Exploring the nature of teaching and learning

An explicit examination of the contribution of educative relationships to effective higher education pedagogy and the role of self-study in the development of teacher professional identity

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Thesis presented for the award of PHD

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Submitted to the University of Limerick, March 2010
May you treasure the gifts of the mind
Through reading and creative thinking
So that you continue as a servant of the frontier
Where the new will draw its enrichment from the old,
And you never become a functionary.

May you know the wisdom of deep listening,
The healing of wholesome words,
The encouragement of the appreciate gaze,
The decorum of held dignity
The springtime edge of the bleak question.

May you have a mind that loves frontiers
So that you can evoke the bright fields
That lie beyond the view of the regular eye

*John O'Donohue (2007)*
ABSTRACT

Exploring the nature of teaching and learning

An explicit examination of the contribution of educative relationships to effective higher education pedagogy and the role of self-study in the development of teacher professional identity

The quality of teaching that occurs within academic institutions has begun to feature more frequently in recent academic discourse. However, the types of educative relationships created with students features less frequently in the discourse. Yet they are an important aspect of the learning process. How academics understand the nature of their teaching and their impact on the learning of their students is an important consideration for those who seek to champion the development of mindful and empowering teaching in higher education.

This research sought to explore my lived experiences of teaching and learning in higher education. A self-study action research methodology was chosen in which I sought to examine how students understood the nature of the educative relationships they experienced in higher education. It also explored in depth the nature of the educative relationships that I created with my students and how this impacted on their learning.

The research was characterised by deep reflection on my practice as an educator in a university setting. A qualitative approach was employed and data were collected from a variety of sources such as student interviews, student focus groups, student reflective journals, evaluations of my teaching, focus groups with a team of critical peers, and my own research diary.

Self-study action research facilitated me to develop my own theory of my practice as a higher education teacher. It illuminated the importance of educative relationships and the role of empowerment in student learning. It also gave me insight into the potential of empowerment as a prevailing ethos in higher education which can be facilitated by encouraging teachers to be more pedagogically reflective. Supervision is an important pedagogical relationship and needs to be reconceptualised in a manner that does justice to its pedagogical dimensions. Universities need to find creative and engaging ways to really listen to the voices of their students and action research is one way in which to do this.

Action research has much to offer because it encourages academics to think in scholarly ways about their practice. It is important that we listen to and gain deeper insight into higher education teachers’ conceptualisation of their identity as teachers in order to champion teaching as a scholarly activity. It could significantly aid the development of a more holistic higher education pedagogy that prioritises scholarship of teaching and supervision.

iii
Declaration

I declare that this submission is entirely my work and has not been submitted in part or full to any other university for the award of degree.
Acknowledgements

I believe that for most people a PhD is not owned by any one person but it becomes like a web of connection among all those who contribute to and support them to achieve it. In particular I wish to acknowledge the following people:

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Maria Gibbons and Eva Devaney who have kept encouraging and supporting me to achieve this PhD. Katie Gibbons for her time and for being the kind of person into whose care I felt I could entrust my most precious son.

My family have been a significant support in this process. My mother has prioritised education in the lives of her children. There is no more personal gift that one can give another than their time and she has given so much time to me in generosity and love. No words can capture how deeply moved my heart has been by the gift.

My father who may not be here to see this come to fruition but who has deeply influenced who I am, what I believe and where I am going.

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Table of contents</td>
<td>vi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>List of Tables</td>
<td>xiv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>List of Figures</td>
<td>xv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Glossary</td>
<td>xvi</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## CHAPTER ONE: SETTING THE SCENE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.1 Introduction</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2 Research aims</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.3 Research objectives</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.4 Self study action research</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.5 Authorial voice</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.6 Context</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.7 The importance of teaching</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.8 The influence of consumerism</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.9 The impact on teaching</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.10 Conclusion</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## CHAPTER TWO: EXPLORING THE LITERATURE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2.1 Introduction</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2 The nature of knowledge</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3 Knowledge values (Pluralism)</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.4 Educative agency and the argument culture</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.5 Critical thinking and the culture of argumentation</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.6 Power</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.7 Power and agency</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.8 Social influence as supporting educator agency</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.9 The interaction between knowledge and power</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.10 Empowerment</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.11 Implications of empowerment for the self</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER THREE: THE RESEARCH APPROACH

3.1 Introduction 70
3.2 Why action research? 70
3.3 Strengths of action research 72
3.4 Limitations of action research 74
3.5 Reflexivity in research 76
3.6 Empowerment in research 77
3.7 Self Study and Action Research- the nature of action in this thesis 78
3.8 Conclusion 81

CHAPTER FOUR: THE RESEARCH DESIGN

4.1 Introduction 83
4.2 Research focus 83
4.3 Qualitative research 83
4.4 Action/constructivist research 84
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>Forms of data collection</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>Sources of data collection</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>Data collection - interviews</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>Interview participants</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.9</td>
<td>Interview protocols</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.10</td>
<td>Focus groups</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.11</td>
<td>Focus group participants (students)</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.12</td>
<td>Focus group protocols</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.13</td>
<td>Focus group participants (critical peers validation group)</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.14</td>
<td>Focus group protocols (critical peers)</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.15</td>
<td>Research diary</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.16</td>
<td>Student journals</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.17</td>
<td>Teaching evaluations</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.18</td>
<td>Data management</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.19</td>
<td>Analysing data –the journey toward coherent interpretation</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.19.1</td>
<td>Stage 1: Inventory</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.19.2</td>
<td>Stage 2: Protecting the data</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.19.3</td>
<td>Stage 3: Inductive qualitative analysis –looking for themes</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.20</td>
<td>Validity</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.20.1</td>
<td>Democratic validity</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.20.2</td>
<td>Outcome validity</td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.20.3</td>
<td>Process validity</td>
<td>102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.20.4</td>
<td>Catalytic validity</td>
<td>103</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.20.5</td>
<td>Dialogic validity</td>
<td>104</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.21</td>
<td>An ecological ethic – some perspectives informing the research</td>
<td>105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.21.1</td>
<td>Ethical protocols and consent</td>
<td>105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.21.2</td>
<td>Ethical perspectives</td>
<td>105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.22</td>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER FIVE: TOWARDS UNDERSTANDING THE NATURE OF TEACHING AND LEARNING IN THE UNIVERSITY SETTING.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5.1 Introduction</td>
<td>109</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.2 The nature of teaching and learning</td>
<td>109</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.3 Communication</td>
<td>112</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.4 Characteristics of empowering learning relationships</td>
<td>114</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.5 Trust</td>
<td>114</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.5.1 Trust in the research management skills of the supervisor</td>
<td>116</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.5.2 Institutional trust</td>
<td>119</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.6 Respectful and equitable engagement</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.7 Care</td>
<td>123</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.8 Power</td>
<td>125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.9 Conclusion</td>
<td>129</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

CHAPTER SIX: TOWARDS UNDERSTANDING THE NATURE OF MY TEACHING AND LEARNING

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6.1 Introduction</td>
<td>131</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.2 Becoming aware of the nature of my teaching and learning</td>
<td>131</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.3 Nurturing dialogue</td>
<td>134</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.4 Building trust</td>
<td>137</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.5 Understanding reciprocity</td>
<td>139</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.6 Paying attention to care</td>
<td>141</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.7 Facilitating a respectful climate</td>
<td>143</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.8 Developing awareness of power</td>
<td>144</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.9 Empowerment</td>
<td>146</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.9.1 Developing awareness of empowerment</td>
<td>148</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.9.2 Lynne’s story</td>
<td>152</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.10 Moving beyond the student supervisor relationship into productive collegiality</td>
<td>156</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.10.1 Collegiate reflection as the key to productive collegiality</td>
<td>159</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.11 Influencing others</td>
<td>165</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.12 Conclusion</td>
<td>169</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER SEVEN: TOWARDS UNDERSTANDING THE ROLE OF ACTION RESEARCH IN SUPPORTING PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

7.1 Introduction
7.2 Boundary and action research
7.3 Border crossing
7.4 Crisis of representation
7.5 Discovering my professional voice in writing this research
7.5.1 Understanding my silence - insights from professional supervision training
7.6 Research insights on validity
7.7 Research insights on influence
7.8 Research insights on influence

CHAPTER EIGHT: RESEARCH SIGNIFICANCE

8.1 Introduction
8.2 Teaching
8.3 The micro dynamics of teaching
8.4 The role of emotion in teaching and learning
8.5 Communication
8.5.1 My assumptions about dialogue
8.5.2 The presence of dialogue
8.5.3 The implications of dialogue
8.5.4 Dialogue and metamessages
8.6 Trust
8.6.1 Interpersonal trust
8.6.2 Institutional trust
8.6.3 Communicating trust
8.7 Care
8.8 Power
8.9 Empowerment
CHAPTER NINE: MY LIVING EDUCATIONAL THEORY OF MY PRACTICE IN A HIGHER EDUCATION SETTING

9.1 Introduction 218
9.2 Teaching attitude 219
9.3 Teaching is not limited to the classroom 220
9.4 To teach or to research—living the contradiction 220
9.5 Teaching as critical engagement 221
9.6 Teaching as a ‘power-full’ process 222
9.7 Teaching as an empowering process 223
9.8 Teaching as a practice informed by student voices 225
9.9 Teaching as a reflective practice 227
9.10 Conclusion 229

CHAPTER TEN: KEY INSIGHTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

10.1 Introduction 231
10.2 Empowerment as the prevailing ethos in higher education 231
10.3 Facilitating educative agency 232
10.4 The importance of pedagogical reflection for higher education teachers 233
10.5 The importance of supervision pedagogy in facilitating critically reflective supervisors

10.6 Development of more student friendly support seeking structures

10.7 Prioritise the evaluation of teaching

10.8 Prioritise the importance of empowering supervision practice through evaluation.

10.9 Legitimisation of self study action research in higher education

10.10 Implications for further research

10.10.1 Action research

10.10.2 Listening to higher education teachers’ voices

10.10.3 Exploring academic professional identity

10.10.4 Illuminating higher education teachers understanding of their agency as educators

10.10.5 Exploring academic attitude to pedagogy

10.10.5 Researching supervision

CHAPTER ELEVEN REFLECTIONS ON THE PERSONAL AND RESEARCH DIMENSIONS OF THIS THESIS, POST-VIVA

11.0 Introduction

11.1 Doing action research in your own organisation

11.2 Doing action research in your own organisation-ethical implications

11.2.1 Future directions-ethical imperatives

11.3 Theorising from action research

11.4 Action Research and Self-Study

11.5 Action research and the development of professional identity

11.6 Supervision

11.7 Care

11.7.1 Care, supervision and citizenship

11.7.2 Care and rights

11.8 Conclusion
**LIST OF TABLES**

| Table 1 | Enrolment Trends 02/03-06/07 for Universities, Colleges of Education, NCAD and RCSI | 13 |
| Table 2 | Supervision Styles (Gatfield and Alpert 2002) | 50 |
| Table 3 | A table depicting interview participants | 87 |
| Table 4 | A table depicting student focus group participants | 89 |
| Table 5 | A table depicting the additional interview participant | 89 |
| Table 6 | A table depicting the critical peer focus group participants | 91 |
| Table 7 | A table depicting the student journal groups | 93 |
| Table 8 | A table depicting the external evaluation groups | 94 |
## LIST OF FIGURES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure 1</th>
<th>Figure 1: Action Research Cycles (Adapted from The Higher Education Academy 2008)</th>
<th>78</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Figure 2</td>
<td>Forms of data gathered for the purpose of this research</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 3</td>
<td>Data sources</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# GLOSSARY OF TERMS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Affective</td>
<td>A term which has come to denote emotions, values and beliefs, spirituality, and self-understanding (Owen Smith 2008:31).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conceptualise</td>
<td>Clearly specified construction of ideas, taken from the influences of theory or models (Silverman 2005:380).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical Pedagogy</td>
<td>An approach to teaching that is grounded in critical theory and that encourages students and teachers to critically reflect on issues such as power and freedom in teaching and learning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reciprocity</td>
<td>An expectation that people will engage with each other in similar ways or ways that are mutually beneficial to both.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reconceptualise</td>
<td>Re-think ideas in the light of reflection on exposure to new ideas/theory/experience.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Reflexivity</td>
<td>Reflexivity is the process of analysing how various elements affect and transform research (McCabe and Homes 2009:1520). An approach to research where the researcher engages in a process of cyclical reflection, reflecting on the research, their role in the research and their impact on the research. It implies that the researcher is not separate from the research.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organisation Culture</td>
<td>The beliefs, ideologies, values, assumptions, expectations, attitudes and norms shared by the members of the organisation (Morley et al. 2004:238).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Triangulation</td>
<td>The comparison of different kinds of data (e.g. quantitative and qualitative) and different methods (e.g. observation and interviews to see whether they corroborate one another (Silverman 2005:380).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Validity</td>
<td>The extent to which an account accurately represents the social phenomena to which it refers (Hammersley 1990:57 cited in Silverman 2005:380).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The scholarship of teaching and learning continues to gain momentum in higher education. However, there is still little research in evidence that is characterised by depth of reflection on the personal process of teaching and the implications of these reflections in the way that this thesis has attempted to do. The contribution of this thesis lies in the real and lived experience of the process of critical reflection.

This research contributes to the scholarship of teaching in a unique way by focusing on the interpersonal dimensions of teaching in order to do justice to the full complexity of teaching and learning in higher education.

Research such as this is a meaningful and scholarly way for educators to deepen their commitment to improving of their practice. Self–study, action research has great potential to create better teaching and learning dynamics and real collaboration in the learning process. It can significantly impact on the prioritisation of teaching in higher education because it encourages practitioners to reflect on the role their values can play in their teaching. This research demonstrates my real commitment to action research, because I believe that action research can act as a facilitative tool for academics to use their scholarly voices for the improvement of higher education practice.
Chapter One: Setting the Scene
Chapter one: Setting the scene

1.1 Introduction
This thesis is an account of my research process. It tells of my engagement with educational action research self-study in an attempt to deepen my understanding of my practice. It explores my efforts to intensify my understanding of teaching and learning in higher education. As a teacher I try to engage in teaching that is mindful of and empowering for others as much as is possible. This research has helped deepen my understanding of just how deeply complex that approach can be. This thesis will show how a self-study research approach that included a strong commitment to reflection has supported my understanding of the nature of my teaching but also of teaching and learning in higher education generally. This research does not seek to make generalised claims about higher education but in keeping with self-study action research it does make specific claims about my living theory (Whitehead 1989) of my practice as a teacher which may support the developing knowledge of others as they critique their own practice as teachers in similar contexts.

1.2 Research aims
The aims of the research were two fold:

a) To examine students’ understanding of the nature of their educative relationships (and influence of those relationships on their learning)

b) To explore using evidence, reflection and analysis, the nature of my educative relationships with my students.

While I could have chosen a more traditional form of research topic and methodology for my doctoral studies, I chose this area and approach because I believed it would support me in the development and improvement of my practice as an educator. Education should be a life enhancing process as Dewey (1938/1997) asserted. As educators we have influence and power that can genuinely support students to become critical and independent thinkers. Conversely, we can hinder students’ independence and freedom of thought. Most of my life and all of my adult professional life has been immersed in
education first as a student and subsequently as a teacher in both second level and higher education. In that time I have experienced many educational challenges, ranging from disaffection and feeling silenced to encouragement and feeling empowered. It is because of these experiences that I have committed myself to engaging with my teaching in a dynamic, person centred and meaningful way which is why I chose the challenge of opening up my practice to critical analysis for my doctorate.

I decided then to examine my educative relationships and how I support student learning from a self-study action research approach because I wanted to look at teaching and learning, to delve as deeply as I could into the micro dynamics of what really happens for people when they learn, to really ‘get under the skin’ of learning and teaching processes in my particular context. I am influenced by critical pedagogy, and in particular the work of Freire (1967, 1970), hooks (1994, 2003), McLaren, (1995, 2006) and Giroux (1981, 1983, 1988). Their work is focused on the impact of race, class, gender and global consumerism on education. While race and class have not been a specific focus for this research, students can still become disaffected and disempowered even if they are not part of a minority. Negative uses of educator power can impact on any student, hindering their independence of thought and voice. The corollary is also true. Empowering educators can support student independence and encourage students to use their voices. It is in the promotion of egalitarian and liberatory education practices, and the expectation that educators should engage critically with the impact of their teaching upon their students that critical pedagogy is relevant to this research.

Commitment to quality teaching and to student-centred learning should be centre stage for all teachers in higher education. Teaching can be as much a scholarly activity as research is considered to be. Teachers have considerable influence and can use this influence in life enhancing ways for their students. Education has the potential to change peoples’ lives and can contribute significantly to the process of empowerment for educator and students alike. I believe that teachers should be open to constantly learning thorough their interaction with their students and my research is guided by these values.
1.3 Research objectives:
In order to meet the research aims set out above I decided to focus on five objectives. How I pursued these objectives is explained in detail in chapter four.

Objective one: To explore student experiences of teaching and learning in the university setting

As well as exploring the experiences of students that I was teaching I also decided to explore the experiences of students whom I had not taught. While much is published on student experience, for example the work of Prosser and Trigwell (1999) and Boyer (1987) it was important to listen to students’ voices to hear what they had to say about their experiences of learning in higher education to see if it correlated with my experience and that of my students. This would help me to gain a wider perspective than the self-study alone would yield. Chapter five outlines the insights I gained from the data collection related to this first objective.

Objective 2: To open up opportunities for my students to engage in a process of critical enquiry and in so doing to encourage students to reflect on their learning

This objective focused on my own practice but also aimed to encourage my students to engage in critical enquiry about their learning, to help them to reflect on how they learned and what it was that helped them to learn. The Higher Education Authority (HEA) identifies the importance of facilitating critical thinking when it advocates “our higher education institutions play a key part in developing individual students with a spirit of enquiry” (HEA 2008:8). Critical thinking is often referred to as a vital feature of higher education (Paul 2005, Tsui 2002, 2000), but what exactly this means for students and for teachers is less clear. For my work, critical thinking or enquiry is defined as the process of examining ideas and asking questions that often interrogate existing dogmas and assumptions so as to develop deeper understanding, not only of the subject being learned but also of the nature of knowledge itself. Drawing on the work of Nixon et al. (1998:278), freedom for others became an essential aspect of the critical thinking I encouraged in my students. This meant that I had to “ensure
that others have the responsibility to speak their own minds, to learn in accordance with their own interests, and to enjoy a secure framework within which to learn” (ibid:278). Chapter six outlines the insights gained from the students’ reflections and from my discussions with them.

Objective 3: To examine my role in facilitating the learning of my students

In order to explore the impact of my teaching upon the learning of my students, I sought student feedback on my teaching. This required creating relationships built on trust so that they felt able to give honest feedback. It is important to note that here I was not researching my students; the focus of the research was on my practice (Herr and Anderson 2005) and my students’ responses to it. While chapter four explains how this was done, chapters six and seven show my developing awareness of issues such as power and empowerment in my own practice and also show the challenges I experienced in engaging with these issues.

Objective 4: To examine the assumptions underpinning my practice as a professional educator.

This objective focused on exploring assumptions and grappling more deeply with my work, and also my beliefs as a teacher. As teachers we hold beliefs about how teaching should occur, and how students should learn. I decided to interrogate my beliefs about teaching because by doing this I would better understand more clearly why I taught in certain ways and what exactly I meant when I spoke about teaching that is mindful, person-centred and empowering. The review of literature in chapter two was instrumental in developing a robust intellectual engagement with concepts with which I was generally familiar but had not researched in depth. Exploring my work with colleagues who acted as critical peers, was instrumental in helping me to engage critically with the assumptions underpinning my practice. Reason and Bradbury (2001) identify the role of critical peers suggesting that they are willing to debrief with the researcher, and collaboratively to make meaning with her. Critical friends pose questions regarding how it is she ‘knows’ what is it she claims to know and often
“push the researcher to another level of understanding because they ask researchers to make explicit that which they may understand on a more tacit level” (Reason and Bradbury 2001:78). Examining my work with my critical peers was instrumental in my examining the assumptions that I held and they also supported the deepening of my understanding of the impact of those assumptions. Chapter seven shows my critical engagement with these colleagues and demonstrates how my thinking moved to a different level as a result of their responses to my work. Chapter eight also shows how I incorporated my learning throughout the research process, from the review of published literature to the data collected and the lessons learned from the research process itself. Through this process I developed a deeper understanding of my practice as a teacher and formed what I believe to be, in action research terms, an educational theory of my practice or what Whitehead (1989) calls my ‘living educational theory.’

**Objective 5: To explore the relevance of empowerment in my work**

Empowerment can be a nebulous concept (Bulsara et al. 2006). It is often referred to as a process that should underpin relationships of learning, but it is questionable just how well understood it really is. Focusing on the conceptualisation and practice of empowerment was something that I hoped would help me really get the heart of what it means in educative relationships. It would help me understand the impact of empowerment on student learning. Chapter two conceptually explores power and empowerment and gives insight into the theorists that have influenced my understanding of empowerment. Chapters six, seven and eight then show how my knowledge of empowerment has developed in my practice. They also show how my commitment to empowerment and my belief in it as an important component of teaching relationships have strengthened as a result of this work.

Given that these objectives were clearly focused on critical reflection on my practice as an educator, I decided that self-study action research was an appropriate framework within which to situate the research.
1.4 Self-study action research

There are as many varying approaches to and interpretations of action research as there are other forms of research. Some theorists, such as Carr and Kemmis (1986) offer propositional understandings of action research while others hold a much more dialectical and evolutionary understanding that is characterised by a strongly reflexive position (McNiff 2000). While internationally, literature on action research evidences diversity in perspectives, some common characteristics emerge. Action research according to (Wennergren and Rönnerman 2006:3) includes collaboration between researchers and practitioners. It values practical knowledge, fosters personal and content related change, and accepts methodological pluralism. Whitehead (1989) has advocated an approach to action research that is characterised by the question ‘How do I improve my practice?’ The focus of Whitehead’s (1985, 1989) work is clearly on practitioners critically reflecting on their work in order to make it better. While this question may appear quite simple, Whitehead is aware that practitioners often work in complex contexts, and that they sometimes hold educational values that may clash with the values of the organisation within which they work. This is why he encourages the examination of “value conflicts” that create the feeling for practitioners that they are experiencing themselves as a ‘living contradiction’ between personal educational values and organisational ones (Whitehead 1989:42). He uses the example of his own critical reflection on his teaching to illustrate this contradiction.

I could see that the 'I' in the question 'How do I improve this process of education here?', existed as a living contradiction. By this I mean that 'I' contained two mutually exclusive opposites, the experience of holding educational values and the experience of their negation (ibid:42).

I decided to choose a methodology that meant I could explore these potential contradictions and thus reflect on how they occur in my work. I believed that this reflection would aid me in achieving the critical engagement on my practice that my objectives were attempting to accomplish.

One aspect of my work as a higher education teacher that challenged my educational values was the pressure between my personal values (which
prioritise education for education sake) and the larger institutional ones (the pressures of a competitive market). Universities struggle with competing forces. The increasing consumerist pressure on universities has meant that as an academic I am now under more pressure to research, to publish and to teach larger numbers and to adopt a more ‘product’ oriented approach. This often makes it more difficult to find time to pay attention to the affective dimensions of teaching such as relationship building and personal development. Critical pedagogy challenges the influence of consumerist values in education and seeks to raise awareness of the potential of education to oppress (Giroux and McLaren 1994, McLaren 1995, 1995b, and Giroux and Shannon 1997). For academics there are competing pressures calling on the limited time available such as research, teaching, supporting students, and time to engage critically and reflexively with students. Therefore choosing a research design that could facilitate me to research and to pay attention to the relationships of teaching and learning was instrumental in addressing the competing pressures that I experienced.

In the past decade self-study action research has grown in popularity among teachers in schools and is now increasingly recognised as a suitable research approach in higher education settings (Trevitt 2008, Burnett 2007, Zuber-Skerritt 1992). I was well versed in more traditional research paradigms but action research was different. I was attracted to self-study because of the work of (Whitehead 1989) who advocates it as an approach to reconceptualising educational theory as a more lived experience form of theory generation. I wanted to research in a way that would pay attention to my developing scholarship and that would support me to become a better practitioner as Zeichner (1999) argues action research can achieve. According to Taylor and Dawson (1998:111) action research was “conceived as a means of facilitating a much closer nexus between educational theory (out there) and the teacher-researcher’s ongoing theorising about their own teaching practice.” Academics who engage in self-study action research can support the development of universities as learning organisations (Senge 1990) in which people can learn from their experience, by reflecting and taking action to improve where necessary. It can encourage a new kind of scholarship as Boyer (1990) advocates,
whereby universities develop as sites of learning in which the quality of the teaching relationships created can encourage independence of mind and action for students (McNiff 2000).

Unlike more traditional research, action research produces knowledge that is grounded in the local realities of the researchers (Herr and Anderson 2005). This thesis is the product of my action research process, which as Reason and Bradbury (2001) suggest should be done in a good faith effort with commitment to the learning process as paramount. In choosing this research approach my role as a researcher became markedly different to the more objective and distant approach with which I was familiar and more comfortable. Now my primary role was focused on my awareness of the choices that I was making and the consequences of those choices for myself and for my students (ibid). This research challenged me significantly in terms of the objectivity and distance between myself as researcher and those who participate in research. I was more accustomed to distance and objectivity. It undoubtedly has expanded my understanding of knowledge, as Castellanet and Jordan (2002) argue action research will do. In effect it encouraged me to consider a broader repertoire of research.

1.5 Authorial voice

Using the first person is common in the production of self-study action research thesis and it can be seen in journals such as Educational Action Research. In my normal practice as an academic this style of writing is absent. I struggled with using it even in the writing of a self-study action research thesis such as this. This is not unique to me; my students often raise questions in class about their writing, some indicating their struggle to use the third person and others the ‘I’. But I have come to understand that this struggle is a product of my feeling that I inhabit two very separate worlds as a researcher. I have been socialised as an academic to write and to develop my style of argumentation in a particular style which is promoted as objective and rigorous (Graff 2002). Habits of thinking and writing that are were familiar to me as an academic meant that writing in the first person seemed counter-intuitive to my daily practice (ibid). Suppressing the use of the ‘I’ can be argued to be a strategy designed to create the appearance of
objectivity (Raymond 1993). Some scholars such as Kirsch (1994) argue that suppressing the ‘I’ has even stronger consequences, such as the silencing of women and marginalised groups. She suggests therefore that the use or not of ‘I’ in academic writing can have social, moral, and political consequences and that authors need to be aware of this. But she tempers this by pointing out that uncritical use of the first-person can read as self-absorbed and can lead to writing losing its focus.

Writing in the first person, I have struggled with concerns that it will not be read or understood as being academically rigorous, all the while my tacit knowledge (as Polanyi (1958) terms it) tells me that I have employed the same rigour and engagement as I have done with my other research. Throughout this thesis I use my own voice. I present my actions, reflections, analysis and insights using the first person. I have used this in keeping with the philosophical assumptions underpinning self-study. This rhetorical decision has not been without its tensions. These tensions have not been easily resolved. I have made every effort to create a seamless representation but this thesis evidences that the authorial voice with which to represent my self-study research is something that I will continue to grapple with and to research.

1.6 Context

This self-study action research took place in a university setting. I am a lecturer and post-graduate course director in a Department of Education and Professional Studies. The past decade has brought with it significant change in terms of student numbers and the programmes of study that are offered. This is in keeping with the changes in universities generally which have experienced increases in the number of third level students (White 2001). Most recent enrolment figures available from the HEA (2009) indicate steady increases in student percentages at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels (see table 1).
It is important to note that these figures are a significant increase on student enrolments in the previous decade, for example in 1991/2 overall student enrolment was 51,029 and by 1995/6 it had risen to 64,644 (HEA 2002). Student enrolment has effectively doubled since 1992.

