academic development’s Janus-face again!

ANITA: So Tai... if you’re not doing any interviews, you are... um... basically just researching yourself then... aren’t you? I mean your own experiences. So, what specifically is your research question? This is what I think I need to find... a gap in the literature that gives me a research-able question where I can then design a study. I thought that sounded relatively simple but in talking with you now, I’m not so sure.

I’m disappointed that I haven’t yet shifted Anita’s negative view of the self. I thought I’d done a better job.

TAI: Well... that’s one way of thinking about how to find a research question. There are lots of others. Your comment about ‘just’ researching myself is not quite how I’d put it... partly because ideas of what constitutes the ‘self’ are caught up within the
discourse of crises I was talking about earlier. And framing it that way continues to contribute a pejorative perspective which is what I want to move away from. One of the tasks I have in my thesis is to think through what kind of ‘self’ is implied in autoethnography, or what kind of ‘self’ it relies on... but that’s probably getting ahead a little too much. Maybe... um... the way to think about it is like this: in autoethnography, the boundaries between self, other and culture aren’t so clear cut so to say that it is just about researching yourself, almost has the effect of separating you off from being in a world of meaning. You can’t just research a ‘self’ that is detached from either language, culture, or some kind of Other. If you can... and if anybody’s done it... I’d love to see an example.

ANITA: [critically] Oh... that all sounds a bit postmodern Tai! I find all that jargon really inaccessible.

*I wasn’t really in the mood for that discussion. I would need several more pots of tea another and far more chocolate.*

TAI: Yeah, I guess some people might read it that way... that all this is about postmodernism. I think it is important to have a sense of the field... the literature... and how conversations about aspects of our work develop both empirically and theoretically. So I do draw quite heavily on other people’s research so I can find an opening or a set of questions that my own work can connect with. As for a research question – there isn’t really just one but I suppose I’m also interested in the difficulty of academic development work and why for someone who is relatively new to it, I had such a hard time finding an expression of that in the literature. And I wanted to write about that. So, what I do is, I document and analyse my own experience, practice and context so that I can raise questions about our community, as a field, and the sorts of ideas and discourses about teaching, learning and higher education we work to make productive or operational. The questions I ask are informed by different theoretical frameworks like anthropology, cultural studies, feminist theory... that kind of stuff... so I try to think not just about my experience... but also how my experience is framed; what I’m set to notice; how I am incited to see... to
use a phrase of Patti Lather’s (1991, in Scott & Usher, 1999) I ask whether these are issues that academic development ought to consider perhaps more than it does.

ANITA: So what you’re saying is that you could have still done interviews if you wanted to… right? You still could have supplemented your own experience with interviews with other academic developers as a way of saying that there are other experiences of academic development other than your own. This is the part of your description of autoethnography that troubles me the most…. it’s the issue of data really… and what counts as data in a research project like yours. How do you actually keep data on yourself and how do you ensure that it’s objective?

TAI: Well… I can’t really ensure anything about objectivity and I’m not sure I’d want to. I think I stopped assuming anything about research was actually objective years ago because I realised that what was important was the claim to objectivity – and the work that it does. But yes, you’re right… I could have chosen to do interviews but I didn’t want to do that since it wouldn’t have made sense in terms of the research question… if you want to put it that way. And there is already some interesting empirical work… for instance… Fraser’s Australasian study and Land’s UK work on orientations to academic development. I wasn’t really interested in replicating those studies because I’m not looking to add another dimension of variation through reading a new set of data. What I am doing though, is acknowledging that the questions I am asking about academic development emerge from my own practice, identity and context… and then I work within a research framework that upholds the strength and legitimacy of that, and then invites me to write about it rather than feel embarrassed or conceal it in some way. And as you say, it has also meant that I’ve needed to re-think my ideas about data. Basically, I keep a learning journal which documents moments of my practice and I use that text as data and turn bits of it into fiction… ‘re-presentations’ to both support and question ideas in the literature.

ANITA: So, what sorts of things are in your journal?
TAI: The stuff I’ve written about includes everything from difficult teaching moments, to ideological differences with colleagues, the way people across the university see the unit, frustrations with disciplinary-based colleagues, to meetings where I’ve felt put upon or misunderstood through to things I’ve read and dialogues with theorists and writers, and feelings of celebration and pleasure in my work... it’s a mixed bag really. I don’t try to restrict it to themes. I write about everything. All my thinking and conversations with others goes into my journal, not as a representation of them, but as a way of unpacking my responses and my own learning. I write a lot... asking questions about why our unit organises academic development the way it does, which always leads me to think about how else it might be structured.

It was a fairly rough and ready but adequate description but it also gave no sense of the problematic of doing research this way – for instance, all the critiques of subjectivity and reflexivity in the literature, the doubts I was having about the textual representations of my journal, the dilemmas about how to position it in a field governed by discourses of research that favour ideas of impact, effectiveness and usefulness. A good many academic developers who do research of that sort could tell you beforehand its impact on student learning, how effective it would be and why it would be useful to the university community. Performance indicators would be devised in order to ascertain these very measurements. I had no such confidence. Like Behar (1996) describes, I had some notion that I wanted to write research that broke hearts.

ANITA: Right-o-then... a learning journal... sounds like a good start. I’d better get on to that. The whole idea of turning those reflections into fiction still makes me feel uncomfortable... I guess I need to think about that some more. How do you choose what to write about from your learning journal?

TAI: Hey, isn’t that the same sort of question people who do interviews would ask about their transcripts?
MAX: [interrupting] Are you on to learning journals again ... Tai? You and bloody learning journals...

I'm surprised to hear Max's voice insert itself into our conversation. Lucy, we discover, is at the counter ordering another round of hot drinks. I hope she doesn't forget the honey for my tea.

TAI: Just sharing the learning journal love Max. Have you two finished playing spot the obscure theorist now?

MAX: Yes... we've actually been talking about the new research supervision policy and Lucy's proposal to the new Dean of Graduate Studies. Lucy thinks the Dean might take some convincing. So... what's Tai been telling you then Anita?

ANITA: It's been really good. We've been chatting about all sorts of things... why Tai didn't do any interviews... data.... crises... reflexivity... the world, the universe and the galaxy! I suppose I thought I would have a research topic by the time we got back to the office. Let's just say I've got tonnes to think about and a lot of reading to follow up on.

MAX: Yeah... it's one of the things Tai's good at doing... collecting readings. Have you seen her office lately?

I reflect for a moment on the truth of that. I don't want to talk about me or my research anymore. I want a moment to be still.

TAI: Um... maybe when Lucy gets back we can talk a bit about her research supervision proposal? I'm keen to see what angle she's going to push with the new Dean.

The others nod in agreement and at that point, I feel relieved that I can stop defending for awhile. It's always the question of usefulness isn't it?

.................................
Locating the researcher-self

It [autoethnography] represents not only the climax of the preoccupation with self that is at the heart of too much contemporary ethnography but also the produce of a postmodern but asocial theory of knowledge that argues the impossibility of knowing anything beyond the self [...]. At times it is difficult not to suspect that some ethnographers are avoiding the hard work that fieldwork entails, even if not deliberately. Although others are using ethnography as a synonym for autobiography, a few are simply engaged in ego trips, whether or not they know it (Gans, 1997, p.5).

What better than transforming the intensive labor (sic) of field research into the armchair pleasures of me-search. Add to this the increased number of publication outlets and increased number of scholars who do this research, and it becomes evident that qualitative research is increasingly being judged by those who do not demand the rigor that was demanded when much qualitative research was being evaluated through quantitative eyes (Fine, 1999, p.534).

... a reflexive practice used to mean self-criticism and the realization of unequal power relations in which ethnographer and informants are placed; now it means, if not for all but for some, self-aggrandizement and the celebration of the personality of the anthropologist. The inversion is a poisonous one (Ryang, 2000, p.316).

I am continually surprised by the sort of writing that situates knowledge from the researcher-self pejoratively – as something only to be acknowledged but not dwelled upon for too long. Above, Gans (1997) seems to relate it with a laissez-faire option for carrying out research; Fine (1999) frames it as an indulgence and claims its lack of systematicity, while Ryang (2000) equates it with a dismantling of the disciplinary identity of anthropology through a turn to the anthropologist. Even among those writers who are sympathetic to the intentions of autoethnographic work (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Tierney, 2002; 2002a), there are often hidden clues or warnings for the new researcher interested in this sort of work – to watch themselves, to assert
modestly and to be particularly vigilant in working against what might often be normalised as an inevitable descent into narcissism. The return to the researcher-self in any inquiry context must still be monitored for its extremities. The self-other relation must always be policed; it must remain appropriate and in balance regardless of the purpose of the inquiry. Here, the ‘Other’ of the research seems to always need the final say. Krieger (1991) argues that it is a view that emerges from a particular conception of self and a researcher-self that acts as a contaminant – a position which she typifies thus:

The self – the unique inner life of an observer – is a variable we are taught to minimize in our studies, to counter, to balance, or to neutralize. We are advised to avoid self-indulgence, not to view other people in our own image, and to speak in a manner that suggests that what we know is not particular to our individual way of knowing it... The self is not something that can be disengaged from knowledge or the research process. Rather we need to understand the nature of our participation in what we know. The problem we need to worry about is not the effect of an observer’s inner self on evidence from the outside world, but the ways that the traditional dismissal of the self may hinder the development of each individual’s unique perspective (Krieger, 1991, pp.29-30).

For those scholars who have embraced the research possibilities of autoethnography in its various incarnations (Denzin, 1997; Ellis, 1995, 1997; Ellis & Bochner, 1996, 2000; Mykhalovskiy, 1997; Sparkes, 2000, 2002; Holt, 2003; Richardson, 1992; 1999; 2000; 2001; Goodall Jr, 2000), the turn itself appears to emanate from a variety of sources. There is a notion of crises currently in circulation – that which Norman Denzin and Yvonna Lincoln (2000) have characterised as a triple crisis – the crises of representation, legitimation and praxis.

The representational crisis asserts that [if] we only know a thing through its representation, then ethnographers no longer directly capture lived experience. Experience is created in the social text. The legitimization crisis questions how we bring authority to our texts. It involves a serious rethinking of such terms as
validity, reliability, and generalisability. This crisis, in turn, shapes the third [praxis], which asks, "How is it possible to effect change in the world, if society is only and always a text? (Denzin, 2002, p.483, my italics).

Deborah Reed-Danahay (1997) situates autoethnography within a postmodern ethnography in which critiques of realism have strategically undone the conceptual distinctions between self, other, the field, together with its representations. She also locates autoethnography's emergence within ethnography's failings - specifically, at the intersections of native anthropology, ethnic autobiography and autobiographical ethnography. Where these dimensions meet is through an articulation of autobiography with ethnographic practice. In fact, she argues that autoethnography constantly moves between these two dimensions. However, for some the focus upon the autobiographical aspect continues to be a suspect form of ethnography.

The purpose of writing ethnography is, unlike autobiography, to singularize not the writer but the culture that is written about. In this sense, whereas biography (singularizing another person) shares common grounds with ethnography – both maintain a conscious perspective on the society at large and the biographer and ethnographer should not focus on themselves more than on the person or culture they write about (Ryang, 2000, p.312).

Reed-Danahay (2002) writes about the shift in representations of the ethnographer-self over time. For her the change is not simply in the move from objective to subjective or negotiated forms of knowledge or even taking on the subjectivity of fieldwork. Rather, it is the textual visibility (and innovation) of the ethnographer self that has become foregrounded. Similarly, Amanda Coffey (1999) has written at length about the ways in which the ethnographer has become textually and autobiographically present within accounts of fieldwork and the range of reasons for it. For some, the narrative is focused on revealing the problematic processes of fieldwork; for others, it is about representing a journey of self-learning alongside the more traditional sorts of realist accounts as a way of working against ethnographic neutrality. But as she recognises too, while these narratives of self are produced as a result of being in the field, they must not divert researchers and ethnographers from
the main game – which is the ‘telling of the field’ (Coffey, 1999). These personal narratives must never be allowed to express the totality of the field experience precisely because they are too self-focused. It seems to me that autoethnography grapples with precisely that challenge too – the challenge of how to tell and write a narrative of the field through a self that is simultaneously the researcher and participant. The conventional sense of ‘distance’ is in suspense here since there is a particular conception of ‘self’ at play – one which seeks to work against a notion of this kind of scholarship as self-indulgence, or that questions the implication of a social science that views the self as a problem to be overcome, or that requires it to sit alongside the experience of another in order to demonstrate both its difference and sameness with and from them. I have sought to position the self in this work as a narrative intervention – in order to draw attention to a more self-conscious production of research within my context which is academic development.

I want to turn now to an exploration of the ways in which a number of writers have positioned autoethnography as a form of inquiry. The spirit or rationale for autoethnography that I wish to invoke for this thesis is the following:

A text that functions as an agent of self-discovery or self-creation, for the author as well as for those who read and engage in the text, is only threatening under a narrow definition of social inquiry, one that eschews a social science with a moral center and a heart. Why should caring and empathy be secondary to controlling and knowing? Why must academics be conditioned to believe that a text is important only to the extent it moves beyond merely the personal? (Ellis and Bochner, 2000, p.746, my italics).

In Ellis and Bochner’s (1996, 2000) terms, autoethnographic inquiry is a serious attempt to research, textually represent and communicate inquiry within the crisis of representation. For them, the crisis discourse signals a set of imaginative openings. It is liberatory. It encourages reflection and a questioning of the sorts of inquiries that are made to matter as research. It explores our mechanisms for writing, representing and communicating them, and it forwards a set of possibilities about the ways these interventions can inscribe a new moral purpose for social inquiry – one that
according to Ellis and Bochner (2000) "allow[s] another person's world of experience to inspire critical reflection on your own"; "that puts you in the place of the Other" (p.22), and "that ask[s] you to care about the particular people whose lives are depicted" (p.23). In the main, Ellis and Bochner are both unapologetic and unashamed advocates of the personal turn implied here.

These same sorts of sentiments are echoed in Andrew Sparkes' (1995, 2000, 2002) discussions of autoethnography. For him, the benefits are a research practice that proffers textual and emotional engagement. It,

includ[es] the researcher's vulnerable selves, emotions, body, and spirit; the production of evocative stories that create the effect of reality; the celebration of concrete experience and intimate detail; the examination of how human experience is endowed with meaning; a concern with moral, ethical, and political consequences; an encouragement of compassion and empathy; a focus on helping us know how to live and cope; the featuring of multiple voices and the repositioning of readers and "subjects" as coparticipants in dialogue; the seeking of a fusion between social science and literature; the connecting of the practices of social sciences with the living of life; and the representation of lived experience using a variety of genres — short stories, poetry, fiction, novels, photographic essays, personal essays, journals, fragmented and layered writing, and social science prose (Sparkes, 2002, p.211).

Clearly, Sparkes' agenda for autoethnographic research practice is wonderfully ambitious. There are two particular elements I want to draw out here as a way of locating the specificity of autoethnography. First, Sparkes (2002) makes reference to the inclusion of the researcher-self as a subject for inquiry — in all its uncertainty and vulnerability. Second, he focuses our attention on making artful inquiry through a connection rather than a separation between social science and literature. In both these senses, autoethnography produces texts that are hopelessly invested and self-conscious. Each is premised on the impossibility of being able to represent and communicate any kind of inquiry objectively — at least as a truth-seeking endeavour that "remove us from the intrusions of our own experience and subjectivity" (Ellis
and Bochner, 1996, p.20). For them, this suggests possibilities for a different kind of social inquiry – inquiries such as autoethographic work – which seek to reinstate learning from the detail of every-day life. Autoethnographic texts “tell stor[ies] that readers [can] enter and feel part of. [These texts encourage us to] write in a way to evoke readers to feel and think about your life and their lives in relation to yours (Ellis and Bochner, 2000, p.751). The text provides an avenue to experience the experience.

The accusation of self-indulgence often levelled at autoethnographic work is of course, one key way of regulating or reining in the autobiographical turn within the social sciences (Krieger, 1985, 1991; Okley, 1992; Ellis & Flaherty, 1992; Ellis, 1995). Researchers who stage their own experiences/subjectivity for the centrality of inquiry are often derided for laying bare what ought to remain private; for producing both uninteresting or ungeneralisable accounts of research; for exploiting their personal selves for academic gain; or for elevating the personal/confessional at the expense of conceptual rigour and theoretical analysis (see Ellis, 1995 for a useful discussion of this phenomenon). Even in the turn to self-study more properly in teacher education contexts, Feldman (2003, p.27) expresses the following concern: “we need to know that it is well grounded, just, and can provide the results that we desire”. There is now an emerging body of work that questions the ways in which experience and subjectivity are imputed onto research participants as an attempt to turn away from or limit the researcher-self from spilling over into the account proper. Eric Mykhalovskiy (1997) connects the claim of self-indulgence with the production of the proper academic/researching subject – this is one who writes about others. In the absence of an explicit participant ‘Other’, is all autoethnography by definition deemed for self-absorption?

Mykhalovskiy (1997) writes that this allegation rests on a problematic split between the individual and social – manifested in the self/researcher – other/participant binary common to social science inquiries. He says “the claim of narcissism rests in a dualism that obfuscates how writing about the self involves, at the same time, writing about the “other” and how work on the “other” is also about the self of the writer” (p. 231). He also suggests that the assertion of indulgence – that inquiries of these kinds
are insular and speak primarily to the pleasure of the writer, challenge particular kinds of engagement with texts or reading practices. The autobiographical turn appears to disrupt or violate the usual and standard ways of engaging with and reading research inquiries. Here, something new and different is demanded of the reader. Exploring self-indulgence in the context of autobiographical sociology, Mykhalovskiy writes that,

... it [autobiographical sociology] does not rely on standard ways of being sociologically meaningful to readers. It does not for example, deploy a calculative reasoning through which the social is understood as the interplay of variables. It does not present the results of research on others. It does not reach for the heights of theoretical abstraction, nor present evidence in a test of theory. To the extent that the experiences of its authors are its subject, those experiences are not presented as data; are not worked up as a case or instance of something else (Mykhalovskiy, 1997, p.237).

Mykhalovskiy invites us to recast how we might engage with research practices and read texts such as those inspired by autoethnography, as not wholly about the self. He suggests that they ought to be read as the telling of “social processes through which subjectivities are formed” (p.239-240). Kathryn Church (in Sparkes 2002, p.216) makes a similar point when she says, “I assume that my subjectivity is filled with the voices of other people... because my subjective experience is part of the world, the story which emerges is not completely private and idiosyncratic”. And an interesting question Ellis and Bochner (1996, p.24) ask, “if culture circulates through all of us, [then] how can autoethnography be free of a connection to a world beyond the self?”

The trouble with being ‘properly’ reflexive

When I first began reading about autoethnography, works that located themselves similarly, and experimenting with my own, I wondered about how to be properly reflexive – particularly, in how to reveal it through the texts that I would later
produce. Was there a model, a recipe, a set of techniques I might adopt that would sufficiently designate the extent of my being properly reflexive? I was further comforted by the encouraging words from some of my colleagues who worked within interpretive research paradigms who insisted that ‘all you need do Tai is to show them your reflexivity’. At the time, I thought: yep, I can do that.

The growing interdisciplinary literature which articulates connections and disconnections between reflexivity, methodology and representation suggests that this ‘showing’ work is not entirely straightforward (Adkins, 2002; May, 1998; Pels, 2000; Macbeth, 2001; Finlay, 2002, 2002a). Here is one way Wanda Pillow (2003b) describes a reliance on reflexivity:

One of the most notable trends to come out of a use of reflexivity is increased attention to researcher subjectivity in the research process – a focus on how does who I am, who I have been, who I think I am, and how I feel affect data collection and analysis – that is, an acceptance and an acknowledgement that “how knowledge is acquired, organized, and interpreted is relevant to what the claims are (p.176, original italics).

And here is the manner in which first name William Tierney (2002) frames a worry about being too reflexive.