Teachers in higher education are now working with larger student groups, which mean larger faculty/student ratios with students who have increasingly diverse needs. Faculty/student ratio is an important factor in the building of student/teacher relationships. It is a recognised criterion that plays an important role in the quality of teaching in universities. O Connor (2009) cites McGookin (2008) that in the UK faculty/student ratios are related to a University’s international ranking and these ratios can range from 10:1 in what he terms the ‘Golden Circle’ to over 20:1 in the former polytechnics. Overall, faculty/student ratios in Irish Universities vary from just under 14:1 to 19:1 (O Connor 2009). The faculty within which I am located has particularly high faculty/student ratios with the average ratio at 30:1 of which four specific departments (my own being one) having faculty/student ratios of 33:1 (O Sullivan 2009). This increase in student numbers has placed significant pressure on teachers in higher education settings. In effect it means greater numbers of students to be taught and
supported. It means that there is increasing pressure to have student numbers on programmes so that these programmes are economically viable, and that the pressure this places on faculty is significant. As institutions, universities now have more in common with complex demanding businesses and less with the historical notion of academic life.

In the course of little more than a generation the tradition of the detached scholar engaged in self-determined, disinterested inquiry and the pursuit of truth has been consigned to history. The image of the secluded ivory tower now belongs to the realm of romance; the ‘cultural state’, it appears, is being displaced by the market place (Skilbeck 2001:16).

These changes are not unique to universities and they reflect the changing nature of society generally. It is important to keep them in mind in research such as this because it is inevitable that societal consumerism will permeate universities and consequently what happens within classrooms.

1.7 The importance of teaching

The pressure of limited budgets means that course directors now need to be knowledgeable about their academic field, they need to be skilled administratively and also in dealing with the financial implications of their programmes. My role as an academic now includes significant administration as well as the teaching and research dimensions. Mindfulness about our teaching could get lost with the pressure of administration, research and publication. Teaching is a central function of universities. The 1997 Universities Act identifies several goals for Irish universities that specifically include teaching and learning such as the importance of the promotion of learning in its student body and in society generally, the need to foster a capacity for independent critical thinking amongst students, the promotion of the highest standards in, and quality of, teaching and research and to facilitate lifelong learning through the provision of adult and continuing education. So it is important not to lose sight of the values and principles that are core to higher education such as the importance of teaching.
1.8 The influence of consumerism

How universities function has been influenced by increasing societal consumerism. The impact of an increasing consumerist agenda in higher education has implications for the role of the university as a critical voice for society, but is also has an impact on teaching within universities. According to critical pedagogists such as Apple (2001:262) “education is the place of struggle and negotiation, characterised by battles over what our institutions should do, whom should they serve and who should make these decisions” Such questions are deeply challenging for higher education but they are important questions nonetheless. However idealistic we might wish to be about higher education as hallowed halls of learning, universities are functioning in increasingly consumerist societies. Consumerist values increasingly permeate higher education and can create tensions that influence policy makers and teachers within educational institutions; therefore critical engagement with the impact of these trends is important. Deuchar (2008:489) points to the impact that consumerism has, specifically on supervision of postgraduate research arguing that it may compel supervisors to be more directive in order to ensure timely and successful completion rates. Cost implications are a significant financial issue for higher education if students don’t achieve PhD completion (Wright 2003). Issues of funding have an impact on how academics teach and for how long. There are pressures on academics to be ‘productive’ in terms of output. In this increasingly competitive environment, attention to developing students’ independent and critical thinking may fall to the wayside in the need to ensure that students graduate within a particular time frame and that they do so in ever increasing numbers.

The pressure to compete for funding also has particular consequences. It can, for example, fuel the increasingly driven research agenda in universities. The research agenda seems currently to be one of the strongest driving forces in academia. The Programme for Research in Third Level Institutions (PRTLI) was initiated in 1998 and has positioned Irish universities in a competition for research funding. The merits of PRTLI include its support in raising research standards, developing knowledge and equipping universities with the resources necessary for advanced research activity.
The contribution of PRTLI to the development of research infrastructure and expertise has been strong; however it also has contributed to a prioritisation of research over teaching. This was not the intention of PRTLI; indeed some efforts have been made through the process to recognise the impact of the individual funded programmes of research on teaching. However, the tendency to prioritise research as a potential funding source remains strong.

In a context where many university senior managers have become pre-occupied with research performance, there has been insufficient valuation of creative initiatives to empower the students, develop their leadership skills and contribute to societal well being (O Connor 2009:4).

Universities also gain funding from the Higher Education Authority for students under a process commonly known as Full Time Equivalents (FTEs). This in effect means that each university is allocated funds on the basis of the number of students registered on their programmes. However, unlike PRTLI this funding source has little impact on the status of teaching which appears less valued than research and publications. This may be attributable to the possibility that it is not sufficient funding for universities. It points to the need for critical awareness of the impact of funding policies on teaching in higher education. This is not to say that programmes of research funding such as PRTLI do not play an important role but the impact upon what is valued within universities needs some critical attention.

1.8 The impact on teaching

The increasing pressures on academics with regard to being more productive in terms of research funding, publications and the higher numbers in classrooms (‘throughput’) has resulted in “an increasing separation between the production of knowledge (research) and its distribution (teaching)” (Rowland et al. 1998:134). This increasing separation has meant that for many academics teaching has become relegated to second priority. “Funding policies have impacted on universities such that research has been prioritised, often to the detriment of teaching which is reduced to second class status” (Lucas 2007:18). It can lead to the fragmentation of academic work and to the differentiation between researchers and teachers with the teaching work being seen as less
important than research (Lucas 2007). It is the profile that academics gain from their research, their publications and their success in gaining research funding that appears to be given more status particularly in terms of promotion. While the promotion criteria might identify teaching as important, the reality is that academic reputations are gained not from the quality of one’s teaching but from one’s research profile. This means that regularly academics may feel that they have to make decisions between whether to prioritise their research or their teaching. Teaching is not valorised, recognised or rewarded in a way that reflects the role, function and purpose of universities. So the culture of the university itself may actually hinder the motivation of its teachers to excel in the quality of their teaching. Hattie and Marsh address this by advocating the strengthening of connectivity between teaching and research, by prioritising teaching and research as integral to academic practice.

The goal should not be to publish or perish, to teach or impeach, but we beseech you to publish and teach effectively (Hattie and Marsh 1996:533).

Brew (2006:180) suggests the adoption a different perspective than the polarisation of teaching and research. Rather than understanding research and teaching as two separate aspects or conflicting endeavours of the academic role (Ramsden and Moses 1992) they need to be treated as “inseparable and suffused into the ‘idea of knowledge work’ (Lucas 2007:18). Lucas argues that the production and communication of knowledge cannot be separated easily and that the “future development of higher education institutions needs to reflect this rather than remaining ossified in polarising research and teaching as two separate activities” (ibid). Brew (2006:180) advocates a possible means of beginning to find ways in which the relationship between research and teaching can be strengthened. She grounds this approach in the creation of “inclusive scholarly knowledge” by “building communities of practice.” Nixon et al. (1998:282) argue strongly for the need to put student/teacher relationships higher on the agenda of academics so that “teaching relationships would form and to a greater extent frame [their] professional identity” (ibid). They call this a professional paradigm that would privilege the student-teacher relationship which they
believe could help decrease student attrition. They also indicate a need for academics to engage in professional development about their teaching.

1.9 Conclusion
This research is for me a scholarly form of professional development. It focuses specifically on my teaching within this complex context. It seeks to position teaching at the heart of my role as an academic and it seeks to do so in meaningful and empowering ways by engaging in self-study about my educative relationships with students. In studying my practice as a teacher my aim is that this thesis will illuminate for others the importance of engaging mindfully with teaching in order to support students to think critically and to become empowered learners. This research sought as Nixon et al. advocate to reconceptualise my role so that the focus is on learning (that of others and my own) “so that the teaching relationship comes first in an academic’s life, so that the connections between teaching and research are strengthened and so that collegial and collaborative academic cultures are created” (Nixon et al. 1998:283).

This research contributes to the body of knowledge in this field by placing a spotlight on teaching and learning with higher education. Fanghanel (2007) identifies that much of the research in this field has looked at teaching in higher education from a psychology based approach (Malcom and Zukas 2001) or from a social-cognitive one (Prosser and Trigwell 1999). This research approaches it through self-study action research within a critical pedagogical conceptual framework and because it does so it has much to contribute in terms of the impact of power and empowerment in the learning of students and teachers within higher education. It also makes a contribution in terms of illuminating the potential of self-study action research in contributing to the development of higher education teachers as reflective practitioners. This research aims to place teaching centre stage in the role of the academic, a position that it seems to have lost in recent years. The next chapter will examine the literature relevant to this research.
The thesis is structured in the following way.

Chapter two offers a review of relevant literature, which explores the key issues that underpin the research such as knowledge, power, empowerment, scholarship and the characteristics of empowering educative relationships within the context of teaching and supervision.

Chapter three provides a rationale for the research approach chosen, in particular why action research was appropriate for my research.

Chapter four outlines the research design and implementation.

Chapter five presents the data relating to understanding the nature of teaching and learning in the university setting.

Chapter six adds another layer to this understanding by focusing on my understanding of the nature of teaching and learning in the university setting.

Chapter seven presents the data on the impact of action research on my professional learning.

Chapter eight explores the research significance and draws on the insights from the data, interpreting them in the light of the existing theories discussed in chapter two.

Chapter nine presents my living educational theory of my practice in a higher education setting.

Chapter ten presents key insights that have been drawn from the research. Some recommendations and suggestions for further research are also offered in this chapter.

Chapter eleven provides some final insights and reflections on the personal and research dimensions of the thesis, post viva.
Chapter Two: Literature review
2.1 Introduction
This chapter explores themes related to teaching and learning in higher education. It discusses the nature of knowledge and power and their links to educational agency. It examines empowerment and its relevance to education while also discussing characteristics of educative relationships. In particular it explores trust, care and dialogue as central elements in empowering teaching and learning relationships. Represented here are theories conducive to a dialectical understanding of teaching and learning. These are examined from the perspective of practice which Schön (1983, 1987, and 1991) advocates should be the aim of reflective practitioners.

2.2 The nature of knowledge
There is a value in uncertainty. Socrates believed that the questioning of assumptions about knowledge was essential. So much so, that for him, that it was important to problematise knowledge. This was why he spent his time in what he called “the argumentative search” (Gottlieb 2001). For philosophers such as Plato (and Socrates whom Plato frequently utilised as the champion for his own ideas) philosophy was reserved for the elite, those who were talented in dialectical argument. Socrates approached the pursuit of knowledge in a dialectical manner arguing that the search for knowledge through the examination of life and the questioning of one’s assumptions was an end in itself. He never claimed to hold essential truths and was consistent in his articulation of his own uncertainty. It was this conviction that brought Socrates to compare himself to a midwife facilitating or bringing knowledge forth from others through a process of dialectical questioning (Gottlieb 2001:27). For academics and researchers, holding knowledge up to scrutiny means that whatever survives the scrutiny or interrogation can be provisionally accepted as current ‘best’ thinking. This gives the space for the development of knowledge, viewing it as evolutionary rather than static.

In the Socratic stance there is an implicit respect for each person’s capacity to generate knowledge. This is particularly evident in Socrates’ advice that through
a process of questioning a person will uncover knowledge for themselves and this is of more benefit than simply being told something. The metaphor of the midwife is appropriate because it reflects the facilitative dimension of knowledge construction. In the Socratic approach the generative bias rests with the learner and is fostered through a caring relationship with a teacher. This implies a more facilitative (thus potentially empowering approach) than the traditional, didactic or transmission model of imparting knowledge. Unlike content transmission models, dialectical approaches include a teacher’s facilitation of dialogue and his/her encouragement of their students’ critical engagement. Critique of content transmission models of teaching is a cornerstone of the work of Freire (1970) who determined that the ‘banking’ concept of education which incorporates the depositing of education into students heads can be meaningless for students. There is a tendency to polarise dialectical and didactic teaching approaches as mutually exclusive. However, the lecture (traditionally perceived as didactic in nature) and dialogic teaching can, when used together, actually serve to enhance teaching and learning. Bligh’s (1971) work on the use of the lecture, points to the need to enhance lecturing in order to support students to engage with content.

The lecture can provide the necessary information for students to think about when they get home; but the teacher must do something to make sure that they do think about it, and this requires something more than the traditional lecture

(Bligh 1971:39).

Approaching teaching in higher education from a combined perspective which holds both lecture and dialogue as important and mutually supportive of learning may serve to engage students more and facilitate the building of learning relationships between educator and student. While some academics may argue that the lecture may do little to facilitate critical thinking, this is a limited view of the potential of lectures which can in fact offer teachers of a particular discipline an opportunity to model a range teaching approaches. Rejection of lecture potential presumes that students are passive in lectures, which is not necessarily the case. Students may attempt to make connections with and synthesise lecture content (Westwood 2008). A well organized lecture can be one of the most effective ways to integrate and present information from multiple sources on complex topics (Richardson 2008: 23). Enhancing the lecture by incorporating
opportunities for dialogue, within the lecture itself and in seminar/tutorial as much as possible can enhance student learning.

Polanyi (1966) voiced his concern about the tendency to make knowledge impersonal, or value free. He saw this as essentially self-defeating for he believed that tacit knowing was an integral element of knowledge construction, in other words that we create theory from some initial form of tacit knowing (1966:20). He argued that even in scientific discovery, personal feelings and commitments infuse the process of discovery. Polanyi advocated that “we can know more than we can tell” (1966:4) and that all knowledge holds a uniquely personal or tacit dimension which is not always quantifiable. The development of knowledge should be integrated with ‘tacit’ ways of knowing. We use a range of conceptual and sensory capacities to attach meaning to that which we seek to learn and understand. According to Glass (2001:10) knowledge cannot be understood as a state of mind or as propositions that are reflected in mathematical type equations only, rather knowledge is a way of being that reflects human potentials for producing culture and history. Critical knowing engages the knower and the known in a dialectical relationship.

Knowledge is not the possession of a single individual; it is contextually and culturally bound. Freire (1994) argues that there is a cultural elitism that underpins the elevation of some forms of knowledge over others and this can be evident in elevating one form of knowledge (for example, scientific or dialectical) to hold primacy over another. Gardner (1983, 1999) refers to a similar phenomenon in his identification of different forms of intelligence. Gardner has been a strong advocate for the need to critique the limitations of the hegemony of valuing only cognitive intelligence. Educational contexts including universities, according to Apple (1995), are microcosms that are regularly permeated with struggles of power and hegemony, particularly in terms of who is a legitimate knower and what forms of knowledge should dominate. Lipman (2004:1) argues that this struggle is embedded in the curriculum:

What constitutes official knowledge – and form – ways in which it organizes actions and meanings of students and teachers? Thus day to day social interactions in the classroom are deeply ideological processes that
shape consciousness and common sense ideas about the way the world works and one’s place in it.

Therefore, education can have quite a strong political dimension to it. Being aware of the hegemonic approaches to knowledge as potentially limiting the intellectual freedom of students is important. Approaching knowledge as dialectical engagement will have an influence on how students will experience their learning and will support educators to teach differently. Dialectical teaching invites active construction and engagement from students. This in turn can facilitate more empowering educative relationships for students and educators alike.

2.3 Knowledge values (Pluralism)

Berlin (1998) and Popper (1962) offered a strong critique of essentialism (the existence of only one truth). The dangers of essentialism/monism are that they can lead to the creation of knowledge hierarchies and that those who ‘know’ should preside over those who do not. Essentialism can contribute to elitism. The influence of monism or essentialism in education has left little room for the place of values in educational discussion. It has resulted in the dominance of technical rationalist education where education potentially becomes an elitist preserve. Teaching and learning are value laden activities particularly as the teacher is in a unique position of educative influence. The values they bring to the educational encounter are significant. hooks (2003:3) in reaction to technical rationalist approaches to education calls for what she describes as the need to decolonise ways of knowing in teaching. She advocates deconstructing our ways of knowing within education in order to open the way for more critical pedagogies in teaching and learning both for our schools and our universities. By this she means that teachers need to critically examine the values that they are bringing to their teaching and to be careful in terms of potentially disenfranchising their students by adopting expert roles. They also need to be critically aware of the values that their institutions are prioritising and the impact upon student learning. For hooks the answer lies in the celebration of diverse values and in educational institutions being able to incorporate this diversity by listening to their students’ voices. Thus educators who are open to pluralism and
to dialectical forms of knowledge generation can contribute in no small measure to addressing educational inequalities. This can be a challenge for educators. Teachers are respected for their expertise, but in order to teach in an empowering manner they need to find ways of bridging the gap between their expertise and their students' learning needs. It is not so much a setting aside of their expertise but rather use of it in a manner fully cognizant of the potential alienation that expertise can create for others.

2.4 Educative agency and the argument culture

Personal agency is defined as one’s capacity to originate and direct actions for given purposes. Personal agency to teach differently is influenced by the combination of one’s actual skill and the belief one has in those skills (Zimmerman and Cleary 2006:45). It is related to a person’s self-efficacy (self-belief) with regard to their capacity to perform given tasks. Educators’ own personal agency is not always strong and is often influenced by their own experiences of education. They may often underestimate how powerful they are in terms of influence.

Bourdieu (1989) coined the phrase ‘habitus’ to reflect tacit knowledge derived from human experiences. A teacher’s ontological and epistemological stance (their perception of being and the nature of knowledge) is influenced by past and current experience. It also influences the students that they teach. Therefore, it is important that educators are aware of their personal epistemologies and ontologies. A teacher’s professional identity and their sense of reality are mediated by their experience of education and socialisation processes.

Educational systems are currently dominated by transmission models and have a strongly transactional underpinning (McLaren 1995). The transmission model sees knowledge as transmitted by a teacher/lecturer and once the student reproduces this content, it is validated by the state via state exams or university degree (McLaren 1995). Critical pedagogists (see Bourdieu 1997, Giroux 1996/1992, McLaren 1995, Freire 1970) strongly criticise education systems for their transactional nature which they argue gives primacy to a form of knowledge that serves to reinforce elitism. Bourdieu (1989:15) in particular compared state endorsed educational certification to “the titles of nobility” arguing that they
“represent true titles of symbolic property which gives one the right to share in the profits of recognition.” While this might be a radically critical stance it does point to the existence of educational inequality and that not everyone is in a position to participate in or to share these credentials.

It is heartening to see the introduction of more student-centred methodologies permeating higher education teaching. New forms of pedagogical engagement including problem based learning, experiential learning, discourse based pedagogies; readings and dialogue are now become more prevalent. Educators need to promote more inclusive and empowering experiences for students. While already experiencing the privilege of higher education many university students still experience a range of problems and difficulties, some of which are related to disaffection and lack of empowerment. Tannen (1998) identifies what she terms the argument culture as problematic for students and for academics alike. She argues that public and educational discourse have become permeated by an argument culture that “urges us to approach the world and the people in it in an adversarial frame of mind” (1998:3). The associations of critique with negativity and the prevalence of an adversarial and argumentative culture have had significant impact on academia. Valuing attack is often seen as a sign of respect in an argument culture, however this can have quite a negative impact for students “especially when they are on the receiving rather than the distribution end” (ibid:267). Constant exposure to negative feedback or criticism can have a negative impact on students’ sense of efficacy about their work. Rather than be formative as academics claim, it can be destructive of motivation and can serve to silence student voice. Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) have argued that the culture of the academy can be a source of domination and academics/teachers can unwittingly contribute to this by unconsciously reproducing what they have experienced themselves. We need to find ways to encourage and challenge students in more productive and life enhancing ways. As teachers we need to be cognisant of our educational agency and give feedback that is both encouraging and challenging, but the key is in learning how to do this in ways that are considerate of students’ potential vulnerability in that their capacity to write and to present academic argument is a skill they are just learning.
So an educator’s understanding of agency (theirs and their students) can contribute to more critically aware teaching, more conscious decision making and more empowering relationships for students and for teachers. Educator need to model teaching pedagogies that are invitational, reciprocal in nature and cognisant of the place power holds in teaching and learning relationships.

2.5 Critical thinking and the culture of argumentation

Critical thinking is considered to be an essential component of teaching and learning in higher education, but what exactly this means in practice is worthy of exploration. The Foundation for Critical Thinking defines it as follows:

Critical thinking is the art of thinking about thinking with a view to improving it. Critical thinkers seek to improve thinking, in three interrelated phases. They analyze thinking. They assess thinking, and they upgrade thinking (as a result)…A person is a critical thinker to the extent that he or she regularly improves thinking by studying and “critiquing” it. Critical thinkers carefully study the way humans ground, develop, and apply thought — to see how thinking can be improved (Paul 2004: 3).

Paul (ibid) argues that we often talk of knowledge as though it is separate from thinking, and “as though it could be gathered up by one person and given to another,” however knowledge, by its very nature, is dependent on thought, in particular on critical thinking. Knowledge is the product of thought, is critiqued via thought, therefore building student capacity as critical thinkers is essential. Often critical thinking is encouraged via problematising an idea. Then it can involve “trying to figure out something; a problem, an issue, the views of another person, a theory or an idea” (Heaslip 2008:2). While the merits of developing critical thinking are irrefutable, the expectation of critical thinking often engenders disquiet, (even fear) for students who associate critical thinking with negative critique. Elbow (2008:2) identifies this same negativity when he argues that “despite all attempts to defuse the word “critical,” it nevertheless carries a connotation of criticism.” He writes:

The OED’s [Oxford English Dictionary] first meaning for critical is “Given to judging; esp. given to adverse or unfavourable criticism; fault-finding, censorious.” Not till the sixth meaning do we get past a censorious meaning to a sense of merely “decisive” or “crucial” (ibid).
The implicit assumption is that in order to be good at critique one must be critical, and this means pointing out the error in the argument offered. Elbow (2008) is particularly challenging of what he terms the doubting game, which he defines as:

The kind of thinking most widely honoured and taught in our culture. It’s sometimes called “critical thinking.” It's the disciplined practice of trying to be as sceptical and analytic as possible with every idea we encounter. By trying hard to doubt ideas, we can discover hidden contradictions, bad reasoning, or other weaknesses in them—especially in the case of ideas that seem true or attractive. We are using doubting as a tool in order to scrutinize and test.

What Elbow is challenging here is the presumption of error. In academia arguments are rigorously critiqued for the presence of such error (Elbow 2008, Tannen 1998). It is little surprise then that students fear the exercise of critical thinking if the desired outcome is to find flaw. Elbow encourages us to adopt an ontologically different perspective, which which he calls the believing game, which is the disciplined practice of trying to be as welcoming of every idea we encounter:

Not just listening to views different from our own and holding back from arguing with them; not just trying to restate them without bias; but actually trying to believe them. We are using believing as a tool to scrutinize and test. But instead of scrutinizing fashionable or widely accepted ideas for hidden flaws, the believing game asks us to scrutinize unfashionable or even repellent ideas for hidden virtues. Often we cannot see what's good in someone else's idea (or in our own!) till we work at believing it.

It is important to note here that Elbow is not suggesting a collusive stance where every thing is accepted as right without critique, but that the critique itself is grounded in more empowering and person centred approaches to the deconstructing of ideas. It means an ontological shift in perspective from the default position of ‘error ‘till proven otherwise.’ Perhaps then critique may seem less threatening to students and to academics themselves. Perhaps what is needed is an approach to critique, that is based on more empathy. To understand, we need to enter into the thinking of the other person and then to comprehend as best we can the structure of their thinking (Heaslip 2008). This applies to our own thinking as well (ibid).
It is questionable as to how well many academics understand critical thinking (Paul 2004). The impact of classroom experiences on students’ critical thinking is far weaker than one might expect (Tsui 1999). Paul (2004) attributes this problem to three things a) a result of college faculty operating without substantive concept of critical thinking b) college faulty not aware that they lack a substantive concept of critical thinking, and believing that they sufficiently understand and already teach it well to students and c) that an over reliance on lecture, rote memorization, and (largely ineffective) short-term study habits are still the norm in college teaching and learning today. Critical thinking is not something that can be taught well in the traditional sense by lecture or by assuming that students will just develop it without support. While it is possible to develop the skills of critical thinking in an argument culture, it may be preferable to do so in more student centred ways. There is also need to nurture a disposition toward critical thinking (Facione et al. 1995). Fostering critical thinking can be achieved by faculty developing a coherent understanding of what they mean by it, and by teaching and modelling it simultaneously (ibid). Critical thinking by its very nature should require openness (the antithesis of the argument culture), the open-mindedness of students and their teachers in fact.

2.6 Power

There is in effect no singular phenomenon called “power” (Lakoff 1990, Barthes 1977, 1987, Foucault 1978, 1980). Commonly people understand power as person A exercising control over person B’s activities in some form, but the exact nature and extent of how this is done is open to debate. Davis et al. (1991) raise some interesting questions about power which include:

a) Does power have to be overt; can it be covert, even latent?

b) To what extent does the exercise of power have to be against another’s interests, if at all?

c) Is power really a straightforward exercise of control or is it likely to be elusive, ambiguous, complex and subtle?

Power is not necessarily explicit; it can be implicit, contextual, constitutive, and relational. It is this complexity and subjectivity that Foucault (1980:112) draws to our attention when he argues that it is more accurate to comprehend power as
mutually constructed and as distributed throughout social networks. From Foucault’s perspective, power can be understood as actively constructed in the relationships that people engage in on a daily basis. He used the metaphor of capillary action to denote how power ebbs and flows through relationships (1997). In this way power can be experienced as ambiguous and subtle as Davis et al. suggest, but to generalise that the exercise of power is always subtle is clearly not the case. Foucault (1978:141) places power at the centre of his critique of social order arguing that power is “everywhere; not because it embraces everything but because it comes from everywhere…one is never outside it.” As an educator who was seeking to gain insight about the role of power in teaching and learning and also to interrogate my own teaching, Foucault and Davis et al. prompted the asking of three questions:

- How do I understand power within the educational environment?
- How is power constructed and reinforced in education practice?
- How can I use my power positively in my influence with others (in particular with students)?

(Mannix McNamara 2005:4).

Expertise is often associated with power and this power can work on two levels. It can be positive in that experts who are comfortable in their expertise and authority are flexible, sensitive to task demands, and the social situations around them (Barak and Yinon 2005). Experts are more successful in choosing the most effective strategies and are opportunistic in that they make use of sources of information around them while problem solving (Chi 2006). However, Chi also points out that experts fall short in that they can be domain limited, overly confident and can be inflexible. Bias is also an issue for experts and they can regularly approach problem solving by generating hypothesis that corresponds to their own field of expertise (ibid).

Teachers are considered experts in their chosen fields and it is therefore important that they are sensitive to the need to be flexible in their teaching and to avoid the potential to become inflexible and rigid. An expert-driven approach is not always commensurate with empowerment in learning relationships if it precludes the student from speaking freely and from feeling able to offer new
ideas or question existing ones. Teachers have expertise in their subject matter, and the ideal is to blend that expertise with facilitation and dialogue so that students are actively encouraged to participate and are free to share their ideas however novice they may appear to the academic. It is through this dialogue and testing of ideas they are encouraged to develop their critical thinking and this is negotiated between the student and teacher rather than located solely in the academic as expert.

2.7 Power and agency

While Foucault placed power at the heart of his social critique he has been heavily criticised for this stance. Giddens (1984: 226) accuses Foucault of holding a reductionist perspective and creating an understanding of power as a “mysterious phenomenon that hovers everywhere and underlies everything.” Nonetheless, he does acknowledge that we cannot relegate power to the sidelines. He agrees that power is complex and influenced by social relationships and that it is embedded within social interaction. Giddens introduction of the concept of agency to his theories of power has served to advance thinking in this field. Like Foucault, Giddens suggests that power is involved in all aspects of social life from large organisational structures to individual interactions. However, where Foucault (1980) argues that power itself is actively constituted as people make meaning during their interactions together, Giddens related the power dynamic between people to the resources they bring to the interaction. So, on the basis of resources alone it can be argued there is a strong power differential in the relationship between the student and teacher. The classroom is not power neutral.