An additional concern I have with the move toward reflexivity is that it appears to be a movement away from trying to understand the world of the “other” and toward a more cathartic psychological agency of the self. This form of reflexivity represents a turn away from praxis and toward humanist, modernist ideals that focus on the concerns and the inner worlds of the author. Although texts need to be rightfully positioned so that the author’s stance is clear, one ought not drop a concern for understanding particular phenomena, people, or ideas. A movement toward literary narratives often seems to have been confused with an assumption that the author should only write about what he/she knows best — and that is his or her self (p.39).
In both cases, reflexivity is something to be worked on and with, while simultaneously being something to be suspicious about. Both warn researchers to be measured in their claims and to attend to what the resulting knowledge actually signals. Further in the literature, there appears to be an ambivalence about how to practise it (Davies et al., 2004), an unease about whether there is something that can be called pre/unreflexive knowledge (May, 1998, 2000; Lynch, 2000) and how these come to be produced and embedded textually (Richardson, 2000; Prain, 1997). For Rosanna Hertz (1997, p.viii), “to be reflexive is to have an ongoing conversation about experience while simultaneously living in the moment”. For Linda Finlay (2002) reflexivity is a research strategy that leads to increased integrity and trustworthiness. Even in recognising its ambiguity, Finlay asserts it nonetheless, for its ability to “identify that lived experience that resides in the space between subject and object” (p.531). She maps five variants of reflexivity: introspection, intersubjective reflection, mutual collaboration, social critique and discursive deconstruction. Each of these variants represents an aspect of the researcher’s ethical relation with themselves, to their participants, and the social context of the inquiry. In Finlay’s (2002a) terms, reflexivity is essentially a tool for engaging in the following research productions:

- Examining the impact of the position, perspective and presence of the researcher
- Promoting rich insight though examining personal responses and interpersonal dynamics
- Opening unconscious motivations and implicit biases in the researcher’s approach
- Empowering others by opening a more radical consciousness
- Evaluating the research process, method and outcomes
- Enabling public scrutiny of the integrity of the research through offering a methodological log of research decisions (Finlay, 2002a, p.225).

Similarly for Denzin (1997), there are six styles of reflexivity at play in the context of new ethnographic writing – subjectivist, methodological, intertextual, standpoint, queer, and feminist materialist reflexivity. While each one works in varying degrees to undo the myth of ethnography as some unreflexive pursuit, there is still a concern
that the ethnographer self does not “squeeze out the object of study” (Bruner, 1993 in Denzin, 1997, p.218). So clearly, working, researching and writing with reflexivity—and the extent to which it can be put to work, is a much more complicated affair than the inclusion of a researcher’s questioning voice, the textually transparent ‘I’ or the move to representing differently.

There is an assumption of reflexivity at work in autoethnographic inquiry. I want to try and unpack how that assumption operates to provide autoethnography with a coherence, not to undermine it but to situate its emergence within the difficulty of interpretive inquiry. Pillow’s (2003b) casting of four forms of reflexivity – as recognition of self, recognition of other, as truth and as transcendence and her reading against them, as a strategy for opening up the kinds of reflexivities and researcher selves or subjectivities that are at work in autoethnographic research is a valuable beginning. As recognition of self, Pillow argues that reflexivity often involves “a disclosure of subjectivity”. It relies on the researcher knowing where ideas about the self and other begin and end, in order to write of/about them “unshackled” or unburdened. This appears to manifest in a variety of ways: where a researcher unequivocally states upfront their politics, positioning and location in order for the reader to engage with these influences upon the meaning of the research; or where a researcher writes in an attempt to identify with or bring into view their relation with the ‘other’ of their research as originating from a similar experience or subject position. In each case, a researcher’s ability to recognise the possibilities and limits of reflexivity are self-evident. Pillow is suspicious of these sorts of confessional tales – she asks after the ways researchers trouble their own notions of knowing and seeks to work against an assumption that “by putting oneself into the text, by questioning one’s ways of knowing, that the messiness of representation has been taken on” (p.183). Further, there is the obvious difficulty in discussing and critiquing such texts since they may be read as a personal affront upon the experience of the researcher. And of course as Spivak (1988) argues, “making positions transparent does not make them unproblematic” (in Pillow, 2003b, p.183). On this reading of reflexivity, data or findings that take on this spirit are often positioned as ‘better’, more ‘valid’, or as lending some credence to the integrity of the researcher, and as a consequence, with the research itself. The declaration of
positionality signals responsible research – a research practice that is aware of itself and its effects. Reflexivity as recognition of the other is based on the notion that we can accurately capture and represent the experiences of the other of research. In fact, this whole idea is akin to the production of good and accurate research. The problem for Pillow however, is that the researcher is still sanctioned to bring the ‘Other’ into view. Because it is the researcher who provides the avenue for representing and ascribing a voice to this ‘Other’, reflexivity “always occurs out of an unequal power relationship and, in fact, the act of reflexivity may perpetuate a colonial relationship while at the same time attempting to mask this power over the subject” (Pillow, 2003, p.185). When the ‘Other’ of the research speaks back in order to question the researcher’s ascription, the representation of voice or its veracity may be seen as a display of infidelity rather than tied to the inevitable problem of inquiry in the first instance. As a mechanism to get at truth, Pillow argues that reflexivity often works to assure a researcher’s desire to make claims about knowledge. It affirms a will to some kind of capturing of a truthful experience. Through a range of reflexive techniques (the learning journal is often cited here), Pillow suggests that researchers must be vigilant in continuing to trouble the processes and products of their research as truths. For me, this is constituted in a consciousness about the claims being made and how they are connected with the tensions rather than the certainties inscribed in inquiry contexts. The final of Pillow’s (2003) framework – sees reflexivity being put to work as transcendence. It promises release. Here, it works to “transcend [a researcher’s] own subjectivity and own cultural context in a way that releases her/him from the weight of (mis)representations” (p.186). On this reading, the transcendent qualities of reflexivity designate an escape from the problem of inquiry.

Although Pillow’s framework does not explicitly address a connection to representation through writing, I attend to it at some length because it describes a commonly-held set of positions about what is often claimed as a result of putting reflexivity to work and then on display. Pillow (2003b) does not seem to be concerned here with the doing away of an overt reflexivity. Rather, she appears to be asking after the way it has been made thinkable in the service of particular forms of qualitative research. What I want to allude to here is the sense of both virtue and danger in exploring autoethnography’s reliance on reflexivity. On this reading,
reflexivity must always court an allegation of narcissism. The excesses of the researcher-self become apparent as a result of putting oneself on display. Too much of you, has come to mean not enough of them. It can indicate the sort research that disavows the voice of others. The interpretive task then is usually framed as a matter of balancing the appropriate self/other relation – where there is a clear demarcation between the researcher and them – the participant. In theorising the self, Krieger (1991, p.34) reminds us that “efforts to view the self as enough – as an experience worth describing and as a legitimate source of knowledge – face great difficulty”, and moreover that “our ideas about the self serve largely as guides to self-censorship. They tell us when to view the self as irrelevant, biasing, or misleading, and when to separate the self from what is known”. So there are paradoxical moves at play for the researcher interested in autoethnographic inquiry.

In writing about the difference between ‘positional’ and ‘textual’ reflexivity – the former an examination of “place, biography, self, and other to understand how [the analyst] shapes the analytic exercise”, the latter leading to “disrupt the very exercise of [its] textual representation” – Douglas Macbeth (2001, p.35) argues instead for a constitutive reflexivity – a reflexivity that is part of ordinary meaning-making. Michael Lynch (2000) questions reflexivity’s necessary articulation with a radical theoretical program – suggesting that such an assumption appears to depend on a critical social reality. Lynch seems interested in the impossibility of unreflexiveness and with Macbeth, seeks to relieve it of methodological virtue in order to restore it as a form for being differently reflexive in context, rather than a matter of producing research that is more or less reflexive and hence, warrants a more or less claim to truth.

It is often supposed that reflexivity does something, or that being reflexive transforms a prior ‘unreflexive’ condition. Reflexive analysis is often said to reveal forgotten choices, expose hidden alternatives, lay bare epistemological limits and empower voices which had been subjugated by objective discourse. Reflexive analysis is thus invested with critical potency and emancipatory potential (Lynch, 2000, p.36).
Indeed, much of this critical questioning around reflexivity has been described by Stronach and MacLure (1997) as “the necessary failure of methodology’s hope for certainty, and its dream of finding an innocent language in which to represent, without exploiting or distorting, the voices and ways of knowing of its subaltern ‘subjects’” (p.4). In the absence of the participant/interviewee/subject ‘other’ and a focus on the ‘researcher-self’ located within a context of practice, there are appropriate claims to be made about the ambit of this work, together with the limit of its warrant. Reflexivity affords particular kinds of research performances and denies others. In the context of this thesis, it makes a turn to the self more visible, not necessarily as individualistic display, but in a whole range of ways that can encourage academic developers to imagine and inhabit questions about how we study our selves, practice and work. Reflexivity asks how particular notions of reality become created through the ways we frame our research inquiries. How do we see, know, or understand the work of teaching, learning and academic development if we are tied to certain methodological positions, to the rush to method, or even to an imperative that requires institutional relevance? Robin Usher (1996a) describes this process as a form of epistemic reflexivity. It moves us beyond the research question/act itself toward a consideration of its place within the research community. To work with reflexivity then, is to wrestle with a set of tensions inscribed in the conceptions of reality, truth and knowledge that are constructed as part of the research project itself. This challenge, also sits alongside the matrices and hierarchies that have been developed to sustain the community.

Reflexivity also asks us to trouble our research, our writing, and its communication to others. It demands that we attend to the practice of theorising ourselves, of working towards frameworks that begin to question the sort of logic that links truth with familiarity. For the scholarship of academic development project, it is about beginning to locate our inquiries within what Pillow (2003b) terms reflexivities of discomfort - “not [as] clarity, honesty or humility, but as practices of confounding disruption” (p.192). These are the sorts of inquiries that “do not seek a comfortable, transcendent end-point but leave us in the uncomfortable realities of doing engaged qualitative research” (p.193).
A strategy for reflexivity: using a learning journal

Like any good research, including autoethnographic work, I have been concerned to document my experiences and practices as a developer as much as possible, and in many ways keeping a learning journal might be seen as the ultimate expression of the turn to reflexivity. This is the structure or mechanism that holds my reflections, observations, interpretations and field notes about the experience. One way to think of the process is as a form of data collection. First, I describe a little of the process. Second, I locate my experience within a discussion of learning journals within the higher education pedagogical literature. Third, I draw on Eva Bendix Petersen’s (2003) work to explore how the writing in the journal is better viewed as ‘creata’ rather than ‘data’ – insofar as it troubles what data can be – particularly when that data is knowledge derived from the researcher-self. Finally, I interrogate the notion of researcher reflexivity on display and being performed by the ‘learning journal’.

Inside my learning journal

When I turn to write in my learning journal, it is always because I feel a need to make sense of something – to explore what it is that has captured me, made me curious or led me to respond in a certain way. I feel unsettled when I neglect it for long periods of time – like I’ve not bothered to care for myself. In the main, I use my journal to write about my work and practice as an academic developer and what I see happening around me in terms of its meanings, scholarship and resistances. It holds the questions, observations and conversations that have both excited and troubled me about my practice, about academic development, about teaching and learning generally and its broader connections to the purpose and transformation of teaching and learning in universities and higher education. In my journal I ask: how can I do this work and be critical of it at the same time? Why is it so important for me to share that criticality with others – those who welcome it as part of the narrative of our work rather than those who perceive it as an attempt to undermine? In this sense, my journal is a strategy, technique or device which documents that kind of questioning. It also holds the more mundane aspects of my academic development practice for ongoing reflection and consumption. Often, days later when there is an opportunity
to read over some of the entries, things can seem both clearer and muddier. What am I to make of these words? How I am to analyse them as instances of practice? What am I seeing and not seeing when I turn to make sense of what they mean? What are the possibilities and limitations inherent in their framing?

I write in my journal in that ‘stream of consciousness’ style – mainly at the keyboard, but often supplemented with scribbled, messy notes developed out of the various contexts which constitute my practice. Many of these are in meetings with individuals or groups of academics who work with me on pedagogical projects, or from faculty teaching and learning committees in which I participate, or in working with academics to write about their teaching and learning for Synergy, the in-house publication of which I am the Editor. Additional reflections might also come from the classroom contexts where I have been invited to provide feedback on a colleague’s teaching, or alternatively from my own teaching, or the array of workshops – in the face to face and online contexts that I have responsibility for organising and facilitating. My journal captures all these moments. What does it look like? There are whole pages without paragraphs – like text that just runs on forever and ideas that assume a life of their own. I don’t pay attention to grammar and structure or sometimes, even English. It is punctuated with Samoan words that better fit the feeling or experience I am trying to write about in a way that the English language doesn’t seem able to. Perhaps Samoan is my clumsy substitute for the usual written romance of Latin or French. I notice that when I turn to my journal, the steady rhythm of tapping keys energises me. The ‘something’ is not necessarily a critical incident. It can be as innocent as a comment or remark that I explore while I write. There is always pleasure in feeling that I have a lot to say and I am able to write it with enthusiasm and eagerness. I usually close the door to my office and put my phone on divert to remind me that this is private time. When I am with it, I do not like to be interrupted. I relish these moments of quiet.

In my journal, I write about how my work might be different. In my own teaching, I worry that I expect too much. I wonder why the academics with whom I work aren’t

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16 Synergy is a print-based and online publication which supports critical reflection on the scholarship of teaching and learning at the University of Sydney. Further information at [http://www.itl.usyd.edu.au/synergy](http://www.itl.usyd.edu.au/synergy).
more critical, although at the same time, I am taken aback when they voice the sort of criticisms that feel confronting to me. But there are pleasures too – in the brevity of corridor conversations, in the knowing glances, in eureka moments, and in some of the assignments that signal academics’ personal struggle with their roles and identities as teachers. If I try hard enough, I have a clear vision of some of the academics I teach curled over their laptops, writing of their teaching and learning into the wee hours. For others, this teaching improvement work competes with the myriad of other academic demands which take a toll on both their minds and bodies. Often, these time-poor efforts show in the accounts of their learning they produce. And on the occasions when I am providing feedback on these papers, I think: you didn’t even try; or why doesn’t this make me feel anything? At the very least, learning ought to generate some kind of felt-level response. But I am often equally amazed too by the outpouring of emotion in some of the work I read. In some cases, these assignments are the first opportunity these academics have ever had to systematically reflect on the values they hold about the professionalism of their academic practice. So when we ask: why do you teach the way you do? I must show care and patience – just like I would expect someone might with me. And with my pencil poised ready to write of my impressions, there have been a few times where I have been moved to tears. I know this is ok but I still turn inwards and question my developer professionalism. I don’t seem to have developed the capacity yet to remain unaffected. Is this something I can tell them – that they made me feel? I want to and with a few I have, but as rule I usually don’t.

Of course, there is always more to write and say about the issues from my practice that form the substance of the journal itself. This is the kind of secret work my learning journal performs. It is a safe space where my desire and discomfort are captured in intersecting moments. Often this happens in ways that I cannot always predict, that I don’t always understand and that I often don’t know what to do with. A good deal of the witnessing, noticing and interpreting of my work and practice – written and rewritten in my journal has been agonising. I am reminded here of Bronislaw Malinowski’s (1989) *A Diary in the Strict Sense of the Term* – that hidden supplement of his Trobriand Island adventures. Of it, Behar (1999, p.473) writes that it documents “his strong feelings of resentment against the natives, his bouts of
loneliness, and his desperation to be done with his fieldwork, as well as his racist erotic fantasies about local women and latent homosexual desires toward local men". I like to think that my journal performs a similarly unruly ethnographic function - that it holds the improper questions of my practice - questions that are now no longer publicly contested because they have been previously asked and seemingly answered. My journal shows me my frustration, together with the desiring work of practice. I try hard not to back away from it but instead, to push through it so that I can weave my learning around it. My journal is the minutiae. To use Clegg’s (2005a) term, it theorises the mundane. In so doing, it is often incredibly difficult to constantly inhabit the terrain my journal represents. I think this is because it goes to the very heart of how I see myself working as a teacher, researcher and academic developer within my disciplinary community. After a long spell of journal writing, two questions are constant: what is my place in this community? And, how might we create a space to ask different kinds of questions about our practice? Perhaps these are questions to be written and re-written rather than ones to be resolved.

What do learning journals do? From data to creata

That learning journals work to develop a kind of researcher reflexivity or criticality goes almost without question. It has come to occupy a particular pedagogical territory where a researcher can know themselves, their position and location for developing a suitable ethic of care with their research participants. It makes transparent the processes and assumptions of research production. In fact, there seems to be universal praise for the researcher-self made available through the textual display of journalling.

Such praise is accompanied by a vast literature on journal writing in higher education teaching and learning contexts. Although much of it is focused on the undergraduate learning context, taken together, there is a sense that journal writing is a strategy for engagement: it connects students more fully with their learning, helping them to become more present (Ballantyne and Packer, 1995; Beveridge, 1997; Park, 2003); it empowers them to take responsibility for their own learning (Morrison, 1996); it enhances a capacity for reflection (Johnson, 2001); it can be a channel for dialogue
and response with the teacher and/or other learners (Maloney and Campbell-Evans, 2002; O'Rourke, 1998); it can be a therapeutic tool providing emotional release (Beveridge, 1997; Johnson, 2001; Maloney and Campbell-Evans, 2002), and it can provide valuable feedback to a teacher (Ballantyne and Packer, 1995; Park, 2003). While these studies are themselves interesting accounts of putting journal writing to work and the expected benefits for students, they do not fully capture the realm of methodological complexity when used in the pursuit of original research. Indeed, the problematic of knowing, inquiry and research is mostly absent in the aforementioned discussions of the virtues of journalling. In the ethnographic inquiry context, the learning journal is often supplemented by other techniques which support fieldwork – notes and diaries for instance.

In the research higher degree context, while there does appear to be writing on the use of learning journals, there is surprisingly little that fleshes out the complexity of their use in relation to its representation within something like the thesis text itself. Even those doctoral accounts that gesture beyond discourses of reflection such as Jane Glaze's (2002) diary as dialogue with self; Helen Johnson's (2001) journal writing as an exploration of voice; or in Hanrahan, Cooper & Burroughs-Lange's (1999) concern with the place of personal writing in the thesis, they are in the main, not explicitly connected with the problem or textuality of its representation. The journal appears to be a supplement or an attachment to the substantive writing project, and it is often the existence of it that demonstrates the researcher's commitment to reflexivity. The thesis then is the final version of a palimpsest. I have been curious to see how others negotiate their writing in, and between journal and thesis contexts – how they write and narrate themselves, the sorts of texts they produce, how they argue for them and the kinds of traditions of research writing that influence their decision-making. What I see in most cases is the journal extract lying beside or following the official reflexive text in a sort of metaphysical interplay. The former signifies thinking of a different order that is temporally and spatially located elsewhere – often coded authentically because it is closer, more immediate to the event or occurrence itself. These are usually private words made public as an intellectual exercise that confirms a researcher's willingness to engage with their positioning – both textually and with voice in their research. The text might often be
arranged differently – indented, with a different font, perhaps colour and sometimes of a smaller size. It signals a ‘beforenness’ that pre-dates the logic and cogency expected of a thesis. The latter bears all the hallmarks of the required convention. And there is the paradox. While the written-ness of the text works to draw attention to itself, it can only do so in limited ways given the conventions and demands of the academic product or output. Again, this is part of the proper production of academic knowledge within specific communities of practice (Yates, 2004).

In my own journal, I wanted the process of inquiring into my work and daily developer practice to shape the form of the journal. I wanted it to be loose. I was less concerned with the form of the journal than I was with the work it was doing. Nor did I systematically code it by entry, or organise it thematically, subjecting its content to the array of very good software programs that manage large volumes of qualitative data. I know this is important work too but I wanted to document and communicate both the small detail, together with the embodied and enfleshed meanings of my practice and work as they came to matter to me. The whole notion that this might be too subjective or biased, or that it required a meta-framework in which to sit, still seems an odd reading to me. Subjectivity was not something that I aimed to do away with, or something I sought to balance. While I wanted language to be able to represent the emotions, I did not want to be contained by a view on how to properly analyse it since my experiences have not been neat or bounded. Practice is inherently messy and I sought an opportunity to understand its effect in the same way. I have also been interested in Ellis’s (1991, 1995) work which seeks to reclaim introspection as a method, and emotionality as a form of sociology that not only acknowledges the intense work of emotions on ourselves and others, but encourages us to write equally of their experiencing. Ellis (1991, p.29) writes that those who look at emotions usually “fail to examine their own responses, and instead, view emotions as feelings that other people have [and that] even when they use their own experiences, they do so in an emotionally detached way”. So my own rationale for the more organic form, work and organisation of my learning journal is not that I wanted to deny a systematicity about my method, it was that I had a vision of its embodied complexity and subjecting that to the work of a ‘method’, and even ‘multiple methods’ seemed to strip that away. Clough (2002, p.6) writes about this
idea more purposefully when he suggests "for how I write a story will not be a matter of method as such, but of personal, moral and ethical response to research experiences". This he provocatively suggests, works to

... blur distinctions not only between form and content, but also between researcher and researched, between data and imagination; to insist, that is, that language itself, by itself, does the work of inquiry, without recourse to the meta-languages of methodology (p.3).