French and Raven (1959) identified five aspects of resource power. These are as relevant to the teaching context as any other. They identify legitimate power which can be perceived as the belief by both teacher and student that the teacher has the right to demand of and expect their students to do as they ask by virtue of the legitimacy of their role as the teacher. Reward power is based on the potential of a teacher to give reward for obedience. Expert power is derived from the acquiescence of students to a teacher’s expertise. Referent power is related to the personality of the teacher, and how their characteristics such as
charisma foster respect. Coercive power is grounded in the beliefs of students that a teacher can effectively punish them for non-compliance. These varying types of resource power can have significant impact on the types of relationships teachers foster with their students. Power is also related to agency or the capacity that a person has to act in response to others. It is important for teachers to be aware of the five aspects of resource power that French and Raven have identified because they can all be present to some degree in the classroom. Where agency becomes important is in how teachers use this power. The can choose to create teacher-centred classrooms of control or they can use their educator agency to influence the values, beliefs and behaviour of their students in student-centred and empowering ways.

The distinction between structuralism and agency was an influential question for Giddens. This distinction is particularly relevant because the ontological position an educator may take with regard to these may influence how they perceive the exercise and impact of power in their pedagogical practices. If a teacher understands power in terms of agency then they are aware of their (and their students’) capacity to act even in power relationships that are asymmetrical. If, however, an educator subscribes to a structural deterministic approach then their behaviour and the behaviour of those they teach is determined by socially constructed systems outside of their control. This perception would imply little freedom or agency to act independently within the teaching and learning environment. Giddens did not accept that people are ever completely powerless. However, he did acknowledge that one’s actions can be influenced by conditions outside one’s control and that choice in some measure is evident even in compliance. He argued that in compliance there is a rational assessment of a situation and a choice to comply. This is a particularly challenging to educators who often complain of the limited choices they have in terms of curriculum or assessment. From Giddens’ perspective, the choosing to comply is an active choice rather than a passive one characterised by powerlessness.

2.8 Social influence as supporting educator agency
Kelman (1974) suggests a three level model of social influence. These he termed a) compliance, b) identification and c) internalisation. Compliance is evident
when an individual accepts influence from another person, or group in order to attain a favourable reaction, approval, or to avoid punishment (Kelman 2006). *Identification* then is when an individual accepts influence “in order to establish or maintain a satisfying, self-defining relationship with the other” (Ibid: 4). He suggests that such relationship may be based on reciprocity where the person seeks to meet the others’ expectations, or modelling where the person seeks to be like the other. *Internalization*, according to Kelman (ibid) is where an individual internalizes the influence to maintain the fit between his/her belief and the system they are within. In internalization the behaviours resulting from the influence are understood by the person to be congruent with their own self concept. There are affective dimensions to these levels. Compliance is an acceptance without much integration of the influence; identification is more related to resource support such as the support of a relationship whereas internalization is characterised by more critical engagement and assimilation.

While Kelman wrote of social influence in terms of the persuasion of another person, he was aware that systems can exert similar influence. So for educators there can be a choice whether it is compliance or identification with the values of the system within which they teach, or whether they engage in a process of internalisation where their own values and the values of the educational institution are congruent. Just how consciously the educator navigates the social influence of the university and their colleagues is questionable. In keeping with Kelman’s (2001) arguments about the social influence, it may be worthwhile for educators to critique, how the university influences them, its right to make demands of them and to expect their loyalty. It may also be worthwhile for academic institutions to critically examine their values in relation to the importance of teaching and learning, in similar ways to this action research self-study which argues that teaching and learning is just as important as research and that they should be valued as highly as research is. If teachers are to really believe in the power of their influence as educators universities need to continue to find meaningful ways to champion teaching and learning with the same energy and focus with which research as been championed thus far.
Arendt (1969) also points to the interconnectedness of power and agency. In critiquing the nature of violence in the aftermath of the Second World War, she identified agency or the power to engage in action (even violent action) as linked to our capacity to act in relation to others. For example, her interpretation of the actions of Eichmann was that of a man who facilitated inordinate violence, not from innate evil but in his unquestioning following of orders. Her thesis is that power is related to the human ability to act in harmony or agreement with others (1969:44). She further adds that power is not the property of any one individual but rather is constituted within groups and remains in existence as long as that group remains together. In Eichmann’s case (according to Arendt) it was belonging to a group (the SS) and the following of orders that provided the powerful context which facilitated the anti-Semitic violence that characterised the Second World War. She encapsulates this in her phrase “potestas in populo, without a people or group there is no power” (ibid). Similar to the work of Foucault and Giddens, Arendt’s work (1963, 1969) also points to the importance of social interaction in creating power. The logical extension of this thinking is that if power is constituted in and between groups and individuals, then a person is never truly powerless, one can choose to engage, to resist, to comply or not. Arendt has been heavily criticised for her analysis of the Jewish Councils during the war. She makes the case that in attempting to negotiate with the Nazis the Jewish Councils made a decision to comply; but that anarchy and resistance would have been preferable, an argument also offered by Todorov (1997). Here Arendt makes a strong case for resistance rather than subjugation to the power of others. Middleton (1998:3) also suggests resistance to dominant hegemonies when he comments that “political orthodoxies, although powerful, are never monolithic. There are always oppositions, alternatives, resistances and creativities.” These are interesting ideas because they challenge teachers who may argue that they are powerless to effect change within their system or institution.

While the context that Arendt writes about is the extreme, the insights she offers are relevant to educator nonetheless. Power is constituted in the group interaction of the classroom and within faculties. Uncritically following hierarchy and structure can have negative effects, even if it is not intended.
Teachers who are uncomfortable with the system within which they work but continue to teach uncritically within that system are making a choice to comply in the same way as others teachers may choose to resist from within the system by choosing to teach differently in an effort to facilitate change. Resistance can also bring with it challenges such as fear of reprisal among those in less powerful positions. For academics making a decision to teach differently might mean feeling some discomfort especially if colleagues are unsupportive. Systemic power is often deeply embedded within organisations and translates into institutional biases such as expectations of conformity (Lukes 1979). Often people are unaware of how their relationships with colleagues can influence them to either use power or be the objects of its use. Educators need to become critically aware of the exercise of systemic power within educational organisations. It is important for educators to reflect on how they however unwittingly, may reproduce inequitable and disempowering systemic engagements with students (see Bourdieu and Passeron 1977), or conversely how they use power to create empowering climates for student learning, where students can learn to argue without fear of reprisal.

The approach to power taken for this research is cognisant of structural power and the impact this has on individual agency, while also understanding that it is in the social nature of interaction where power is constituted. Foucault’s (1983:233) caution that power in itself is neutral was considered important as it informed my awareness of my use of power as value laden (either positively or negatively) in my relationships with others. Foucault helps us understand the often understated, multifaceted and potentially damaging effects of power relations that influence and direct educational institutions (McDonough 1993:1). In order to be effective large institutions rely on structures, systems and rules. Hierarchies function as a management strategy to support the smooth functioning of organisations and are often deeply influenced by market trends and budgets. Within universities the prioritisation of budgets and market trends may not be commensurate with educational values but they influence educational provision nonetheless. Educators need to question how they have come to accept certain things as authoritative, legitimate and of value and how this in turn influences their teaching. Foucault’s relevance to education is that when teachers recognise
that their practice is influenced by power relations, that practice then becomes contingent and arbitrary and can be altered. This recognition should prompt reflection and critique with regard to how our actions as a teacher may have power implications. The recognition that we operate within a given system with constraining power relations can paradoxically be quite liberating for it can prompt new fields of action as has been the case for critical pedagogy and practitioner-based educational research. Both of these developments are linked to the need for critique of power in education. So Foucault’s reduction of everything to power can serve as a catalyst for change by provoking educational critique and action (McDonough 1993:2).

2.9 The interaction between knowledge and power

While Foucault places power at the centre of his critique of social order, his conceptualisations of power as contextual and constitutive also have implications for knowledge. Because he saw power and knowledge as inextricably linked he argued that one cannot assume that knowledge is generated in a power vacuum. Implicit in his writing is the recognition that “the goals of power and the goals of knowledge cannot be separated; in knowing we control and in controlling we know” (Gutting 2003:5). It is precisely because of the interlinking of power and knowledge that elitism dominates.

We should abandon a whole tradition that allows us to imagine knowledge can exist only where the power relations are suspended and that knowledge can develop only outside its junctions, its demands and its interests... We should rather admit that power produces knowledge (and not simply by encouraging it because it serves power or by applying it because it is useful); that power and knowledge directly imply one another; that there is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations

(Foucault 1977: 18).

Power and knowledge are reciprocally constitutive. To perceive the nature of knowledge as objective and independent of power is essentially to distort the nature of knowledge generation. The challenge for educators is the concern with how knowledge and truth are used to prioritise certain forms of knowing over others, and how particular discourses become dominant while others are marginalised. More particularly, educators need to be cognisant of how language
itself can reinforce elitism. Language is significant in initiating and interpreting power relations (Lakoff 1990). Students often articulate their stress in learning the nomenclature of a new subject. Shahjahn (2004:303) reiterates the need for sensitivity in the use of academic language

We need to understand that language itself can be disempowering and inaccessible to those who are marginalised and having no access to such language can cause a spiritual scar in students.

Students tend to attribute power and authority to their teachers and course leaders often in an uncritical manner (Giroux 1988). Teachers need to be critically aware of how they use personal power ethically and wisely in order to facilitate student learning in an empowering manner. This essentially demands deconstructing standardised ways of knowing (hooks 2003:3). The symbolic power of authority that is bound up in expert knowledge can be demystified for students through the interactions and engagements that teachers have with them (Kieffer 1984). In order for these interactions to be demystifying teachers need to spend time exploring the assumptions about power that students bring to the classroom, and they need to devote time to creating opportunities for dialogue so that students can feel free to question their assumption about the nature of learning. This means teachers reorienting themselves in relation to their expertise and authority and adopting a more democratic approach.

Empowerment is therefore not about acquiring new skills such as advocacy it is rather as Kieffer (1984:27) suggests, a “reconstructing and reorienting deeply engrained personal systems of social relations.” The language that a teacher uses can illuminate their attitude towards power. It is important to critique use of phrases such as power over or power to because the discourse needs to change to the more appropriate: power with. Empowerment is not about acquisition but is more about transforming understandings of power relations and the part that educators play in reconstructing more equitable power relationships through their teaching.

2.10 Empowerment
Empowerment is about much more than taking control of one’s decision making (Ryan, Mannix McNamara, and Deasy 2006). It can be understood as incorporating positive self concept and critical engagement (Kieffer 1984) and it
is linked to personal belief or self efficacy (Bandura 1986) in the same way as educator agency can be. Empowerment and educator agency are interwoven. Supporting student empowerment often includes enhancing their feelings of self efficacy (Conger and Kanungo 1988), through the identification and addressing of conditions that foster powerlessness. Power is often equated with the intrinsic need for self determination (Deci 1975) and critical pedagogists advocate that in order to facilitate what they term emancipation, there is need to foster critical awareness of the impact of power on one’s personal circumstances. Some differences exist between empowerment and emancipation and for this research empowerment involves “people developing capacities to act successfully within the existing system and structures of power, while emancipation concerns critically analyzing, resisting and challenging structures of power” (Inglis 1997:5). Educators need not only to recognise the conditions that actively disenfranchise them and/or their students, but they also need through their teaching to work to remove barriers to student empowerment.

Empowerment is often defined in terms of its absence (powerlessness, learned helplessness, alienation) but is particularly difficult to define in its positive attributes as it is a subjective concept that takes on different forms for different people and contexts (Rapaport 1984). Control over, and being able to influence events and institutions that affect our lives is a recurring theme from the work of authors who have focused specifically on empowerment such as Rappaport, Swift and Hess (1984), Torre (1986) and Wallerstein (1992). Central to these authors’ work is the sense of mastery and control that is fostered either within an individual, organisation or a community. Thus for them, empowerment is about achieving control with regard to life and work. Jackson, et al. (1996) describe empowerment as a process and also identify that practitioners who facilitate the empowerment process usually build on peoples’ existing strengths (Ryan, Mannix McNamara and Deasy 2006). It is clear that Freire (1970) also saw empowerment as a process, more specifically as a social action process which promotes participation of people, organisations and communities towards the goals of increased individual/community control, political efficacy, improved quality of life, and social justice. Therefore, there is consensus in the literature
that achieving the control or mastery needed for empowerment requires an ongoing process which can be at individual or collective levels.

But empowerment is not simply about achieving control or mastery. It also includes a state of mind that encourages a person to believe that they are capable of engaging equally with those around them and with their organisations. A key feature of empowerment literature is the recognition of empowerment as a process of enabling people to gain control or mastery over their own lives (Inglis 1997, WHO 1986). Empowerment is also an active choice, where teachers choose to have an empowering underpinning to their actions and interactions with students. It is linked to a humanistic approach where teachers use their power (be it their legitimate, expert or referent power) for the good of self, others and society. As a teacher who is commitment to this kind of empowerment I believe that people must be self determining. They are also aware of their right as educators to influence and contribute to their educational contexts and they believe in the capacity of their students to learn in self directed ways.

Halstead and Taylor (1996) define values as principles and fundamental beliefs that act as general guides to behaviour and as points of reference in decision making. The place of values in educational discourse in recent years has become amplified, particularly as teachers’ personal and professional identities are now often referred to in educational literatures. The values one holds as an educator influence one’s professional identity. While there may be some differences between personal and professional values, they often coincide. Professional values are strongly influenced by personal ones. Teachers “have a responsibility to clarify their own values and attitudes, to articulate them, in order to be able to enter into reasoned debate when confronted with opposing views” (Rice 2002: 33). For example, if a teacher values social justice, then they must recognise that there is a link between social justice and empowerment. Empowerment is the process by which students are enabled to take control of their learning and indeed their lives, therefore teachers who hold strong values in this regard must work to ensure that it is championed in their practice.
People’s values can change over time and their personal/professional development is a life long process (Cairns 2000). Committing to values as a teacher is challenging, particularly values like social justice or empowerment because there are strong implications for their practice. Negating ones’ values in ones’ practice or working within organisations which negate such values can mean that teachers experience what Whitehead (1989) terms “living contradiction.” Classrooms can often be places of expected student acquiescence. Choosing an empowerment process to underpin ones’ teaching means that students are encouraged to question, challenge and in effect become less dependent on the teacher and more self directed in their learning. This can be challenging because systems of education can often be characterised by processes that disempower. It can also be challenging because if real empowerment is to occur, where students’ voices are given space, then students may question the teacher, which may be discomforting for them. It requires an educator who can be comfortable in their knowledge expertise and still be flexible enough to engage robustly with the challenge of their ideas being held up for interrogation by their students. The reconciliation of these challenges is not simple as this thesis illuminates.

Achieving equity can be understood as almost synonymous with empowerment, which at the outset of this research was the case here. I assumed that if students could be empowered, they would perceive themselves as equal to me and act accordingly. However, I have come to recognise that certain responsibilities come with the role of teacher/course director and as a result a truly equitable relationship was not going to be possible. Teachers are responsible for assessment which inherently brings some authority with it. There is need for realism and clarity about what we can achieve in terms of empowerment and this research will show that equality was not feasible but democratic teaching was.

2.11 Implications of empowerment for the self

Empowerment like freedom itself comes with rights and responsibilities. Often these rights and responsibilities are in conflict with each other. The focus for this research began to evolve and into awareness of how I use power as an educator, and how sensitive I was for students of any potentially alienating use of
hierarchy and language (Bourdieu and Passeron 1977) in my teaching. Power is never totally avoidable because it is constantly exercised within and between individuals. The challenge for me became about using power wisely (Foucault 1980). I became more sensitive to how power is exercised towards me as an educator and how I exercised mine in response. As an educator I operate within a particular structure and hierarchy. By choosing to teach in higher education I choose to work within this system, but not uncritically. I can exercise my professional agency by becoming more critically aware of my understanding of the role of structure and hierarchy. I can choose to create as empowering a learning climate as possible. According to Orner (1992:81) educators should “attempt to recognise the power differentials present and to understand how they impinge on what is sayable and doable in that specific context.” This is an important perspective in that it potentially encourages teachers to be more accountable for their practice and it encourages them to model an empowering teaching approach for students.

2.12 An empowering critical pedagogy

Freire (1973) is considered the inaugural philosopher of critical pedagogy. He has become internationally renowned for his efforts to reconceptualise education as a means to promote freedom. He saw education as enmeshed in politics and believed that for educational change to be successful; it must be accompanied by change in the other contexts that influence education also such as societal and political contexts (McLaren 1999). Freire argued that both students and educators need to become critically aware of their contexts and any potentially oppressive influences (a process he called conscientização) that hinder their learning or empowerment. Critical consciousness does not occur in a vacuum. It is influenced by the historical and cultural contexts within which knowledge is produced (McLaren 1999:50). Pedagogical ideals and goals vary widely and can influence education very differently. Probably most educators would like to believe that their teaching has something to do with freedom. They hope their efforts will liberate their students, somehow empowering them and their communities to change our society for the better (Schutz 2000). The form of pedagogy we subscribe to is heavily influenced by our epistemologies of knowledge generally. What we know informs and influences how and what we
teach (Bernstein 2000). Grioux (1992:248) argues that a critical pedagogy is “a discourse of critique and a project of possibility.” However, pedagogy itself, as a form of communicating knowledge can become a form of symbolic control, because those who teach are assumed to hold power (Bernstein 2000, Foucault 1980).

Freire has been criticised for not providing concrete examples as to how teachers can make the leap from critical thought to critical practice. This research points to the micro dynamics of teaching that are related to issues of power and empowerment. Freire’s refusal to be prescriptive meant that practitioners would have to invent the best way to do this in their own particular situations. Thus according to McLaren (1999:52) practitioners influenced by Freire can enjoy a “contextually specific translation across geographic, geopolitical and cultural borders”. They make their own of it in their own culturally specific ways. In theory this appears to make sense, being prescriptive would undo the very thing Freire was trying to achieve. In practice it is much more difficult to know even where to begin. However, in paying attention to the micro dynamics of teaching and learning such as the building of empowering relationships based on trust and care, this thesis offers an approach to critical pedagogy that can help answer some of the problems associated with student experiences of disempowerment and disaffection. Critical pedagogy is a way to alter existing relationships within the academy in a productive way, by paying attention to the ethical use of power in education. This attention is necessary not only at the macro level of organisational structure but also at micro levels such as how teachers interact with their students and how they create learning spaces that are safe.

Technical rationalism which dominates educational systems positions the educator as expert in a particular field (McNiff 2000, Apple 1995, McLaren 1995). The purpose is to transmit information/knowledge to students; Freire (1973) used the ‘banking’ metaphor to denote this transactional view of learning. This metaphor creates the image of the educator depositing knowledge in their students. But Freire resisted this transactional approach and argued that the generation of knowledge is a dialectical process, and he advocated interaction through education as a productive way to develop knowledge. Dialectical
approaches are grounded in the belief that knowledge constantly evolves when both educator and students critically engage together about what it is they seek to know.

Knowledge is not extended from those who consider that they know to those who consider that they do not know. Knowledge is built up in the relations between human beings and the world, relations of transformation, and perfects itself in the critical problematisation of these relations

(Freire 1973:107).

There are power relations implicit in the traditional didactic model of content transmission; it is not apolitical as may be commonly assumed. Education is deeply enmeshed in the complex relationships of economic and cultural capital. This is becoming progressively more relevant with the increase in the commercialisation of education. The role of the academy in reproducing hierarchical and unequal relations of power is significant as this is influenced by how pedagogy and curricula are organised (Apple 1995, 2004). Education for the self and for social empowerment should be ethically prior to questions of epistemology and of the acquisition of skills that are linked to the drives of the marketplace (Apple 2001, 1995, McLaren 1995, Giroux 1988 1996). But there is an inherent tension in ensuring that large numbers of university students are educated in their subject and taking the time to prioritise the construction of knowledge as a mutually constitutive process where students and educators engage in a synergistic relationship of knowledge generation. Student empowerment is political as well as psycho-social, because it supports the building of their individual capacity and also it reshapes traditional understandings of the educator as expert. Student empowerment means listening students’ voices and hearing them so that our teaching is influenced by their ideas as well as our own. It is important that teachers engage in empowering pedagogy that is characterised by an ethic of care.

2.13 Teaching
In higher education there has been much debate about the quality of teacher effectiveness (Marsh et al. 2002). While some research has been done on teaching evaluation (Ghedin and Aquario 2008, Felder and Brent 2004, Kember
and Wong 2000, Pratt 1997), less is available on the qualities associated with effective teaching. Research into the interpersonal qualities of effective teachers and the emotional dimensions of teaching in higher education are in their infancy. Teaching is not just about classroom performance and it is far more complex than knowledge transmission. At times the very structure of how we organise teaching lends itself more easily to transmission mode. In higher education the lecture and seminar/tutorial/laboratory still tend to predominate. Many have questioned the place of the lecture within higher education given decreasing attendance at formal lectures (Bligh 1971, Barr and Tagg 1995, 2004). It is problematic when higher education teachers approach their lectures as moments of content delivery with little interaction or expectation of active knowledge construction from their students. There has been much debate about the use of the lecture as a form of teaching. However, the lecture can be useful and potentially quite a powerful teaching strategy. It can serve as a springboard from which an educator inspires students and motivates them through his/her enthusiasm for their subject. The debate about the usefulness of the lecture as a teaching format would be better served if it engaged more actively with the quality of teaching that occurs within lectures rather than questioning the relevance of the lecture as one of the media through which teaching occurs.

We cannot assume that higher education teachers’ understanding of and beliefs about teaching develop with increased teaching experience (Richardson 2005). Experience as a teacher does not guarantee or imply increased effectiveness (Barkhuizen 2002). It is even possible that people can even become less effective over time. Teachers who see teaching as transmitting knowledge are more likely to adopt teacher centred approaches, and are more likely to continue in that style for their teaching career while those who see teaching as facilitative are generally more student centred (Prosser and Trigwell 1999). More experience does not automatically translate into more critically aware and student centred teaching (Postareff et al. 2008). There is need to find innovative and creative ways to engage teachers in higher education more critically about their teaching.
2.14 Emotion in teaching

According to Hargreaves (2005: 278) “emotions are at the heart of teaching. They comprise its most dynamic qualities.” The emotional dimensions of teaching are also frequently referred to as the ‘affective’, a term which has come to denote emotions, values and beliefs, spirituality, and self-understanding (Owen Smith 2008:31) Recognition of teachers’ emotions is essential in understanding teachers and teaching (Sutton and Wheatly 2003). Emotions play a crucial role in communication between people and in teaching there is “an inherent interplay between cognition and emotion” (Demetriou, Wilson and Winterbottom 2009: 449). In writing about educational change Hargreaves (2005:278) suggests that

If emotions are acknowledged at all this is usually in a minimalist way in terms of human relations or climate setting, where the task of leadership is to manipulate the mood and motivation of their staffs, in order to manage them more effectively. The more unpredictable passionate aspects of learning, teaching and leading, however, are usually left out of the change picture.

It can be argued that the same may be the case for research into teaching itself. There continues to be little research about the emotional aspects of teachers’ lives (Sutton and Wheatly 2003), especially in higher education settings. Research tends to focus on beliefs attitudes, thinking, identity and knowledge but very little focuses on emotions (ibid). Of the research that does focus on emotions and teaching (Baird et al. 2007, Lasky 2005, (Demetriou, Wilson and Winterbottom 2009, Hargreaves 2005, 2001, 1998) it appears to suggest that the emotional responses of teachers and how they interact with their students with regard to the affective dimensions of learning are an important aspect of student learning (Demetriou, Wilson and Winterbottom 2009: 450). Students are aware of and often affected by teachers’ expression of their emotions, be they negative or positive (Sutton and Wheatly 2003). Owen Smith (2008) attributes the reluctance of higher education teachers to engage with the emotional and affective dimensions of teaching to the belief that higher education teachers have been socialized to dichotomise between the heart and mind and between the affective and the cognitive. She further argues that there is a reticence to discuss emotion for fear of lack of rigour when she writes: “we have learned quite well
and are sometimes fearful that a discussion of emotions in college teaching will translate to a pedagogy that lacks rigor (Owen Smith 2008:31).

Emotions are an inherent part of daily life. Teaching and learning is influenced by experience of our own emotions and those of students. Our organisations (including our classrooms) are full of emotions (Hargreaves 1998). This is a positive resource that can support teachers to make their teaching more meaningful for students. Good teachers are “emotional, passionate beings who connect with their students and fill their work and their classes with pleasure, creativity, challenge and joy (Hargreaves 1998:835). The affective dimension is a significant resource that can be helpful to teachers. It is important those teachers who are sensitive to the affective dimensions of their work create a “context of critical analysis rather than one of pure sentimentality” in order to optimise potential learning (Owen Smith 2008:34).

2.15 Pedagogical education
While there is dissent in the literature with regard to the impact of pedagogical education for higher education teachers, there is still enough evidence to suggest that intensive pedagogical education can assist the professional development of teachers (Postareff et al. 2007, Gibbs and Coffey 2004). Subject expertise is not enough. Pedagogical education can also play a key part in the professional development of teachers in higher education. Pedagogical education is not a panacea, but it can be a significant first step in helping to develop more consistent quality of teaching and of student experience. There is evidence to suggest that schoolteachers will teach the way they have been taught themselves (Lortie 1975, Britzman 1991, Parsons 2005) and the same can be argued for teachers in higher education. If teachers have themselves been taught from a less empowering, more authoritarian and didactic perspective, then they may be likely to replicate this in their own teaching. Uncritical remodelling of a less than positive teaching style limits our potential as innovative and empowering educators and it also limits the potential of those we teach (Dewey 1916). Pedagogical education for teachers in higher education can have positive effects on the development of student centeredness, and can strengthen novice teachers’
self efficacy beliefs about their teaching (Postareff 2008). The call for pedagogical education for teachers in higher education is a contested one. Some criticisms have been levelled that such an introduction could potentially end up as a delivery of skills sets (Rowland et al. 1998), while others argue that it is necessary to equip novice teachers with skills and critical reflection capabilities (Jenkins 1998). Yet, while there is dissent in terms of the relevance of pedagogical education, the growing focus on the quality of teaching is evident. Pedagogical education can be as problematic as any other discipline if certain values, principles and approaches are not adopted.

2.16 Scholarship of teaching

Boyer’s (1990) Scholarship Reconsidered has been profoundly influential in terms of propagating a discourse of scholarship in higher education. He identifies four types of scholarship. The scholarship of:

- discovery or research as we commonly know it
- integration or the making of interdisciplinary connectivity
- application of knowledge
- teaching

Ideally, all aspects of academic practice should adhere to principles of scholarship. A scholarship of academic practice should be underpinned by what Schön (1985) calls an epistemology of reflective practice. Schön (1985) argued that introducing these ideas into universities could be understood as an epistemological battle.

Introduction of the new scholarship into institutions of higher education means becoming involved in an epistemological battle. It is a battle of snails, proceeding so slowly that you have to look very carefully in order to see it going on. But it happens nonetheless.

Schulman (1999) advocated three specific attributes for the advancement of scholarship: it becomes public; it becomes an object of critical review and evaluation by members of one’s community; and members of the community build on the work. A scholarship of teaching can be understood from several perspectives. It can be focused on faculty researching and publishing on the
teaching of their own discipline, it can be understood in terms of teaching excellence, or as an educational prerogative which faculty from other disciplines apply (Kreber and Cranton 2000).