I also wanted to question "the sense that to be scholarly our work should be impersonal, [that it] deny the emotionality of the researcher, [that it] call for the separation of subject and researcher, and reject the addressing of emotional experience" (Ellis, 1995, p.308). My learning journal then has been one such tactic for these moments of recognition to flourish and be challenged.

When I first began writing a learning journal, I did not know that it would form the substance of this work. It was only later, when I came to the literature on autoethnography that I decided to give this writing as both process and product, a central role. In fact, that writing, in many ways was, and still is the heart of my thesis. But rather than take extracts and excerpts from my journal and reflect upon them as evidence of what I was thinking, feeling and reflecting on then and its impact on me now, or in transit, I have chosen to re-present those words and that text, and redevelop them anew. This can seem a dangerous sort of enterprise, particularly in the present moment where qualitative researchers are concerned with their legitimacy and authority to represent others' lives, words and experiences. The tradition of 'verbatim' textual representation is often understood as holding up a truthful and real account of an experience. It is the place where the 'Other' is made transparent or revealed in the research text. Their own words are laid out for consumption as a faithful rendering of an experience. But here, I want to work with a number of understandings regarding the playful nature of and possibilities for data. Using the work of Wendy Stainton-Rogers and her substitution of the term data for createa, Bendix Peterson (2003) maintains that,
... 'data' is not something lying independently out there to be generated and
used by researchers who are, perhaps not consciously or reflexively, but [are]
theoretically informed and positioned in various ways. Stainton-Rogers points
out that the common phrases such as 'data' suggests, or 'as evident in the data'
deny the agency of the researcher and create illusions of universal facts.

*Speaking of data as saying something in itself, as 'speaking the truth whether
we like or not', relieves the researcher of interpretive and moral responsibility.*

Using the word creata, she suggests, is a way of making the denial of agency
impossible, that is, the 'agency' involved in, for example, choosing who to ask,
how to ask them, what to make of what they say, what is recognised as
'interesting' and 'relevant' and what goes unnoticed (p.71, my italics).

Creata then, recognises the active putting together, fashioning and fabrication of data
and its representation within inquiry contexts. It is not something which attracts the
status of innocence. It is neither 'raw' nor 'unsullied' before the act of translation.
All data are already interpreted, and exist within networks and discourses of
meaning. It is merely constructed by us in one form and then put differently to work
in another, consistent with whatever the argument seeking to be made is. But this
refashioning of data can cause enormous worry among researchers, particularly when
these acts are perceived as relinquishing faith in ideas about validity or truthfulness –
and the assumption that writing can get at and necessarily represent an actual and
true context. And even in an autoethnography like this one, there is a commensurate
need to view data on and about the researcher-self as subject to these same sorts of
suspicious manoeuvres. For instance, how can I trouble my own experiences as
creata? How am I to textually represent a sceptical reading of the creata of this work?
How do I not take my experiences as creata as a given? In writing about the
fictionalisation of experience, Clough (2002) seems to achieve this kind of
questioning representation by abandoning the search to represent data as
corresponding to some ontologically real position. For Clough, data are not
necessarily to be found in the same coherent space or context, rather he appears to be
interested in the "opportunity to import fragments of data from various real events in
order to speak to the heart of social consciousness". Of the life accounts of
'educational difficulty' he offers in his book *Narratives and Fictions in Educational
Research, he says

ey are stories which could be true, they derive from real events and feelings and conversations, but they are ultimately fictions: versions of the truth which are woven from an amalgam of raw data, real details and (where necessary) symbolic equivalents. [...] such stories can be derived from any data: the important moment of creation is synthetic (and thus draws purposefully and fitfully on data as well as dreams, hunches and histories, causes and cases, transcriptions and trangressions, morals and meanings) (Clough, 2002, p.9, original italics).

This same sense of being overtly playful with the functions and forms of data is also offered in Elizabeth St Pierre’s (1997) notion of transgressive data. Taking up an explicitly poststructuralist position, St Pierre explores her own unease with the way qualitative research methodologies actually conceptualise what data can be and do. One of the interesting issues she identifies is that various data forms must often be accompanied by and accounted for in words that lend it interpretation. She appears to be interested in how we can account for data that emerges in the gaps and cracks of language – such as dreams, emotions and the sensual. For her, these data are anathema to the thematic coding practices with which we are trained as researchers to be familiar. They are constructions of and reactions to putting her subjectivity to work within her research. Her emotional data might include an aspect of her desire for validity. Her idea of dream data might be the desire for a repudiation of closure, or being unable to pinpoint precisely its effects on the narrative of the research. Dreams, she argues, seem to peddle in the production of confusion and fantasy rather than clarity or certainty. Her explanation of sensual data comes to life through a grounding in the place or location of research; its presences, absences and the way it insinuates itself upon/within the body of the researcher. St Pierre (1997) argues that the effect of physicality on her subjectivity was only accounted for when she started to reconceptualise the experiences which constitute data and where they might actually come from.
These elegant and unusual twists in how we think about the work of data, its representation together with a desire to engage in a moral purpose for research can sometimes feel troublesome. Might this be precisely the worry with the way I have put my learning journal to work in this thesis – that I have not been faithful to the social science injunction of first the data, and then the analysis? How have I grappled with these more playful understandings of data within this work, and their textual integration and interrogation? How have I sought to open up or delimit what must count as data in order for this work to do its work, and then argued for particular kinds of fashioning and representation?

In seeking to write an account of my experience and practice as an academic developer – one that borrows heavily from my learning journal, I have been guided by Brew’s (2001b) ‘guidelines’ for rethinking the rules of research – and the formation of data. Drawing on phenomenologist Husserl, Brew’s (2001b) first guideline is: if you think you know then look again. Here, she writes about a spirit of continuous inquiry; about always looking to trouble our impressions of the way things are and what it is we see. I would want to add to this Lather’s (1991 in Scott & Usher, 1999, p.22) observation that it is “not only a question of looking harder or more closely but of asking what frames our way of seeing when we do research – what are those spaces where visibility is constructed and from which we are incited to see”. The representation of my learning journal in this work is slippery. Might this be because I have not followed the usual practice of placing excerpts from it within this text? Is it because the demarcation between the data and the analysis might be seen to have come undone, or merged in some distrustful way? My wish is that this slippery-ness be allowed to stand; more precisely, that it be grappled with in the context of Brew’s first guideline and that we continue to explore what might be possible to think and know within the way autoethnography defines a purpose for itself.

Second, Brew invites us to act on the hypothesis that everything is relevant. A work like this one which seeks to detail experience and practice is undeniably connected to a whole range of meanings both within the locale – understood here as academic development but also in those contexts which may not be readily perceived as
academic development. We are practised at seeking data from the contexts we know as academic development. Following Brew’s second guideline, I have not sought to make such a distinction. Dreams, desires and emotions are in constant circulation throughout this work – in ways that often produce anxiety, pain and discomfort. In fact, my journal and the creata/data it holds might be seen as testimony to a set of ‘eccentric influences’. In one instance, I wrote of my frustrations around the boundaries of fields through experimenting with metaphorical illusions of ‘exchange’. In another, I experimented with ideas about authority and hegemony through writing a letter to my father. How are we to track the ways academic development practice travels across seemingly irrelevant or unusual terrain? The text of such writing and thought experiments are not necessarily represented throughout this work nor do I think they need be. Rather, it is the spirit of being open to that kind of exploration and the kinds of insights they forge that are inevitably re-presented here. This might translated into a need to do and think data differently, or as an injunction to generate data from absurd contexts. In any case, the notion that *everything is relevant* can support the work of thinking against familiarity through developing new modes of inquiry and inquiring.

The final of Brew’s (2001b) guidelines refers to *proceeding with unbending intent*. She describes it as ‘not shirking the difficulties’ of research and of continuing in the face of unexpected hardship. For several reasons, this autoethnographic work has been far and away the most difficult piece of research I have been engaged in. It is a relatively new way of inquiring into the work of academic development and as such, like anything new it has the potential to be misunderstood and therefore simultaneously celebrated and marginalised. This thesis carries a self-consciousness about its knowledge and status as research through drawing attention to its own production, textuality and representation. Nor does it shy away from expressions of the personal, or seek to distance itself from the emotional and subjective effects of research. It can therefore seem highly provocative. *Proceeding with unbending intent* refers in this work to realising a particular sort of research vision.
The writing and written-ness of research texts in autoethnography

Autoethnography has also encouraged me to think artfully about my research – what I want it to do and be. This was a revelation that crept up on me so softly that I spent a long time being suspicious of it. And I was suspicious of it because I could not see how the context I was in might ever account for my desiring it. I also failed to see how I might be enabled to write with an attention to crafting a text that took seriously the invocation of feeling. There was an unfamiliar research language being peddled: love, ethics and morality, whereas I was in a context where the primary talk was: outcomes, effectiveness and impact. On difficult days, it often felt like I was being kept on the wrong side of the divide between art and science – a divide that seemed sweeter on the other side and a historical divide that Elliot Eisner (2004) frames thus:

Science was considered dependable, the artistic process was not. Science was cognitive, the arts were emotional. Science was teachable, the arts required talent. Science was testable, the arts were matters of preference. Science was useful and the arts were ornamental (p.2).

I would hazard a guess that the divide is conceptually less striking than perhaps it once was due to the proliferation of writing brought on by experiments in a whole range of fields. There are several which have moved me to consider not only what I am writing about but what my larger purpose for writing is – that is, to consider what I am writing for and the work I want it to perform. One, specifically located in my field – higher education, is a piece of dialogue written by Craig Prichard (2001). Its setting is a train journey. As the train pulls out from the station, a young academic and a Vice-Chancellor find themselves sitting across from each other. The young academic is reading a publication about the nature of change in universities – written by a friend and colleague of the Vice-Chancellor’s. He notices. They discover that they are travelling to the same conference. Imagine the scene. The clumsy opening. The respectful fumbling around each other’s positions while they aim to enforce the credibility of their own. Different views about academic professionalism are being exchanged. One talks of the encroachment of performativity on shaping academics’ subjectivity; the other about providing strategic leadership to change academics for
the better. They disagree. They talk past each other. Each accuses the other of deliberately misunderstanding. They retreat, tend to their wounds. They start again – this time with tenderness – seeking to know something about the other; to bring themselves into a relation with each other. They come to the problem and opportunity of change in academic life with different experiences. They find themselves agreeing on some things but the language they use to describe themselves still keeps them distant from each other. The perspectives they each hold reveal a lived complexity and a materiality that is very rarely articulated in the books on academic life, universities and change. The chosen form allowed me to connect that conversation with my own experience of similar conversations. It also seemed to me an authentic account of what those discussions actually feel like. Plus, the account is funny, insightful, and eloquent and I wanted to insert myself, my views and my morality into their discussion. I wanted to be on that train journey with them. In fact, straight after I read that piece, I sat down and wrote an email to Craig. That's when I know something has got under my skin. It occupies me in ways that I find very hard to get rid of and I am very rarely able to turn my attention to much else until I address it in a meaningful way. In most cases, that happens through writing.

There are of course more examples to mention and more attempts at writing to mine and admire. Yet there is still relatively little attention given over to the whole enterprise of writing in the scholarship of academic development – particularly, what it is we want our research texts to signal, represent and communicate about the work we do. If there is a focus on writing, it is usually in supporting academics to write of their teaching and learning inquiries for scholarly publication, or in working with them to develop their students into better writers – writers who understand disciplinary convention, and can deploy the tools of language appropriately in order to express themselves in relation to it. With the exception of Brew's (2004) chapter Writing for Development, where she describes the shifts in her writing for different academic audiences (individual, university managers and committees, committees that consider applications, wider academic community), there are few instances of creative representation or artful renderings of academic development work. I believe that this is an absence felt by those who like me, have mused on the possibility of writing creatively: perhaps an ode, sonnet or an elegy that expresses the life of our
academic development practice. It is felt by those of us who have begun to experiment tentatively with different textual stagings of our writing. It is felt by those of us who want to write our own stories, personally, vulnerably, but for some reason, cannot, without worrying about its status as knowledge and then seeking to supplement it with the experience of others. And it is especially felt by those of us who want to hold up a moral and ethical vision of the scholarship of academic development, and who ask how this might be achieved in both what we choose to write about and then how we go about writing it. There is still a legacy that is intensely felt about what knowledge can be written about, and how to write it, that reins in how the work of academic development can best progress. What is it that artfulness might offer us in times of change – times characterised by doubt, panic and reservation? What does autoethnography’s focus on crafting writing, on representation and on the communication of research, make available to us as both readers and writers? Why have we failed to see this as an opportunity, or as a risk worth taking?

MacLure (2003) describes a focus on research writing as a threat. Usher (1996, p.33) argues that writing is often seen as mechanism for “communicating a reality that is ‘outside’ the text”. MacLure says that the written-ness of research is,

...generally played down, or even forgotten, in accounts of the research process. Writing is often considered, when it is considered at all, to be merely a technical business: a matter of finding the best words to convey, or capture, the stuff that really counts – the meaning, the message, the ideas, the essence, the principles, the themes, the categories, the fundamentals, the thoughts, the writer’s intentions, the participants’ views, the truth, the reality, the inner self, the research ‘itself’ (p.105).

MacLure (2003) goes on to argue that much of the anxiety surrounding qualitative research is about managing the way research accounts draw attention to their own textuality. This seems to then result in a view about what constitutes proper and improper kinds of writing.
Proper writing is that which meets the demands of the 'required reading'. It translates meaning into 'readily understood' language, which by implication is a kind of universal or standard language, in contrast to the 'patois' of improper writing, which translates meaning into the uncrackable codes of jargon. Improper writing is unfaithful to the demands of meaning: it exceeds, falls short or misses the mark of the particular meaning that it is its duty to convey (p.108).

In a similar vein, Richardson (1995, pp.203-204) has highlighted the ways in which the social sciences constitute its writing practices through a logico-scientific mode, characterised by knowledge that is 'focused', 'problem-centred', 'linear', 'straightforward' that can be 'abstracted' and attributed a cogent 'theoretical or methodological label', but that must inevitably draw on narrative, metaphor and particular conceptions of language in order to persuade. Others too, appear similarly frustrated by the limitations of social science writing to communicate the lived messiness of experience. Arthur Frank asks what it means to “think and feel with the story rather than about it”. He says that,

[t]o think about a story is to reduce it to content and then analyse that content. Thinking with stories takes the story as already complete; there is no going beyond it. To think with a story is to experience it affecting one's own life and to find in that effect a certain truth of one’s own life (Frank, in Sparkes, 2002, p.219).

In the writing of Final Negotiations – a much cited autoethnographic work on love, loss and chronic illness, Ellis (1995) sets the goal for her text as communicating evocation rather than the representation of truth. And in responding to the more challenging critiques and reviews of her work pre-publication and the claims she makes for it as a new kind of sociological knowledge, Ellis begins to question a number of the assumptions inherent in her disciplinary training: that scholarly work must necessarily be impersonal; that it must denounce the emotions of the researcher; and that a therapeutic motivation for scholarly work actually disturbs what we understand inquiry to be and do. Similarly, H.L. Goodall (2000) argues that new
ethnographic writing is premised on its ability to hold an interesting conversation with readers. As Sparkes (2002) suggests, these texts trust that its readers will put themselves to work in bringing meaning to bear with and against the text – accompanied by an open spirit of exploration and discovery. In large measure, these moves are entirely consistent with representing a text’s formation or production as “something made or fashioned” (Clifford, 1986, p.6) rather than something made up or essentially truthful and is then represented as such. Those interested in autoethnography are now writing texts that are made for particular effects.

In writing this work, I have been pleased that examples are appearing more and more within the social science literature. I have now read and engaged with a number of works that claim themselves as specific kinds of textual interventions or experiments, or forms of new writing: ones that reconstruct interview transcripts in the service of poetic representation (Richardson, 1992; Glesne, 1997; Davies & Bendix Petersen, 2005), some that import character dialogue to dynamically capture the spark and complexity of human interaction (Ellis & Bochner, 1996; Ellis, Kiesinger & Tillman-Healy, 1996; Richardson, 1997), and yet others that use personal narrative and experience to dramatically and creatively recreate scenes and settings that speak to our learning from stories (Neilson, 2002; Richardson, 2001; Bochner, 1997; Sparkes, 1996; Rambo-Ronai, 1992). It might be said that they represent messy texts – texts that “reflect back at its readers the problems of inquiry at the same time the inquiry is conducted” (Lather, 1997, p.286). I like the way Bochner (1997) stages a purpose for these sorts of texts:

... we try to produce texts that show how people breach canonical conventions and expectations; how they cope with exceptional, difficult, and transformative crises; how they invent new ways of speaking when old ways fail them; and how they turn calamities into gifts. These stories activate subjectivity and compel an emotional response. They long to be used rather than analysed, to be told and retold rather than theorized and settled. And they promise the companionship of intimate detail as a substitute for the loneliness of abstracted facts, touching readers where they live and offering details that linger in the mind (p.11).
The return to a representation of the corporeality of the experience signalled above has been important in providing me with some gauge in how my own thinking, writing and positioning is located socially – but particularly, in what it means to write vulnerably and with artfulness in mind. Artfulness is not really something academic developers seem to have thought or written very much about. So I shall write about it.

*Looking for artfulness in the scholarship of academic development project*

Artfulness – or making artful inquiry for me is about using the qualities of speculation and imagination to reveal aspects of ourselves – or to rethink ourselves. Eisner’s (2004) work provides a particular set of insights about what these developments might offer researchers of education. I wish to extend his insights to higher education too. The first, he suggests is a reliance on ‘feel’ and a paying attention to ‘nuance’ – what he calls becoming qualitatively intelligent. He invites us to imagine what it is like to create a painting, a poem or musical score. He asks to think about how we bring together the various elements that go into its fashioning. What are the relations that need attending to? And how do we make judgements about those relations – a rightness that fits the specificity of our vision, precisely, intimately, wholly? The second insight is that artfulness reminds us to pursue and exploit the notion of surprise. This is about working against a tendency to seek the surety offered by certainty, by what we already know. Here we are encouraged to suspend our knowing, or perhaps even to un-know in order for the new to make itself visible to us. These are ‘tentative resting places’, he says. Stuart Hall (1992) uses another term for this same sense: temporary settlements. Third, is that artfulness seeks an integration between form and content. This is also the point Clough (2002) draws attention to in asking how pieces of art (and I think, research texts) carry their methodological import within themselves. Fourth, is a recognition that “not everything knowable can be articulated in propositional form”. On this, Eisner reminds us of the following,
... [w]e build shrines to express our gratitude to the heroes of 9/11 because somehow we find our words inadequate. We appeal to poetry when we bury and when we marry. We situate our most profound religious practices within compositions we have choreographed. What does our need for such practices say to us about our sources of understanding and what do they mean for how we educate (p.7).

The fifth lesson is to think on the relationship between thinking work and the materials or media at our disposal. Artfulness in this sense is about seeing the possibilities in the medium and using it to realise some wider purpose.

While Eisner’s (2004) project at large is about developing a fresh vision for school education – a vision he suggests ought to be connected with an aim for education that is about the preparation of artists, his concern does not appear to be with art forms in the particular – rather, it is about a disposition to what it is that artfulness enables us to see, feel, be, and make possible. These are,

... individuals who have developed the ideas, the sensibilities, the skills, and the imagination to create work that is well proportioned, skillfully executed, and imaginative, regardless of the domain (p.4).

There are interesting lessons here for the research and scholarship of academic development. My focus on refashioning our writing and texts, or looking to artfulness is not about doing away with the sort of research that our institutional responsibilities demand of us. It is instead to ask whether this is the only work that represents the complexity of what we do. In some ways, it is to extend our options for writing, researching and knowing so that there is room too, for discourses of love, morality and ethics – that unfamiliar research language which led me to the possibility of autoethnography in the first place.
How can we trust this knowledge? Criteria and quality in autoethnographic inquiry

Once a rationale is in place for autoethnographic work, then discussion turns to judgements of its quality. There is at present, a marked ambivalence about putting in place new criteria to evaluate this work since there is an anxiety that it may function to reinstate a new hegemony. This is the spectre of criteria and evaluation that hovers over all productions of academic work and in which all research is invested in one way or another.

Rather than rehearse debates around the usual terrain - validity, reliability, rigour and even trustworthiness in qualitative research generally, I follow Richardson’s (1999, 2000) move which argues that autoethnographic research needs to consider foremost, the intent and context of the inquiry itself. Criteria often pose as something beyond culture; beyond ourselves and own our conventions. As Schwandt (1996) argues, they tie us with “the necessity of regulative norms for removing doubt and settling disputes about what is correct or incorrect, true or false”. Instead, I trace the questions and experiences asked by scholars who write these kinds of texts. I ask how they themselves grapple with the constitution of quality, and I assert a space for this thesis to exist in relation to those ideas specifically.