2.17 Scholarship and the politics of change
Not all academics will want to make the scholarship of teaching the focus of their career, nor should they be required to (Kreber 2002). Furthermore, the competing demands of career and the priority/reward incentives associated with disciplinary research in universities may serve to increase faculty reluctance to engage with a scholarship of their teaching (Benson and Brack 2009). The scholarship of teaching as advocated by Schulman and Kreber and Cranton still has a strong focus on publication and critical review (strategies that also serve to progress the academic career). In this model of scholarship there is little attention to teaching relationships; one can hypothetically develop a scholarship of one’s teaching without having paid close attention to the emotional and interpersonal dimensions of how one actually teaches. From my perspective what is needed is a scholarship that is grounded in student centeredness and empowerment. The increasing discourses of scholarship and of teaching and learning in higher education points to the possibility that while scholarship is being taken seriously by some, it remains unfortunately a minority. Fostering faculty wide scholarship would be a significant change and change is never simple. Usually, the more challenging the change to traditional and dominant epistemologies, the slower the progress will be in effecting change. Taylor and Dawson (1998:109) suggest that many educators abandon their ideas for change because of the pervasiveness of the current culture and the fears of threatening the existing social order of their institution. But the culture of a university “can and will shift given the right conditions for institutional change” (Asmar 2002:18).

2.18 Academic supervision
(2004) and six specific ‘Quality in Postgraduate Research’ conferences were instrumental in initiating international dialogue on the issue of supervision. The Australian government has funded research into doctoral education through a strand called Evaluation and Investigation Projects (Evans and Kamer 2005), potentially quite a positive step in this field. However, in-depth analysis of supervision and the pedagogical relationships within supervision is still under researched. Academic supervision is often understood as separate to teaching. On the contrary supervision can be seen as an intensification of the teaching relationship. While supervision may well be pedagogy, the relationships which characterise supervisor/research student are more likely to be of a much more intense and multidimensional nature than which one is likely to encounter at undergraduate level. The supervisor/research student relationship is a complex and sometimes very intense relationship (Lloyd 2010), indeed supervision is focused on achieving depth of knowledge in the context of much more intense one to one relationship. According to Connell (1985 cited in Pearson and Brew 2002:139) the relationship between supervisor and student is different to that of two academic colleagues.

It has to be seen as a form of teaching. Like other forms it raises questions about curriculum, method, teacher/student interaction and educational environment.

In supervision, pedagogical engagement happens on a one-to-one basis. Rudd (1985:79) identified the prevalent assumption of supervision capacity in universities as “if one can do research then one presumably can supervise it.” The relative lack of literature related to the supervisor, according to Gatfield (2005) suggests the assumption that supervisors automatically know what makes the supervision process successful.

Supervisors now face increasing complexities and diversities in research and students (Gatfield and Alpert 2002). Many supervisors may view their role as research specific; however, many argue that there is also a strong mentoring dimension to this relationship. Lee, Dennis and Campbell (2007) differentiate between what they term mentor and standard supervisors. A mentor supervisor is interested in the career of their student, has enthusiasm for the student’s work, has sensitivity for the personal circumstances of the student, appreciates
individual difference, is respectful, unselfish, lacks intellectual jealousy, and has strong teaching and communication skills. Like teaching there is evidence to support the belief that supervisors frequently base their supervisory approach on their own often unexamined experience as a research student (Pearson and Brew 2002).

Yet the style of supervision adopted can have a profound impact on a student’s self confidence and ultimately their sense of efficacy with regard to their research. Gatfield and Alpert (2002:267) identify a model of supervision styles using a four cell matrix of pastoral/contractual/ laissez-faire and directorial styles. The focus and style of supervision may change over the course of a doctoral research process, alternating between the pastoral, contractual and perhaps even directional styles advocated here. It can be argued that underpinning processes characterised by support and empowerment should be at the heart of the process at all stages. A blend of the pastoral and contractual approaches to supervision might be appropriate, but it must also be noted that these approaches, as with any good supervision are demanding of supervisors’ time and attention.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pastoral (High Support)</th>
<th>Contractual (High Support)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>▪ Low structure and high support</td>
<td>▪ High Structure High support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▪ Candidate has personal low management skills but takes advantage of all support and facilities on offer</td>
<td>▪ Candidate highly motivated, able to take direction and act on own initiative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▪ Supervisor provides personal care and support but not necessarily in a task-driven directive capacity</td>
<td>▪ Supervisor able to administer direction and exercises good management skills and interpersonal relationships</td>
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<tr>
<td>▪ Most demanding in terms of supervisor time</td>
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<tr>
<th>Laissez-Faire (Low Support)</th>
<th>Directional (Low Support)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>▪ Low structure low support</td>
<td>▪ High structure low support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▪ Candidate has limited levels of motivation and management skills</td>
<td>▪ Candidate highly motivated, sees the need to take advantage of setting objectives, completing and submitting work on time on own initiative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▪ Supervisor is non-directive and not committed to high levels of personal interaction</td>
<td>▪ Supervisor has a close and regular interactive relationship with the candidate but avoids non-task issues.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▪ Supervisor may appear very uncaring and non-interfering</td>
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Table 2: Supervision Styles (Gatfield and Alpert 2002)

These supervision styles were advocated as a mechanism to “stimulate thinking on the types of supervision styles and the timing of their application” (Gatfield and Alpert 2002:272). The goal was to encourage supervisors to reflect critically on the processes they engage in as supervisors. What is also important in any discourse of supervision styles is recognition of the diversity of relationships engendered in the process (as varied as the number of students and supervisors as each is unique and individual). A one-size-fits-all approach is counterproductive. Gurr (2005:86) proposed what he termed the supervisor/student alignment model which recognised this developmental aspect. In it he suggests that “as a student undergoes academic growth during candidature, the supervisory style needs to be adjusted to a more hands-off approach in order to allow competent autonomy to be developed.” My research also highlights the need for the caring, expert professional that Grant (2005:340) stipulates.
Just as good teaching can be said to be about connecting interpersonally with our students, it can also be argued that good supervisors also “posses a capacity for connectedness” (Palmer 1998:11). They too are “able to weave a complex web of connections among themselves, their subjects, and their students so that students can learn to weave a world for themselves.” Clearly an encouragement of student independence is important. Like traditional teaching “the connections made by good supervisors are held not in their methods but in their hearts—meaning heart in its ancient sense, as the place where intellect and emotion and spirit and will converge in the human self.” This requires a supervisor who is willing to engage on an interpersonal level as well as a cognitive one.

2.19 Empowering supervision pedagogy

Power is possibly the most influential and least spoken about aspect of supervisory relationships. “When individuals take up the positions of supervisor or student, they become located in a profoundly unequal power structure which has many effects (Grant 1999:6). This inequality can make open dialogue difficult as the student is especially conscious of what may or may not be said so as to be acceptable (ibid).

Empowering educators are keenly aware of the importance of encouraging autonomy among their students. They are open to disagreement, to being challenged in robust argumentation with students; indeed they perceive cognitive conflict as a resource that supports the learning process (Alton-Lee 2003). They also do not position themselves as the ‘nice’ nor the ‘intimidating’ supervisor. While cultures of negative use of power clearly impede learning, so too do cultures of ‘niceness’ where students do not feel able to voice any dissent they may have (ibid), or where supervisors are somehow reluctant to challenge or to extend their students’ thinking. This is not easy and it requires teachers to be comfortable in their own teaching identities and knowledge. They also need to be comfortable with the unknown and with the potential of being wrong, something that many educators may not wish to do.
There is pressing need for academic discourse and practice to recognise supervision pedagogy because currently it is poorly understood. The Harris Report (1996) in the UK makes recommendations in terms of codes of supervision practice. But while it makes reference to the quality of supervision, it does not explore the complexity of supervisory practice.

Postgraduate supervision tends to be more private that any other teaching and learning activity and its pedagogic practices remain largely unquestioned (Johnson et al. 2000:135). It is important for supervisors to develop a repertoire of knowledge and understanding of the different aspects of supervisory practice (Pearson and Brew 2002). The process has been compared to ‘walking on a rackety bridge’ (Grant 1999:1), requiring situational attentiveness and flexible posture.

Supervision has been described as teaching the student to be their own supervisor (Gurr 2005). The focus is often on the student moving beyond competence to autonomy and self knowledge. In effect it can be seen as a process of facilitating student empowerment in terms of their knowledge, self esteem and efficacy as researchers. Johnson et al. (2000:136) refer to the “pedagogy of indifference” and the “pedagogy of magisterial disdain” that they argue has traditionally dominated postgraduate teaching in many universities. They make reference to the lottery of chance that accompanies supervision “yet the supervision relationship is often fraught and unsatisfactory—as much marked by neglect, abandonment and indifference as it is by careful instruction or the positive and proactive exercises of pastoral power” (ibid). It is important that supervisors develop their skills as educators and leaders (Pearson and Brew 2002), and to become more flexible. Supervisors can be to be supported to recognise student diversity. Students who enrol directly from undergraduate studies may have different needs to those of professionals who return to postgraduate education. Ethnicity and gender can also impact upon supervision (Grant 1999).

Differences in disciplinary approaches to research are often cited as reasons for different supervision approaches (Pearson and Brew 2002); however, there is a distinct need to rise above discipline specifics (Gurr 2005). While research approaches may vary, the need for interpersonal relationship skills remains consistent across the disciplines. Supervisors can be more to be open to gaining
feedback on their work as supervisors and be willing to develop their interpersonal and communication skills. They can also pay attention to the affective dimensions of the work as well as the research specific dimensions. Even when supervisors are motivated to improve and evaluate their work, they still need professional assistance on how to actually improve it (Marsh et al. 2002).

The quality of the relationship created with students enhances the learning of both educator and student. Teaching relationships are by their nature intense and require attention and care. Usually the focus of meetings with supervisors is on research content; discussion of the relationship is usually avoided or is often taboo (Gurr 2005). Given the power dynamic inherent in the supervisory relationship it is very difficult for a student to open up discussion about inter-relationship. The supervisor needs to provide the appropriate and “explicit green light” to facilitate such a discussion happening (ibid: 87). However, supervision is a deeply affective relationship (Grant 1999) where the needs and desires of both student and supervisor intersect, both strongly invested in the success of the project. It is this intense level of investment that potentially complicates the process. Grant (ibid) refers to supervision as an opaque practice, and in so doing she cites Sofoulis (1997:11) who suggests a definition of supervision as:

> The creation of a space in which two subjectivities/intellects must necessarily interact so that the project of one may be brought to completion” with the goal of assisting the student “to discover [her] ‘own standpoint’, to gain recognition for [her] ‘own work’, and to find ways of expressing it in [her] ‘own voice.

This definition clearly holds a strongly affective dimension to it. It is not only about producing research but is also about developing self awareness, self belief, and developing academic voice. There is a strongly emergent empowerment paradigm implicit in such understanding of supervision. But it is a negotiated space and this is problematic when supervisors who are uncritical in their approach to supervision and who lack awareness of potential power issues in supervision operate from a more technical rationalist base, giving little time to quality of relationship issues. There is need to emphasise the collaborative
nature of the process, where students have more active voice in the process (Gurr 2005:82).

The issues surrounding supervisory relationships are rarely researched and critiqued publicly (Boucher and Smyth 2004). The unequal power dimension is rarely discussed. The main function of the supervisor is to guide and to give feedback on student work. Giving feedback can be the most problematic area of the relationship. The critique function of the supervisor is essential to effective supervision (Hockey 1997). Few commentaries have highlighted that there are specific interpersonal skills that should be part of any teaching/supervisory relationship. Clearly effective interpersonal communication such as active listening, respect, empathy, authenticity and understanding would greatly aid learning. A good teacher also has the capacity to balance the interpersonal dimensions with the more challenging dimensions of their role, such as giving constructive feedback, and encouraging the student to move beyond their comfort levels and confronting lack of progress. It is through critique that the students’ academic potential may be realised but the process of giving and receiving feedback is not one that comes naturally to everyone and it is an area of the teaching relationship that requires careful attention as early and as sensitively as possible. The use of a contracting process which openly engages with preferred feedback styles facilitates the discussion of issues such as these from the outset. It means also that they can be revisited when necessary, thus exploring the unspoken fears and concerns often felt by both supervisor and student.

Hockey (1996) advocated the use of contracting in the supervisory relationship. Such contracting requires “a degree of negotiation between supervisor and student and involves shared commitment to agreed objectives, decision-making processes and choices” (ibid: 365). In professional supervision (most used in the fields of counselling and social care) much time is spent from the outset in paying attention to the initial meetings (Haynes et al. 2003, Hawkins and Shohet 2000, Campbell 2000) in order to increase both parties comfort in the relationship and to support the building of mutual trust. In academic supervision,
there is much to be gained from employing that same mindfulness at the beginning of the relationship.

2.20 The roles of care, reciprocity and spirituality in teaching

“That which we are, we shall teach (Emerson 1990:182).

Caring should be at the centre of educative relationships. Noblitt (1993) argues that care can be understood as the ethical use of power. For Noblitt power relations are deeply implicated in caring relationships, but it is employed in a confirming and supportive way. Authors of care in education literature generally see the caring relationship as an encounter between the carer and the cared for and describe it as “a connection between two human beings – a carer and a recipient of care” (Noddings 1992:15, McLaughlin 1991, Weinstein 1998, Neiman 2000). Such conceptualisation implies an unequal engagement with the responsibility resting more with the carer (usually in this case the teacher). Care has a somewhat ethereal quality and cannot be reduced to a set of behaviours but rather it is a way of being which is based on continually building on a foundation of trust (Smedley and Pepperell 2000:262).

For teachers, caring is often interpreted as “the interpersonal experience of human nurturance, connectedness, warmth and love” (Hargreaves and Tucker 1991:497). There is strong emphasis here on interpersonal relationships, which are a dimension of educative caring. Weinstein (1998) argues that teachers who have a limited understanding of caring as simply “warmth and affection” may not see the connection to academic expectation and may be less willing to exercise the authority needed to maintain a fruitful learning atmosphere. Educators need to facilitate educative relationships that are characterised by care and are empowering for students while also paying close attention to academic expectation and achievement. It might appear paradoxical to argue that authority can be part of empowering and caring learning relationships, but this type of authority is not coercive, rather, it is an authority based on a teacher’s knowledge and role as facilitator of their students’ learning. This type of caring includes reconciling attention to academic achievement with attention to personal wellbeing. It requires seeing both as important in the teaching and learning
process. This is what Noddings (1984:496-7) identified as caring fidelity, that is being “reflectively faithful to someone or something, that promotes both the welfare of the other and that of the relation.” There is no easy formula for caring because it can often requires different responses in different situations, sometimes requiring tenderness, sometimes toughness (Noddings 1992:xii).

It has been argued that, argued that the structures of current schooling “work against care, and at the same time, the need for care is perhaps greater than ever (Noddings 1995: 20).” The same may be said of teaching in higher education. Interpersonal connection facilitates learning and growth to happen (Goldstein 1999). Interpersonal connectivity is desirable, but it is not a prerequisite for learning. The nature of the human mind allows us to construct knowledge in all types of environments even the most oppressive. However, an educative relationship with positive interpersonal connectivity is the most desirable environment for learning to occur. Knowing and caring are deeply interrelated (Berman 1987). The idea is that teachers and students engage in the shared construction of knowledge characterised by relationships of care.

The place of spirituality in teaching has been advocated by many, such as hooks (2003) and Palmer (1999) who, like O Donohue, describe it as a sense of connectedness. Laurence (2005:3) defines spirituality as “the ability to experience connections and to create meaning in one’s life.” Tisdell (2004:3) offers a deeper explanation which includes connectedness and meaning-making. She further adds; ongoing development of one’s identity, moving towards greater authenticity in interactions, awareness of how people construct knowledge through largely unconscious and symbolic processes manifested in image, symbol and music among others and openness to spiritual experiences. Among what she terms principles for spiritually grounded pedagogy are what she calls an emphasis on the authenticity of teachers and students (spiritual and cultural). She also advocates a learning environment that allows for the exploration of the cognitive, the affective (through connection with other people, ideas and life experiences) and the symbolic (art, music, poetry, drama). She also advocates recognition of the limitations of the higher education classroom and the need for a more holistic approach to teaching and learning in higher education. A holistic
understanding of learning and teaching can enhance the educative experience for
both educator and student.

When as teachers we create a sense of the sacred simply by the way we
arrange the classroom, by the manner in which we teach, we affirm our
students that academic brilliance is not enhanced by disconnection. We
show that the student that is whole can achieve academic excellence.

(hooks 2003:180).

The need for connectedness in teaching is strongly advocated in the work of
Palmer (2003) who points to the relative absence of any recognition of the
teacher or student as person in education discourse.

Despite our cultural bias that all power resides in the outward
visible world, history offers ample evidence that the inward and
invisible powers of the human spirit can have at least equal impact
on our individual and collective lives. That simple fact is one that
our educational institutions ignore at their and our peril.


Educative caring relationships are characterised by interconnectedness and
reciprocity. Reciprocity in this case is more than just empathy. Reciprocity
means respecting the difference of the other and facilitating them to speak for
themselves (Marion Young 1997). An educative approach that includes
reciprocal responsibility needs to take into account the fundamental inequalities
that may exist between people (in this case educator and student) and awareness
that others may not have the necessary linguistic and cultural capital (ibid)
required for academia. A teacher’s task is to support them to gain it while
respecting their individuality and uniqueness.

I would detect a necessary symmetrical reciprocity at work every time we
communicate with another person with the intention not only to
understand each other but also to respect each other’s heterogeneity. I
locate this reciprocity at an ontological level that lies in a deeper layer of
the human relationship

(Pspastephanou 2003:8).

John O Donohue (2004:143) draws our attention to ‘webs of belonging.’ a
concept he draws on from Celtic traditions. He develops this idea of a sense of
belonging between people into what he termed ‘webs of betweenness.’ In the
‘web of belonging’ from Celtic traditions there was a sense that the individual
life was deeply interwoven into the lives of others and of nature. This was
perceived to provide both psychic and spiritual shelter for individuals. For O Donohue the ‘web of betweenness’ characterises true community, where full identities can be realised so that individuality and originality enrich the self and others. There is an inherent spirituality in O Donohue’s ideas.

Teachers need to support their students’ learning in ways that are considerate and are characterised by respectful interactions. Quality of relationship is central to education that fosters growth for both educator and student. Buber (1970) differentiates between ‘I – Thou’ interactions which are characterised by respectful interaction where two subjects are fully present to each other in dialogue, and ‘I – It’ interactions where the ‘thou’ become an object, an ‘it’. It is the quality of presence that Buber was attempting to convey. Strongly authoritarian teaching can leave students and teachers alienated from each other in ways that hinder learning. What Buber’s philosophy offers us is an understanding of education and of knowledge as ‘grounded in the primary reality of relation’ (Murphy 1988:95). Being present interested and engaged; in other words, caring, can significantly support learning.

When teachers become critically aware of the quality of interactions that they have with others, they can potentially become open to more reciprocal engagements with their students. They begin to understand themselves as learning also. This in turn facilitates education as a developmental process which is grounded in personal responsibility where both teacher and student become empowered enough to understand their personal responsibility in facilitating their own learning while experiencing support and motivation from their relationships with each other. Buber (1970) argued that it is not necessarily the educational intention but the actual encounter that is educationally fruitful. Clearly Buber’s priority was the relationship between student and teacher. Yoshida (2002) argues that the quality of educative relationship characterised by openness and awareness makes all the difference for students.
2.21 Dialogue and ‘ideal speech’

Dialogue plays an integral part in educative relationships. Genuine dialogue requires both educator and student to become critically aware of their social and political contexts as influencing their learning. Freire (1970) distinguishes between dialogue as horizontal, characterised by empathy, trust and critique and anti-dialogue that is vertical in nature and is characterised by communiqués, which is a sense of communicating at someone rather than with them. The latter does not tend to promote respectful interaction. The mode of communication employed between educator and student is central to the learning process.

Genuine discourse (speaking and listening) is essential in true communication and for sustainable learning. The process of knowing itself can also be understood as dialogic in nature, and according to Buber (1973) the role of the educator should be to weave holistic relationships with students. This presumes openness to searching for meaning and truth and an understanding of knowledge as fluid and generative rather than fixed or absolute. For students to engage in authentic meaning making, the goal of the educator is to:

> Seek in every way possible – through the confirming action of the teacher – to bring about the process of conversion by which objectified knowledge is transformed into the realm of the I – Thou, the sphere where it becomes personally meaningful

(Murphy 1988:107).

As educators it is important to avoid “inadequate communication processes that so often limit the effectiveness of personal situations and roles” (Winter 2003:3). Strong critique has been levelled at dialogue theory for not taking into account asymmetrical power relations. Where they exist such asymmetrical relations must be acknowledged. Equality may not always possible between educator and student but reciprocity and respect can be.

Habermas (1970) advocated the concept of ‘ideal speech’ in which he argues that communication is only free from constraint when each person is equally able to initiate speech and equally able to pose questions, argue for or against an idea, explain, interpret and justify their thinking. Habermas’ ideal speech situation was his attempt to find an alternative to inequitable engagement in conversations and is characterised by each individual in the process having the freedom to
engage equally. This means that each person engaged in the encounter is autonomous and can offer ideas, agree and disagree freely, also that communication is not impeded by external contingent forces. Habermas (2001:97) advocates attention to the structure of the communication itself in order to truly attempt dialogue that is empowering for all involved. His concept of communicative action is orientated towards reaching mutual understanding. He saw communication as broader than mastery of linguistics. The speaker must also have at their disposal, basic qualifications of speech and symbolic interaction (role behaviour) for what he termed communicative competence. Strong critics of this approach have indicated that Habermas’ belief that those involved in the ideal speech must both be motivated by the desire to reach consensus about the nature of truth is problematic. Reaching consensus is no simple task and can be impeded by the influence of culture, values, hierarchy and/or emotion. Indeed Habermas himself indicated that the language that we use, the reason we employ and the actions we engage in are inherently intermeshed (ibid). Even though many argue that ideal speech is a utopian concept it is an attractive one nonetheless. Even attempting to create the conditions of ideal speech with students moves us closer towards empowering practice.

An alternative to the need to achieve consensus in ideal speech is perhaps the commitment to sustained dialogue instead, as it encourages the dialectical nature of learning and allows the process of coming to know to be continuous and developmental. Fostering sustained dialogue as the goal rather than that of consensus also contributes to the development of sustainable education (Mannix McNamara 2005). While Habermas has been critiqued for the lack of consideration of cultural traditions and material resources in his writings on ideal speech (see Held 1980) an educator who advocates an empowering approach with their students will acknowledge these differences and go so far as is possible to negate their influence in the speech acts they have with their students. His theories of communication aim to offer standards for non-coercive engagement between individuals. Such a concept is similar to the ideas of Barthes who espoused “peaceable speech” which in effect is speech “divested of all sense of aggression” (Barthes 1977:213). This is not to say there is no
disagreement but the engagement is respectful and non competitive or in Foucauldian terms “reciprocal elucidation” (1991:381). This is reflective of the assumption of empowerment processes as “two way” characterised by communication and self care (Gibbon 1990). Reciprocity becomes the common characteristic. For Bohm (2004) dialogue is about developing shared meaning, where no one person is attempting to push their ideas on another.

In dialogue, however, nobody is trying to win. Everybody wins if anybody wins. There is a different spirit to it. In a dialogue, there is no attempt to gain points or to make your particular view prevail. Rather, whenever any mistake is discovered on the past of anybody, everybody gains. It’s a situation called win-win...dialogue is something more of a common participation.

(Bohm 2004:7).

Reflection was also central for Habermas, which was evident in his assessment of positivism. He critiqued positivism as not being able to facilitate reflection as part of the process of knowledge generation as to do so would negate attempts at objectivity. The dialogue that educators promote is influenced by their enculturation and socialisation. Should an educator choose to pay attention to the types of dialogic practices they foster with their students it could potentially be liberating and empowering. The focus is less simply about what is said and when, but is also in the doing, the wholeness of the actions that occur.

2.22 Trust

Trust is an integral element of teaching and learning in higher education. It implies that people can rely on each other, believing that others will act in a reasonable manner (Nias et al. 1989). It also, according to Hargreaves (2002), implies the belief that others will act with good will, integrity and competence. Indeed Curzon- Hobson (2002:266) cites trust as fundamental in higher education.

Trust is a fundamental element in the pursuit of higher learning for it is only through a sense of trust that students will embrace an empowering experience of freedom, and the exercise of this freedom is a risk on behalf of students and their teacher. This is the experience and risk of having to face a world beyond absolutes, and yet live in a meaningful way.
Trust is an important characteristic of interpersonal relations. The teacher/student relationship is also essentially an interpersonal one and as such goes through the same processes as any other interpersonal relationship. Frymier and Houser (2000:208) identify that teacher and student meet one another and exchange information. They develop and adjust expectations in the same way as any two individuals would in developing a relationship. However, they point to two differences in the student-teacher relationship, in that it lacks the equality typically associated with friendship and it has time constraints not typical of friendships. Developing trust is linked to the care and communication that the teacher fosters. When teachers facilitate students to communicate beyond the context and content of the formal classroom potentially trust can be enhanced. When trust increases it is much easier for the student to seek clarification, feedback or to ask the “stupid question” without fear of looking foolish (ibid: 217). This is reiterated by Curzon-Hobson (2002) who also points out that lack of trust can mean that neither teacher nor student is encouraged and hence not willing to question.

In the context of supervision, interpersonal trust has been defined as “a relationship of a voluntary nature based on the belief that the other party involved harbours good intentions and will conduct themselves fairly, but it can be a leap into the unknown” (Hockey 1996:363). McAllister (2002) identified the specific characteristics of empathy between teacher and student as being: sensitivity, patience, respect, tolerance, acceptance, understanding, flexibility, openness and humility. Empathic teachers enhance student learning by considering how students will construct meaning from their teaching (Rasmussen 2001). Trust is built by being aware of the other and caring about how our actions impact on the other.

2.22.1 Institutional and professional trust
Ghosh et al. (2001:325) define student trust in a college or university as “the degree to which a student is willing to rely on or have faith and confidence in the college to take appropriate steps to benefit him and help him achieve his learning and career objectives.” The degree to which a student perceives that the institution is concerned for their welfare will influence their decision to enrol in
that institution. This is particularly true of research postgraduate education where the student has more choice and autonomy in the decision making process. Trust is also important for academics within the university. Trust is often the filter through which events and the motives of colleagues are experienced and interpreted (Corrigan and Chapman 2008). While it is rarely discussed among colleagues, implicitly “trusting in others’ integrity, competence and goodwill is the cornerstone of effective relationships in complex organisations” as such organisations hinge on the interdependence of tasks and people (Hargreaves 2002:395).

Trust operates at micro and macro levels (Sachs 2003). Drawing on the work of Bradbury et al. (1999) Sachs argues that system/institutional level trust (in this case the university) establishes the context where the social relationships occur (student/teacher or collegiate relationships). The establishment of trust at the micro level increases confidence at the systemic or macro one (ibid). There is a reciprocal aspect to this. If the institution does not demonstrate trust in its professionals or its students, it becomes increasingly difficult for those professionals to establish trust with students. Or even more worrisome they can develop trusting relationships of resistance in collusion with their students. Giddens (1994:127) claims that trust is interlinked with reciprocity perceiving that with trusting and being trusted comes obligation and thus reciprocity.

Trust in others generates solidarity across time as well as space: the other is someone on whom one can rely, that reliance becoming a mutual obligation…When founded on active trust, obligation implies reciprocity.

When professional trust disintegrates the impact for the individual is significant. Hargreaves focused his research on schools and argued that teachers had a strong tendency to avoid conflict, opting instead to insulate themselves from constructive disagreement but also from collaborative learning. The same is arguably true within higher education where teachers in this context can also insulate against conflict but also potentially professional growth and learning.
2.22.2 Building Trust

The emphasis in trust literatures is commonly on what the teacher can do to establish trust. However, real trust building is about what the teacher and student can achieve together. It requires the engagement of both. According to Corrigan and Chapman (2008:5) “the underlying circumstance is one that must ask their students to share in the development of a relationship that could increase greatly the success of their education.” Building and sustaining trust then asks educator and student to engage collaboratively. Palmer (2003:385) takes a spiritual interpretation of what it requires to build trust arguing that “it takes people who are explorers of their own inner lives. It takes people who know something about how to get beyond their own egos; how to withdraw the shadow projections that constantly involve us in making enemies out of others.” Building trust also may require some elements of self-disclosure, something that teachers can often be quite reluctant to do. Self disclosure does not mean inappropriate disclosures of personal information; rather it is giving insight into the humanity behind the teacher role. In simple terms it is the sharing that people do normally in getting to know another. Corrigan and Chapman (2008) found that their study of building trust for students in higher education yielded them the conclusion that the gains in motivating and empowering students was well worth the risk in opening up to students.

2.23 Activist professionalism in higher education.

Sachs (2003) proposed what she called activist teacher professionalism as a potential means to develop professionalism for second level teachers. Her aim was to develop teacher professionalism in ways that supported teacher agency and autonomy in collaboration with colleagues. Her proposal resonates strongly with the themes pertinent to this research which centres on the higher education context. She claims that “active trust, respect and reciprocity stand at the core of activist teacher professionalism” (2003:141). Activist teacher professionalism centres on collaboration, holding oneself accountable for one’s work, reflection on practice and reciprocal forms of association. She explains that in practice, reciprocal forms of association might look like joint presentation at conferences, joint writing for publication or the development of collaborative research projects. Such activism, based on trust respect and reciprocity she claims
enhances professional dialogue and generates analytical insight that can improve classroom practice.

The potential for the improvement of teaching in higher education from an activist professional perspective is attractive. Sachs (2003:147-149) gives nine characteristics of active professionalism in action, which she calls protocols. Transferred to higher education these look like:

1) *Inclusiveness rather than exclusiveness:* networks and partnerships to enhance teaching and supervision between people involved in education. In higher education this might be teaching academics, supervisors, and people who work within centres of teaching excellence.

2) *Collective and collaborative action:* individuals can only achieve so much. In higher education this might be the creation of a forum to increase interaction, sharing ideas, where student voice is heard.

3) *Effective communication of aims and expectations:* activist teachers within higher education need to communicate their purpose and aims in order to raise awareness. Students and colleagues need awareness of their goals.

4) *Recognition of the expertise of all parties involved:* in higher education people from diverse academic areas of interest are interested in improving the quality of teaching and supervision. This offers opportunities to learn from others and develop new practices in teaching and/or supervision.

5) *Creating an environment of trust and mutual respect:* Sachs argues that activism requires trust in people and processes, for when trust is eroded the good will and energy that sustains organisations is also eroded. Therefore increasing collaboration between colleagues, between student and teacher and attention by the institution to trust is essential.

6) *Ethical practice:* Acting ethically is essential to the fostering of caring educative relationships. This is something that needs to be worked at and not simply taken for granted. The knowledge that ones teacher, colleague and organisation are committed to ethical practice provides security for all those within the university.
7) Being responsive and responsible: timing of action and being responsive to ones colleagues and students is in the best interests of positive educative practice.

8) Acting with passion: advocating for better practices and teaching/supervision improvements is not always easy. It requires courage, determination, transparency and belief that the process has the best interests of all at heart.

9) Experiencing pleasure and having fun: developing relationships and sharing success stories as well as failures can add to the enjoyment of the process. When one is truly engaged in improvement often Csiksentmihalyi’s (1997) flow ensues which adds to professional satisfaction and self belief.

Sachs’ proposal has much to offer the higher education context. It potentially offers opportunities to decrease the individualism often associated with university teaching, through collaboration and dialogue, and potentially offers opportunities for enhanced teaching and supervision practices. It offers opportunities to raise the discourse of teacher professionalism within higher education. It also offers opportunities for teachers in higher education to develop deeper understandings of themselves both as teachers and their roles within the society in which they live and work (Bottery 1996 cited in Sachs 2003). Coupled with practitioner research the potential for improvement is significant.
2.24 Conclusion

The research and commentary on the interwoven concepts of knowledge, power, agency, and empowerment suggest generally that teaching hinges on relationships, positive or otherwise. Developing empowering educative relationships is a complex process, influenced by a range of factors.

Empowering teaching requires sensitivity on the part of the educator and is enhanced by critique of influences such as the nature of power, knowledge and of teaching itself.

Educator agency is an important feature of empowering relationships. Educators need to be aware of their personal and professional agency, in order to be able to use it to teach from a more critical perspective. Becoming more aware of educative agency implies that teachers are more conscious of the power implications of their decision making. For empowering educative relationships to flourish educators need to pay attention to the role of power in their teaching and in the learning of their students.

Adopting a more dialectical approach invites more active engagement from students and facilitates them to become more autonomous learners. Dialectical educative practices imply that teachers will be influenced by student ideas as well as our own. It challenges the privileging of some forms of knowing over others and these dialectical practices are important in challenging elitism within higher education.

Care, trust, reciprocity and dialogue are also important factors of empowering educative relationships. Care is a robust concept. It links academic achievement and personal well being. Interconnectedness and reciprocity are important dimensions in caring educative relationships and their impact is that teachers and students pay attention to the role of interpersonal engagement as well as content in their learning.

Teaching is a core function of the academic role, but it is not always prioritised in the same way as research is within the academy. This implies that universities
need to explicitly value teaching and learning, because to do so would help support the personal and professional agency of educators.

The insights gained from the exploration of the literature and from critical pedagogy in particular challenged me to examine how I as an educator construct my ideological and political positions (Giroux 1992:81). I began to question the implicit messages about the nature of knowledge and power that I transmit to my students. I also began to examine how I paid attention to the micro-dynamics of my teaching relationships and how I was endeavouring to create communities of practice (Lave and Wenger 1991:29) with my students. During this action research I began to understand how deeply complex this is and that learning is not simply about cognitive construction but is also about social participation or socio-cultural practice as Lave and Wenger term it. The following chapter will show my rationale for choosing an action research approach in keeping with this examination of my teaching.
Chapter Three: The research approach.
3.1 Introduction
I chose action research because of its strongly reflexive base. Reflexivity, for this research, included self awareness, self understanding, the co-creation of the social spaces contextual to the research and an awareness of knowledge as value and power laden (Foley 2002), all of which were important aspects for my teaching and my research. Adopting an action research approach allowed me to explore critical self-understanding and the connection of the personal and the political spheres of influence that I contend with as an educator. Empowerment was also central in this research; therefore, a research approach that allowed me to pay attention to the type of social interaction I was creating was essential. I sought to represent the characteristics of empowering teaching and learning, but these are complex and subjective. In critical action research exploring such complexities and subjectivities are common and this influenced my decision that action research was an appropriate approach. So while the principles of reflexivity, critical self-reflection and empowerment we held as inviolable for my research. It is of note that the success of an action research project is in the insight gained into one’s own practice (Meyer 2000). This chapter now sets out the rationale behind the research choices made.

3.2 Why action research?
This research involved engaging intensively in critique of my practice as an educator. In order to do this it was necessary to deepen my own understanding of the nature of teaching itself. While an examination of my teaching and learning and that of my students was of concern, it was also important to gain deeper understanding of the ontologies and epistemologies that influenced our learning. My ontological assumptions have influenced my epistemological ones, and these in turn influenced the methodological considerations I undertook (Cohen et al. 2007). The assumptions that I made of an ontological kind, (how I perceived the very nature of being e.g. objectively/subjectively), influenced the research choices that I made. My epistemological assumptions, (how I understood the very nature of knowledge) also greatly influenced my research. If I held the view
that knowledge is objective and existing externally I would have chosen a research approach that was more objective in nature, but because I perceived it as subjective I choose quite a different one. Drawing heavily on the work of Polanyi (1958/1966) who argued strongly about the nature of personal knowledge and of Foucault (1970, 1972) among others who cautioned against objectivist understandings of reality, a constructivist and critical approach was adopted to underpin the research. This research became a deep excavation for me into the realm of the subjective so that I could explore my subjective reality as a teacher/researcher.

Through this process I aimed to gain more in-depth understanding of the nature of educative relationships, and of the possibilities of facilitating an empowering approach to teaching and learning. By understanding what was meant by empowering dialogical practices, students could be better supported to think more critically about the knowledge they were developing and the contexts in which they were learning. Educators need to understand their own capacity to generate knowledge and to critically reflect on how they teach that knowledge if they are to support students to do the same. This research approach allowed me to interrogate my own practice in an intensive and evidence based way.

In higher education, teaching and research are sometimes understood to be dichotomised practices (Stenhouse 1975, 1983). The belief that research should and can contribute to the improvement of society permeated this research and action research offered an approach that had what McNiff and Whitehead (2002) describe as generative transformative potential. By this they means that learning builds on previous leaning and can do so in potentially transforming ways that can contribute to a better society. They argue that new learning already has potential for evolution and improvement. In referring to their own and their students’ action research, Whitehead and McNiff (2006:118) explain:

> The practitioners’ stories that we have collected, systematized and published…all reveal this quality of generative transformation. Further, these stories themselves constitute a knowledge base that also has the generative transformational capacity to influence new thinking and new practice for new communities of inquiry.
I chose action research and in particular the subjective nature of self-study, because it would facilitate me to adopt an epistemological stance that was open to the process of being in the flux of constant evolution and development. Kemmis (2001:95) labels what he terms a small body of action research that is concerned with improvement of self understanding and with the critique of social, educational work as critical or emancipatory action research.

It recognises that we may want to improve our self understandings but also that our self understandings may be shaped by collective misunderstandings about the nature and consequences of what we do. So emancipatory action research aims towards helping practitioners to develop a critical and self critical understanding of their situation – which is to say, an understanding of the way that both particular people and particular settings are shaped and reshaped discursively, culturally, socially and historically. It aims to connect the personal and the political in collaborative research (Kemmis 2001:96).

### 3.3 Strengths of action research

Action research brought with it a particular set of strengths that were useful for this research, for example the principle of democracy. Meyer (2000) advocates that democracy in this type of research usually requires participants to be seen as equals. While equality with students might be desirable, some may argue that it may never be possible particularly in contexts where teachers assess and evaluate students in ways that decide outcomes. However unarticulated or unacknowledged, power permeates the teaching and learning relationship, making equality difficult. In beginning this research I thought that I could achieve equality with my students, but at the very early stages of the research I realised that equality was not going to be possible. I still had the responsibilities that being a course director brought with it in terms of grading and student progression. Therefore my understanding of the possibilities within my teaching relationships had to change. I realised that it was not equality that I was striving for but democratic teaching. I wanted the students to be able to develop their critical thinking and exercise their voice without fear and in order to do this I needed to ensure that democratic principles were central to my research.
The engagement with power issues in both the research and teaching dimensions of this work reflected the prioritisation of democracy in action research. I believed that by naming the inherent power issues, by engaging in transparent teaching, assessment, listening to my students’ voices and by inviting student critique of my research and teaching I attempted to observe in practice the democratic principles that tend to be valued in action research. It also meant that the research was personally meaningful as Meyer (ibid: 178) suggests it should be because it was rooted in the reality of my day to day practice.

Action research is grounded in evidence-based practice (Hart and Bond 1995) which contributed to enhancing my professional understanding, my consciousness of the influences on my decision making and ultimately sense of empowerment. My goal was to support the improvement of my practice. It facilitated me to thoroughly examine my understanding of my work in my natural setting. It can be adapted to suit individual focus and need. It promoted in-depth reflection on the organisation and systems within which I work.

Krippendorf defines research validity as “that quality of research results that leads us to accept them as true, as speaking about the real world of people, phenomena, events, experiences and actions” (Krippendorf 2004:313). Validity can be a specific strength of action research, because often it is those closest to the issue being researched that are checking the researcher’s interpretations. In this case the findings were made available to participants to check if their voices were being represented accurately. Also a team of critical peers, comprising academic colleagues, experienced in action research who were independent of the research and who worked in different regions around Ireland also checked my data interpretation. This formative process fostered collaboration (Meyer 2000). It also ensured that my interpretations were assessed by a group of practitioners from different perspectives.

According to Lewin (1947, 1951:129) there is nothing as practical as a good theory. He also advocated that to truly understand something, one should try to change it. This research attempted to engage with these two ideas. I endeavoured to generate good theory from my practice. This theory was generated from my
reflections while trying to change (improve) my practice. The insights gained here are shared with the wider community who can read and interpret them in terms of their own situations.

Action research often encourages the collection of data from diverse sources which in this case were: the accounts of participants, my research journal and reflections, and the accounts of critical peers in keeping with the nature of action research which provides the opportunity to “seek out triangulation” (Eden and Huxam 1996:83). However the varying perspectives were “not necessarily expected to triangulate (agree), as the focus is on discovering multiple views” (ibid). In triangulating I was not seeking agreement, but deeper understanding.

3.4 Limitations of action research

Generalisations drawn from action research are often heavily critiqued in terms of questions about sampling, and of the inherent subjectivity of the researcher and their design. Traditional assumptions about generalisibility need to be suspended in action research. The types of generalisations made are different. Action research reports “rely on readers to underwrite the account of the research by drawing on their own knowledge of human situations” (Meyer 2000:179). This is why the contextual detail in action research is so important. Such detail captures the nuances and complexities of experience in context. The contextual detail and reflection gives insight into the action researchers’ capacity to understand and engage with the particular living situation. Validity (and also generalisability) is not a commodity that can be purchased with techniques (Maxwell 1992). Indeed the recent decade has seen significant challenge to the assumption that validity is procedurally satisfied when such techniques as member check, triangulation and the weighing of evidence are made integral to research design (Smith 1998:1). Meaningfulness and authenticity are what are important in examining action research accounts. Such meaningfulness required me to examine my practice, my decisions as a researcher, my context and the focus of my research. To do this, I had to be prepared to reflect intensively, repeatedly and persistently on my own practice.
The roles in action research can often seem blurred. Who is researcher and who are ‘the researched’? Balancing the role of being simultaneously researcher and teacher was deeply challenging. The focus of the research was on my own practice as teacher and supervisor (Kemmis 2001). I was not doing research on the participants. I invited participants to collaborate with me by critiquing my work and by clarifying the purpose and focus of the research I aimed to make our roles clearer.

Action research is frequently subject to critique because of its size and scope. It is often described as small scale and insular research. “Unlike traditional research, action research produces knowledge grounded in local realities” (Herr and Anderson 2005:98). Epistemologies and methodologies that represent local realities and needs are sometimes not sufficiently appreciated in the academy (Herr and Anderson 2005:98), but they are necessary for the promotion of critically reflective practitioners.

Another criticism of action research is associated with inherent difficulties in replicating or repeating the research. The question of rigour is addressed by Eden and Huxam (1996: 75) who, drawing on the work of Rowan and Reason (1981) contend that because action researchers choose to research an issue that is of particular and significant concern to them, they gain a richness of insight that could not be gained otherwise. As with generalisability, the traditional understanding of measures such as repeatability are clearly inappropriate given the individual and unique nature of self-study. However, trustworthiness and transparency are important in mitigating this gap.

The subjective nature of self-study action research is also cause for some critique. Peshkin (1988) identifies the individual and subjective nature of research in his paper entitled ‘Virtuous Subjectivity’. In it he argues:

I feel at liberty to spin a particular story—the gift of my subjectivity—but not out of thin air: my story must be borne out by facts that are potentially available to any other researcher (1988:278).

Here Peshkin recognises that action research is not objective in the traditional sense but that it is verifiable. This verifiability should be evident in the
legitimate nature of the data collected and the interpretations drawn from that data.

In looking at the limitations of action research it is important to remember that action research has a different focus; it places different demands on the researcher and it recognises the subjectivity of the research in terms of usefulness for the researcher. The focus is on extrapolating the learning from the experience of the self and others. In reading accounts of action research others may gain insight into their own practice and may gain deeper insight into the nature of the organisations in which they work.

3.5 Reflexivity in research

Reflexivity can be understood as “disciplined self-reflection” (Wilkinson 1988) and action research by its very nature necessitates openess to such reflexivity in order to provide clarity with regard to the decisions and actions of the researcher. In essence to be reflexive requires constantly reflecting on, interrogating and evaluating the research to understand how the subjective aspects have influenced both the data collection and the analysis (Finlay 1998). Reflexivity demands a complex self-dialogue in which the individual reflects on the self and his/her actions (Woskett 1999). Reflexivity has been linked to the desire to achieve rigour as follows:

I understand researcher reflectivity as the capacity of the researcher to acknowledge how their experiences and contexts (which might be fluid and changing) inform the processes and outcomes of inquiry. If we can be aware of how our own thoughts, feelings, culture, environment and social and personal history inform us as we dialogue with participants, transcribe their conversations and write our representations of the work, then perhaps we can come close to the rigour that is required of good qualitative research

(Etherington 2004:31-32).

Reflexivity is important because it is in the transparency of representing the researcher’s actions and interpretations that the integrity and authenticity of the action research becomes evident. Tryona (1994, 1995) argues that it is through reflexivity that the values inherent in the research are made explicit and accountable to the reader. Being reflexive meant that I made links between my
biography, context, culture (my own and that of my students) as influencing the decisions and interpretations that I made (Smith 1998).

But this reflexivity also added a complexity that sometimes blurred the boundary between the research, its representation and my presence in the research. Grappling with the self, my context, the research itself, the participants, their context and their stories, created for me what Richardson (2000:931) identifies as the problem of finding a textual place. For example, finding the right authorial voice was quite challenging in the writing of this thesis. But also the constant reflection sometimes meant that temporal boundaries seemed less clear. Where action research cycles began or ended were less obvious because the more I reflected on them and their inter-linkage the less defined and discrete they became. Suddenly data seemed to be everywhere, in recorded conversations, in emails, in feelings and responses recorded in the research diary, in external and self evaluations of teaching. How to represent the work and how to derive meaning from it became a challenge. As the amount and depth of the data grew, so too did the realisation that my research seemed to outgrow the action research cycles as advocated by Carr and Kemmis (1993, 1986) and Elliot (1991). It took on a fluid structure of its own and so it emerged that the writing of the research itself became a reflexive activity. Through the writing I learned more about myself as well as about the nature of educative relationships (Smith 1998).

3.6 Empowerment in Research
Empowerment is at the heart of positive educative relationships and this has been explored in more depth in the previous chapter. Empowerment is as important in research as it is in teaching and learning. The researcher and participants should experience the research as potentially empowering. Such empowerment is characterised by relationships of caring.

At the heart of every practitioner research project there is a significant job of work to be done that will make a small contribution to the improvement of the human condition in that context. Good practitioner research, I believe, helps to develop life for others in caring, equitable, humanising ways (Dadds 1998:41).
The integration of empowerment within research is not a simple task. Empowerment in research is often confused with the notion of listening to the student’s voice but this does not necessarily facilitate empowerment (Troyna 1994). For a research process to meaningfully constitute empowerment, the analysis of the research must cater for the power contexts in which the voices are articulated (Bhavani 1988). On the advice of Whyte (1996:20) participants were actively included throughout the process from the initial design to the final presentation of results and the action implications of those results. At all times we understood that I was researching with rather than on participants (Kingsley 1985), opening up my interpretations of my findings to participants for their challenge or validation. The research was occurring in relationship with participants characterised by Buber’s (1970) I-thou ethos. As Bowes (1996: no page number) described her intention - mine was similar:

The relationship between researcher and researched was intended to involve far more mutuality that was conventionally accepted in research projects, that is, to be collaborative and participatory.

The potential for researcher objectivity is often considered a problem for qualitative research if the participants are as deeply involved as this research process required. Freyer and Feather (1994) argue differently. They suggest that the diffusion of researcher control can be desirable to enhance the data quality. They advocate maximising participant control wherever possible. They cite developing the relationship between researcher and participant as important for data enrichment rather than viewing it as a source of data pollution. In this research the diffusion of researcher control for data enrichment was prioritised.

3.7 Self-Study and Action Research- the nature of action in this thesis

Reflexive cycles are synonymous with action research, whereby a researcher reflects on issue, creates a plan to address the issue, implements the plan, observes the results and then reflects on the process again. In the case of this research there were four cycles all inherently interlinked, each leading to the next. In action research the difficulty is often where to stop collecting data as
each cycle is generative and will create another. For the purpose of this study I focused on four cycles.

Figure 1: Action Research Cycles (Adapted from The Higher Education Academy 2008)

Cycle 1: The first action research cycle centred on student experience and my efforts to create an empowering and dialogic climate for learning.

Cycle 2: The second cycle on improving my own practice was influenced by the ideas generated through the reconnaissance phase. It was focused on developing my understanding of teaching for my own learning and that of my students.

Cycle 3: As I began to understand the collegiate dimension of mutual learning and when my students then began to become lecturers themselves, we moved into another way of relating and the third cycle began which I denote with the phrase from students to colleagues.
Cycle 4: Finally, as I began to understand the impact that not using my academic voice was having for me I began the fourth cycle – *discovering professional voice*. 

As the cycles developed the focus and depth of reflection deepened considerably. The approach taken to action research in this doctoral study evolved as the depth of self reflection grew and the study began to outgrow the traditional action research cycles *per se*. My reflections on each cycle theme were not as discrete and separate as the model of the cycles suggest. At times they overlapped considerably and often occurred in an ongoing and simultaneous way. My constantly deepening understanding arising from my reflections on my practice meant that the insights being gained began to drive the research rather than an adherence to the original cycles decided upon. My research design had to accommodate my changing knowledge and skills (Frost 1995 cited in Mellor 1998). This caused me much concern and prompted a wider search of action research literature to find if other action researcher had similar experiences and while few there were some. McNiff (1998) identifies that many of the action research problems are dealt with at once and she terms the need to adapt to this as ‘generative action research.’ This approach however still adheres to the cyclical process. Atkinson (1994) however states more strongly that the models of the spirals of action research look neat and orderly in theory but the actual experience in the field is often much more messy. Mellor (1998:458) identifies a struggle similar to my own and in fact abandons the label action research and writes:

> I felt that it was more honest to abandon attempts to hide my methodological struggles under the label of action research, and simply to aim to write as openly and clearly as possible about the very perplexing path of the inquiry.

However, I did not wish to abandon the action research approach. The cycles I believed were relevant; however they happened not in the orderly processes set out by action research theorists but rather in a more messy and lived way that was responsive to the issues that were raised by my practice. This also meant that the action dimension to my work cannot be set out in this thesis under the
traditional cyclical model. But action exists nonetheless and can be seen in the changes in my thinking as a result of the deep self-reflection engaged in and in the ensuing careful attention to the issues in my practice that I was prompted to reflect upon by my students. My teaching became more mindful, more careful and more empowering for myself and my students, which is where the heart of the action lies. The reflections prompted by this research have not ceased but will continue long into the future.

3.8 Conclusion
This chapter has sought to give insight into some of the thought influencing the approach to action research I have adopted. The focus of the research in terms of action research cycles are also set out here for clarity. While the next chapter will present the details of my research design and implementation, this chapter sought to explain what I understood to be the particular strengths and challenges to my action research approach.
Chapter Four: The research design
Chapter four: The research design

4.1 Introduction
This chapter outlines the research design and implementation. It explains the thinking behind the research decisions. It details the research aims and objectives. It explains the form of action research employed and discusses data sources and collection methods. The chapter explains the approach that I took in interviews and focus groups that were central to this research. The methodology was qualitative in nature and gathered data from various sources such as focus groups, interviews, student reflective diaries, my own reflective diary. Quantitative data were also collected through the use of structures student feedback surveys. In each section that explains different data sources, a table is provided detailing the research sample for that data collection phase. The process of the data analysis stages is also outlined. Issues of validity are discussed and an explanation of the approach to ethics employed for the research is provided.

4.2 Research focus
The research proposal compiled in 2002 set out the research aim and objectives and specified the focus of the research. Guiding questions or objectives are important for research coherence. Schostak (2002:12) suggests that in qualitative educational research all the guiding research questions might not be evident at the beginning and that “the search for questions continues throughout the life of the project.” This was the case for my research.

4.3 Qualitative research
There are a specific set of assumptions underpinning the qualitative paradigm that I considered appropriate for this research. Researchers subscribing to the qualitative approach tend to treat social reality to be something that is constructed and interpreted by people rather than something that exists externally. “It is a reality that only exists through the way people believe in it, relate to it and interpret it” (Denscombe 2002:12). Thus qualitative researchers usually assume that people’s experiences, beliefs and actions are subjective experiences that need to be interpreted in their context (Ryan et al. 2006).
The positioning of the researcher in qualitative research has been the cause of much debate. Broadly speaking qualitative researchers can be understood as operating from either an interpretivist or constructivist perspective (ibid). In this case a constructivist perspective was taken and an ‘emic’ position adopted in keeping with self-study action research. I did not see myself as a detached observer interpreting the actions of others. Rather I perceived myself as engaging with participants in constructing the account together. “Constructivist researchers assume that it is impossible to completely bracket out experiences, values or beliefs and that their key function is to construct accounts of reality in partnership with their research participants” (Ryan et al. 2006:112). I am not claiming one objective truth in this research, rather in keeping with self-study action research I am claiming my subjective truth in the accounts that I offer of my work. This is not to say that the research was not rigorous or systematic, as the research procedures and protocols are explained the reader should be able to judge the efforts made to ensure rigour.

4.4 Action/constructivist research

Williamson et al. (2002:7) describe the blending of action research with qualitative frameworks as “a successful mixed marriage.” They argue that although the language of researchers in both approaches may differ, “both assign importance to meanings that are constructed by people in social and individual situations.” Action researchers and qualitative researchers treat data as culturally saturated, and tend to assume that data cannot be divorced from the context and culture within which it is generated. Both action research and qualitative research approaches seek to understand experiences and perceptions from the perspective of those who live the experience. Both lend themselves to research approaches that can be empowering for participants and for the researcher and are cognizant of the relationship between researcher and participant as an integral aspect of the research process.

Some differences also exist particularly if the action research approach grounds itself in Whitehead’s (1986) ‘living theory approach.’ In living theory action
research the researcher plays a significant role in data generation. They are as Sanguinetti (2000:237) indicates:

…complex, multiply positioned, and shaped by a multitude of historical, psychological and social forces. Their “actions” are constrained by a dynamic and contradictory field of subconscious or conscious beliefs, apprehensions and ways of being—the discourse of which constitute their sense of who they are and how they feel they might act.

Thus, the focus differs from that of qualitative research in that the individual researcher in action research heavily influences the research whereas in qualitative research the researcher influence might not weigh as heavily. Action research implies a level of engagement with participants that is rather different to some other forms of qualitative research (Williamson et al. 2002: 15). This notwithstanding, for the purposes of this research action research and qualitative research were commensurate particularly because of the values based perspectives of data culturation and potential empowerment practices that underpin both. The flexibility offered by blending both has much to offer and in the wise advice of Patton (2002) purity of method is no virtue, the best approach matches the research methods to the research questions being posed.

4.5 Forms of data collection
To align the values and scope of the research, my methodologies needed to be open to the creation of dialogic opportunities with participants so that they felt free to engage with me openly. Ghaye and Ghaye (1998) perceive critical reflection on practice as encompassing practitioners developing the capacity to formulate argument and employ skills and to improve practice. In action research this means the capacity to generate theory from my practice in order to improve it. Interviews and focus groups were treated as reflective conversations that would enable critical reflection on practice. The data collection was influenced by and Rogers’ (1983) concept of the interpersonal and relational nature of teaching which centres on awareness of how we interact. A focus on this relational practice includes a focus on the impact that others may have on us and our impact on others. Advocates of relational practice emphasise how important it is for the relationship to be positive for both parties and this was
prioritised throughout the research. For the purposes of this study, data were gathered using a variety of data collection forms (see figure 2 below).

Figure 2: forms of data gathered for the purpose of this research
4.6 Sources of data collection

The data for this study were gathered from three main sources, a) the wider university student population; whom I had not met prior to this research b) my undergraduate students and c) my post graduate students.