Nicholas Holt (2003) writes an autoethnographic story about the trials of publishing an autoethnographic account of his beginnings as a university teacher. To make sense of his referee’s reports, he rewrites them into dialogue so that he can engage with them imaginatively in a defence of the premise of autoethnography. In the piece, he imagines himself being asked to comment on the lack of rigour; the seeming absence of data; the neglect of a theoretical and methodological framing; the fact that his article does not appear to respect the need to show dominant patterns and relationships. While Holt concludes that both reviewers have essentially misunderstood the intention of autoethnographic work generally, he describes how the problematic nature of ‘self-as-the-only-data’ source, troubles the criteria in qualitative research with which we already familiar. He says “qualitative researchers have long been encouraged to consider how their personal subjectivity influences the
investigative process” (p. 15). From the proliferation of work about the virtue of reflexivity, I think this is true. But how are we to handle the issue of quality and criteria when the researcher is simultaneously the issue of/under investigation? Let me turn to some of the ways we might rethink what it is that constitutes quality in those conversations.

Autoethnography is probably best seen as part of a stable of creative analytical practices (CAP) in the way Richardson (2000, p.937) describes. In recognising a need to move away from traditional assessments of quality, Richardson invites to consider the extent to which a work such as this one has taken into account the following qualities.

- **Substantive contribution**: Does this piece contribute to our understanding of social life? Does the writer demonstrate a deeply grounded (if embedded) social scientific perspective? How has this perspective informed the construction of the text?

- **Aesthetic merit**: Does this piece succeed aesthetically? Does the use of CAP practices open up the text, invite interpretive responses? Is the text artistically shaped, satisfying, complex, and not boring?

- **Reflexivity**: Is the author cognizant of the epistemology of postmodernism? How did the author come to write this text? How was the information gathered? Are there ethical issues? How has the author’s subjectivity been a producer and a product of this text? Is there adequate self-awareness and self-exposure for the reader to make judgments about the point of view? Does the author hold him or herself accountable to the standards of knowing and telling of the people he or she has studied?

- **Impact**: Does this affect me? Emotionally? Intellectually? Does it generate new questions? Move me to write? Move me to try new research practices? Move me to action?
• *Expression of a reality:* Does this text embody a fleshed out, embodied sense of lived experience? Does it seem "true" — a credible account of a cultural, social, individual, or communal sense of the "real"?

The first thing to notice here is that there is no standard, universal measure in which to assert quality judgements about works of this kind. Added to this, when Bochner (2000) is asked to make judgements about similar works, he looks for six things.

1. That the concrete, bodily and emotional detail of an experience is adequately fleshed out.
2. That the narrative is structurally complex — that it moves its readers to think about the way it unfolds — its back and forth movement over time and their simultaneous playing out in the text.
3. That the piece contains an emotional vulnerability that can speak to the credibility and honesty of its writer.
4. That there is a focus on transformation; that the piece opens up a sense of the journey, what he calls a tale of two selves.
5. That there is an ethical self-consciousness. How does the piece show care and develop a moral awareness around representation and communication — of itself, of the researcher and those it writes about?

And finally, Bochner says, "I want a story that moves me, my heart and belly as well as my head; I want a story that doesn’t just refer to subjective life, but instead acts it out in ways that show me what life feels like now and what it can mean" (p.270).

These judgements or qualities are not designed to subtract from the more traditional approaches to social science research. There is no claim that these ought to act as some substitute for the purpose of inquiry more broadly. Rather, these qualities encapsulate the struggle to make visible knowledges, knowing and forms of being within research contexts that have a particular kind of legacy. Additionally, Patricia Clough (2000) maintains that any discussion of setting criteria for experimental writing ought to remember its politics. Worried about the institutionalisation of criteria as reissuing a new orthodoxy, she suggests that these narratives must also
transcend the self (as confessional and individualistic) in order to contribute to important work of cultural criticism.

I find Richardson's (2000) description of the purpose of CAP, and Bochner's (2000) qualities enormously helpful in thinking about the construction of autoethnographic texts – and perhaps, what will constitute the success of this text in particular. They provide both a language and a framework to move toward a renewed sense of the possibilities around what research in academic development might be, in order to communicate with more force the way in which the work can feel. Bochner's (2000) qualities especially, gesture toward CAP-like texts being seen as forms of resistance – similar to the way I have been arguing that autoethnography can open up the scholarship of academic development project to tell new kinds of narratives about itself.

In the next chapter, I continue to prise open the academic development project by asking questions about the ideas regarding student learning that underpin it. One of the ways I aim to 'think against' the work developers do to secure what student learning can be about, is to imagine why and how a focus on the 'body' can interrupt the narrative that provides the project itself with a sense of coherence.
Chapter 5

Extending narratives of student learning for the academic development project

I know that little girl’s passion for questions. The pleasure of questions. Warm sun on her back. Looking at grass. “Why do I see green? Does my mother see the same green, or is her green blue, like my sky? Does this sky touch me? Something moves her. There’s a limit here; she knows she can’t know the answers, and yet... something else. I feel her desire to share these questions, for someone else to feel the intensity, the wonder of it all. And perhaps to be touched by another’s wonder too, a desire for connection to the world and to the other, through this passion to know.

She runs into the kitchen. She runs in there with her questions. “Mom! Could your green be my blue? What is the sky?” She gives them to her. She wants her to love them too, to love her questions. At four she knows that love is in those questions, a particular kind of love. It’s impossible that her mother should not know this, too. But the woman does not turn; she remains at the sink (Martusewicz, 1997, p.97).

When I stumbled across this passage, I saw myself in this little girl. I recognised in her the thrill of questions: having them, sharing them, exploring and troubling them – and then challenging myself to be open to what they might allow. Following Brian Massumi (1998), it is to ask: what new thoughts does it make possible to think? What new emotions does it make possible to feel? What new sensations and perceptions does it open up in body? Employing simple imagery, Martusewicz describes with uncanny precision, the feeling of what it means for me to learn in all its complications, joys, frustrations, disappointments and ambiguities. To see and experience learning like this is to go beyond what Paul Standish (2005) has described as that “closed economy of teaching and learning” – an economy of exchange “that totalises the field of concern” (p.54),
... found in the 'well-made lesson, with its symmetry of objectives and method. The 'well-run' university, quality assured, replicates this through the institution as a whole (p.57).

It is expressed similarly, perhaps more acutely by Richard Smith (2005).

What a fine thing it would be, we might think, to have a university where nothing was left to chance, where risk had been substantially eliminated. Consider the benefits that would flow on from this. For students, above all, the quality of the teaching they receive would no longer be determined by chance, with the unlucky led in tutorials by a young and inexperienced lecturer with eyes only for research and prospects for tenure, and the lucky receiving instruction from a teacher who takes the time to learn their names and who knows how to encourage discussion and debate. In such a university all teaching staff could be relied upon to do a professional job. Their classes and lectures would have clear aims, matched by learning outcomes that would be widely and demonstrably achieved (p.139).

So, Martusewicz's opening also reminds me of a sense of absence, or lack. It reminds me of the particularity in which the idea of learning appears available to me in the context of my work as an academic developer. What gets circulated as forming ideas about learning often seems to me to be quite specific in these contexts. It might be argued for instance that learning comprises an explicit interaction between the teacher and student: the student desires what the teacher knows, has, or represents and so their relationship to learning, and with each other must by necessity be an uneven one. One has the knowledge the other seeks recognition in. One is the master and the other is the apprentice to that knowing. Alternatively, it might also be said that the teacher and student learn together, though often very different things, but nonetheless both are engaged in the desire to learn something for themselves through encountering each other. Here, the teacher acts as a facilitator – an organiser of the conditions that make possible a shift in students' understandings. At the end of this formalised encounter, what the student knows and has experienced is both
considerably more and has increased in its qualitative complexity than what was known at the beginning. The student seeks learning for a purpose – its ends knowable and put to use as such. The teacher too, might also be transformed by the encounter but the nature of that change is often excluded from students' purview. The focus here is on what the student learns and can do as a result. Yet, it might also be argued as Martusewicz does, that learning is about stepping up to that limit-space – the space which constitutes the unthought, or yet to be thought: "the space of question and solution is the boundary between the world and our attempts to comment on it. It is at once a limit and an empty space, forming the condition for both what has been said and what is to come" (p.100). On this reading, the desire for learning and the conditions that enable it are not always to be found in its conscious and public articulation; in the economy of exchange alluded to by Standish (2005); or even Smith's (2005) 'Certain University'. For Martusewicz (1997) then, learning is also caught up in aspects of the unsaid – those parts of ourselves and bodies where the emotional work of desire, pleasure, longing, pleasing, loss and trauma, reside. While this does not preclude a focus on the student, it constitutes a particular sort of focus on the pedagogical terrain in which both the teacher and student are engaged and rendered as learners. It is a staging of the pedagogical encounter which takes us beyond the instrumental learning of things, the development of skills and competencies, and perhaps even the more recent work on the appropriate habits and dispositions as outcomes of university learning, to a more urgent engagement with those dimensions of learning that are corporeally constituted, that are sometimes slippery, difficult to name with certainty, that often remain hidden, or that gesture toward contradiction and paradox. For me, much of this lies within the complex negotiations between identity, pedagogy and bodies. It is curious to me that although there is much written about these more elusive aspects of the pedagogical relation (Lee & Williams, 1999; Pitt & Britzman, 2003; Probyn, 2004; Mann, 2001; Todd, 1997; hooks, 1994; McWilliam & Jones, 1996: Smith, 2003), it does not appear to feature very much in the work developers do with academics to develop their understandings of teaching and learning. The detail of this work seems to sit awry – and at times, it is taken to be a foreign and incomprehensible language that works to only alienate those who want to better understand how they can improve their teaching and student learning. There are other discourses about the idea of learning,
deemed more comprehensible, more akin to translation across disciplinary boundaries and that are in keeping with the measures and performances of excellence and effectiveness. The move from the individual teacher to institutional teaching and learning quality has undoubtedly effaced some aspects of the pedagogical encounter.

I begin this chapter by remembering my own learning as a student – my reflections on learning to be a teacher. This is intended to act as a device which works to give a sense of how the idea of learning becomes operationalised so that it creates a particular kind of student learning experience — a specific way of taking up and making available what learning is, and what students' identities as learners are. I then move to review the ways in which discourses of student learning appear available to me in the academic development project. In my context – an Australian context, this cluster of ideas has become known as the student learning research perspective, best captured in the work of Ramsden (2003), Biggs (1996, 1999, 2001), Prosser and Trigwell (1999). It is these perspectives that pervade and underpin the organisation of academic development work at both an ideological and structural level in my institution. They also represent in part, the proper academic teaching subject insofar as their vision of teaching and learning becomes inculcated as good or best practice — as does their view of what constitutes a properly learning student. My concern is to foreground a number of questions — or narratives that go toward unpacking the appearance of a coherent academic development project. I ask: Does the absence of learning's complexity contribute anything to the work academic development must do in order to build a consistent narrative of itself? We might ask instead not what learning is and how best to develop it, but how the work of learning is made thinkable? How is it made available to be taken up and thought through? How is it made contestable? How is it experience-able? How does it make its subjects; its students into particular kinds of learners, its academics into certain sort of teachers and reinscribe the work of universities as learning organisations? To this end, I consider how a focus on bodies and their effects, begins to speak differently of the teaching and learning experience for the academic development project. The narrative below begins that process. For me, it is also about beginning to step up and into that limit-space so valued by Martusewicz (1997) as reinstating an element of learning that is also unknowable, or that inevitably escapes the gaze of those very systems that seek
to improve it.

**Learning to be a good student and wanting to be a good teacher**

I don’t remember any of my lecturers or tutors being that concerned with *student learning*. Maybe they thought about it — and even talked about it with colleagues in their offices, or behind closed doors but they certainly never said anything to us – to their students, in class, where we might have been able to contribute something meaningful ourselves. Few said they were interested in how we were experiencing our learning so that it could be made better. I studied to be a teacher – so issues of teaching and learning – and of education were constantly on my mind. I would watch each of my lecturers carefully, intently, purposefully – to see how they were teaching, and to monitor the ways I was being invited to learn. Of course, they never knew this; that they were my first conscious scholarly models and that I was mining them, their actions, expressions and the experience itself as part of my learning to be a teacher. But I was curious about why they did the teacherly things they did. Would they stand behind the lectern – sheepish and hesitant, or inhabit the space of the room? Were they cool, stand-offish and remote or keen to get close to us? Did they read from their notes or were they from that school of spontaneity – confident performers who carry a joke and then laugh with relative ease? Even then, I knew it wasn’t good to be a try-hard. Recently, one of the academic participants in a unit I was teaching called ‘Reflection & Practice in University Teaching and Learning’ - revealed to me at an afternoon tea break that she didn’t much find the unit very practical. It was only the second session. She told me that the readings were too waffly, and that the language I used to talk about teaching and learning was somewhat foreign, too alien to her, ‘too political’ was the way she put it. She told me that while she knew the term ‘ideological’, she couldn’t say with any certainty that it had a place in the veterinary science curriculum she was responsible for developing. And then it came: she said the most fascinating thing for her was ‘watching me’. I smiled uncomfortably at that. I suppose what goes around comes around.

I completed a curriculum major in political economy – what someone once tried to convince me was a Marxist bastardisation of the beauty and natural order of
economics. At the time, I was interested in developing young people’s capacity for political and civic engagement. I wanted to know how to make learning political and I was convinced that teaching some version of economics and politics would help me on my journey to realising it. In these classes, teaching was normally a lecturer talking – usually of the most wonderful and fascinating things – and reminding us to do the reading. While this appears to be a very common form of teaching in universities – that sophist pedagogical gaze, it was hardly the hotbed of radicalism I imagined I was signing up for. I held a probably naive view that I would be taking to the streets weekly, storming the citadels at least some of the time and that federal politicians, lesbian activists, pillars of the indigenous community would come and go, sharing with us the urgency of their transformatory visions. Yet here in this context, we were learning if we’d done the reading and could mumble something about its ‘key ideas’ in the tutorial. I rarely said anything in tutorials – not because I didn’t want to but because the way I wanted to say things would come perfectly to me after the class was over. My silence also meant that I needed more time to think. I was not game enough to show that my ideas were still in formation since there was an immense pressure to arrive at a position quickly; to know what you thought; to argue it and then convince others of its merit. I was never that quick. I was always slow to get it but when I got it – it was something I could never unlearn. I could see the sometimes smug tit-for-tat that went on in my tutorials. The explicit competition amongst many outspoken students used to irritate me. The tutor tried hard not to favour them but how could he not – when he was clearly enjoying every moment of it. Learning for me was never about who could be the loudest or most persuasive.

University teachers, I think, have a tendency to worry when their students are silent – since noise, activity and discussion – a bustling classroom is often a rough indication that they are engaged in some collective enterprise. But for some reason, it is mainly the attire and appearance of the lecturers that I mostly remember. A few were stern and sometimes unforgiving; others gave the impression of being uninterested in anything we might say – or rather that we didn’t have anything interesting at all to say. One or two, seemed regularly put out that they were here – teaching us – and I imagined that it was because they would rather have been out on some picket line inciting revolution, or involved in a union stoush, or generally inflicting their rowdy brand of havoc upon the world. It seemed strange to me that while they could see
themselves making important contributions to the various contexts of politics and economics in all its complexities, these opportunities were rarely extended to students in the formal organisation of their learning. Maybe they expected us to organise ourselves. Maybe that’s what student life was all about. Maybe I wanted them to give it all to me – spoon-feed me. There was this one lecturer who would lament that students these days were so apolitical – conservative, materialistic, obsessed with sex, technology and mobile phones and that it was all so different in their day. ‘We had to fight for everything,’ he would say with monotonous regularity while he pondered the playing out of history. I really loved his anecdotes about rallies, protests and picket lines since it was a world I knew little of, but wanted to know everything about. It was this very spark, this incitement to learn that I sought to emulate early on in my learning about teaching. There was one lecturer – John someone I think – who regaled us with tales of backroom deals, factional squabbles and who was sleeping with whom in one of the major political parties. He had been some kind of mover and shaker himself – now retired and resigned to a certain kind of story-telling. I reflect now that perhaps his wasn’t a particularly scholarly approach but it is usually the minor detail of my learning that I seem to cling to. I wonder why it’s the scandal and innuendo that I recall best.

The lecture room for my Social Movements class had a flat floor – unusual – for such large numbers of students. At that stage, I was beginning to really notice how spaces for learning were being organised – from whether we had access to fresh air, heating, to other issues like proxemics and interaction. I was also writing a paper on bodies and space in the classroom for an education drama module and so these observations were materialising in latent ways in a good many other learning contexts. We sat in rows – one behind the other behind the other. I’d be about two arm spaces away from the student sitting next to me and the student in front of me. It all seemed very equidistant – as if someone had gone to great trouble to measure the precise constitution of an efficient learning space. The tone of the class was terribly serious and enormously scholarly. In the mornings, there’d be about 100 of us – all turned in the same direction: toward the lecturer – waiting to be taught; to receive something of her wisdom; the stuff of her years of toil and labour. She would talk on for about an hour or so about Pakulski’s theory of social change or the influence of
postmodern ideas on the ethic of mass movements. In my Education subjects, they
told us that one of the first rules of a good teacher was to draw on students’ own
experiences. It was a strategy, a technique that helped to construct meaning. I was
also learning the psychology of Vygotsky’s ideas: scaffolding and his zone of
proximal development – connected to other theories of constructivism. Even though I
treasured the ideas I was exposed to in my Social Movements class, there were no
opportunities to speak of our own experiences. I was curious about that then – and
remain so to this day – curious about the pejorative perspectives associated with
learning from our own personal experiences. It seemed to be denigrated as
atheoretical. Other peoples’ lives was what made theory – it constituted ‘evidence’
while our own represented anecdote. It could rarely exist in and of itself; it had to be
read against another’s, compared and contrasted for its truth and legitimacy. We
appeared to be learning someone else’s view of the world in ways that were removed
or disconnected from our own. I used to dream up ways of how I might see myself in
this material, in the thick of the action, in the world of theory that this lecturer had
the care of introducing us to. That year, Laclau and Mouffe were my new heroes.

To make matters worse, hardly anyone joked around or laughed. The lecturer herself
didn’t seem to encourage it. Students would exchange only quick, polite hellos – and
occasionally, if I smiled long and hard enough, my efforts would be rewarded with
some stranger’s similarly goofy smile. But there were really few organised
opportunities to talk with others. It just wasn’t part of this pedagogy. We were often
too busy writing down the key points from the overheads or listening for the
information that sounded important. If we were lucky, there were clues. ‘Ok
everyone… write this down. It’s going to be in the exam’. So we did. In the end, my
learning fell in line with her teaching. When she talked, I listened quietly; when she
wrote on the whiteboard, I copied its contents. Most times, it wasn’t always clear to
me what I was writing down but if I got the main points I would leave the lecture
reasonably confident. This I reasoned, was me rehearsing the habits of being an
autonomous and independent learner which was not altogether a bad thing. It didn’t
matter so much that I hadn’t yet had a conversation with the lecturer. One of the guys
in my tutorial told me that she didn’t actually like students very much. ‘Oh,’ I
thought, ‘that seems a bit of a shame’. I later wondered how I was able to get through
a course at university without having had a decent conversation with the teacher. I vowed that things would be different when I got my own students. We would talk all the time. I would make sure of it.