In self-study action research the researcher’s impact on the data is significant. I perceive the various sources as contributing to my understanding rather like a funnelling process. The general student population data helped me develop a clearer understanding of current practice by offering explicit articulation of key issues for students from a wider, more general perspective. The data gathered from my own undergraduates gave me deeper insight into my own teaching especially with varied groups of all ages. The data gathered from my postgraduates helped me to examine my practice at an advanced level and the facilitating of more intense and in-depth teaching experiences. All data sources contributed to my developing professional identity as an academic and also to deepening my understanding of teaching and learning in higher education.
4.7 Data collection - interviews

Interviews aid researchers in understanding the meaning making and significance that participants place on their circumstances (Ryan et al. 2006). They offer practical approaches to data collection as they are flexible and can be modified in changing circumstances. While interviews have the potential to generate culturally rich data they are also concerned with “the generation of knowledge which is created when two people actively engage in dialogue with each other” (Ryan et al. 2006:151). Interviews were important here because they facilitated participants to reflect on their own understanding of their current educative relationships. As we discussed these experiences, opportunities to probe in more depth arose, something a questionnaire would not facilitate.

Three styles of interview are most common: structured, semi structured and unstructured interviewing. This research prioritised relational practice as part of the data collection. Structured interviews would not suffice as they would limit the freedom of the conversation. Neither were unstructured interviews a good fit as there were particular themes and questions relating to their experiences of being a student and the types of relationships that they had with their teachers/supervisors that I did wish to pursue with each interviewee (more detail on these are available in appendix A - the interview schedule). I chose to conduct semi-structured interviews which were strongly conversational with the interview schedule operating as a flexible guide. I tried to ensure that the interviews were conversational and fluid nature of the interaction was important. I set an informal atmosphere, conducting the interviews in a venue of the interviewee’s choice and provided tea or coffee to soften the formality of the process. I also paid close attention to the verbal and non verbal communication that I used to ensure that they felt more relaxed in speaking to me. Rapely advocates that the interview is a “space of finely co-ordinated interactional work in which the talk of both speakers is central to producing the interview” (Rapley 2001:306 emphasis in original). This perspective involves the researcher understanding the roles played in the production of data. The perceptions articulated by interviewees reflected their internal (thoughts) and external (actual
experience) worlds. As we discussed them we were also constructing an understanding of those worlds.

4.8 Interview participants

I contacted the Graduate Studies office in order to seek permission to e-mail all postgraduate students to see if any would be interested in participating in the research. Permission was granted and access to e-mail addresses was provided. An e-mail was sent explaining the research focus and the request of the researcher. Nine e-mail responses were received across all academic disciplines indicating interest. All nine were interviewed.

In order to protect the anonymity of the interview participants they have been provided with pseudonyms. All were students within the University of Limerick and were previously unknown to myself or each other. More specific detail is not included in the following table in order to protect anonymity as promised.

The interview participants were as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Programme</th>
<th>Date of interview</th>
<th>Current Status</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lorraine</td>
<td>PhD</td>
<td>September 2005</td>
<td>Completing her studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alan</td>
<td>M.A</td>
<td>October 2005</td>
<td>Transferred to PhD register: completing studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Steve</td>
<td>PhD</td>
<td>January 2006</td>
<td>Graduated PhD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lisa</td>
<td>PhD</td>
<td>January 2006</td>
<td>Left studies without completing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helen</td>
<td>PhD</td>
<td>February 2006</td>
<td>Completed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carmel</td>
<td>PhD</td>
<td>February 2006</td>
<td>Graduated PhD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sheila</td>
<td>PhD</td>
<td>February 2006</td>
<td>Completing her studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>James</td>
<td>PhD</td>
<td>March 2006</td>
<td>Graduated PhD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Celine</td>
<td>PhD</td>
<td>January 2007</td>
<td>Opted to graduate with MA</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3: Interview Participants
4.9 Interview Protocols

Nine interviews were conducted. A schedule of questions was pursued in each case but the process was flexible in nature and the content of the discussion was mutually negotiated. Participants were aware of the questions I had on my schedule, they were invited to critique it and to add or delete any questions they wished and they were given control of the recording device so they could stop and start it whenever they chose. Interviews lasted a minimum of one hour and a maximum of one and a half hours, were recorded and transcribed. Participants were given an information sheet prior to the meeting to review and were also given the interview schedule in advance. As the first interviewee had requested the questions in advance it was decided for consistency to continue this process for all interviews. On meeting the information sheet was discussed. I asked each participant if they still wished to participate and if so, they were given the consent form to sign. These forms were locked in my office. Three interviewees were particularly anxious to protect their anonymity so I reiterated their freedom to withdraw, reassuring them that they could do so without prejudice, however they proceeded in a context where I assured them of the confidentiality and safety of the process. They wanted to tell their story safely and so they continued.

In order to facilitate participant validation each participant was given a copy of the transcript and asked to verify if they understood it to be an accurate account of the conversation. Careful attention was paid to this process particularly and participants were invited to change, remove or add anything that they wished. No changes were recommended by any of the participants.

4.10 Focus groups

Focus groups are a dynamic and interactive way of data collection if the emphasis in implementation is on the group interaction and process. The collective activity is central to focus groups (Kitzinger and Barbour 1999). The engagement is between participants and includes the researcher rather than the researcher asking questions of participants. The active encouragement of group interaction among participants is central (Webb and Kevern 2001). Small numbers in focus groups can be desirable given the focus and/or scope of the research (Morgan 1995:517). Focus groups were conducted with two distinct
groups of participants. One group were students of the researcher and the other group were colleagues of the researcher.

4.11 Focus group participants (students)
There were five participants who knew each other as they were students together on the Graduate Diploma/Master’s programme for which I was course director and on which I taught. Five student focus groups were conducted with participants between 2003 and 2005. Pseudonyms are provided for each participant.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Focus Group</th>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Focus Group 1</td>
<td>Jane, Emily, Charlotte, Lynn</td>
<td>October 2003 (a)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus Group 2</td>
<td>Jane, Emily, Charlotte, Lynn</td>
<td>March 2003 (b)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus Group 3</td>
<td>Jane, Emily, Charlotte, Lynn</td>
<td>April 2004 (a)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus Group 4</td>
<td>Jane, Emily, Charlotte, Lynn</td>
<td>September 2004 (b)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus Group 5</td>
<td>Jane, Emily, Charlotte, Lynn</td>
<td>June 2005</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4: Student Focus Group Participants

With this particular group one additional interview was conducted with Lynn in order to gain further clarity with regard to research issues that emerged during her studies. The rationale behind this additional interview will be clarified in the results chapter.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interview</th>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interview</td>
<td>Lynn</td>
<td>October 2005</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5: Additional Interview Participant

4.12 Focus group protocols
The focus groups were conversational in nature with a focus on relational practice. I used a topic guide, which was basically a list of themes that reflected my practice at that time. The process was fluid in nature and like the interviews the content of the discussion was mutually negotiated. Each focus group lasted approximately two and a half hours, and each was recorded and transcribed. These participants had been involved in the study from the beginning, and were aware of and had given input during the drafting of the research proposal. I gave
the participants an information sheet in advance explaining the commitment that was required. They were also given general themes for discussion in advance. At the first focus group the information sheet was explained in person. Participants were asked if they still wished to participate and if so, I gave them the consent form to sign.

To validate the focus groups, every participant was given a copy of the transcript and was asked to verify if they understood it to be an accurate account of the conversation. They were invited to change or add anything that they wished. No changes were made to the transcripts but frequently several participants wrote to me in response to the transcripts and agreed to allow those responses to be part of the data archive.

4.13 Focus group participants (critical peers validation group)

Critical peers can act as a support for action researchers as they can serve to validate in time of doubt and to challenge in times of complacency. “Validating in action research contexts involves submitting your research to the judgment of a group of relevant others, that is inviting their legitimisation (McNiff et al. 2003:137). My validation group consisted of five academic peers who were either actively engaged in or had completed their own doctoral studies using an action research approach. All knew each other and were familiar with each others’ doctoral work. Six validation focus group meetings took place between 2003 and 2007, in which aspects of this research were offered for scrutiny and response. E-mail communications about the research were often sent to me and each individual agreed to the inclusion of their e-mails in the data archive. I offered to provide pseudonyms for the group but they declined, so original names are provided here. The group continued to take an active interest and provide feedback throughout the writing of the thesis.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Focus Group</th>
<th>Names</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Focus Group 1</td>
<td>Breda, Mary, Mairin, Bernie, Caitriona</td>
<td>October 2003 (a)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus Group 2</td>
<td>Breda, Mary, Mairin, Bernie, Caitriona</td>
<td>May 2003 (b)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus Group 3</td>
<td>Breda, Mary, Mairin, Bernie, Caitriona</td>
<td>April 2004 (a)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus Group 4</td>
<td>Breda, Mary, Mairin, Bernie, Caitriona</td>
<td>October 2004 (b)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus Group 5</td>
<td>Breda, Mary, Mairin, Bernie, Caitriona</td>
<td>June 2005</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus Group 6</td>
<td>Mary, Mairin, Bernie, Caitriona</td>
<td>June 2007</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6: Critical Peer Focus Group Participants

4.14 Focus group protocols (critical peers)

The critical peer focus groups were conversational in nature with relational practice at their core. The focus of these meetings was critique of the research and its emergent themes. The chapter writing that I was currently engaged in was also distributed in advance of the meetings. During the first twenty minutes of the focus group I spoke about my current insights into my thinking about the research. Comment and responses were then invited. At the first meeting the processes such as recording, transcription and participant validation were agreed. This group said that they did not perceive the need for consent forms or information sheets are they were very familiar with the use of critical peer groups having utilised them in their own research. Focus groups lasted approximately two hours; they were recorded and transcribed. In order to employ participant validation each participant was given a copy of the transcript and was asked to verify if they understood it to be an accurate account of the conversation. They were invited to change or add anything that they wished.

4.15 Research diary

The use of a research diary also aided the data gathering process. Diary keeping is becoming increasingly popular among researchers in order to capture valuable insights that might otherwise be lost. The diary was useful in the way Hart and Bond (1995:201) advise as “a place to deposit emergent ‘facts’; a wall to bounce ideas against (dialogue with self); an aide-memoire.” Keeping a diary acts as an activity which can help reflection on experiences, observations and thoughts during the research process. It served at various stages to provide an account of
the way that my thinking developed over the course of the research process. The
diary was particularly valuable in that it helped me to capture the development in
my thinking as well as my actions (McNiff and Whitehead 2002). While the
diary did not serve as a day to day journal of research practices it did serve as a
recording space for critical junctures in thinking, often blending the emotional
and the cognitive together. Using my own research diary helped me to focus my
ideas for reflection, it provided data through which I could explore my practice
and it provided a mirror in which my ‘self’ as researcher was reflected back to
me (Hughes 1996:1).

4.16 Student journals
Students were encouraged to keep a reflective journal of their learning
experiences. Critical self-reflection is a dynamic way to foster learning
experiences and is described by Mezirow (1990:13) as a potentially “significant
learning experience in adulthood.” Reflection is an effective tool for recognising
formal and informal learning (Pearce 2003). Students were encouraged to write
in their reflective journals in a free style that included their self awareness,
feelings, and attitudes to their learning. The students were given a framework to
support their reflection and asked to record some reflections after each teaching
session. The guidelines were presented as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reflective Journal Prompts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Identify key learning(s) from the session</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical reflection on key learning(s) including application of key learning(s) to your work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal learning, insights, and feelings at completion of session</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>After completion of one entry per session, the diary should have a conclusions section, drawing the main points from the reflection together.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The student journals were used across a range of student groups undergraduate (modules EN3051 and EN4021) and postgraduate (EN6401, EN6411 and EN5402). (see table 5 for module titles and time frames).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Journals</th>
<th>Module Group</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Student Journal 13 Students</td>
<td>EN6401/6411 (Research Methods and MA dissertation supervision)</td>
<td>September 2003-May 2005</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(postgraduate)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(undergraduate)</td>
<td>and Alcohol Studies.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Journal 17 students</td>
<td>EN4021 Social Personal and Health Education</td>
<td>January-May 2008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(undergraduate)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Journal 15 students</td>
<td>EN5402 Programme Development and Implementation</td>
<td>September – December 2007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(postgraduate)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 7: Student Journal Groups

4.17 Teaching evaluations
The Centre for Teaching and Learning offers independent and confidential evaluations to all UL staff. I invited these evaluations in order to gather anonymous feedback about the students experience via a third party. Students who might be reluctant to articulate their ideas in person might find the anonymous evaluation easier. The evaluation questionnaire was distributed, collected and analysed by an independent person. I was not present as these were being done, and they provided an additional independent source of data relating to my students’ experiences. Included in the data archive are three independent evaluations, two from 2004 and one from 2007.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CTL Evaluations</th>
<th>Module Group</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>External Evaluation 1</td>
<td>EN6401/6411 (Research Methods and MA dissertation supervision)</td>
<td>January 2004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>External Evaluation 2</td>
<td>EN4004 (Reflective Practice)</td>
<td>May 2004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>External Evaluation 3</td>
<td>EN3051 (Experiential Group Work and Group Processes in the Context of Drug and Alcohol Studies.)</td>
<td>October 2007</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 8: External Evaluation Groups

Data were gathered from sources such as e-mail communications from students, colleagues and from critical peers such as the validation group. All e-mails received and responses made that were relevant to this research were printed and added to the data archive. If the emails included comments about my teaching, student learning or classroom related experiences they were deemed relevant and included. Permission was sought from each person to keep the e-mail and to add it to the data archive. Where an extract was used for the thesis, specific permission was sought before inclusion.

4.18 Data management

A data archive was created to store all data as they were collected. Focus groups and interviews were transcribed. Each transcript was dated, assigned a code and hard copies were printed and stored in the data archive. Soft copies were filed in a password protected folder on my personal computer.

Permission was sought from the authors of electronic communications for use in the research and when granted they were printed, filed and stored in the data archive.
Student journals were added to the data archive. My diary was created in digital format. This was downloaded onto my personal computer and saved in a password protected folder.

4.19 Analysing data – the journey toward coherent interpretation

Initially, the focus was clear - to examine the data for evidence of the improvement of practice. However, as Patton (2002:431) indicates:

Analysis brings moments of terror that nothing sensible will emerge and times of exhilaration from the certainty of having discovered the ultimate truth. In between are long periods of hard work, deep thinking and weight lifting volumes of material.

Finding a method of analysis that would fit an approach that was essentially a hybrid of action and qualitative research was challenging. There is limited published work on data analysis in action research. Indeed as Miles and Huberman (1994:16) state, “there are few agreed canons for qualitative data analysis” generally. There were many guidelines but few rules (Patton 2002:433). The challenge was to find a way to reflect “on the development of an interpretation, to show the way a researcher’s self, or identity in a situation, intertwines with his or her understanding of the object of the investigation” (Peshkin 2000:5). Throughout the qualitative data analysis was the understanding that all data produced was the product of social interaction that included the researcher as well as participants (Rapley 2001:317). As interviewer I was active in the interaction and this is reflected in the analysis.

The style of research was fluid and defied linear progression thus the timing of action cycles and the distinction between data gathering and analysis became less clear. In such cases Patton (2002:436) suggests adhering to two primary guiding ideas in order to organise the analysis.

(1) The questions that were generated during the conceptual and design phases of the study

(2) Analytic insights and interpretations that emerged during the data collection.
This guide was useful. Patton then suggests three specific stages of analysis for coherence: inventory, protection of data and inductive analysis. These stages were followed in order to provide a coherent and rigorous approach to the data analysis.

4.19.1 Stage 1: Inventory
Taking inventory included being organised for the data analysis and began with taking stock of what had been collated. The data were checked for any unfinished aspects, and were also checked to ensure that all transcripts were labelled and dated correctly. All collated data were checked to see if any additional data were needed. This was followed by an examination of the quality of the entire collation in order to get “a sense of the whole.”

4.19.2 Stage 2: Protecting the data
Backup copies were made of all data. Tapes were copied and transcripts were saved and backed up electronically. Three transcripts were printed: one for clean copies which were filed away, one for highlighting and thematic coding and one for cutting and pasting by hand (a process engaged in order to see the tapestry of interpretation emerge manually).

4.19.3 Stage 3: Inductive qualitative analysis –looking for themes
An inductive approach was taken where findings would emerge out of the data through interaction with them rather than adhering too closely to a particular existing framework (Patton 2002:453). The two guiding ideas were kept in focus throughout. All texts were examined for recurring words and themes. Emergent themes were decided upon as being the themes that occurred frequently within each and across all interviews/focus groups and journals. The identified themes were decided upon in terms of their frequency of occurrence but also their relevance to the research aim and objectives. These emergent themes were then brought to the critical peer focus groups for feedback. The volume of material was examined in order to identify core consistencies and meanings. These core meanings became themes and patterns that were consistent with the emergence of that theme. The themes were the overall concepts that emerged such as power
for example; while patterns referred specifically to how this concept was manifest in practice.

When this process was completed manually NVivo was then employed as a second or back up process. NVivo is useful software in supporting qualitative data analysis. It facilitated me to electronically sort data and was employed here in order to cross-check in case some data might be overlooked.

4.20 Validity

It is necessary to engage in knowledge generation in a thorough way so that it is trustworthy both in academia and in practice (Anderson and Herr 1999). In action research validity can be an issue. The literature refers to the crisis in validity (Denzien and Lincoln 1994). However, attempting to impose traditional validity measures on research that is subjective and context bound is futile as McMahon stipulates.

The issue, then is, whether or not it is ever possible to frame meaningful validity criteria for action-research accounts given that action-research investigations are always context bound (McMahon 2003:1).

Given that action research is as concerned with the process of inquiry as with the findings (Stjernström, Lund and Olin 2006), the question of validity becomes even more pertinent, particularly as objectivist perceptions of validity will not allow for the complexity of interrelationships which characterise self-study. The paradox of closeness and distance permeate action research self-study.

Stjernström et al. (2006:17) raise the question ‘how does the researcher keep a critical perspective when she does not have the traditional distance to the field? Can she ignore her feelings in such a setting?” Anderson et al. (1994) make a cogent argument that in approaching validity for action research different criteria need to be taken into account:

a) Democratic validity refers to the degree to which consultation and collaboration permeate the research process.

b) Catalytic validity, which is the level of change of perception on the part of the researcher, understanding, endeavour and change.
c) Process validity which determines the relevance, competence and appropriateness of the course of action.

d) Outcome validity, which refers to researcher engaging in reflection in order to reframe the problem and the ensuing outcomes/resolutions

e) Dialogic validity, which is achieved when the research is exposed for critical engagement with a critical friend and/or other researchers, who then give feedback on data interpretation and current thinking.

Anderson et al.’s categorisations are helpful as implicit within them is the understanding of the contextual and subjective nature of action research. McMahon (2003:8) developed these categorisations further by proposing questions to logically follow each validity categorisation. I employed these questions in order to illuminate the concerns that I had with regard to validity and the measures taken to address them.

4.20.1 Democratic validity

Question 1: Were the perspectives of all those involved in the study accurately represented?

For many action researchers democratic validity is taken to incorporate the level to which the research is collaborative. While McMahon (2003) points out that there is little consensus within the action research community as to the meaning of collaboration. He argues that if collaboration means ensuring the voices of all those concerned in the study are properly represented then the aforementioned question is sufficient. In this study every effort was made to ensure the perspective of participants were accurately represented. Conversations were recorded and transcribed. These transcriptions were then returned to participants for participant validation. On receipt of that validation the transcripts were only then considered actionable data or evidence. The process of participant validation in itself can raise some interesting insights. In some cases the researcher can be so caught up in trying to pin down the ethereal (for this research it was the quality of our educative relationship) during the taped conversations that they could nearly miss the key insights that come in response to the transcripts. I was careful to
engage in the process with heightened awareness about what participants were saying.

When I included data in a paper that I was writing for conferences, participants were asked a) if the data excerpts and the style they were presented in were in keeping with their understanding of the tenor of our conversation and b) if they were happy for the data to be used in that way. This in turn led to many participants attending the delivery of some papers if they were within reasonable geographical distance.

Democratic validity also implies relevance in other words what Cunningham (1983) calls local validity or what Watkins (1991) terms relevancy/applicability criteria. In this study the focus on how I as a professional educator could create educative relationships that were characterised by care and collaboration were relevant to the participants who took part thus democratic validity was met.

4.20.2 Outcome validity

Question 2: Did the action emerging from the study lead to the successful resolution?

In attempting to evidence outcome validity Gustavsen (2001) argues that one needs to evidence the claim to have improved practice in some way. Although I hold a lecturing position and had completed Master’s research prior to embarking on this practitioner research I had not really interrogated my own practice or the assumptions underpinning it. While I had engaged in aspects of reflective practice prior to this, it was not of the same robust critique that the interrogation of my work for this research was. My reflections led me to the insight that I experienced myself as living the contradiction of believing in empowerment and being surrounded by expectations of didacticism both from colleagues and students. I then needed to problematise how I believed learning should occur in higher education in order to provide coherent and realistic educational experiences for my students. Engaging in this study has led to the prioritisation of empowerment and student centred learning for all students who come into
contact with both myself and other teachers on programmes of study that I lead. By interrogating my practice I gained clarity with regard to the characteristics necessary for empowering educative relationships. This in turn influenced my personal ‘living educational theory’ (Whitehead 1989), but significantly has also influenced others to prioritise empowerment and care in their relationships with their students and clients. It was also important that students would see the value in an empowering approach to student learning and in so doing would prioritise it as a working ethos for those they came in contact with in their professional lives. Thus, my work and the opportunity to discuss that work afforded by the research gave us all the opportunity to improve practice.

4.20.3 Process validity

Question 3: Was the study conducted in a dependable and competent way?

The traditional standards generally used in judging research that I commonly used were no longer a good fit. Generalisability, a concept I strive for in traditional research practice would not be a cornerstone of this study, nor would the need to randomly select participants in order to limit bias. It required some unlearning of ‘the rules of engagement’ in that if I wanted to really interrogate my teaching and learning I had to hold myself accountable to my students. I needed to ask them how they perceived I used power, knowledge and care in my practice. Therefore, the focus narrowed into two avenues. I wanted to listen to student experiences in order to test my assumptions about how teaching and learning are manifest in higher education. I needed to then hold my practice up to critique from my own students in order to improve my own work as an educator. Thus influenced by McNiff et al. (2004, 2006) and Whitehead (1989, 2006) the process of my study followed a specific pattern:

a) Background…what was my area of concern?

b) Context…why am I concerned?

c) Current practice…the search for data?

d) Gathering evidence…data analysis

e) Implications…what is the significance of the research?

f) Evaluating the work…submission of a thesis for examination.
Every effort was made to ensure research competence and dependability throughout. Data were painstakingly collected. Each data piece was validated by the participant and permission was sought to employ every single data excerpt that is included in this thesis. The attention to detail in this process was deemed important for in all cases I wanted participants to feel control over the data they shared with me and to be familiar with how I was choosing to interpret and represent their voice. In this way process validity was strictly adhered to.

4.20.4 Catalytic validity

*Question 4: Was the study a catalyst for understanding, action and/or transformation?*

As an action researcher I tried to espouse Whitehead’s (1989) Living Theory approach. This meant that from the outset I needed to examine my values and the implications of such values for my practice as a professional educator. This thesis illuminates how this doctoral study has acted as a catalyst for my understanding of the nature of education and indeed of my work as a practitioner/researcher. Several key shifts in understanding developed as my thinking evolved. Some changes were pedagogical in nature, such as my errors in assuming that one style of postgraduate supervision would be appropriate for all my students or my assumption that didacticism and empowerment could not co-exist. Other changes were epistemological in that I discovered that empowerment in knowledge generation and learning was not something I could do for others but rather something that students had to engage in for themselves. While I could not empower another person I could work to facilitate them in that process. I developed deeper awareness of how teacher actions can promote or inhibit the development of empowerment. My ontological perspectives also underwent change. I gained deep insight (often painful to explore) with regard to how easily silenced in the academic arena I became. I began to understand Virginia Wolf’s critique of how as women we often swallow our voices for social acceptance. The writing of this action research study meant I finally had to examine why this silencing could (and did) happen and the impact it had on my academic output. These changes are the focus of the following chapter which outlines the main findings for this research. The thesis shows just how much my
thinking developed and how my practice has become much more informed by this research.

4.20.5 Dialogic validity

Question: Was the study reviewed by peers?

Opening this work up to colleagues for critical review has been an integral part of this research. This process has also been referred to as ‘social validation’ by Whitehead and McNiff (2006:103). The meetings were reflective of Whitehead and McNiff’s (2006) recommendations that the critical peer group meets regularly and reviews progress to date. The researcher informs the group of the research, then produces evidence and argues the claim to knowledge thus far. The validation group listens, assesses the quality of the claims made and explores whether the claims are justified. Critical feedback comes during the meetings and subsequently via email communications. My assumptions and the development of my thinking with regard to the nature of educative relationships were held up to the scrutiny of six peers, five of whom have doctorates in educational research. This scrutiny took various forms such as:

a) Meeting as a group and recording our conversations. These conversations focused on discussions about my current educational thinking and about the challenges I encountered during the research. Robust critique was invited at these meetings.

b) Sending my writing and my data analysis to them individually for feedback.

c) Engaging in e-mail communication about my writing or about challenges that I may have encountered between the meetings.

I also availed of opportunities to critically engage with the wider academic community when I delivered papers in symposia (Mannix McNamara 2003/2005) focusing on my work in progress. Critique was invited from audience members and was subsequently debriefed with the critical peers who were present. This dialogue was used as part of my analysis.
4.21 An ecological ethic – some perspectives informing the research

Ethical codes are important for research and have been described as a moral pathfinder aiding perception among all participants to ethical elements throughout the research process (Punch 1986). While ethical codes of practice are important Collins (2004), drawing on the work of Flinders (1992), cautions us against an exclusively utilitarian approach to ethics in research, rather he advocates what he terms ecological ethics. “Ecological ethics is a conception of the world, environments or communities (including classrooms) as unified systems” and as such is particularly suited to collaborative action research (Collins 2004:349). In a unified ecological system no one part of that system can employ control over the entire system (Flinders 1992). All participants consider that they are part of an evolving whole and are engaged in ongoing negotiations of power (Collins 2004). The ecological perspective that both Flinders and Collins put forward was attractive in that it required an understanding of the relationships in the research as interdependent and fitted with my desire to hold myself accountable in my practice. It also connected with my concern of the ethical use of power in research and in educative relationships generally. An ecological perspective meant not employing a utilitarian approach with participants but rather I used a collaborative style that respected all participants.

4.21.1 Ethical protocols and consent

Ethical approval was sought from and granted by the faculty sub committee of the University of Limerick’s Research and Ethics Committee. All participants were given an information sheet and a copy of the original proposal to read at their convenience. They were invited to participate and those who volunteered signed a consent form to participate.

4.21.2 Ethical perspectives

The spectrum of ethics is vast and ranges from simple ethical practices in research such as ethical approval, adherence to ethical guidelines such as verbal and written information for all participants, to more philosophical questions as raised by Stjernström, Lund and Olin (2006:18) such as:
To what extent does the researcher have a responsibility to share her developing new knowledge? The knowledge production depends on interaction but does that necessarily mean that every new idea has to be shared all the time? The difficulty lies in making judgements about when to speak and what to say.

As a teacher/researcher I had a greater concern in gathering data from my own students (rather than those who self-selected to participate). Would my students feel they had to give me the ‘kind’ answer? Would my research be prone to the critique often made of action research that it is often presented as successful with little problems or lack of resolution evidenced? As a course director and supervisor I had power with regard to grading, student access and support. Would this influence my students to tell me only positive aspects of my work? The data in the following chapter will show that in fact students were extremely frank in highlighting my shortcomings as well as my successes.

Dominant publications on ethics appear based on discourses of harm, “that human activity, such as research, should not generate harm, social psychological and/or physical, to living beings” (Bruni 2002:30). This is possibly a necessary emphasis and throughout the research I was specifically conscious of doing no harm. Furthermore, I wanted to pursue a research process that would possibly enhance relationality and empowerment.

4.22 Conclusion
I chose action research primarily because it was best suited to facilitate a deepening engagement with my professional practice. This chapter sought to identify the careful deliberation of the methodological choice and to provide insight into the importance that was placed on a methodological approach that mirrored the values of the study, namely empowerment and student centeredness.
The following three chapters serve to outline the main themes that emerged from the data analysis. In particular these themes were beliefs about the nature of teaching and learning, communication and/or dialogue, trust, care, respect and power. Each of these themes inter-connects with each other and with the overall unifying or underpinning theme of educative relationships. As the data were collected from two sources it was decided to represent the data resulting from each source separately for clarity.

Chapter five details the results from my interviews that were conducted with research participants who were previously unknown to me.

Chapter six details the results from the research with my own students.

Chapter seven details the insights gained during the research processes.

There is similarity in data emerging from all sources. Issues that were of interest to participants who were previously unknown to me were similar to my students. The depth of reflection from my students is the most obvious difference between both sources but this is unsurprising given the time and exposure that I had with those students.

Pseudonyms have been provided for all participants except for my critical peers.
Chapter Five: Results A

Towards understanding the nature of teaching and learning in the university setting
Chapter five: The nature of teaching and learning

5.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines what the data showed about students’ experiences of teaching and learning and of educative relationships in higher education. There are six sub themes that clearly emerged. These themes include: beliefs about the nature of teaching and learning, communication, trust, care, respect and power. As this chapter will illuminate participants’ commitment, deep insight, the positive experiences of being mentored by their teachers/supervisors and in some cases the difficulties experienced as part of their studentship were evident.

5.2 The nature of teaching and learning

Teaching is in the relationship we have, it is in how we talk to each other.

The teaching approaches that an educator employs, and the types of relationships they cultivate with students, play a significant part in the learning process. Throughout this research, the quality of relationship fostered between teacher and student was identified as important. In particular, participants pointed to the strongly interpersonal dimension of third level education. In terms of teaching, (either inside or outside the classroom), participants often did not differentiate between the nature of teaching in either; rather they saw the principles of good teaching as relevant to both.

To be a teacher or supervisor of students in university... there is the interpersonal dimension to it. It’s like when we were in school, we had certain teachers who knew everything there was to know about their particular subject but they couldn’t teach it. You can be sitting there looking at someone going what are they talking about? And then another person can come in, teach the exact same material and whatever teaching skill it is they have, it clicks straight away. It is the same with a supervisor, just because they have written extensively in one area does not mean that they have the necessary skills to help you develop in that area. It is a teaching role.

(Lorraine interview 2005: 37).
Lorraine went on to explain her perceptions of university teaching, which she saw as often informal and with a strong emphasis on conversation and guidance.

You see, to me teaching is not actually just about standing up in front of a class, it is about that in a way but not exclusively. Actually, when you are sitting down having a cup of coffee with a student there is teaching happening. I could be sitting having coffee and he (supervisor) might say, I read this great book and tell me about it and I might go to the library or on Amazon before I go home and get that book - that is teaching too. Teaching is in the relationship we have, it is in how we talk to each other.

(Lorraine interview 2005: 40).

Being able to adapt to the different needs of students seemed important to Carmel, who at the time of interview was a research student and more recently a junior lecturer in her university. She reflected on the impact of different learning styles on teaching and supervision.

Carmel: So much depends on the person you are teaching or even supervising. So I think you need to see what their needs are in terms of what they need from us and try to meet those.

Patricia: So how would we do that then?

Carmel: Well I know this sounds odd but experimenting at the beginning, you know have expectations, set a limit like a piece of work, so long... by a certain time... and see how they meet that and feel about it. I mean obviously you have some ideas in your head about what works and what won’t but perhaps try different things and see

(Carmel interview 2006: 19).

Here, Carmel was drawing attention to the affective aspect of the teaching relationship when she suggests setting a target and subsequently reflecting with students on how they felt during the process of working towards that target. The implication of the process of supervision as a negotiated space seems evident in her thinking.

In recent years we have seen much emphasis placed on developing a scholarship of teaching within higher education. Participants raised the need for such emphasis when they questioned what they perceived as the assumption within universities that those who have completed research at Master’s or PhD level
automatically possess the skills and comfort to in teach. Lorraine initially raised the question.

What qualifies you to supervise somebody’s work? Is it because you have done a PhD yourself? You know there is a hell of a lot more skills involved

(Lorraine Interview2006: 36).

Alan similarly pondered this assumption:

I think there are assumptions that because you gain a lectureship that you automatically know how to teach or supervise but I am not sure it is that natural for people you know?

(Alan Interview 2005: 25).

The style of supervision can have an impact on how positively one can engage with feedback. Steve discussed his experience of having two supervisors for his research which he appeared to experience as a positive team approach:

One supervisor is more of a counsellor to the project but he is not directly related to the project, but the supervisor from X (external to his department) is directly related to the project and I am closely working with him but it is more a colleague relationship. When it is a colleague [sic] relationship I can get critical feedback and it is fine I can hear it because it is always done nicely and in a work focused way not personal to me.

(Steve interview 2006: 2).

Approaching research supervision in what was understood as less hierarchical ways appeared to be different to the perceived norm, and was interpreted positively by Steve.

We are differently organised, we have a different way of being organised. I heard from languages or teaching departments you write and the supervisor approves your stuff. In our structure you write or do a project in common like in the industrial sense. It is not like supervision in the traditional sense, there is input too and you can discuss. It is almost like co-supervision of the project, it is quite nice

(Steve interview 2006:1).

An approach with clear boundaries was also emphasised by Steve who discussed the importance of checking in on progress in order to offer support.
Patricia: So you are looking for a professional relationship not a friend, from what you say? Does care have any part in this then?

Steve: That is a huge area...just checking regularly on how the plans with the student are going, just make a schedule to see how it is going with the learning.

Patricia: So it is paying to attention to progress you mean?

Steve: Yes that is important because a lot of people in university can get lost, slow down or lose momentum (Steve interview 2006: 5).

When the supervisor achieved the balance of a guiding presence rather than a coercive one they seemed to be in a position to effect a gentle rescue if necessary. Lorraine describes how her supervisor gently caught her increasing de-motivation.

He said if you want to leave, you know get a job I am not going to stop you but I think what you have done so far is really valuable and I think you are well able for it. I wouldn’t have taken you on if I didn’t think you were able for this. Just going to him and having that chat and getting that little bit of confidence back means everything (Lorraine interview 2005: 6).

5.3 Communication

Communication is important, you need to be approachable

Often referred to by participants as conversation, communication with teachers and supervisors was perceived to be essential for students to feel positively about their learning. A common theme emerging from interviews with students was the importance of feeling heard. Students articulated that it was important to them to feel that their supervisors were listening to them and also really hearing their concerns. But the communicative process is not always an empowering experience for students. Lisa, an international student, describes her discomfort in attempting to communicate with a supervisor with whom, from her perspective, the relationship was less than supportive. Language difficulties appeared to play a part for her. She described herself and her supervisor as “two foreigners together.”
I thought it was my fault ok? Because my English is not very good, that is a bit of it. But the Irish students have the same problem. Very often they say he doesn’t understand what they are saying. Very often I am sending some e-mail and he doesn’t get the idea of what I am trying to say…it is very…the communication is not clear

(Lisa interview2006: 17).

Helen, an Irish student also described experiencing difficulties in being heard but in this case her supervisor was the same nationality as herself.

Patricia: Did you feel that you could really dialogue with your teacher?

Helen: I could but it didn’t make any difference (laughs)

(Helen interview 2006: 38).

Students appeared to place importance on communication. The option of discussing with the teacher or supervisor how they might work together emerged. While this was considered important, the timing of when this conversation might happen was identified as needing careful consideration:

Patricia: Is it worth having a conversation with your teacher about the way you or they like to work?

Steve: On the one hand it is good but on another side I think it can be a bit too strong to assume that a student will know what he needs from his teacher or supervisor at the beginning, that conversation may come later

(Steve interview 2006: 4).

Steve’s response seems to indicate an emergent understanding of the self in relation with others in the learning relationship. At the beginning a student may not know themselves what they need, but as time passes they may gain a better understanding of their learning needs and also become more assertive in being able to articulate them. Thus the timing of such conversations may be quite important.

Communication appeared to be important but there was also a balance required. That a supervisor be available but not overly so seemed to be significant:
Communication is important, you need to be approachable. Not to mollycoddle but at the same time to hover and make sure students don’t get lost

(Helen interview 2006: 35).

Initially it was intended to title this section dialogue. However, after much deliberation and discussion it became clear that despite attempts to map the theme of dialogue onto what was essentially communication and conversation it was not a good fit. No matter how much it was wished, interviewees did not engage with the concept of dialogue and this will be discussed in later chapters.

5.4 Characteristics of empowering learning relationships

Some key insights emerged with regard to how participants perceived the characteristics of empowering learning relationships. Specifically these characteristics were trust, respectful and equitable engagements and care.

5.5 Trust

It is really important to be able to ask a question without fear or judgement.

Trust was perceived by all participants as an essential characteristic of empowering educative relationships. The building of trust is complex and requires strong interpersonal engagement and commitment to building supportive teaching and learning relationships. A reciprocal process that is as important to both actors in the learning relationship is crucial. For relationship based teaching and learning, safety, trust, student needs, teacher needs and modes of communication are important considerations. Support and trust appeared important to Carmel who travelled from another country to work with her supervisor.

What works really well is the relationship with my supervisor, but of course that is the reason why I came here as well. I knew her before I came because she used to be my lecturer and she also supervised me in my first Master’s....Also she is more than a supervisor I mean she is a friend as well you know? That if you have a problem even if it isn’t strictly related to the research I can go to her, I can talk to her

(Carmel interview 2006: 8).
The theme of collegiality/friendship that Carmel discussed was also reiterated by others. Being able to approach a supervisor with doubts was also mentioned by Sheila as being very important particularly as she feared that she could not trust the judgments that might be made of her vulnerability.

Sheila:  I didn’t know that I was going to experience like...you know I hit a wall, and you just think oh I can’t do this or I don’t want to do it, it is not going anywhere and you think it is all your own fault. That has been difficult. I have really struggled for weeks with self doubt and despondency...and he (supervisor) didn’t know I was going through this at all.

Patricia: Did you not talk to him... should he have known?

Sheila:  I think students should know that if they have something like that, they can go to their supervisors. I didn’t feel like I could go to him because I felt it would just show me up in a bad light and he would have doubts about me then so I kept it hidden.

(Sheila interview 2006: 40-41).

Carmel seemed to see her supervisor as placing much trust in her by having a flexible approach to the timeline for her research and while this was important to her it also worried her as she preferred a structured timeline for her work.

My supervisor, because from her experience she didn’t like this very strict rigid model of supervision she had from her own supervisor, she is quite free with me, she trusts me, she expects me to manage in terms of my time and deadlines and stuff but I worry that might fail her too

(Carmel interview 2006: 17).

Participants gave the impression that trusting that they could communicate with a supervisor without anxiety was important for developing their thinking specific to their research:
I mean you have to feel confident enough to say these things to your supervisor because there isn’t anybody else that we can talk about it to anyway. You know with the research the only person you can really actually talk it out with is the supervisor and sometimes I found that I am dealing with things in my head even just by talking through them without even my supervisor giving me a particular solution

(Carmel interview 2006: 26).

The need to be able to trust that a supervisor’s response to your dilemmas would be supportive seemed to have an impact on willingness to engage in seeking help.

This is not just me; other guys here that worked with him said this too that when you didn’t know something he made you feel stupid that you didn’t know. It works against you because you are kind of afraid to say well I don’t understand this and can you help me out...you know? It is really important to be able to ask the question without fear of judgement.

(James interview 2006: 6).

This trust in supporting the work was reiterated by Sheila who spoke highly of her supervisor:

So far he has not let me down at all do you know? That is important

(Sheila interview 2006: 35).

Trust in the boundary of confidences in the relationship also appeared important.

It needs to be confidential I don’t want my teacher or supervisor to discuss another student not to discuss me with another. I expect this basic behaviour. It is like every relationship you need to understand how to deal with it

(Steve interview 2006: 6).

5.5.1 Trust in the research management skills of the supervisor

Trusting that a supervisor would guide and keep the research on track was deemed important as both Steve and Carmel illustrate.

You might go in the wrong direction, get lost...it is always like this...so yes to keep them on track or even just to make them aware that they left their track. It might be good to say I would like to have a look at this direction too it might be interesting but they need to be familiar with the
work enough to know that they have lost track. It is no criticism and it might be even interesting for both but we are often dependent on funding…

(Steve interview 2006: 5).

Being able to guide you is important. Not exactly even in terms of knowledge, they don’t have to know everything about your subject but they need to know the process, so as to help you make your own choices

(Carmel interview 2006: 14).

Carmel was aware of the delicate balance between having too structured an approach to teaching and supervision and having too little. She struggles with time management:

To a certain extent if she had realised this about me a little earlier she should be able to deal with me a little but differently and put some particular deadlines in even though she felt this is not the good way to supervise somebody but then again other people if they do get stricter deadlines they completely feel like that cannot work; it depends so much on the person you are working with

(Carmel interview 2006: 17).

This theme was reiterated by Steve, who liked the independence but was aware that it does not work for everyone.

I like the independence, which is quite nice. You can do whatever you like. There is risk there as well. You have to organise yourself and when you are not the type who is able to organise it could be quite hard yes? We have other post grads who are here a long time and they have nearly no work but they don’t have someone who might tell them, look, stick to a time plan or whatever so this could be one of the problems

(Steve interview 2006: 3).

Being able to trust that a supervisor will be supportive was also cited as important:

It all goes back to this support thing at the beginning, you really need that. It has to be that your supervisor must be approachable. You have to learn for yourself but you also have to be able to go to the supervisor without fear that they will make a fool out of you and be able to say look I have this problem can you point me in the right direction?

(James interview 2006: 13).
Not all students experience positive trust throughout their studies. Lisa, spoke with emotion about the lack of trust she appeared to experience from and consequently felt for her supervisor. During the conversation she drew attention to her meetings with her supervisor during the first year of her postgraduate studies.

So that time I remember a few unpleasant meetings with him, then he was nicer for a time, and then after Christmas it was worse actually... he was changing... he is really changing... I feel like the daughter of an alcoholic at the moment do you know? How do I feel at the moment? He is judging me and he is not judging my ideas... what would I change?... trust, a little trust, when I am saying things about motor dynamics that he is supposed to trust me a little and believe me (Lisa interview 2005: 15).

Judgment, which is part of the academic development process, needs sensitive and careful deconstruction. The focus needs to be placed on critiquing the ideas together dialogically but in the above excerpt it appears that Lisa herself felt judged rather than her work and this was quite a difficult experience for her. Lisa went on in the interview to make a plea for trust:

I don’t know why he doesn’t trust me so much. I wish I just would have... I could have... somebody who is able to understand what you are doing and trust. That somebody trusts your knowledge that you are bringing to the table that they don’t see you as knowing nothing... I am a normal person and I wish a good supervisor could assume that the student here is trying to achieve something and will really work on this. It would be nice if he could trust my questions you know a saying in my country there is nothing that is a stupid question (Lisa interview 2006: 16).

Students gave the impression that trust was important for them during interviews. Celine also seemed to experience lack of trust as characteristic of her relationship with her supervisor.

But she had no trust in anybody and she locked all the presses in the lab so that I could not take stuff out of them when she was gone on holidays and I used to have to go to other people to get stuff like chemicals off them. I was embarrassed to be asking them (Celine interview 2005: 5).

For Sheila trust was also on the wish list.
...there is always the balance you know...maybe he could just trust me that bit more...

(Sheila interview 2006:32).

Trust levels seem to rise markedly when students recognise that teachers are supporting their common needs. However, if they perceive support is not available it can lead them to self-doubt and require them to engage in positive self-talk to remain productive and engaged.

*Because there were times there, where I know for me in the first two years I felt like walking away so many times but I said no, look you are interested in your work, you like working on it, this is just because there is no support there*

(Celine interview 2007: 41).

### 5.5.2 Institutional trust

One student Alan, who returned to University after years of working in industry, identified the impact that lack of institutional trust can have on students’ relationships within the learning environment. In particular, he referred to being placed under pressure to sign a postgraduate agreement form in the very early stages of his arrival on campus of his university:

*I feel that the institution was trying to protect itself. We were asked to sign a post grad agreement form...agreement is a bit of a paradox because you were asked to sign it and you felt under pressure, we were lucky that the three of us were asked at the same time...I thought what a pity because it was the first couple of weeks of our post grad start up*  

(Alan interview 2005: 4).

Alan went on to describe his supervisor as a ‘competent’ and ‘thoughtful’ supervisor who listened to their concerns but he was aware of the difficulties that their problem with the form may have placed upon the supervisor himself. While later in the interview Alan continued to reiterate the ‘concerned’, ‘thoughtful’ nature of his supervisor, conversely he seemed to feel that the educational institution was, “the opposite of my supervisor.” Alan took time in making his choice of supervisor

*I very much picked the people I am working with...I very much did the ground work before, I had thought about it for two years, approached*
them over the two year period and I worked out a relationship so I had a sort of social contract, a social bonding...

(Alan interview 2005: 22).

5.6 Respectful and equitable engagement

It is not like he is up there and I am down here.

In the exploration of the characteristics of empowering educative relationships, the theme of respect appeared to emerge consistently as an important feature. Being able to exchange ideas in an open and non-threatening manner was important. Students appreciated when supervisors showed interest in their studies. Carmel saw this as an important quality for her supervisor to have:

Well first of all she was really enthusiastic about what I wanted to do so she was very supportive in that sense. Even though it was not strictly her area of interest, she has a lot of enthusiasm, like me for it and she was showing a lot of support for me in that sense

(Carmel interview 2006:7).

For some, lack of interest appeared to characterise the learning relationship they had with their supervisor

Patricia: If I asked you in a nutshell how would you describe the relationship you had with your supervisor?

Helen: Well I can’t say conflict or anything it was more that they just didn’t have any interest, so I was trying to get them motivated, trying to get them interested and I’d be saying look here is the result.....ahh... no, no, no...they just we never happy and they really dragged it out but personally I could still go to them if there was a problem

(Helen interview 2006:34).

A supervisor taking an interest in career progression appeared important for students. Carmel identified that while her supervisor’s interest in her research area motivated her, she also supported her by encouraging her to think about her career.

She has been supportive of me as well. When I first started I had no idea about what this all is or about my career I had no clue but she was
interested. Because I have only been a student before she was the one who introduced me to the whole idea of papers. She said ‘oh you need a good conference that you could present at and learn from, you could actually turn a decent paper and try submitting to that conference and I find looking at a lot of people their supervisors didn’t do that for them (Carmel interview 2006:16).

The importance of voice and capacity to engage reciprocally was discussed by Lorraine as a very important part of her writing process.

...say if we are working on a paper together and if he has done something, you know I wouldn’t be afraid to say look you know that is wrong there, that doesn’t make sense and he will do the same back to me at the same time he is really positive when something good is done, which I feel is really important from my perspective, because I don’t want somebody telling me that I am doing is great if it’s not (Lorraine interview 2005:8).

Being able to communicate in a reciprocal manner that was not hierarchical was important to Lorraine. She attributed their relationship in some part to their personalities:

Well the relationship we have is that actually that we both have very similar personalities and we kind of discovered this as we got along working together, even though he is very senior in the department I would not be afraid to criticise something that he has done. I will point to something and he will say yes that is rubbish there I don’t know what I was thinking. It’s not like he is up there and I am down here you know? (Lorraine interview 2005:3).

Respect was highlighted specifically as a characteristic of positive educative relationships. Students seemed to want to feel respect for those who were teaching and supervising them. Respect in this regard was characterised by lack of fear, by the student feeling valued and by being responded to in an effective and timely manner. It also was characterised by democratic engagements in which students felt that they were free to engage openly without fear. Lisa, who during her interview described a difficult learning journey, saw respect as necessary for her:
I need to feel respect for the person who is teaching me, but I can’t be afraid  

*(Lisa interview 2006: 2)*.

Steve also believed that responding efficiently to students in a democratic manner helped the learning process.

*Patricia:* You mentioned respect what did you mean by that?

*Steve:* That you stick to schedules and appointments and that you answer emails even if it is just to say sorry I don’t have time today I will reply next week. That you don’t cut someone off in a meeting just the standard, let’s call it business behaviour. They are not on a higher level.

*(Steve interview 2006: 4)*.

Simply making time was interpreted by participants as a message of respect. Helen was impressed by the way in which a supervisor other than her own dealt with his students. She saw the giving of time and attention as important when students were investing so much time themselves:

*He would be over to the lab every day that he could, he would spent an hour with his students, it depends on your work I know but it helps to chat, it’s about giving some time when we are giving so much of it*  

*(Helen interview 2006: 23)*.

Lack of response or ineffective responses impacted on learning relationships.

*Celine:* When I would request meetings she would say that she hadn’t time to meet...that she had to get lectures prepared and stuff like that. It might be two or three weeks later that I would get a meeting...

*Patricia:* And what about the relationship? Did you talk about support?

*Celine:* She obviously didn’t want to know. I would write reports and six or seven months later nothing would be given back  

*(Celine interview 2006: 2).*

122
For Lorraine this also extended to the feedback process and she describes how she perceived her supervisor to be respectful in giving feedback:

*He is really good at giving constructive criticism in that this bit is wrong you know, this bit is whatever and needs to be changed and the structure needs to be changed but it is an improvement on the last time or you know the idea here is really good but you might think of developing it this way?*

(Lorraine interview 2005: 4).

*Because I feel a lot of respect for him which I might not have if I knew him better or if I saw him in less formal situations…*

(Sheila interview 2006: 35).

The importance of professional boundary emerged, for example Sheila referred to her own teaching and indicated her attention to boundary:

*Well I just find from my own teaching as well you know I am friendly and sort of laugh and what not. But you know when it comes down to it I’m the boss*

(Sheila interview 2006:33).

She also saw respect as developmental and evolving

*I think he accepts that I am serious and I am becoming more and more impressed by his level of knowledge in the area.*

(Sheila interview 2006: 6).

5.7 Care

*Just going to him and having a chat and getting that little bit of confidence means everything.*

During interview, Alan, discussed what he understood as a care continuum in education. He attributed high care to primary teaching, using the example of vigilance in the school yard, stating that for example if a child fell there was always attention to care. He perceived post-primary schooling as similar but “not quite as powerful.” He perceived a ‘slight gap in care’ between primary and post-primary but not much. He saw third level as significantly different in the area of care, indicating that it is up to the student to attend lectures and he cautioned “it is very easy to leave the care thing behind as people become adults” (Alan
interview 2006: 24). He finally cautioned on what he saw as the individual and subjective nature of teaching and supervision in universities.

You rely on a degree of care. Now there are a lot of lecturers that are very caring and are much better but even then there is a divide, a wedge between students, because there is different quality of supervisors. They have differing aims and targets and they handle the care issue very differently too

(Alan interview 2005: 25).

Lack of care was linked to waning motivation

There’s a time when I don’t get on great with my supervisor, there is times when he drives me absolutely nuts and I would go out of my way to avoid him but he knows me, he know my strengths and my weaknesses and he knows how to work them to make my studies work for me. There is a balance there, if he was too professional on the other hand with no element of care there, well I think that just has the effect of de-motivating any student

(Lorraine interview 2005: 20).

James who experienced despondence and flagging motivation found the caring response from his supervisor most helpful.

I was on a low point that January. My supervisor was head of department at that time and I met him in the corridor and said I am feeling...I don’t know unsure about this...what am I doing this for?...He suggested maybe I go over to the States where this person with the expertise was. He let me think about it but it was my decision. When I got there I found a dedicated research centre and people to point you in the right direction. The more de-motivated you become the less work you do, the more de-motivated you become and you get caught up in a vicious cycle...and he spotted it straight away. He said look I have not heard from you in a while I know you...I know you are getting de-motivated so what is the story? And then I could say straight out I am fed up, sick of it. Since then I have gotten back on the track again.

(James interview 2006: 4).

However, Sheila who struggled with her financial situation felt uncared for in that regard, but she saw this as an institutional issue rather than specific to her supervisor.
I am in severe financial difficulties at the moment and I am barely hanging on and I’m like…nobody…nobody cares …they just don’t care (Sheila interview 2006: 5).

5.8 Power

But I'd just have done something because I was told to, but by the end of it I was not afraid to speak my mind or to say no

Power in its varying manifestations seemed to emerge consistently as a concern for people. References to how power played itself out in the learning relationships appeared to extend along a continuum from feeling confident enough to articulate dissent to having little confidence or control of ones work. That supervisors are in a position of power was articulated by Carmel:

I think the supervisor or teacher is the one who is let’s say…not the most powerful one although yes to a certain extent he or she is in a position of power compared to the student

(Carmel interview 2006: 23).

The theme of confidence to articulate need was discussed by James who said:

If I had a question I had to bounce an e-mail over and back and I didn’t really have the confidence to go and badger him every day of the week. So I was kind of fighting against it from that point

(James interview 2006: 2).

James later in the interview described the effect that a supervisor who employed power in negative ways had on him:

The supervisor in (country X) will only change something if it will improve it. The guy here will complain about something for the sake of complaining about it. Like I would get emails and the first response that would come into my head would be to survive, you know? It is all part of it.

(James interview 2006: 8).

The impact of negative use of power is evident in James’ reference to survival here. Sheila, who was content in her relationship with her supervisor, indicated feeling timid with regard to asserting her intellectual direction
It is just having…do you know…having the kind of…timidity is the word…to say I don’t really want to do it your way I want to do it my way...

(Sheila interview 2006:30).

She went on to indicate how she had not had any dissent with her supervisor but she asserted that should it happen she would not shy away from it, going so far as to say she perceived the moment of dissent may be approaching:

Sheila: I kind of have not taken him on ...head on...you know? We have never had a row about anything.

Patricia: But have you needed to?

Sheila: No I haven’t needed to but I may in the future and I know that I am not going to back away from it, if I have to I will...you know not have a stand up row but you know I know I will. We still haven’t reached the point where I have really challenged him you know...but I think it is coming

(Sheila interview 2006:37).

Lisa, whose relationship with her supervisor appeared to be characterised by negative expressions of power described how she felt afraid to disagree with her supervisor:

If I am trying to explain it to him too much, I am just trying to be helpful so he is shouting at me that I am treating him like a child. But if I am going through details and I see his confusion I see he’s confused ...it is not easy sometimes. He told me to show him correlations ok but whenever I am going to do this, because there are questions you have to think of, so last time I started to think and after a couple of seconds he told me you don’t know anything, it seems like you don’t know anything. This type of exaggeration and general statements, it makes you confused anyway I started to be afraid of him...my voice is shaking when I am meeting him so I actually am trying to avoid that at the moment

(Lisa interview 2006: 2).

In the interview Lisa also mentioned a peer who was experiencing similar difficulties with the same supervisor.

Lisa: My friend, she doesn’t do anything she is trying to cope with him but she too finds it hard. He told her she was to
prepare an article based on her thesis. She told him basically she couldn’t do it and he did not say anything to her and left the room, but then he e-mailed her that it was an insult for him.

Patricia: What will you do?

Lisa: I don’t know I am sitting on the fence. I can’t sleep I think I am going to try to finish this or I will regret it. I am so confused at the moment…sometimes I can’t…sometimes I am nervous…I can’t say anything. I’m simply afraid at the moment…already I look…ok maybe this is escaping a little what I would try to do…I would try to find a job…you know I am fighting to at least have an ok nervous system because I feel like calling a psychologist or someone. You know I think I will just find a job or try to transfer into xxx (names area) if he wants this, at least then I will have something that is sure…I will finish …if not I will have…I cannot live like this anymore

(Lisa interview 2006: 7-9).