The course outline contained the following description of tutorials:

Tutorials are an opportunity for students to apply theories of change to contemporary social and political movements. They offer an opportunity for students to discuss and critique, dominant understandings of social movements. The tutorials are intended to be theoretically engaging and challenging and students are expected to complete the weekly readings to support the completion of assignments.¹⁷

For the final assignment, we were asked to choose a contemporary social movement to analyse and then write a 3000 word paper. It was a standard sort of paper. I chose to examine the influence of identity politics on the women’s movement looking particularly at a non-government organisation I was working for at the time – the YWCA of Sydney¹⁸, or the Y as I knew it. I decided to get organised and be really conscientious with this assignment – a different approach from the myriad of others that I had struggled with the night before. I was even keen to submit a first draft to my tutor Greg, for feedback. They encouraged us to do this in Education all the time so I assumed it would be ok here too. To my surprise, Greg said he couldn’t look at it, or wouldn’t look at – that it would be unfair to the other students. I argued with him. ‘But I do this in Education all the time,’ I said hoping he would see the sound pedagogical reasoning I had in my head but was having trouble articulating with force. He asked me if I felt it was an objective process. It seemed a strange sort of question. I said I didn’t know if it was objective – all I knew was that I wanted his feedback so I could make it a really strong and well argued paper. We stood talking, or rather staking out our positions in the bowels of that building for some time. In the end I told him not to worry about it, that I wasn’t asking for special treatment and

¹⁷ This is the actual description taken from the text of the unit of study outline. I was enrolled in this unit in 1994 but have changed the name of it slightly.
¹⁸ The YWCA is the Young Womens Christian Association.
that I was sorry to have bothered him. I passed the paper even though I had hoped for a higher mark. It upset me at the time since I had spent a great deal of energy, worrying and caring about it. I was sure that our feedback conversation went some way to contributing to my giving up in that course — even if just a little. There was no doubt that I had learned a whole range of fascinating things — it was my faith in teachers, teaching, and in particular university teaching that was at this point, waning.

The three lecturers of my Anthropology course appeared to be cut from the ‘great humanities man’ cloth. They swaggered into the first lecture embodying the wonder and grand narratives of history, culture and progress. This was precisely what I had signed up for. One was an old-ish gentleman, slightly rotund but with the sort of face etched in history. He wore a pale yellow jumper underneath a checkered sport coat, the kind with leather patches at the elbows. I thought immediately of an Oxford Don I had seen recently in a film. He had a posh accent too, although it was hard to tell whether it was English or just some variety of Australian posh. Collectively, these great men teachers symbolised a sort of tag-team approach to teaching — both in mind and in body it seemed. The Wednesday lecturer would arrive in the morning and not seem to know anything about the previous lecture on the Monday — and the lecture on Friday often seemed to have little to do with what went on earlier in the week. Simply put: they were incoherent and disorganised. The ideas themselves were always arresting, it was just that I was never sure whether I’d quite understood them. Perhaps this was the stuff of intellectual life to which I needed to adapt. Was it up to me to make the connections? What were we each responsible for? My notebook was full of doodles and unfinished sentences about the nature of Balinese kinship and even when I supplemented my naïve and scrappy notes with those of others, I worried that there wouldn’t be much for me to write about in the exam. Yet I still went to those lectures. I went partly because I had a crush on the guy in the Fugazi t-shirt who without fail would always sit two rows in front of me. I was really into Fugazi at the time. I had most of their records and a few of their t-shirts myself. Occasionally, I would wear one — just to let him know.
In the middle of the semester, I came to realise that one of the lecturers— the Wednesday morning one— had written a piece of work that I really loved. It had to do with the religious symbolism of menstruation. It was a particularly difficult chapter that I had sought out specifically. I found the ideas in it challenging; the language seductive— words that I'd never come across before let alone knew how to pronounce. I suspected it was mostly Latin but since I had never studied it, the mystery only heightened its romance. It was also a very different take from much of the feminist literature I had been reading at the time. I began to imagine us meeting for coffee, having dinner and evening interludes in his office or in the university bar— talking about ideas, the people he knew and the detail of his exotic ethnographic adventures. We would talk at length about the feminist critiques of his work and together, we would lament their blatant misappropriation of the central tenets in his chapter. In these scenarios, he was mobilising the pleasure and desire I felt for learning. My fanciful conversations with him allowed me to see myself as someone who enjoyed ideas and could talk with ease and confidence about my own— tentative and small as they were. A few of my friends at the time worried that I was becoming obsessed with him sexually. Together, they'd coined a term for my behaviour— mindfuck. Since I had never actually talked with him, I didn't think it was really that at all. In reality, I had only seen him lecture— and badly at that so I had to balance the competing knowledges I had of him. It was unlike the discourses of bodily presence that permeate some accounts of remembering teaching and teachers— such as this piece by Zora Neale Hurston (Kerr Conway, in McWilliam & Jones, 1996).

There I met a man who was to give me the key to certain things... There is no more dynamic teacher anywhere under any skin. He radiates newness and nerve... Something about his face killed the drabness and the discouragement in me... He is not a pretty man, but he has the face of a scholar, not dry and set like, but fire flashes from his deep set eyes. His high-bridged, but sort of bent nose over his thin lipped mouth... Caesar or Virgil in tan skin.

That night, he liquefied the immortal brains of Coleridge and let the fountain flow. I do not know whether something in my attitude attracted his attention, or whether what I had done previously made him direct the stream at me.
Certainly, every time he lifted his eyes from the page, he looked right into my eyes. It did not make me see him particularly, but it made me see the poem...

But he did something more positive than that. He stopped me after class and complimented me on my work. He never asked me anything about myself but he looked at me and toned his voice in such a way that I felt he knew all about me (p.132).

In my case, it was not that my anthropology teacher performed his scholarship through his body; in fact it was his body that let him down. I preferred to interact with him through the space at which his writings collided with my imagination. So it was that I had reinvented or refashioned him in the image of a teacher I wanted for myself as a learner. And anyway, I told these concerned friends, I was being simultaneously ‘disciplined’ in my teacher education subjects to recognise the boundaries of teacher and learner appropriateness. It was a narrative I knew well and one that I was expected to wholly absorb as a mark of my commitment to teacher professionalism. It manifested in the injunctions to ‘always leave the door open’, to ‘be alert to risk’ and to ‘never show your students undue affection’. I became more conscious of these cautionary tales following a class on gender and the philosophy of education – a class I would later teach myself. Three young male PDHPE student teachers commented that the physicality and embodiedness of sport would only ever be compromised within this inappropriate gaze. Teachers needed some new way of ‘touching’ or some different sense of learning that could hold both those perspectives in balance. My male teacher friends too, would bemoan that narrative’s unfair insinuation on their ability to properly carry out their duties and to properly build relationships with their students. But it is everywhere now – this idea that teachers of all kinds must know in advance how their bodies and its power are construed and can be misconstrued by others. Teachers must act appropriately, and in accordance with professional standards of conduct. The onslaught of media images of the teacher as a predator-in-waiting, in need of strict moral regulation was enough to curb the fear that ‘care’ would always spill over. Years later, I read novelist and journalist Helen

19 At the time of my study, PDHPE (Personal Development, Health and Physical Education) was one of Key Learning Areas of the New South Wales secondary school curriculum.
Garner’s *The First Stone* (1995) – a provocative account of the difficult intersections between gender, sex and pedagogy in a university college. In it, she wondered why the female students had made so much of a drunken professorial indiscretion when a sharp rebuke, or slap across the face would have sufficed. Instead, these women went to the police – a confounding and difficult move for Garner. She assumed a dangerously compelling position. Some time later, I became enormously moved by the way a number of writers recognised the presence, centrality and circulation of desire, eros and eroticism within the pedagogical encounter (hooks, 1994; McWilliam & Jones, 1996; Bartlett, 1998; McWilliam, 1999; Todd, 1997a, 2003; Hull, 2002; Star Johnson, 2005). bell hooks for instance, writes of eros as an energetic force, rather than primarily a sexual one. Eros was not something that could be erased because it held within it, the desire to learn. For her, understanding eros “enhances our overall effort to be self-actualizing, it can provide an epistemological grounding informing how we know what we know, [and it] enables both professors and students to use such energy in a classroom setting in ways that invigorate discussion and excite the critical imagination” (hooks, 1994, p.195). When I thought about my own responses to the work of this particular anthropology lecturer, I came to see why my friends expressed concern. We had different readings of the work of desire and eros. The same danger that stimulated my desire to learn seemed also to restrict my capacities as a teacher. I was to exhibit only pedagogical balance – to be warm and caring – but never in an ambiguous way. McWilliam & Jones (1996) demonstrate this tension wonderfully:

They (teachers) must motivate others – but never *seduce*. They must stimulate – but never *tantalize*. They must ‘get to know’ the learner – but never, of course, in the biblical sense. In short, they must empower others but not give the appearance of ‘potency’. They must rid the classroom or seminar of that very *eros* which both sustains powerful pedagogy and threatens its collapse into abuse (p.136, original italics).

Students too it seemed, were often constructed as learners that could only ever be enacted upon – since their power to desire for themselves, always required appropriate channelling and redirection precisely because they had not yet attained
the capacity to fully know themselves. So, as I was being prepared to be a teacher of
curriculum knowledge, I was simultaneously being taught as a learner, not to
transgress; to know my place – and to view the teacher as some neutral arbiter or
innocent in my learning. As a learner however, it was often this very ambiguity that I
sought out – this appeal to the uncertainties and contradictions of desire that was the
very thing I was deeply invested in – that moved me, that willed me to try harder and
that demanded a more complex engagement with the world around me. And even as
the instrumental discourses of skill development, competence and proper curriculum
organisation were being brought to bear on my self and ideas about teachers and
teaching, I could sense it reducing my learning (and presumably, the learning of my
future students) to forms of knowing, thinking and feeling that could only ever be
comfortable and that would always be properly accounted for. Desire’s untidy and
problematic effects had to be concealed in this narrative since it worked to trouble
that sanitised view of learning – where one travels through stages of understanding
typical of the linear movement from pre-structural learning to extended abstract in
search of more complex understandings. It was only later that I realised that this
anthropology experience revealed to me a kind of paradox about myself as a teacher
and learner – that my own views about learning were caught up and positioned
within these very dirty discourses. Excited but slightly uneasy by this new revelation,
I would often try to explain this position in class. I wanted us to engage in a
discussion of it. On some occasions, it was put to me that those sorts of views acted
as a justification for pederasty. It went against the ‘in the best interests of the child’
philosophy that dominated contemporary discourses of learning. I knew I was
reading texts that they weren’t and I was engaged with ideas that were not sanctioned
as part of the official curriculum – and so I seemed to be inviting all sorts of bother
precisely because they were coded as dangerous and potentially exploitative. So,
towards the end, I stopped going to those Wednesday morning lectures – to that place
I knew where he would be; fearful that my desire for learning would eventually work
against me. I was still perplexed as to how he could be such an ordinary teacher –
when his writing and ideas were so urgent, vital and vivid. Perhaps he just wasn’t a
performer – but I couldn’t bear to imagine him in front of me – acting like that. I also
began to wonder why my meaning-making rarely followed the rules of the
educational theory I was being trained to inhabit.
I was delighted to find that my Anthropology tutorials were much less chaotic than the lectures. When the tutor George appeared – we were to introduce ourselves and say a bit about what had attracted us to study Anthropology. I knew this exercise from my micro-teaching subject: the dreaded Round. I could see through the intention of his pedagogy. The trick I had learned, in order to avoid too much embarrassment was to say something – but as little as possible. To my left was a student enrolled in an Arts degree. He said that the study of different cultures sounded interesting, that he had been to Bali on a surfing holiday and pretty much left it at that. I interpreted it as code for ‘I have no idea’ or ‘it was the only course that fit my timetable’. It was a common enough reason. The girl next to him was an Education student too although not familiar to me. She had spent time doing volunteer environmental work in Brazil and had always been fascinated by other cultures. Another student said that she wanted to ‘interrogate how Western knowledges imagined the other’ and offer a ‘critique of the formation of exoticised sites of inquiry’. I had no idea what that meant – just that it sounded really impressive so I wrote it down. When my turn came, I said that I was attracted to the study of Anthropology through Margaret Mead’s writings about Samoa. It was true. I had read Mead’s text in high school and was amused by the notion that young Samoan girls would tell fibs about their sexual promiscuity to a white researcher and have it cause such outrage and scholarly controversy amongst the anthropology community. And, I had been grappling with my own ‘Samoan-ness’. The impressive woman told me later in the corridor, that she had transferred from another university and had studied a bit of anthropology before. Right-oh. That explained it then.

We ended up working together on a tutorial presentation – she and I, and so we chatted a great deal about the class and what we were learning. Liz was 8 years older and struck me as having an unnatural curiosity for theories of learning. ‘Two small children under 7,’ she confided, ‘and I think I’m one of those sad mature-age students Tai’. George our tutor, joined us for coffee once after class. We found out that he was a postgraduate writing up the final stages of his PhD. It had something to do with the naming rituals of a small Indigenous community in Alice Springs. He mentioned that we were the first bunch of students he had taught – ever – and that he
was quite nervous. I liked it that he told us he was nervous. In some strange way, it made me feel secure to know we were all learning together. I mentioned I was studying to be a HSIE teacher. I explained that HSIE was a cluster of high school subjects; commerce, economics, legal studies and the like. I think I added to his beginner’s paranoia. Liz mentioned that she liked it when we broke up into small groups for discussion. It helped clarify her ideas – engaging with other students’ interpretation of the material. I wasn’t a fan of always breaking up into small groups (it was the default position in most of my micro-teaching courses) but I really responded to George asking us to share what we learned at the end of each class. Occasionally, it was a pain but most times I knew I had to really think about what I was learning and actually communicate it. It is a strategy I still employ in my teaching today. George was fantastic too, at helping us prepare for our presentations. He pleaded with us not to regurgitate the readings, the text, or to talk for a half hour – he wanted us to have fun with it. He negotiated two conditions: the first was that it needed to be engaging and interactive; the second was that we should end with three or four key ideas that everyone in the class could use to encourage further exploration of the issues. They weren’t just ideas though – he asked us to craft them as exam questions. I knew that the whole ‘let’s have fun’ with this mantra didn’t always work with students, particularly if they saw it is inauthentic or irrelevant. It could seem to some people a bit corny, silly or decontextualised – like a sleight on the intellectual status of the ideas we were grappling with. But for some reason – in this particular context – it worked really well. There was one in the style of a confessional TV show – sort of a bit like Oprah. They performed a very amusing mock interview with an ethnographer who was caught having ‘relations’ with one of the ‘natives’. In scholarly terms, we were exploring ideas around how the body becomes emersed in fieldwork and the dilemma of participant observation. George had given us an excerpt from Malinowski’s diaries. So, when he handed out bits of paper for feedback, I wrote the most I had ever done about what I had learned during the year. I was beginning to see some merit in why there was all this educational emphasis on developing student teachers into reflective practitioners. Dewey and Schon were starting to make sense to me.
My Education subjects were amongst the most profound yet the most problematic. At the end of my second year, I’d decided that high school teaching was in the end, not for me. I wanted to work in education, still with young people but I didn’t really know in what way. I remained firm in my desire for political engagement but my notion of politics had been dramatically opened out by the things I had been reading, writing and learning about. I became less and less confident that the schooling system I was headed towards could cater for the sort of ideas that were moving me intellectually. The student teachers I studied with were all so keen to get out into the classroom – to get an embodied experience of what it represents and to inhabit schooling as a complex institution. Most seemed to resent any suggestion that their teaching practice might benefit from being framed theoretically. Theory for them was highly suspect. It diverted their attention away from the constant work of practice. Teaching for them was about classroom management; the development of curriculum knowledge; addressing students’ individual needs and how to improve their performance. I wanted to know those things too but not just those things. In my head, they were political or theoretical issues as well. I was one of those students who began to see theory in everything. And when I saw it at work in the classroom and could name it as such, I wanted to talk about it, flesh it out, explore and trouble it. I had a preference for the foundation subjects in Education – philosophy and sociology mainly – areas that expressed a complicated vision of teaching and learning, and the work of schools. I enjoyed asking questions about the nature of education more than I wanted to actually be a high school teacher – plus, I used to always get sick before my placements – no doubt, anxiety and fear of failure. That year – third year, my body was telling me something was up.

At each of my practicums, I had done my best to adhere to all the proper lesson planning conventions – third year included. I could articulate a teaching and learning philosophy probably better than most neophyte teachers but this practicum was different. I was gutted when I read what my supervising teacher wrote in a classroom observation report:
Tai needs to learn to manage the behaviour of difficult students more efficiently. She has trouble asserting authority, cannot seem to set boundaries and lacks the skills to discipline students appropriately.

I knew classroom management wasn’t my forte so it really shouldn’t have been a surprise. The context was 9C Commerce. One of the teachers in the staffroom had warned me that this class had the worst boys in the school. It was intended I think as a helpful observation – one that would explain the inevitability of my failure. My supervising teacher asked me to read her report aloud and then invited me to self-assess my own behavioural management skills. Whether it was true that I had ‘trouble asserting authority’, or ‘lacked the skills to discipline students appropriately’ seemed to escape my attention at the time. I fumbled through it – all the while thinking to myself – I don’t want to teach this way – her way – yet she is charged with assessing my capabilities, my aptitude, my future worth as a teacher. This was not what I understood student-centred learning to mean. I wanted these students to know what it was like to really learn – the way I had with George that year. But perhaps my expectations of the Year 9 boys in my care were too great. Perhaps our personalities clashed – hers and mine, and our philosophies on schooling and education too different. And perhaps following that debriefing, I had assumed too quickly or rather too arrogantly that I had nothing to learn from her. Hindsight affords that kind of reflection. Nevertheless, throughout my time at this school, she shared with me her opinions about how teaching programs in universities needed to get back to the basics; that they were producing poor quality graduates like me who were so obviously lacking in subject content knowledge; a graduate who might be conversant in all the fashionable theories but who knew nothing of the real world of teaching. In her view, my inexperience positioned me as not having anything of merit to say about my learning to be a teacher. I was there to learn by mimicking her. She was my mirror and I was to follow her movements, her teacher subjectivity and impute it on to mine. When she whispered to me over playground duty during my last week that I should consider another profession, I had assumed she was referring to another. I remember my coffee mug slipped ever so slightly from my hand at exactly the moment I realised it was me to whom she was referring. At the time, I didn’t know what constituted an adequate response to her estimation of me, so I
found myself believing her – that whatever stuff I thought I had was actually not all that great. Her mentoring had the required effect of turning me away from the world of teaching. That year, she had only confirmed what my body had been trying to indicate to me all along.

My six-week placement the next year was a wonderfully challenging learning experience. My teaching spirit had been restored as a result of critical conversations with friends and academics, and I was fortunate enough to rediscover a passion for what the classroom could be and what schooling might do through a few hours of paid work in a literacy program for ‘at risk’ high school girls called Circuit Breaker. The school where my final practicum took place was itself a beehive of interesting teachers, brilliant extra curricula programs and energetic students – more akin to a vibrant village atmosphere than the oppressive institution I had imaginatively and falsely constructed the year before. I did well at this placement – very well. The sick feeling to which I had grown accustomed lessened over time and my body was responding in kind. I emersed myself in the culture of this village by asking lots of questions about why things were the way they were. This appears to be the way I go about learning. Lots and lots of questions – just letting them tumble out of me and trusting that they mean something. In fact, I took away with me a view that teaching and learning was about supporting students to find and explore the questions of interest to them – not my questions but their own questions. Luckily, my pedagogical curiosities were seen as a quirky form of inquisitiveness rather than the annoyance it might have become. It wasn’t all easy mind you – particularly with three very different supervising teachers: one who was very hands-on and expected possibly too much of me; another who was simply laissez-faire; and yet another who was frequently absent and seemed constantly pleased that my presence delivered her more free time. ‘I’ve seen you twice now Tai. I trust you know exactly what you’re doing,’ she would say by way of encouragement. I didn’t always know but in some ways, I was pleased to be relieved of her gaze. I was relatively free to experiment

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20 Circuit Breaker was a program funded by the NSW Department for Education and Training (NSWDET) to support the literacy and numeracy needs of high school students in years 9-10 who were identified to be in the ‘at risk’ category across the public schooling system. I was employed by the YWCA of Sydney as a tutor on this program in 1995 and from 1997-2000, as its Program Coordinator. It has since been re-modelled for vocational education and training and currently operates under the suite of programs run by NSWDET called Links to Learning. Further information about the YWCA Program is at [http://www.ywca-sydney.com.au](http://www.ywca-sydney.com.au).
with my teaching and I was warmly encouraged to notice its effects on the students I was growing to adore. I had worked hard to develop a positive rapport in all my classes and decided to experiment with obtaining student feedback as an additional gauge of both my and their learning.

When I communicated my intentions at the Tuesday afternoon departmental staff meeting, several of the more experienced teachers didn’t like it one bit. They told me that it might be alright for the seniors but that feedback from my Year 8 Geography class – a class that I wasn’t particularly enthusiastic about either, was plainly, not going to tell me anything of use. In fact, I would be lucky if they took it at all seriously. Moreover, it could set up a dangerous precedent since there was no need to formalise the feedback process when a quick chat with students had always been taken as an adequate enough measure of the quality of their learning. No survey was ever going to contest the nature of that special long-term teacher/student relationship. ‘It’s that these particular year 8s lack maturity Tai,’ the Head Teacher informed me as we strolled back to the staffroom from school assembly the following day. I suspected she was trying to temper the harsh response I had received. ‘They just don’t possess sufficiently developed metacognitive skills to accurately assess their own learning,’ she confirmed again as we drifted off to the mid-morning roll call. Against their warnings and following a telephone call to my university supervisor, I pushed ahead with it. Intuitively, it felt right and I wanted to test out some of the ideas from the research literature I had read on student feedback. My year 8s told me they thought it weird – what I was asking them to do – to complete this survey thing called a minute-paper. But a good many of their comments were actually quite astute. Some provided me with new and interesting ideas – some more sensible than others; two or three students suggested I was trying too hard; one student wanted to tell me that my newly shaved head made me look like a boy; and another had written of my tendency to use too many big words that I did not then go on to explain. This final comment resonated. I knew this already about my teaching. It had been made to me by a friend who’d first seen me in a micro-teaching context. It appeared that that aspect of my practice still needed some work. On the whole, I considered it a worthwhile experiment, sharing the results and my impressions at the next departmental gathering, as well as with a group of student teachers on placement in
different departments across the school. The five of us had taken the initiative to meet every second Friday with two different Head Teachers so that we could share our observations of the school, our classes, and our learning. It was a wonderful opportunity for me to continue to ask questions, to probe their rationales beyond the immediacy of the classroom. I knew that this school had a particularly good reputation for supporting its student teachers. But in spite of each of these little pleasures and small victories, this final experience of practice wasn’t enough to lure me away from my developing addiction to what I understood at the time was a thing called ‘theory’. bell hooks (1994) once wrote that she saw in theory a location for healing. I saw in theory a way of comprehending the questions I had about what education was still yet to think, and still yet to be. This was the work that seemed pressing to me.

At the beginning of second year, I was invited to join the Honours program in Education. I was enormously chuffed, particularly because I would be learning with academics whose theoretical works I had admired and had been devouring voraciously. I had developed an enormous respect for this one, particular academic – a scholar of some repute. I was riveted by his presence, command, and knowledge – but more especially, it was his generosity that struck me. And his body seemed to perform and convey that very same spirit. He didn’t seem to me to be the sort of teacher who was intent on dazzling us with tools or techniques that might be mistaken for an ‘act’ or ‘performance’. And although he probably carried with him a tacit set of ‘teaching strategies’, I was never able to pick them; to name them with any certainty; to read them against the taxonomies with which I was familiar in order that I might reproduce them for myself. It was his manner that I thought appealing about him, and that attracted me to his ideas. There was an authenticity in him, as Smith (2003) puts it, “a way of being with people that he [had] grown into” (p.489), over what seemed to be years of study and practice. This teacher was still, patient and willed in us a respect for the slowness of time. For him, time was the source of interesting questions. Now I suppose that this too could be argued as a kind of scholarly performance as well but while other teacher educators around me emphasised pedagogy as a form of facilitation, caught up in forms of doing – of activity and interactivity – and for good reason, I was attracted by his injunction to
engage with its tranquillity. Clearly, this was not the outcomes-based discourse I was accustomed to but it didn’t surprise me that the learner in me responded lovingly to it. In lectures, the ideas he introduced us to, were always open to debate and speculation. I still carry with me to this day, the way he framed what he was doing. He would often say – ‘see what you make of this’ or ‘let me just run this particular idea past you’ – as an attempt to invite us into a dialogue that signalled knowledge’s contingency. He seldom told us how things should be or what it was we ought to think. Some students in the course interpreted this as him shirking his responsibility to instruct us – to give us the information we needed to know in order to teach, to make us into better teachers. I never saw it that way nor did I see him or his intentions in that light. In seminars, he asked us to imagine ourselves in the situations and scenarios he evoked. He offered his own experiences up for collective reflection and invited us to critique them so that we could share our thoughts about what he might have done differently. He laughed with us when someone was trying too hard to be funny and was hard on us when we needed it too. But more importantly, he encouraged us to connect what we were learning to important questions about our lives and how we were going to be teachers and educators in a messy and uncertain context; a world where systems would break down; where students might not want to learn or could not afford to; where parents would challenge us; where colleagues would disappoint us; and where we would come to question the value of our efforts through sheer exhaustion. His peculiar sociological take on education, the questions he insisted we deal with, and his determination that we seek out and cherish our own questions made the course a difficult intellectual journey. It caused a great deal of worry amongst students. But it also mattered enormously to me. As I progressed through the honours program, I realised that in all my years of undergraduate study, he was one of the few people who had been patient enough to allow the questions I had to flourish. With him, the ideas I had began to find a voice and a community.

And so here I am, 10 years later in a position working with other academics to develop the practice, scholarship and professionalism of their teaching through encouraging them to think about student learning as an organising principle. I think constantly about my own teachers, of their habits, dispositions and idiosyncrasies. I reflect on the particularities of my own desires as a learner and its inevitable
influence on my practice as an academic developer. It’s not always orderly, tidy and measured – despite how much I might want it to be. Like most teachers I know, working theories, models and taxonomies regularly rise and fall. This makes me wonder about the kinds of learning experiences my colleagues bring to their identities as teachers, researchers and academics and the spaces we make available for a similar kind of remembering. What are the contradictions, complexities and ambiguities that lie dormant within their own views of their practice that I will never be able to access because ‘talk’ of this kind of learning is disavowed – perhaps even, the source of too much pain? Have they already developed too stoic representations of their teaching experiences, or perhaps they were just unremarkable? Is it my responsibility to seek out those experiences, care for them, respond to them, research them, take them up and challenge them anew? What happens if I struggle to find a connection with those who I am responsible for teaching and developing, and them with me? What if I find their views repulsive, repellent even, so much so that we cannot learn from each other? What is to be done? What if my training in developing a requisite care for Others, these regular academics, stops working? And how does the way my practice is framed – its institutional imperative for quality, measurement, its agenda of continuous improvement, its discourse of learning outcomes, the particularity of its research agendas, actually work to deny these unspoken aspects of learning? What have we lost (and gained) of ourselves and of our learning, in the rush to a particular kind of articulation? What, I wonder is all this work on student learning not showing me about learning?

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Student learning in the academic development project

A focus on the student, together with their experience of learning, is now central to any considered understanding of university teaching and learning. While the complexities and tensions produced by it are only just beginning to be fleshed out, it does seem the case that the student experience of learning is now foregrounded in discourses of university teaching and learning in ways that are clearly historically unprecedented. A good deal of this work can be attributed to the research produced
by academic developers, and to the renewed focus on teaching and learning as its
own form of scholarship (Boyer, 1990). Academics are now expected to inquire into
their teaching and students’ learning as a matter of course – more systematically and
reflexively as a marker of responsibility to new forms of professionalism (Nixon,
2001, 2003). As such, it no longer seems permissible to talk seriously or to engage in
scholarly conversation about teaching and learning without including students
themselves in discussions of appropriate pedagogy, or without making some
reference to the wealth of research literature about student learning from within the
field of higher education teaching and learning. As some writers have noted, in the
context of audit, quality assurance manoeuvring and institutional strategic planning,
the teacher who once proceeded solely by intuition alone, who made sense of their
teaching through the innocence and/or naiveté of an experiential craft knowledge
might now be said to be of a bygone era – displaced and encroached upon by the
increasing material demands of performativity (Ball, 2000, 2003). The renewed
institutional enthusiasm for the student learning experience and its playing out within
definitions of good and best practice is under the gaze of regulation, both for good
and ill according to McWilliam (1996).

For many university teachers, this scenario presents both opportunities and
dilemmas. Alongside the perhaps more usual celebratory narratives that document
the many gains and improvements to student learning outcomes, academics
themselves have taken to writing about the teaching and learning encounter. In some
cases, these narratives translate into a literature that attempts to both question and
theorise the consequence of an uncritical focus on student learning within broader
efforts to reframe the work of universities more generally. A number of accounts of
teaching bear this problem and anxiety out more fully (Barcan, 1996; Parker, 2003;
Notwithstanding the elevation of the student as customer or consumer, market and
economic discourses work to reframe the ways in which accounts of their learning
are made available as research-able and tell-able. In attempting to account for the
status of the sociology of education and to make a case for the sociology of higher
education – sociologically, Rosemary Deem (2004) makes the following observation
regarding teaching and learning in higher education – in the UK scene.
Much less attention has been paid to learning and teaching, a field largely captured by psychologists, learning technology specialists and educational developers, many of whom seem more concerned to focus on the perceived failings and inadequacies of teachers (Hativa & Goodyear, 2002), or on how higher education teachers facilitate key skills in students, rather than examining the social relations of higher education, university classrooms and laboratories (p.35).

Further, Deem cites work by Abbas & McLean – research that reports on a funded study designed to better support the needs of part-time teachers of sociology in the UK. Deem argues that “[i]n such projects, any research conducted must be secondary to the development purpose” (p.36). What Abbas & McLean concluded from their work was the following, and it is worth quoting at length:

It was assumed in our project that we could produce deliverables that would lead to part-time teachers of sociology being supported more effectively. Once researchers are engaged in this type of developmental work the onus is on them to prove success in terms of outcomes if they wish to be funded in the future. We are sure the project did have some successes, however, in our view the major findings related to the impossibility of supporting part-time teachers fully and effectively given the current context (McLean & Abbas in Deem, 2004, p.37).

These might be the sort of unintended effects of the imperative to focus on student learning.

So it might be said that the work of university teaching and learning now exists in a time where learner-centred pedagogies inhabit the normative educational terrain. At the very least, such pedagogies hold the means to contemporary definitions of propriety. Although more recent work has sought to uncover the nuance in the experience of university teaching (McKenzie, 2003; Åkerlind, 2003, 2004) – both in terms of adding new dimensions of variation; teacher-centred pedagogies continue to
invoke suspicion, and at its most severe can suffer from accusations of un scholarliness. There are still limits to leaving the work of teaching unattended to, or to relying wholly on the truth assertions of teaching as professional craft knowledge. These days, it is clearly not the preferred pedagogical model for bringing students into a relation with complex understandings consistent with the outcomes of a university education. Interestingly, much of the research that lays claim to a focus on the student learning experience seems to me to have created an almost paradoxical effect. While it works to trouble versions of a particular kind of teacher — that egocentric, content-oriented and transmission preoccupied teacher, toward one that sees teaching as a focus on student learning — a teacher who is perhaps reflective, committed to the prospect of learning through ongoing inquiry and self-examination, and one who can draw on research to inform their practice, the focus also draws attention to what is unspeakable about learning. Since student learning now constitutes the favoured technology to which academics are encouraged to adhere, it also holds within it the central measures of effective or excellence in teaching. In part, these moves mark the domain of the professional university teacher. It also appears to be the hallmark of a quality institution. This is the university that self-consciously organises itself for learning (Bowden & Marton, 1998; Biggs, 2001), who knows it, and with evidence, can claim it.

The technologies and languages through which academic developers have worked to make possible student learning — those such as learner-centred, student-centred (Ramsden, 1992, 2003), student-focused (Prosser & Trigwell, 1999) and even user/client-focused versions focused on quality, each limit particular kinds of enactments of, or encounters with, what is possible to think about teaching and learning and what constitutes its progression. They operate as narratives that contribute to a collective understanding of the idea of learning as well as providing an avenue for effort — a way of looking, seeing and doing the work that must be done. As a result, developers are schooled at holding up a portrait of the successful student. It is a student who approaches their learning deeply, with an intention to

21 There could be an assumption that the criteria for teaching excellence be typified in the institutional and national awards for university teaching, although this is a position that some hold to be problematic, see for example Kirkpatrick & Thorpe (2000). In Australia, a central awards scheme (the Australian Awards for University Teaching) is administered by the Carrick Institute for Learning and Teaching in Higher Education. Further information at http://www.carrickinstitute.edu.au/carrick/go/saut
understand, who can move in and out of atomistic and holistic forms of understanding and is eager to be transformed by it so that some aspect of their experience of the world is inexorably changed. University teaching then, must be organised so that this very student can come into being.

First and foremost, the academic development project is predicated on a commitment to enhancing learning. There is virtually universal regard for the notion that the efforts of academic development work, at whatever level of its operation is essentially about holding up care for the student experience of learning. It might now be seen as some proper corrective to an historical neglect that has focused for too long on the performance of teachers as an appropriate measure for claiming quality learning. While the variation in the organisation of academic development units and activities has been noted for some time (Johnston, 1997; Gosling, 1996; Land, 2004), academic developers carry an institutional responsibility to systematically attend to students’ learning experiences. It is a mandate that attempts to go beyond the learning of subject matter – whatever its disciplinary and professional forms of knowledge, to the development of attitudes, stances or dispositions. The academic development project then also extends to a view of the institution itself. Biggs (2001) has written about this idea as the ‘reflective institution’. A good many academic developers I have come across in my work are fully committed pedagogically to the principle that university teaching ought to be informed by systematic research into students’ experience of their learning. There is a good deal of general (Ramsden, 2003; Prosser & Trigwell, 1999; Biggs, 1999) and disciplinary specific literature – for example, in accounting (Lucas & Mladenovic, 2004; Leveson, 2004); biology (McCune & Hounsell, 2005); mathematics (Crawford, Gordon, Nicholas & Prosser, 1999); physics (Prosser & Millar, 1989) that supplies the scholarly grounds for doing so. That the focus is on the student – their experiences, conceptions and understandings of the system and environments in which they learn, hardly seems in dispute amongst developers. Even those who proffer a more critical reading of teaching and learning development (Rowland, 2001a; Mann, 2001; Haggis, 2003) would be hard pressed to argue against its openings. In part, the focus on student learning is what gives meaning and purpose to the academic development community, together with a cogency to its project. Students’ understanding of their
learning experiences ought to figure somewhere in the ways academics make sense of their teaching because the endeavour itself is intended to affect some transformation in students' understanding of themselves and their subsequent engagements with the world.

The challenge for university teachers I suspect is often in what constitutes an appropriate rationale for turning to the student and a consideration of the weight that it carries academics' teaching and curriculum decision-making. This has been precisely the work of academic development to date. It seeks to present a coherent and scholarly argument for the outcomes of students being actively engaged in their learning; the inquiry work university teachers might do to bring that about; and how universities might organise themselves to that end.

Both the variety in nomenclature and meanings attributed to 'student-centred learning' or 'student-focused learning' (Prosser & Trigwell, 1999) bear witness to it assuming different kinds of practical manifestations and very different effects for the way academic developers perform their work. For some scholars, student-centred learning is itself the mark of appropriate pedagogy for higher education - although it can no longer be allowed to be an empty claim. It must be supported by particular kinds of action - and evidenced through an appropriate notion of scholarship. In some cases, there is a focus on aspects of curriculum design and organisation, and the associated structures and activities for engagement. Yet in others, the starting point is in supporting students to unpack their sense of themselves as learners. It is to invite students to reflect on themselves as learners, presumably in order to change or consolidate upon strategies for success. Lea, Stephenson & Troy (2003) characterise it thus:

... student-centred learning embodies the following tenets: reliance upon active rather than passive learning, an emphasis on deep learning and understanding, increased responsibility and accountability on the part of the student, an increased sense of autonomy in the learner, an interdependence between teacher and learning (as opposed to complete learner dependence or independence), mutual respect within the learner-teacher relationship, and a
reflexive approach to the learning and teaching process on the part of both teacher and learning (p.322).

These elements are not particularly surprising. Some are values which describe the nature of the pedagogical relationship; others characterise what might be classroom processes; and yet others still, illustrate the potential outcomes for enhancing the learning of both students and teachers. Hitendra Pillay (2002, p.93) draws out student-centred learning’s more common implication – that “it considers learners’ needs to be central to the design and delivery of instruction”. In her view, the important point to grasp here is that learners are different; they hold different conceptions of knowledge, learning and their relation; that learning can and does mean many different things depending on context, and that this is the necessary information for the proper design of student-centred learning programs. Similarly, in a paper written as a dialogue between two educators (Bates and Rowland, 1998, p.5) tussling over the meaning of student-centred learning in an explicitly politicised higher education context, Rowland argues that it is a stance “which places students’ meanings at the centre of the curriculum” (p.5). For him, it is to “affirm a set of values rather than to believe that a certain technique or set of techniques are the most efficient means of teaching” (p.7). These values are framed around the recognition of students’ personal experience and a move toward student control and ultimately, autonomy. Inge Bates however, warns “that the fashion for student-centredness has floated back on a tide of economic, political, social and educational circumstances” (p.6). Her point is that student-centredness is liable to lose its pedagogical potency when viewed in the context of larger market structural reform. Bates is suspicious of a student-centredness that centres primarily on ‘method’; together with it upholding any heroic notion of ‘experience’ that does not recognise its own location or constructed-ness. Concerned with how this might then become framed within an apolitical curriculum, she argues a strong case for connecting the student learning experience to a critical and socially responsible educational problematic. Rowland suggests that this is a tension that manifests from,

... contradictory sets of criteria upon which we base our teaching: the one concerned to work within students’ frameworks of meaning, the other
concerned to move the students beyond that framework or, at least, to develop an awareness of other frameworks (Rowland & Bates, 1988, p.16).

Thus, the need to see and experience ‘variation’ is one way of describing how to reconcile competing views of student learning.

The phenomenographic tradition which has spawned much of the justificatory scholarly work for a focus on student learning in the context of the academic development project – with its empirical investigations of students’ approaches to learning and studying (Marton & Säljö, 1984; Biggs, 1987), students’ conceptions of learning (Marton & Säljö, 1976; Säljö, 1979; Marton, Beaty & Dall’Alba, 1993), its relation to teachers’ conceptions of and approaches to teaching (Trigwell & Prosser, 1996; Trigwell, Prosser & Waterhouse, 1999), together with their subject matter (Martin, Prosser, Trigwell, Ramsden & Benjamin, 2000) – and with its attendant references to learning outcomes, assessment, teaching and learning activities, and perceptions of context and the more recent focus on learning environments, has over time come to dominate the landscape of university teaching and learning research. The strength and resonance of this work has been its reach across a range of disciplinary communities, and the migration of its international reputation through comparable empirical studies. As Peter Kandlbinder (2004) argues, because these early studies were carried out with university students themselves, about their learning and meaning-making in-situ, the phenomenographic tradition came to distinguish itself as the distinctive research method for exploring teaching and learning in university settings in ways that designated its difference from school-based contexts.

Much of this work can be captured by the ‘relational model’ – a model designed to showcase the experience of ‘variation’ – that in my context is evidenced in the work of Ramsden (2003), Biggs, (1999) and Prosser & Trigwell (1999). Effectively, the model attempts to move beyond an explanation of learning being situated primarily within the psychology and past experiences of individual students (ie. student characteristics or presage), or teaching as a set of strategies to be enacted upon the learner in the classroom. Instead, teaching and learning is located in a system where
a number of elements that constitute the preparation, the teaching and learning encounter and the outcome are in constant interaction. It is the students’ experiences and perceptions of these elements (assessment, learning outcomes, teaching and learning activities and context) that determine in part, the ways in which they approach their learning. Moreover, it is a deep approach to learning, characterised by a student’s intention to understand meaning and to bring themselves personally to it so that it transforms some aspect of their engagement with the world (Prosser & Trigwell, 1999), rather than a surface one typified by an intention towards reproduction towards a final goal and a disconnected view of their learning, that is in this model, preferable for attaining the learning outcomes of higher education. This systemic interaction is the key to curriculum planning, development and teaching and learning improvement. In this model, academics are offered a clear sense of where in the curriculum process they can intervene and how to do so – and to identify aspects of the learning environment more generally that help make it possible. And with the current focus on the strategic planning of teaching and learning (Gibbs, 2005), and with discourses of appropriate institutional and individual leadership now taking hold (Taylor, 2005, Blackmore & Wilson, 2005; Fraser, 2005; Ramsden, 1998), the student learning gaze also draws attention to the ways in which disciplinary, department and faculty structures must also subject themselves to constant reorganisation. If the point of all this work is to encourage students to adopt a deep approach to learning, then the curriculum and context must be reorganised to bring it about it. This is a curriculum that emphasises clear goals and standards; that encourages active and long-term engagement with learning; that holds personal relevance and meaning for students; and that contains an assessment strategy which provides students with an opportunity to demonstrate their learning (Ramsden, 2003). In this scenario, teaching and learning comes to be something that can be measured, enhanced, made better, and ultimately in this vocabulary, more complete (Bowden & Marton, 1998). Unlike learning styles, which “are seen as stable aspects of the individual’s personality” (Cuthbert, 2005, p.238), it is feasible that a student who adopts a surface approach in relation to one learning task has the capacity to adopt a deep approach in another. And so both teaching and learning exist in a context and relation where some manipulation is possible and where there are possible factors that can be worked on that predict or suggest a likely learning
outcome. It is a model that showcases practical improvement, and that assumes improvement is possible. It is also a model in danger of forgetting that its work must also be about continuing to argue for itself – and its increasing hegemony in the context of a world filled with supercomplexity.

Towards new representations of student learning

Academic developers often perform the work of bringing this particular research about student learning to light; introducing it to those in our university communities through more formal courses and programs – and in my context through strategic working groups. On occasion, some of this work is problematised by the participants in our groups – those regular academics who might often be suspicious of its research-basis and wonder about the detail and trustworthiness of the findings. In my own teaching, this research has been both a revelation for some while being accused by others – as too simple. For some developers, precisely ‘how’ we focus on the student experience of learning is no longer a problematic that warrants much discussion. That we do is simply enough. There already appears to be an adequate enough language to describe it, a reliable research enterprise that can inform and guide the academic development project – one that has proven its mettle time and time again. Although the higher education sector is having to respond to unfathomable sorts of interventions, and the knowledge production work of universities is radically altered as a result, the core ideas of teaching and learning development remains relatively uncontested in my context. It is not that these forms of contest do not exist or circulate amongst developers. Rather, it is that these interventions struggle to penetrate a long history and tradition of research that supports a concise, confident and a perception that there is a ‘certain’ development trajectory and improvement agenda for teaching and learning change. There are narratives of student learning available that make visible its conceptual difficulty and that offer sophisticated accounts of learning for the academic development project. For example, Rowland (2001a), Webb (1997) and Haggis (2003) have each written about the seeming unchallengeability of the work on approaches to learning and the need for more critical conversations. Kandlbinder (2004) too, has argued that the methodological basis of phenomenography lies in a form of linguistic behaviourism.
Much of this work is not a challenge to the focus on student learning itself. Taken together, they function to open up what can be thought, read, researched, represented and communicated about it. But this is difficult work as Lee (2005) maintains. She argues that

[...]he pragmatics of the institutional conditions under which Academic Development work is often carried out are such that criteria such as intelligibility and applicability for change strategies particularly within the more entrenched ‘transmission or collection code’ pedagogies take precedence in the short term over conceptual adequacy. [...] It offers an empirical project, readily identifiable across disciplinary boundaries, it is suggested, a ‘framework’ through which to construe change strategies to overcome the trial and error which often marks academics attempts at their own teaching without outside advice (p.42).

Moreover, there is only a nascent culture of reflexivity – or at least one that carries doubt, provocation and challenge easily, as virtues to be encouraged and as risks to be taken in the venture to differently narrativise student learning. Since regular academics have taken to writing about the problematic of student learning, some of the more interesting and risky work emanates from outside the improvement imperative – often focused on relations of pedagogy, identity and bodies. One example is Elspeth Probyn’s (2004) work on bodies and affect – both students’ and teachers’ – as they play out and circulate as working and learning bodies in and beyond the classroom. As a teacher of media, gender and cultural studies, it is a dynamic she describes in the following way:

[w]e (teachers) may often teach potentially ‘messy’ topics like embodiment or sexual identity. At the same time the zone of contact between student and teacher is heavily policed by ourselves and our institutions. So while we offer material that potentially sets off lines of flight, we then have to continually re-territorialize the very bodies that have been set in motion through our teaching (p.35).
Notwithstanding the subject matter, Probyn’s work and others like it from different fields (Estola & Elbaz-Luwisch, 2003; Star Johnson, 2005; Gustafson, 1999; Johnson, 1997; Kapitzke, 1998; Bartlett & Mercer, 2001; Simon, 1992) point to the question of how narratives of these kinds come to be excluded, dismissed or made irrelevant from the knowledge concerns, domains, and sites of change in which academic developers labour. Indeed, there may be too much at stake for academic developers to take up projects like these. Since the fidelity to the tradition of student learning research provides the development project both with a secure sense of its professional identity and its designation from others; it simultaneously delimits the possibilities it can imagine for itself and for enabling complicated stories of student learning to be folded into its own narrative. The potential danger as I see it being played out is that the models, theories and taxonomies of learning used by developers in their work with others becomes unproblematically reproduced in different disciplinary contexts in ways that continue a homogeneous reproduction of the student learning experience itself. Deem (2004) calls for complex ethnographies of learning that connect matters of experience to larger sociological structures. Lee (2005) argues that the continual isolation of Education from Higher Education – both institutionally and as fields of study and practice has had deleterious effects for generating more sophisticated accounts of teaching, learning and curricula. Manathunga (2004, 2005a) has drawn on postcolonial theorising to unpack the complex movement of teaching and learning ideas from the field of higher education to other disciplines. David Mills & Mary Taylor Huber (2005) do the same drawing on perspectives in anthropology - and in particular on the notion of exchange within an interdisciplinary trading zone. And yet, there is persistent tension that emerges for me and it is this: how we ourselves move toward more explicit variation – to that place and space where creating and adding different narratives can extend both individual and institutional representations of learning in higher education as contributing to the complex work of cultural change. I see that spirit as encompassing a form of academic developer professionalism much like the one Jon Nixon (2001) describes, where he argues the need for a moral language to frame a new sort of academic professionalism. He suggests that this language would require
... [I]ooking beyond its own professional and institutional interests, [...] [to] take a critical look at those interests and at the moral and political assumptions that underpin them. It must in short be both oppositional and self-critical. Moreover, that particular conjunction will be a difficult one to achieve, since the politics of opposition requires a sense of solidarity (commonality) while the politics of self criticality requires a keen awareness of identity (difference). [...] What is required is an institutional repositioning whereby academic professionalism turns its critical gaze both inwards (towards its own moral bases) and outwards (toward its public horizons) (p.180).

Nixon forwards a number of institutional reconstructions that are helpful here. Clustered around a reconceptualisation of research, the reintegration of professional development to within academic structures, a redrawning of the boundaries of academic collegiality toward ethics and mutual responsibility – each of these offer a reassessment of how we might come into a new relation with students’ experience of learning. I am particularly interested in the way Nixon continues to argue a central place for research – a “research-active” notion, of which he says: “a more inclusive and differentiated notion of research needs to be developed and articulated: in short, modes of empirical enquiry and reflexive theorising that currently fall outside the conventional categories urgently require recognition” (pp. 180-181). In this configuration, it also means “redefining the parameters of what counts as research within their own fields” (p.181). I am excited by the prospect of this shift to a moral basis for research and what it might offer in terms of the necessity for new and different student learning narratives. What ideas might frame these narratives? It is to this work that I now turn. I explore the ways a focus on bodies can unearth complex questions of identity and pedagogy. I suggest that this focus can extend the speculative work of the academic development project.

**Critical narratives: returning the body to an account of learning**

It is not as though bodies have ever really left, or can ever really leave the teaching and learning encounter. My own account of remembering student learning draws attention to the complex world that bodies inhabit. I wrote about feelings of desire
and disappointment and their effects on my learning. I wrote about the ways that bodies show us our limits; that they let us down when we least expect it and that we experience its pleasure when aspects of the learning encounter 'go well'. I signalled the ways we notice the bodies of others and the effect of those observations upon our selves. These are unusual narratives to make known. The minuitia of bodies is an absent discourse in the work of academic development. But if as Terry Eagleton (in O'Loughlin, 1998, p.288) suggests that "we think as we do because of the sorts of bodies we have and the sorts of complex relation with reality which this entails; [that it] is the body rather than the mind which interprets the world, chops it into manageable chunks and assigns it approximate meanings" then what might this mean for the scholarship of academic development project?

Paying attention to the realm of bodies in higher education might seem unusual to the sort of teaching and learning work that takes the imperative to improve as its starting point. The focus itself might be particularly prone to suspicion since the narrative which governs learning bodies is often set around a specific relation between teachers and students located within an account of inappropriate desire. There are a number of well documented cases that confront the dynamic of this difficulty (Pybus, 1993; Garner, 1995; Gallop, 1993). A focus on this sort of sexual predator teacher body plays out a familiar view of the nexus between knowledge, power and desire that is also commensurate with both the master/apprentice and transmission views of teaching and learning. Even so, there is now a good deal of literature which showcases the productive and communicative capacities of bodies for the educational project (McWilliam & Jones, 1996; O'Loughlin, 1998; Bartlett, 1998; Satina & Hultgren, 2001) so that reading bodies differently into education – and higher education in new ways, means that other and different questions are liable to unfold.

I want to signal how some of this might manifest as narratives that make more complex, an engagement with what it is that is represented in and about the experience of student learning. While the turn to the body has generated much exciting and critical scholarship across a range of different fields - sociology, gender and cultural studies in the particular (Csordas, 1994; Turner, 1996; Witz, 2000; Howson & Inglis, 2001), if academic developers notice it all, it tends to be that
discursive and immaterial body – and as Robyn Longhurst (2001) notes – not the body that breaks spatial and surface boundaries. The discursive body is one where we read the play of signs and signification so that the inappropriate body is contained. Writing of the need to reinstate the corporeal body in the context of geography as a form for breaking disciplinary boundaries, Longhurst comments:

[t]here is little in the discipline that attests to runny, gaseous, flowing, watery nature of bodies. The messy surfaces/depths of bodies, their insecure boundaries, the fluids that leap and seek from them, that which they engulf, the insides and outsides that sometimes collapse into each other remain invisible in the geographical canon. When geographers speak of the body they still often fail to talk about a body that breaks its boundaries – urinates, bleeds, vomits, farts, engulfs tampons, objects of sexual desire, ejaculates and gives birth (p.23).

The same might be said of the study of teaching and learning in higher education. Indeed, it is difficult to write of these aspects when there is really no tradition of doing so within the academic development project. Given that there is also a long history of denying the specificity of the body within the academy (see Barcan, 1996 for a useful summary) – particularly that working and mundane body – the one that moves from place to place across the university; the one that labours for hours and can become unwell as a result; the one that feels bored or unproductive in meetings; and that experiences pain when receiving uncomplimentary feedback from students, there is still a sense of propriety around what can be spoken about as learning. In fact, disciplines do the work of disciplining how, whether, and what sort of body comes into view at all. It can hardly be a surprise then that although disciplines require bodies to work them into debate, contest and resistance; the presentation, status and success of that work often relies on the fabrication of a disembodied knowledge worker. In terms of the academic development project, when students are invited to describe the way they bring themselves to learning, the frameworks used to research and study the process have so far been concerned with understandings of particular kinds of subject matter or learning tasks. And so there is the focus – developing students’ understanding of learning in relation to disciplinary knowledge.
The concern to hold up variation in this research tends to conceal the individual particularities of learning stories. I do not want to refute the importance of this work in the particular, but I do want to ask whether this tradition has relied too much on the ideal of a disembodied learner – one that must deny that the body contributes anything at all to the understanding of the subject matter even though it is through our bodies that its frustration, difficulty, joy and pleasure is profoundly experienced. My own narrative of remembering has taught me the importance of experiencing the learning body in all its difficult manifestations.

It may also be as Lee & Williams (1999) describe – that these dimensions – bodily dimensions are construed as forms of ‘noise’ within particular kinds of technologies and systems which organise the learning encounter. These may well be systems that do not know how to handle a focus on bodies and so by necessity, effaces it or at the very least, contains and minimises it so as not to spill over into the learning project proper. It is beyond the scope of this thesis to comprehensively survey the vast literature on how the turn to the body has come about or indeed, its various representations in terms of a social, theoretical or philosophical project. Rather, I want to take up a more humble agenda which suggests foremost that putting ‘bodies’ (both discursive and corporeal) more explicitly on the map of the academic development project opens a space for imagining what might said about learning. It is simply to begin a conversation about what else academic developers might notice if they engage in a struggle to consider the body’s complex relation to learning and in so doing, begin to unpack the limitations in how present discourses make learning think-able and experience-able.

**Bodies at work in the classroom**

Bodies are clearly present in our classrooms (even in our online ones, although perhaps in different configurations, with different intentions and effects) and in our interactions with colleagues and students across the university campus. There is always a teacher’s body and a learner’s body (or a set of learners’ bodies in a common space) acting and communicating with, off and against each other – in order for the academic development encounter to work. Crudely put, somebody is always
responsible for doing the developing and somebody is always being developed. Even as we become more expert at talking about systems, policies and structures - and even relegating our decisions to them as acts of responsibilisation, it is the working body that must think them into being, and enact them into place.

In fact, it is the bodies of academics – the students I teach – that I first notice. As they trickle into the sessions one by one or sometimes in groups – laughing and joking or more often looking tired and worn, I might notice a number of physical characteristics – and if they change over time, it might lead me to tentative sorts of conclusions that can and do have an array of pedagogical effects. There is the shape and size of bodies – their physicality too (he seems awfully skinny, I wonder if he’s eaten today. I should organise some lunch before the session – food always sets a relaxed environment for learning); raced bodies (maybe she’s Chinese or Malaysian – I need to get that right. Perhaps she’ll notice the cultural particularities of the ideas about teaching and learning on offer. I really should photocopy that Biggs chapter on the Paradox of the Chinese Learner for her – she might enjoy it); the age of bodies (our philosophy tutors seem really young this year. I ought to make sure that I don’t assume that the teacher identity I talk about is always full-time tenured because the issues involved in the casualisation and part-time academic labour are very real); gendered bodies (I should get the Pro-Vice-Chancellor Teaching and Learning22 into the session to demonstrate to the group that this university promotes women to senior management positions) and sometimes, pregnant and parental bodies (of course it’s ok that you bring your small child to the last hour of the session. I’d much prefer that than you missing it because you can’t find childcare on such short notice; or, I wonder if we need to break this session up more to allow her adequate time for breastfeeding). I have come to observe too, that these same students often notice and comment on my body too. Whether I look weary or seem sluggish on a particular day seems to matter to them. One colleague from herbal medicine asked me recently if I had lost weight and from that, assumed that something was wrong. She hugged me at morning tea and then proceeded to provide me with a three minute shoulder massage.

22 In my university, the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Teaching and Learning) is a woman. The opposite of course, does not necessarily follow. I have often caught myself out thinking that there is no similar appeal to showcase a male PVC T&L because he is man – rather, it is because of the position. The trouble and effects of this logic has been the subject of much feminist philosophy and theorising (see for instance – Gatens, 1991; Lloyd, 1983; Bordo, 1988; 1992).
After some initial unease, I relaxed into it, but I simultaneously worried that I was enjoying it too much. Would my showing bodily pleasure be a signal of transgressing the boundaries of professionalism? The colleague with whom I teach has a habit of scratching a particular spot on his head for long periods while standing at the overhead projector, talking to the group. He is unaware of it - and particularly that some in the group have noticed it too. Recently, another of my students asked me about my background. This ended up playing out in an amusing exchange that we still joke about when we see each other: ‘What’s your cultural background Tai?’ ‘Born in NZ, parents are Samoan.’ ‘Oh, my husband’s from Tonga. I told him that I thought you were Tongan.’ ‘Nooooo,’ I said. ‘Ask him if he knows that the Samoans used to eat the Tongans.’ The sound of her hearty laughter at my comment is something that I will always recall with affection. In fact, it is the reverse which is true – so, the story goes. And with bodies, there is always the regulation and monitoring of our own through matters of deportment, fashioning and refashioning. Our bodies – how they look; what we wear and don’t wear; whether we need to excuse ourselves to run to the bathroom at inopportune moments or when they are broken and not working at their capacity – these all signal messages, sometimes intended but often unintended to those whom we learn with. I was reminded of this recently when I read over the evaluation forms from a semester of my teaching. Someone wrote that they thought a pair of trousers my colleague wore, were cool and groovy. We both read that and spiralled into chuckles. I also wonder sometimes if there is any coincidence in the fact that a good deal of these interactions have been with other women. There is clearly more to be thought through here about the materiality of sorts of bodies that matter.

In many cases, the assumptions about my students’ learning that I have arrived at through taking notice of their bodies, of trying to read them pedagogically, have often been very wrong ones. I think this is standard fare when we examine it carefully: bodies move; they are communicative and they act in fluid and contradictory ways. The pedagogical effects I attribute as a teacher to the bodies of those whom I teach and the way they learn are very often imagined, or imaginary in the way Moira Gatens (1996, p.viii) puts it referring to “those images, symbols, metaphors and representations which help construct various forms of subjectivity.
[...] those ready-made images and symbols through which we make sense of social bodies and which determine, in part, their value, their status and what will be deemed their appropriate treatment”. So in this circumstance, the way a body looks or appears is not necessarily the same way a body performs, or indeed wants to. And it performs differently according to different sorts of relations and configurations that are made possible when teachers and learners come together to learn and be with each other. Drawing on the work of philosophers Deleuze and Spinoza, Probyn (2004) describes the unpredictability of learning bodies in space and time in the following way.

The body here is not a monolithic entity, it is composed of an infinite number of particles, continually arranged and re-arranged in relations of speed and slowness. Crucially, ‘a body affects other bodies, or is affected by other bodies; it is this capacity for affecting and being affected that also defines a body in its individuality’ (Deleuze, 1992:625). [...] Applied to the classroom as assemblage many things make sense. ‘You do not know beforehand what a body or mind can do, in a given encounter, a given arrangement, a given combination’ (1992:628). How better to explain that always quirky, always unknowable combination that is the classroom? Why is it, we ask either in elation or depression, that the same material will work so differently in different situations? The magic or chemistry that seems so elusive to any systematization may well be the necessary result of the moving arrangement of particles, histories and affects that are the bodies of teaching and learning (p.37).

To focus on bodies in this way is also to make the teaching and learning relation unpredictable. In David Lusted’s terms (1986, p.2), it is a move to pedagogy;

[which is] important since as a concept, it draws attention to the process through which knowledge is produced. Pedagogy addresses the ‘how’ questions involved not only in the transmission or reproduction of knowledge but also in its production. Indeed, it enables us to question the validity of
separating these activities so easily by asking under what conditions and through what means we ‘come to know’ (p.2).

This is an important issue for the project of academic development; ‘how we come to know’. It is a question that surfaces when the encounter with learning becomes subject to alternative sorts of readings. It is also a question that reminds us to attend to the narratives which lend the academic development project, a coherence and credibility. In this chapter, I have raised this question in relation to the availability of ideas about learning that circulate within the academic development project. I have sought to argue a place for different kinds of narratives of learning; different ways in which they might be produced; and to ask how they might feature as part of the way in which the academic development project understands itself and the work it performs. What might it mean for the project of academic development to open itself up to a focus on bodies; to include in its ideas of learning some recognition of the role that bodies play; or to express learning as a ‘knowing’ through the body? I think there are openings to this sort of exercise that could usefully add to the discourses of student learning that circulate amongst academic developers. It is certainly the kind of knowing and being that Barnett (2004a) urges us to consider as a result of the conditions which characterise supercomplexity.

In the next chapter, the final chapter, I ask: what has been the work of this thesis?
Chapter 6

The difficulty of closing an opening: framing academic development as a hybrid encounter

Learning may be released by a teacher but it can never be conferred - for it is not an object so much as a particular cast of mind, a creative and critical orientation towards experience. The student has to learn to become the protagonist of his or her own learning. This means that in the teaching of any intellectual or artistic discipline there must be open structures - gaps for the unknown, gaps for reflection, gaps for revision, gaps for contemplation, gaps for questions, gaps for the imagination, gaps for the Socratic  elenchus - gaps which constantly invite, provoke, and support the deep self-involvement of the student (Abbs, 1997, p.132).

Above, Peter Abbs (1997) writes specifically about the necessary political and cultural work of an aesthetic education. I found his chapter towards the very end of my thesis journey. It seemed to me, to encapsulate some of what I had been trying to say about the academic development project and why I was having such difficulty trying to close off, make neat and resolve all the gaps that I had fought so hard to identify - all those spaces and conversations that I had been so keen to open up in the first instance. Following Abbs’ (1997) conceptualisation of the student, I wanted to make for myself, a critical interpretation of my experience as an academic developer. I have realised that this thesis is an expression of precisely those gaps. It performs the work of desire, recognition and fear simultaneously. In the morning after all, there is still the academic development project as it exists in its pragmatic reality. And I still have to find a place in which to labour – even as I continue on with the work of imagining how the academic development project might be different, and otherwise. That is the struggle of this thesis.

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I thought I could write a thesis that I would be able to close with ease; where I could signal with a scholarly sort of confidence what it is that the academic development project ought to be about; to provide a vision of it and to identify my own contribution it. I wanted this thesis to reach for a reorientation of the academic development project; to shift the terrain in how we think about what it is capable of doing and being. I believe this thesis has gone some way to joining those discussions already in the literature that have gestured towards the academic development project needing to be different, or those wanting to gently nudge it in new directions so that it might perhaps perform unsettling work too (Rowland, 2002; Clegg et al., 2004; Land, 2001, 2004); work that at the very least, maintains an open disposition to the very idea of the academic development project itself. In my own small way, I have extended upon those conversations started in earnest and with difficulty, by others. The difficulty of closing an opening, as the title of this chapter suggests, represents a dilemma that not only travels across the thesis itself but inhabits its very essence. And the dilemma is this: while I have been concerned to open up spaces; to ask questions and perhaps to ask them differently; and while this has been a thesis prone to encouraging fancy and imagination; as I have thought more and written more about academic development, and about my identity and my role in it; the project itself has become more and more slippery. As I have amassed experiences upon which to critically reflect; as I have revised my practice as a result; as I have offered arguments and narratives that have sought to re-territorialise notions of research, learning and becoming within the academic development project; and as I have written about those processes in this thesis, the security with which I gaze on the project itself has fallen. And not only that – what I offer to those ‘Others’ with whom I work, is becoming undone. Amid all the opening up and all the work of imagining it, the academic development project has become increasingly and worryingly insubstantial. That is to say, what I have desired in this thesis for the project of academic development can only ever be realised in part. It is that ‘in-part’ or ‘in-between’ space, or the ‘gap’ as Abbs (1997) names it, that I want to turn my attention to in this final chapter. I reframe it slightly by suggesting that the project of academic development be seen as a hybrid encounter, where a thesis such as this one, be seen

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23 I want to acknowledge and thank my CAD Collective colleague Barbara Grant for naming with such poetic precision, the elegiac-like qualities of this idea.
as an outcome of that very problematic. If this is work to be done, then I offer it in the spirit of what Hall (1992) has called a temporary settlement. Let me begin first, by refreshing the journey of the thesis itself.

Without a doubt, this has been a thesis with more questions than answers. In part, this is the very spirit I wanted to convey since asking questions, letting them spill out of me is the way I learn. While easy answers are not always forthcoming and has never really been my forté, questions with few answers also leave me in a place of enormous loss and grieving; a place that contains an uneasy energy. In Chapter 2 *What is the work of academic development? A neophyte developer in conversation*, I sought to unearth the tensions which have surfaced as a result of my own practice. I described how they manifest and circulate, but also how they are, and must be in constant negotiation with the institutional context within which the project of academic development is located. In many ways, it is the institutional context which gives the project of academic development its purpose and meaning. It is also that context which makes the work itself visible and available to critique. In Chapter 3 *On shifting ground: making trouble for the academic development project*, I invited speculation on the sorts of ideas that have provided the project with a sense of its own coherence. These have been ideas to do with a turn to student learning being situated as a moral imperative, together with assumptions about changes to academic work - in particular, changes to teaching and learning work that have emerged as a result of quality agendas and appeals to the machinery of audit. These are agendas that have worked to first define, but also keep mobile, the teaching and learning terrain as they have played out within the contemporary conditions of academic life. The desire to do well and perform well under these conditions contains contradictions. Within the chapter, I suggested that the project of academic development might benefit from recognising and including those effects in the way it thinks about its identity. My concern here was also to ask about the possibility of communicating this very difficulty to those with whom we work. In Chapter 4, *Autoethnographic interventions: openings for researching academic differently*, I sought to begin a discourse about the research economy within the academic development project, and to raise questions about the ways in which its institutional location demands particular kinds of research processes and outputs. I was interested
to recover a turn to the academic developer-researcher-self; a self that makes and creates knowledge, stories and narratives that are in need of telling, and that tell useful things as a way of interrogating its obligation to the ‘Other’. I speculated on the absence of these narratives from its scholarship and shared my suspicion that it is this absence which works to diminish the prospect of inviting a complex academic development project. In Chapter 5, *Extending narratives of student learning for the academic development project*, I turned my attention to the availability of the idea of learning for academic development work. In particular, I was concerned to question the dominant discourses of student learning that circulate within my own institutional context and practice. I offered an account of my own learning as a student in order to articulate the idea that ‘gaps’ appear to invite narratives of difficulty. I also suggested that a focus on bodies – learning bodies – as they play out in the learning enterprise, contains the potential to tell us new stories about the work academic development performs. And across each of these chapters, I have presented accounts of my own experience of learning and becoming as an academic developer – narratives which are the expression of the sort of ‘being’ which I identified at the very beginning of this thesis, as caught up in the uncertain and fragile work of supercomplexity. And so the inevitable question has arrived: so what does it all mean? As a colleague put it to me, “why is all this work so important to you Tai?”

By way of providing an account of this importance, let me first work towards a conceptual elaboration of the notion of hybridity taken from postcolonial scholarship. Hybridity is the spatial metaphor I employ to account for the emergence of the questions this thesis has raised. It also speaks to the difficulty of their resolution. I then reintroduce a discussion with Sage, my friendly provocateur from Chapter 2. Our conversation is by no means the final word on the matter but it does afford an arbitrary closure of sorts; albeit an inevitably temporary one to the thesis itself.
Experiencing the spaces, gaps and cracks of this thesis: the academic development project as a hybrid encounter

When I started to think about academic development as a hybrid encounter, I wondered how best to represent the complexity of it. First, I began to think about it as an outcome. A developer colleague asked me if it could be likened to a new rose created from separate entities. She asked: is that what is hybrid about academic development? Is it that we have identities which cannot easily be pinned down in the usual configuration of academic work? Is it that Janus-faced identity that Brew (2003a) has identified? Yes, I thought; that is one way to think about it but it feels incomplete. Then, I began to think about hybridity as a process, or a space. And that is precisely the point where the term itself starts to get more interesting and equally troubling for the scholarship of academic development project.

Let me write a little of the difficulty in claiming hybridity itself. I draw in part, on the postcolonial literature because it conceptualises the complexity in trying to pinpoint a term that is by its very nature, caught up in a moving set of relations. My colleague’s example of a new rose is in this scenario, too simple a way of articulating the work of hybridity. The hybrid is primarily a celebration of beauty. It is a focus however that neglects two important questions: What are the conditions that have required its making? And what has that making left behind? What I think is useful about the way the postcolonial literature comes at the issue of hybridity is really the struggle with the term itself. Much of this work connects hybridity to the project of development (here, we might think of developing nations as a parallel idea) more generally. Any project that is about ‘development’ comes with a history that cannot be ignored. Sometimes there is a sense of being displaced; other times, development is welcomed. Witness for instance, the way Seth, Gandi & Dutton (1998) have written about the process of colonisation – as a form of development.

But other voices and other programs, sometimes temporarily drowned out the din of development, reasserted themselves. Some challenged the statism which had defined the nationalism of their elites; others developed critiques of the nation-state itself. Some challenged how development was conceived; others
questioned whether it was attainable, or even desirable (Seth, Gandi & Dutton, 1998, p.8).

In this development trajectory, there is a history of violence. It is a history of forgetting and remembering; one of loss, recognition, desire and regeneration. What appears to be struggled over is always the history of interpretation. What often remains in the spaces, gaps and cracks of interpretation, is that hybrid identity; one that belongs both here and there; but also one that belongs everywhere and nowhere. And so inevitably, writers of postcolonial scholarship disagree on the precise moment of its constitution. Does a concern with hybridity signal an epochal shift; a time after the colonial? Is it a process that continues to play out after all is said and done? Does the view from hybridity rely for its existence, or identity, on those very binaries which have caused it violence? And perhaps most importantly for this thesis, what can the project of academic development learn from an encounter with hybridity?

There are useful terms, ways of thinking and being, and ways of challenging that are opened up for the academic development project in beginning a dialogue with the work of hybridity. Powerful, evocative images emerge in the encounter with postcolonial scholarship. Hall (1996b) uses the following terms to describe the strength of its signification: “expansion, exploration, conquest, colonisation and imperial hegemonisation” (p.249). It is those images that bring into view the politics and struggles of displaced knowledges - knowledges that have been hidden from view. It is also the playing out of that history of displacement that is itself held up to critique; for the question of who names them as such and for what purpose, becomes important. But these are not only mere images; they contain a strong anchor in experience and are accompanied by material effects. As the development project marches onward to seek new spaces and to assert a new and confident moral claim about the world in which we live, it is not just that those experiences become defined and redefined into new kinds of identities; it is that the encounter itself shifts the terrain upon which come to know how to experience. Nothing remains the same. Even the terms of the encounter are changed and changing. Drawing further on Hall’s (1994) account of the difficulty of cultural identity, he argues
[identification] belongs to the future as much as to the past. It is not
something which already exists, transcending place, time, history and culture.
[...]. [They] come from somewhere, have histories. But like everything which
is historical, they undergo constant transformation. Far from being grounded in
the mere ‘recovery’ of the past, which is waiting to be found, and which when
found, will secure our sense of ourselves into eternity, identities are the names
we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves
within, narratives of the past (p.394).

It is this constant movement and constant shifting that speaks to me of the work of
hybridity. It is at once a move to transgress; yet it is also a search to belong and to
seek recognition within what is known. So there is undoubtedly, a slippery quality to
hybridity. It is an awkward strategy, beset with conceptual difficulty. It can be taken
as reclamation of Otherness (Bhabha, 1994, 1996; Hall, 1996a; Anthias, 2001). It
asks how that Otherness has been experienced, represented and recuperated, and then
how those relations operate to reconceptualise notions of a stable self. It also works
to make visible those at the margins, repositioning it as a ‘new’ centre. But as Seth et
al. (1998) recognise, the reinstatement of subaltern knowledges, the “against major
knowledge on behalf of minor knowledge” (p.8), does little to explain the complex
processes of complicity, resistance and negotiation inherent in the way these
knowledges (and identities) live and play themselves out in the world. Nor does it
account for the ways in which the centre (as a stable unchanging entity) comes to be
re-thought and reshaped as a consequence. There are a range of vexed issues that are
of interest here: that specific knowledges continue to occupy only an ‘othered’ status;
the assumption that these knowledges can remain sacred, pure and unsullied - akin to
being memorialised; and that these knowledges can even be desirable (and re-made)
as a result of being appropriated, exoticised, accessible and use-able through systems
of exchange. The reach toward hybridity features as part of the conceptual
problematic of Otherness. While Homi Bhabha (1994, p.31) argues that “[t]he Other
loses its power to signify, to negate, to initiate its historic desire, to establish its own
institutional and oppositional discourse”, one of the effects is that occupants of
‘otherness’ are often positioned as complicit in their own making. While there may
be a certain discomfort in appealing to systems and techniques of reason that rely too heavily on the boundaries that speak us into being, it is precisely the limits of those boundaries that provide us with spaces in which to emerge anew. Hybridity speaks of that very problematic.

This is precisely what the project of trying to re-think or re-imagine the academic development project feels like to me. To see the questions raised in this thesis as emerging from that hybrid space suggests a number of critical challenges for the work of the academic development project. These are challenges for instance that require us to be accountable for both what it is and what it is not; and for what I can be in my practice and what I cannot. In my work across the university, I can and have, assumed a whole range of identities. Those that speak to me with most force are that of a traveller and a migrant. They are both useful tropes. In seeking the experience of new places, new forms of being and identification, they must also take with them the experience of who they are and how they have come to be that way. The individual histories of travellers and migrants cannot easily be waylaid. If we take the idea of the university itself to be a representation of the terrain being struggled over, my role in the institution is really to contribute to it. I work to set in place the desiring work of teaching and learning and in so doing, I shift the boundaries of engagement of what becomes experienced and valued as ‘good’ teaching and learning. Yet, that ‘good’ is mired; it has a history, a history that is often obliterated by the struggle to name it as such. And as I work with colleagues from a whole range of disciplinary areas to question and change the cultural contexts in which they labour so that the work of teaching and learning is made visible in a particular kind of way; that work of change too, carries a similar history. When I leave my office to observe the teaching of others and to offer feedback, I am relied upon to be the ‘knower’ who can ‘know’ with some degree of expertise and certainty. Yet I resist that. I mine their contexts to grow my understanding of how best to achieve change; a change which is often about changing them. I want my colleagues to both desire and aspire to the knowledge which I offer them. In this sense, the reach of the academic development project is an ambitious one. Yet it is this ambition that causes me to retreat; to tread carefully; to know and carry the effects of my practice with me. There are complex traces left behind in any work that
aims to offer new visions, new subject positions, new identifications and attendant forms of experiencing. In many cases, these are spaces, gaps and cracks which hold the promise of renewal. For others, they can represent fear, loss and rejection too. I have tried to signal some of that contradiction throughout this thesis.

The particular reading of hybridity I want to claim for the project of academic development, and that I have been making visible throughout this thesis, is that offered by Jan Nederveen Pieterse (2001): "the importance of hybridity is that it problematizes boundaries" (p.220). Even as there continues to be some ambivalence in the literature about the concept of hybridity itself; what it is; what it is not and what it has become - a backlash perhaps (see Nederveen Pieterse for an extensive discussion), I want to hold on to that very simple idea for the project of academic development. For me, that the academic development project works to problematise boundaries is useful because it speaks to that very paradox of identity work caught in both subversion and appropriation. A concern with hybridity always seems to foreground the question: how can I belong in the very same moment there is the recognition of limit? I am also attracted to it because it signals to me that the work of asking questions in order to shift boundaries is intensely political work. So within a hybrid space, academic development work becomes less about seeking to describe the ‘things’ or ‘experiences’ that constitute or render it meaningful in terms of an ‘essence’, ‘fixity’ or ‘closure’. Instead, it becomes about asking why it is made up of those ‘things’, or unpacking the essence being put forward (and in so doing, making visible its excluded ‘other’); asking why this meaning at this time (developing critical historical perspective); together with interrogating the conditions which see the emergence of particular meanings over others. Framing academic development as a hybrid encounter reminds us to do the work of how we think it into being. The meanings given to academic development are then seen as a set of changing relations between ideas that gain dominance over others. If this is the work of problematising boundaries; of negotiating and renegotiating the terrain of the academic development project, then this thesis has sought to perform precisely this work. If this is the work of imagining how academic development might be otherwise, then hybridity provides us with a conceptual tool within which to imagine it.
So, before I turn again to the final conversation with Sage, I end with a brief reflection on the questions I have tried to make visible in this thesis. How might academic development work and developers occupy this hybrid existence? Is this a space that provides an opening for reclaiming and expanding the critique of ourselves I have tried to argue is important? Is this the place of uncertainty where counter-narratives can be valued and shared? Might this be the place where academic development and developers can experiment with the forms of its research and teaching; with a multitude of theoretical frameworks; with ways of conceiving the relationship between research and evidence and of connecting its work with larger questions about living in the world? If this is literally a place where academic developers can grapple with the epistemology of their practice, then how might its work be reconstituted to include the promise of this space in an ongoing way?

The final conversation

SCENE: I am back from the conference in Canada. It all seemed to go reasonably well. I met some lovely people who offered the most amazing and supportive feedback. There was even talk about some sort of international collaboration. Over too much wine at the conference dinner, we coined it the ‘Challenging Academic Development (CAD) Collective’. We described ourselves as a group of hybrids and migrants eager to explore the question: how does academic development theorise itself? It was that question that seemed to mark us off as different from some of the other conference delegates. One of the Canadians joked that he had always fancied himself a bit of a cad.

Smiling at the memory, I see a pile of papers in my pigeonhole with a note from a colleague: ‘Hope Canada was great. Can’t wait to hear all about it. Here are the projects from the Graduate Certificate. Can we aim to have these done by Wednesday next week? I promised feedback by then. Will be back at 2pm if you need me. Thanks. ’ I shouldn’t be surprised. I promised to take most of the marking load in exchange for being absent from two weeks of teaching. Ahhh... the daily grind! How I have missed you so! I catch sight of my coffee mug with its quasi-inspirational...
message – ‘teaching is a matter of the heart’. It was bought for me with love by a friend. She said it reminded her of me. Sometimes, the work of teaching just makes me feel tired. When I’m feeling that, I tend not to think of my heart or anyone else’s for that matter.

I am expecting another visit from Sage later today. I am looking forward to a matter. One of the key piece’s of feedback on my conference paper he suggested that I think about was this whole issue of why these ideas I’ve been developing in my thesis have come to feature for me in a personal way. That’s what he said was missing! That’s what he reckoned I needed to write about. So, on the plane back from the conference, that’s what I started writing about.

[Cut to the afternoon]

SAGE: Tai… you’re back! So, how was the conference? How was Canada? Meet any nice people?

TAI: The conference was excellent. The paper went well I think. The whole symposium was ok. And there was a good crowd… about 30 maybe 40 people. They seemed to respond to the reader’s theatre piece which was great. Your feedback on that was really helpful. We even had two developers from Canada help us with a couple of the characters. So, yes it was good. Lots of fun as well. Caught up with a few colleagues and made some new friends. There was a fairly decent Australian contingent. Ohhh… and it got videotaped. I think the conference organisers are putting it on the web.

SAGE: That’s excellent! So it went well… and you’ll be an online celebrity. I worried that after our last conversation that you had left in a state of despair. Sounds like you’ve been replenished.

TAI: Yeah, it was good to get away. Listen, thanks for coming out again. You were so good with the feedback you gave me on the paper that I just wanted chat a bit more about that question you asked me to think about.
SAGE: Just remind me… which question was that again?

TAI: The one about you asking me to write about why it all matters. And the other question about whether I was a hybrid. I’ve been thinking a lot about that last one.

SAGE: Oh… those ones! The hard ones! The big existential issues! So… go on… tell me then… what have you been thinking about?

TAI: Well, it came out of a conversation with someone in Canada really. She asked me how I came to think about all these questions and their application to academic development. I could tell she thought she had me worked out… probably a bit like you Sage! Anyway, we were talking over morning tea about one of the keynotes and she asked after my background, so I talked a little about how I came to be in Sydney, my family, my parents and all that. She reckoned that all my looking to transgress had to do with a complex personal history and biography of difference.

SAGE: What do you mean … ‘and all that’? Despite the fact that it sounds like a bit of a therapy session… I’d say that that was a pretty spot on observation. Tell me you didn’t hug each other at the end of it? I bet you did … didn’t you? I have this vision of you going around hugging everyone.

TAI: No. We’d just met. I reserve all my hugging for the second meeting! You should know me better! And… it’s complicated. As I’ve been writing my thesis trying to understand what it means… things surface and they’re not just things that can be easily attributed to aspects of my cultural background.

SAGE: But culture’s everything wouldn’t you say?

TAI: Yeah, it can be. But I think it has more to do with coming up against limits rather than an easy sort of mapping against anything like being Samoan, or being an academic developer and trying to reconcile those two things. You know I’ve never been particularly comfortable with that additive model of identity… and the idea of
all routes leading back to a single explanation. Sure, those things are part of it... but both those things need a context within which I experience their limit. Most times, whenever I experience a ‘limit’ of some sort... that’s when all these questions start to tumble out of me. And as you know... I have a proclivity for questions!

“These don’t really seem to be the sorts of stories that circulate with ease amongst academic developers although I started to tell a little of it in my thesis. The personal stories, the ones about struggle, identity, community and belonging, do seem to play out in unexpected ways in our professional lives. They always seem to be lurking!”

SAGE: Huh?

TAI: Well, it’s like when someone asks me where I’m from... and I say Sydney... there’s often a look of confusion. I’ve either answered their question in the wrong way or they think me strange... that I haven’t understood the question. Then I discover that what they really want is an explanation of my skin colour! And it’s at that precise moment where I go into over-drive... wanting to unpack the politics of it all. It can be quite funny actually! But I can get really shirty when they don’t want to engage in that same conversation with me. It’s a bit like someone opening up a can of worms and then wanting to shut it down too quickly - at least before I’m ready to let go of it.

SAGE: So, what are you saying about limits...or more precisely, your experience of limit in academic development?

TAI: Well... just that a lot of what I’ve done in my life so far... has been about trying to go beyond limits. Sometimes they’re real limits; sometimes they’re imagined limits. I’ve realised that whenever I see boundaries, I want to unpack them; to test their limits, to find out how these boundaries both open and close down what it is that can be thought. And that’s really difficult work. That’s what hybrids do though isn’t it? Their very essence is about being created by a past, a history even... but then always looking for the new. And sometimes there’s a lot of hope in that
seeking and then other times, you have to redefine yourself so that you see those limits differently. And that Sage is really the story of my thesis.

SAGE: Not only that... but it's the main storyline of academic development... what you've been writing about all these years.

TAI: Yeah, it seems a pretty simple conclusion on reflection don't you think? I wonder why it's taken so long. You know... maybe it's because the conclusion is simple that it makes the journey matter even more.
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