Celine also describes feeling disempowered in her engagements with her supervisor:

It broke my heart like where she told me to do this reaction and I did it, I didn’t understand why I was doing it but she told me to start it this way that this was the way we were going and I spent six or eight months at that stuff. In the end I got a page out of it for my thesis so it wasn’t worth it. Every time I went to her and I said I don’t think it is working she kept saying no you have to try this and you have to try that. It was like a total mess, it would not dissolve in anything

(Celine interview 2007: 24).

Lorraine felt quite differently with her supervisor, with whom she felt empowered enough to articulate dissent:

I am not afraid to challenge him but then at the same time I’m not upset if he challenges anything I have written.

(Lorraine interview 2005: 32).

However, she was also aware of the potential for more hierarchical engagements.

There is this person (another lecturer in her department) driving me nuts, he is like superior this that and the other. You know the way people try to put themselves on a pedestal you know they have this air of superiority and then you coming in you are like a lowly PhD student to them and
that can be quite intimidating, whereas if you have the personal relationship and you can just chat then the academic stuff is not so scary. 
(Lorraine interview 2005: 42).

Sheila indicated that she needed a structured approach from her supervisor who in her own words would “keep tabs” on progress.

*I think you should keep tabs I know I am talking about getting freedom and so on I don’t think I would give myself as much freedom.*

(Sheila interview 2006: 31).

She needed her supervisor to assert some power in the supervisory engagement in order to foster motivation. Again as with the themes of respect and care, a balanced and developmental approach to emergent empowerment became evident. Lorraine explained:

*How long am I at it now?...a year and a half and he actually said to me recently that it is getting to the stage now where when I meet him I am telling him what I am going to do rather than him telling me what I am going to do and he has said he sees huge development from my point of view in that before he was the one coming up with all the ideas, telling me what to look at whereas now I am saying to him, in the interviews they said this and I think I should talk to that person...You become more confident in yourself and in the research directions you want to take*

(Lorraine interview 2005: 8).

The perception was that the supervisor may need to be more available at the initial stages, taking a leading role at the beginning. However, as the relationship progressed their role would move into listening and facilitating more and directing less as the student gains comfort and control of their research. The desire for an emergent empowerment approach was beginning to emerge:

*I think a supervisor should be there from the beginning. The supervisor should be able to show you the ropes and help you get to grips with it, and do that for the first year. After that you should be able to drive it*

(James interview 2006: 5).

Lorraine concurred:
It's a balance. You need to be present though with giving the student enough discretion and freedom, capability to work on their own initiatives because otherwise it will lead to what I was saying earlier the element of hand holding you know. If you have too much direction you don’t develop your own thoughts or ideas and you are a puppet just doing what you are told to do. It is a mixture of the two  
(Lorraine interview 2005: 25).

James described the role of a supervisor in terms of what he calls teaching the ground rules and encouraging freedom with a guiding presence:

As time goes on you should encourage the student to go off on their own once they learn the ground rules of their area. Yes encourage them to go off and still keep an eye on them  
(James Interview 2006: 14).

Helen identified that she had to learn the confidence and skills to articulate a differing opinion:

I remember when I started I would not have been a quiet person But I’d just have done something because I was told to, but by the end of it I was not afraid to speak my mind or to say no I am not doing that or no I actually know my project well to know that won’t work  
(Helen interview 2006: 25).

5.9 Conclusion
The data suggest that communication, trust, respect and care were important dimensions of the learning relationship. Being able to communicate well with one’s supervisor was an important element in the creation of a positive learning climate. Students perceived that they needed to trust their supervisors and they in turn desired that their supervisors would trust them. Care also featured as an important characteristic of the learning relationship and this was manifest in many ways such as communication practices, professional boundaries, and sensitivity to student needs. Respect seemed to be intuitively recognised by students and they also had strong intuitive awareness about how power was manifest in their learning relationships. These themes are reflected in the next chapter.
Chapter Six: Results B

Towards understanding the nature of my teaching and learning
6.1 Introduction
This chapter sets out the data from the reflections based on my teaching and supervision within the university setting. Chapter five focuses on the students’ experiences of teaching and learning, this chapter now focuses on teaching and learning in the context of my relationships with students. Six sub themes clearly emerged. These themes include: beliefs about the nature of teaching and learning, dialogue, trust, care, respect and power. While this section focuses on the students’ voices it also includes data that emerged from my reflections, on the experiences that I shared with the students, on the emerging data and on my learning from both. It shows a developing awareness of issues such as power and empowerment in my practice. There is an interwoven dimension with the previous chapter in terms of similarity but also in how the data from each strand influenced my thinking throughout the research.

6.2 Becoming aware of the nature of my teaching and learning
Prior to working in the university setting I had been a post-primary teacher for a number of years. I had an affinity for teaching and had become quite experienced in my field. Nevertheless, until embarking upon this research I had never taken the time to articulate what I understood good teaching to be. I knew I was respected as a ‘good’ teacher by students and colleagues alike. Nominations (2004, 2005) for and success in gaining an excellence in teaching award from the university (2005) was deeply important to me. It served to strengthen my engagement and commitment to teaching as an important aspect of my role in the university. An excellence in teaching award is the university’s way of validating teaching commitment and they are not easily won. Preparing the portfolio that is required for adjudication as part of the competition provided an opportunity for me to reflect on what teaching means. But it was this research however, that encouraged me to question and to really deconstruct the reasons why I placed such importance on being a good teacher. The realisation of how much of a teacher’s personal and professional identity is bound up in their
teaching was surprising. What has also come solidly into focus for me is the deeply complex nature of teaching and learning.

Teaching is inherently relational. The type of the relationship that is created between teacher and student impacts on the quality of learning/growth that is experienced by both. On reflecting about why teaching was so important I began to understand that my teaching was supporting students to learn but it was also contributing to my professional self-esteem in the process. Until this research I had underestimated the role that influence plays in teaching. When we teach or supervise in higher education we are influencing others in the values and knowledge systems that we ascribe to. It was only as I read an e-mail from a distance student, himself a lecturer in health studies in a third level institute that I began to understand just how influential educators can be. This influence is not confined to the supervisory relationship. Influence can be exerted even in the briefest of conversations. One afternoon, as I was gathering my resources having just delivered a guest lecture he approached me to tell me of his research ideas. As I listened I was stuck by the similarity of his ideas to that of a colleague in another university. I suggested he read her thesis and suggested some books that might be of interest to him. Even though he was not a student of mine, he was interested in my approach to action research and he began to e-mail me as a result. He wrote:

> Patricia, thanks for letting us keep in touch. Having read your suggested reading on action research and one of the approaches the living educational theory it all rang bells for me and with the talk you gave in Limerick about the values that we hold as underpinning my work, so I have decided to open up my thinking to include teaching and learning…. I feel more confident taking this route and really appreciate the directions you gave me especially MF’s thesis. I recognise her journey as my own…

  (John e-mail correspondence 2006).

My e-mail response was as follows:

> John, as always it is good to hear from you and to be a small part of your journey. It is great to explore teaching and learning you know. That is what it is all about, knowing the self a little better so we can become better teachers and learners.

  (Patricia e-mail response 2006).
It is evident here that even a brief conversation as we leave a lecture theatre has teaching potential. Teaching and indeed learning is much more than the formal classroom engagement, it is relational, and in all aspects of the interpersonal. Later in the same e-mail response to John I wrote about the theory/practice gap as he called it of theory becoming potentially disregarded in professional practice.

*It is true that sometimes the practice is far removed from the theory (e.g. your example of manual handling) but isn’t that telling us something about the impact that theory is making and perhaps that we need to change the format and the approach? It is the same for me. When I meet students before teaching practice they ask me ‘how do you want me to teach?’ they want to know the techniques I favour so they can do well. I answer ‘teach to your personality and to your strengths’ but this is like a chasm to them. When did teaching become a set of techniques? But I think I know the answer…*

(Patricia e-mail response 2006).

Even within the medium of electronic correspondence the exchange of ideas and experiences can continue the educative process. Teaching and learning are complex processes and are not necessarily confined by space (classroom) or time (timetable). A student on a teacher education programme that I contribute to identified both the complexity and the subjectivity of teaching in her reflective journal:

*The opportunities for teachers are countless. Dealing with different groups of students, colleagues, being part of a job you love, becoming a life long learner, passing on value knowledge and most of all enjoying yourself. But teachers also have to deal with the emotional rollercoaster that can occur in a classroom and that is hard.*

(Clara journal 2007: 11).

Teaching is also about expanding the parameters of our thinking and creating the climate to challenge students to think differently. This is an important aspect of my teaching and something I work hard to facilitate. This theme of challenge emerged as something students responded to quite well.

*Being able to challenge my ideas and feelings was really helpful; being challenged was enlightening; I found my experience challenging which was enjoyable but really tiring!!*

(anonymous student evaluation 2008).
It is important that students think critically about the nature of teaching and learning for themselves and for those they may teach. Therefore, it was heartening to read when I have some measure of success in delivering that message.

*Overall I took an important thing from the class today, that is that I really need to be conscious of what I teach, how I teach it and who I teach it to. (Deborah journal 2007: 7).*

Teaching has an emotional dimension also, therefore how one is feeling about oneself can influence how and even why we teach. How a person experienced their own education, how they themselves were taught, often strongly influences how they teach. The following excerpt from a student’s journal illustrates the emotionality that is often present in teaching.

*I am a paranoid person and this is a result of a lack of confidence (which I feel is a result of my dyslexia). I found it hard doing the exercises today and got quite worked up when I had to speak about it. Afterwards I even think my mood had a lot to do with it. The important thing to remember when I am teaching is I need to be able to avoid talking about personal things when I am going through a hard time myself. I need to respect the way my body is feeling and adapt the class to suit this. As well I have to be aware for students they need to feel in their comfort zone to be able to talk to me I have to learn not to push*  
*(Rhoda journal 2007: 7).*

Here Rhoda is beginning to understand how her personal perspective and her emotions on a given day can influence her teaching. In her way she is telling us that what is going on for us when we walk into the classroom is part of the teaching dynamic. She shows here that as teachers we are personally as well as professionally engaged and that we need to keep that in mind when planning for teaching and when actually teaching.

### 6.3 Nurturing dialogue

Dialogue that is open, supportive and encouraging of students while still maintaining a constructive agenda is important in learning relationships. The creation of learning spaces in which students feel safe to articulate their developing ideas is essential for real dialogue to occur. Students need to be sure
that they will not encounter negative judgements yet a teacher needs to be able to maintain his/her authority to give constructive feedback where necessary. This can be in difficult in practice, but defining the characteristics of real dialogical engagements is also challenging. The importance of being open and receptive is integral to my teaching. Creating the open environment needed for students is important and this was linked to judgement as Jane and Emily’s comments show:

I just felt that the whole interaction between us all the time was very open and I have to say that was a very new experience for me

(Jane focus group 2004 (b):13).

I think not being judged was important for me it meant that I could say what I needed to

(Emily focus group 2004 (b):13).

In an independent evaluation the theme of judgement also emerged when one student wrote:

I find Patricia very non judgemental and reassuring, she is easy to talk to and very approachable thus encouraging me to learn more and challenging my assumptions

(anonymous student evaluation 2007).

While another student in the same cohort wrote:

I felt very comfortable in the group and found it easy to learn. I felt the lecturer was very professional and made it a safe place to learn. Patricia is very helpful and always urging us to read and ask questions

(anonymous student evaluation 2007).

As the data here show setting up a positive climate and fostering dialogue with students’ means that they find it an easier and safer learning environment. Fear of judgement by a teacher and/or by peers can often be an issue that students content with. Sarah whom I perceived as a confident student wrote in her journal:

It was hard sometimes to express myself in front of the class and I was afraid of others judging me as ‘big headed.’

(Sarah journal 2007).
Dialogue was identified as supportive for students as the independent evaluation indicate:

*There has been a great sense of growth through dialogue and group learning and this lecturer has promoted engagement and participation in the process. Overall, a module with this lecturer has been what I imagined a “true learning experience” for both sides.*

(anonymous student evaluation 2004).

While another in that cohort wrote:

*This form of shared learning is a mutually beneficial approach to education, fostering deeper understanding and stimulating informative dialogue.*

(anonymous student evaluation 2004).

Being part of a group can motivate and support students. Group supervision meetings were organised for part-time Masters students, previously each student worked independently with access to a supervisor, usually myself. In those individual meetings I was aware of the potential synergies between students work and thus introduced these group meetings on a voluntary basis. The meetings were structured informally to promote dialogue and always happened over coffee to enhance the informality of the atmosphere. These meetings were additional to the individual supervision meetings. As the supervisor there were areas I wished to cover, in as much as possible I facilitated these to emerge naturally which they did at the instigation of the students themselves.

*This has meant so much, these meetings, you know some evenings you might go away and think what did we really discuss? And you might sit back and think and things hit you. Not that you started out and said now look everyone we need to cover this and this, it just flowed, just evolved and it got you to look more deeply at yourself sometimes and definitely your practice which I don’t think the same could have been done on an individual level only.*

(Jane focus group 2004(b):10).

The process was kept as student friendly as possibly. Students began to bring papers and books to share with each other and this was picked up by Jane who said:

*There is a simplicity about this scenario and these meetings that we are having and yet the amount of sharing and learning just by the*
discussion alone. Even reading the papers and feeding back to each other it is such a simple way and really works.

(Jane focus group 2003(b):6).

The data show the students' awareness of the learning potential of dialogue, having experienced it themselves. The creation of the climate in which this can happen is clearly an important dimension.

6.4 Building trust
Building trust is a cornerstone of positive learning relationships and was an important aspect of this research. If it was possible to foster real trust with students this trust would become evident in their willingness to engage in open dialogue with me. The quality of that dialogue would serve as a further indicator of established trust. In order to facilitate trust I needed to be transparent in my research agenda and to invite students to articulate their perceptions of my own work. Thus, I compiled a research proposal and I consulted with students by firstly distributing the proposal to them to read. A focus group was then held to discuss their response to it and how they perceived the importance of the research aims and objectives. This was initially quite challenging as this was my first time giving my writing to students to critique. I struggled with what felt like boundary crossing, after all I was ‘the teacher’ and they the student. Personal journaling prior to this initial focus group was characterised by uncertainty. While it is one thing to talk about the importance of student voice and critique it is quite another to actually open up one’s work to that critique. While in principle I placed value on student voice it was difficult in practice to relinquish my teacher/expert status. The following extract from my journal shows my unease:

The focus group is this evening and I have picked a comfortable venue so that should be nice but I am nervous and I am not sure why? I know that I really do my best for them but am I giving away all my personal power by asking their opinion on my proposal? Will they think me vulnerable? 
(research journal September 2003).
I held some anxiousness about whether I could trust that more democratic engagements with my students would not negatively influence teaching and learning dynamics. In reality I feared undermining my status as the teacher and supervisor.

Opening up the proposal to feedback from students was an enlightening process. The students took to the task with energy. I felt humbled by the time and diligence spent on framing their feedback for the focus group. Some feedback was very positive and some was quite challenging for me to hear. One student raised the question of sustainability. In particular she raised the issue of how I was prioritising the interpersonal dimensions of my teaching. Our dialogue was as follows:

*Patricia:* *I am hoping that we will have sustained dialogue and not always be striving for a conclusion to our talk. I wrote in the proposal that my values are empowerment and intellectual freedom. The PhD is to explore am I living them out in my teaching…*

*Charlotte:* *If anything you are giving yourself a little too much to this I would say. You try so hard, you run yourself ragged trying to meet everyone’s needs and while we adore it, for your own sake it is unsustainable in a large group, but you do certainly embody these I think*

*(focus group 2003(a): 5).*

While there was appreciation for the work that I was attempting to do, there was also a note of caution in terms of boundary and sustainability. Without necessarily realising it the student had caught the internal challenge that I was dealing with and that many academics struggle with daily. The desire to spend time supporting students can conflict with the pressures of an increasingly pressurised and resource constrained teaching setting. My trust fears appeared to be unfounded; the students perceived this process as an opportunity to engage reciprocally with me and thus the action research process began. The key insight I gained at that moment was that paradoxically, to become confident in my
expertise in this field I had to relinquish my expert status and invite robust critique. I understood that I would gain much insight if I chose to do so.

Much later in response to my teaching of a newly introduced module in Social Personal and Health Education, a group of postgraduate students on a teacher education diploma (sixteen took the SPHE module as a voluntary elective) wrote to me their impressions of my teaching approach. These were unsolicited, anonymous and given to me by their class representative. The pages were heartening as many referred to my passion and enthusiasm as a teacher but one stuck in my mind as the words on the page were striking. They read:

\begin{quote}
At first I didn’t think you were for real, sometimes we let first impressions stick in our mind but then when I began to trust you and got to know you I then realised you were for real.
\end{quote}

(anonymous student journal 2008).

I could not respond to this communication due to its unsolicited and anonymous nature. I can but hope that the student saw what I see, that there is so much potential for learning when trust is fostered.

6.5 Understanding reciprocity

In the same way as fostering trust was important to the research, developing reciprocity was also important to the work. I wanted students to perceive me as journeying with them so that we were in a process of coming to know together. That this was achievable is demonstrated in comments such as Emily’s

\begin{quote}
There was less of the expert/student role. I felt that you learned from us as well as we were going along...there was a strong feeling of that I thought
\end{quote}

(Emily focus group 2004(b): 2).

Reciprocity meant that I needed to respond to students in a timely manner, that I was available to meet with them and that I demonstrated interest and engagement with their work all of which I was able to do without challenge. I organised informal group meetings to support students in their studies. This was a successful endeavour with all students opting to join those informal meetings.
Nevertheless, I was unprepared for the depth of understanding about the complexity of reciprocity that one student was to illuminate for me.

Reciprocity can also unintentionally create potential burden for students in the learning relationship, even when that relationship is characterised by care. The group process that I instigated to support the students through their research worked well for the majority of students. However, one struggled with the momentum that her colleagues were achieving and this had the effect of creating a writing paralysis for her (this will be specifically discussed in section two dealing with empowerment). Lynne, because of her desire to engage in positive reciprocity with me as her supervisor, hid her struggle from me. As the group meetings progressed I became aware of her discomfort in the non-verbal signals of her body language and I invited her to meet with me for coffee to chat about her progress. In that discussion she evidenced an internalised self doubt and a reluctance to let me down. In a subsequent interview we discussed her struggle:

**Patricia:** Can we talk about that conversation we had when we met for coffee in the library?

**Lynne:** Yes but I want to tell you what it was like is that ok?

**Patricia:** Yes that’s fine

**Lynne:** It was like absolutely being in a void is the only way I can describe it to you, is that there was this feeling that I was going everywhere and no where at the one time...there is this sense of despondency when you are in a group and you go there because you need the support of the group, you need what the group is doing for you but there is this awful feeling when you come away from it. ... it looks like everyone else is extremely successful and you are saying to yourself where is my piece going?

**Patricia:** I knew there was something. I am learning that the group idea does not work for everyone but why didn’t you say it to me? I tried to discuss it but I thought you didn’t wish to?

**Lynne:** I felt awful about saying it to you because I thought to myself...I felt that if I say it, it sounds negative and I did not want that to be a reflection on you, clearly it isn’t but I
In this interview I realised that Lynne was articulating a reluctance to let me down personally and this in turn made her struggle more intense. This left me deeply aware of the need to be sensitive to the individual patterns of learning. It also illuminated that even in the best of intentions about facilitating learning, people can struggle as Lynne did in her desire to respond positively to me.

Reciprocity is also complex and can be encouraged in the building of students esteem. If students are confident in their sense of self they will encourage this in others. When I am teaching students I incorporate feedback as an important teaching moment. Students must first assess their work, such as presentations, in terms of positive attributes first. Only when they have successfully identified the strengths in their presentation do I engage in any discussion about areas of improvement. By adopting this style I believe I am supporting students to be able to hear constructive feedback in a positive and non-threatening climate.

Jane drew my attention to this quite some time after her first experience of this process.

Since the first day we met you, there are things that you have seen as a priority in working with the group like our own self discovery. When we did our first presentations you would not hear of anyone saying what they thought went wrong, we had to say what went right first and even to get yourself to think like that. To think did I actually do something right? To bring that out to other people what that does for your self esteem is huge and I am building on that all the time.

(Jane focus group (b) 2003:8).

6.6 Paying attention to care

As with each of these interweaving themes of trust, reciprocity, and dialogue, care is also an important element. Care for me meant being available in the formal classroom moments but also to adopt an invitational approach that students would feel able to come to me with any blocks or challenges they would encounter in their studies. It was important to meet students with an attitude of openness, a willingness to listen to the student’s dilemma, and to ensure that any
academic judgements I might make were about the work and not the student. It was also essential from my perspective to encourage the student to work out the problem for themselves in as much that that was possible. The busy nature of academic life makes this a significant challenge. Time is always at a premium, but making that time to meet with, to facilitate the student to articulate their struggle and to offer a simple guiding insight paid dividends as Charlotte indicates:

*I remember coming to you during the research project. I had six days of complete block where I couldn’t write and that frustration...and it took just twenty minutes and it was free flow after that and I just wrote and wrote and wrote and wrote and that is what I mean, you being to help us work through it so we can process it for ourselves. I think that is the biggest thing to me.*

(Charlotte focus group 2005 5)

The significant learning for me in this regard is however; that students need to be open to processes of care and with different life stories and approaches to learning they might not all be ready to engage at the same level as Lynne explains:

*I think the group is very valuable because you have the support of other people, whether you choose to embrace that yourself you know is very much a personal thing. I say to myself when I look back on it did I embrace the support of the group? Did I actually let other people support me? And, maybe I didn’t...I didn’t allow the group to do that and I didn’t acknowledge that support was there either. I kept my anxieties around my work to myself as there was feeling for me of weakness.*

(Lynne interview 2005: 4).

An unexpected outcome for me was the level of care from students that opening up my work for critique engendered. During participant validation in responding to a comment she had made about study being at the right time in her life Jane underlined words ‘the right time’ in her transcript and beside it wrote a note to me.
Clearly in this note Jane is demonstrating insight and care in terms of my own busy schedule and in that demonstrates reciprocity of care that I found helped sustain my belief in the importance of developing empowering educative relationships.

6.7 Facilitating a respectful climate
As respect is an important personal value for me, my practice as a teacher is characterised by respectful interaction. This is a standard that I work particularly hard to ensure is a cornerstone of my work. This emerged as something students picked up on.

You felt that you could say anything, ask anything, it wasn’t going to be laughed at, you know acceptable to everyone, equal as a group

(Jane focus group 2005:5).

In anonymous evaluations of my teaching respect emerges as something students respond to well

It is great to be learning with the mutual respect of every member of the group including Patricia.

(anonymous student evaluation 2007).

A wonderful space was created for the group to share and we saw an approach modelled that might be possible for ourselves to use transferable to a mentoring meeting where we have to support NQTS. I guess it became obvious that the respect we have for them will impact on our success maybe even begin to change a culture...

(anonymous student evaluation 2008).

It was also reflected in student journaling
This kind of teaching requires good skill and knowledge and facilitation is very important as it trust respect and understanding (Graham Journal 2007:6).

Students also took time to initiate contact with me about their experience of the creation of a respectful teaching environment

I was a little apprehensive about this (group process module) because I did not know what would be expected of me. I really feel you created a respectful environment in which everybody was made feel at ease and opened upon many complex and thought provoking issues (Maura Journal 2007).

It is also important for me that those who will be teaching others themselves think critically about the value of respectful interaction so that they also may prioritise it in their practice.

I need to act as a resource in my teaching. I need to be sensitive in my manner as a teacher towards the students’ dealings and issues within the class and ensure a climate of mutual respect and understanding is established from the beginning. As this in turn will aid students in their own personal development (Deirdre Journal 2007: 9)

Being sensitive to people’s feelings but encouraging them as being ok too was really important. I am going to be a mentor for NQTs (newly qualified teachers) in schools and I need to know how to do this. We don’t all do this naturally you know. (anonymous student evaluation 2008).

6.8 Developing awareness of power

Throughout this research my discomfort with the holding and using of personal and resource power became more and more evident to me. When I began I truly believed that I could create relationships of equality with students. It took months of painful lack of clarity before I finally accepted that as long as I held power as a teacher, supervisor or course director that I would not be in a position of equality with students. When Emily stated unequivocally the position as follows I finally began to understand
There is still that…you are still the lecturer, you are the one who 
grades or recommends grades, and it is down to that basically you 
know that will never go away 
(Emily focus group 2004(b):1).

My efforts to create equality through trust, dialogue, respect and care, while they 
seemed to create positive learning environments, were less effective in realising 
my initial aim of equality.

Jane: It is a very non-threatening situation really you 
know, you don’t come to this meeting feeling that 
you have to have A, B or C done. You do it in your 
own time

Charlotte: And I think we have all unclogged each other at 
different stages

Lynne: There is something round the feeling of safety when 
all of us are together. 
(focus group 2004(b): 3-4).

The learning environment was characterised more by democratic and respectful 
processes than by equality. It was then that I understood that I could not shirk 
the power dimension of my role. I had a clear responsibility to use that power 
democratically and with an ethos of care. I could, in some measure, level the 
field in terms of consultation and facilitating empowerment and this I set out to 
do. I believe negotiation to be a powerful tool in teaching and optimise its use 
whenever possible. And while I never explicitly stated this to students I was 
heartened to read it reflected in a student journal.

A significant insight came for me not during the content of a 
lecture but it was in the fact that Patricia negotiated the time of 
lesson with us instead of telling us what time class was beginning 
the next day. It made me feel Patricia was not just there to get the 
subject completed but was genuinely facilitating the group. This 
allowed me to feel more comfortable in this learning environment 
and as I result I felt more at ease in contributing to class 
discussions. This reminded me of my own TP with a class 
because I was unfamiliar with them and didn’t know what to do I 
negotiated with them what they would like to include in PE. 
Therefore, I now realise the need to involve students in the 
decision making within a class where possible. 
(Deirdre journal 2007: 9).
Not only did my negotiation free Deirdre to participate more openly with the group and with me but she begins here to make the connections to her own practice as a teacher. Negotiating is not easy, sometimes the solution offered by the students are less that optimal for me and I have to compromise, but I remain convinced of the facilitative capacity of negotiation. Also connected to Deirdre’s insight is my growing understanding of just how powerful our influence as teachers and supervisors really is, however unwitting. After a guest lecture to postgraduate students from another faculty the following e-mail was sent to me:

You struck a chord with my inner self today, which can often be put to the back of the closet when dealing with students every day and so often you see teachers moving away from the reasons they took up teaching and their core beliefs and mission
(Mark UG student e-mail correspondence April 2008).

The theme of this lecture was What will your teaching legacy be? During this lecture I encouraged students to critically reflect on the implicit values that they currently transmit as teachers. A teacher can strike a chord that can encourage and influence others to think about their motivations, their core beliefs and their mission as practitioners.

6.9 Empowerment
Empowerment is a difficult concept to define because of its inherent subjectivity. What is potentially empowering for one person may not feature as important for another. During the action research phase the students and I discussed empowerment on many occasions. Students had clear insights as to what aspects of how we worked together they had found facilitated their sense of growing empowerment.

Developing a sense of ownership and control of their work is important and research participants voiced its significance.

Emily: For me empowerment has meant being in control of my own work I feel I am in control of my own work and it has meant having a non-directive approach from you.
Charlotte: It is all of that, making your own decisions and taking responsibility for them. I don’t feel that you (Patricia) have to agree with everything I put in because if I can justify and support it then it is all right to leave it in. It is not a people pleasing exercise do you know what I mean? It is not about writing a certain way for certain tutor you know?

Emily: It is having the freedom you know....

Jane: It is something that has developed within each of us over the past 18 months the feeling of ownership was not as strong when I began as it is now and the types of feedback you gave us it was like a building of trust between us.

(focus group 2003 (b): 2).

Supervisors are in my experience generally very aware of the impact that feedback has for students. Constructive feedback is essential in education and I am particularly aware of its potential to motivate and engender a sense of ownership (thus possibly facilitate empowerment) or conversely to lower student esteem (thus possibly disempower or in worst cases create writing paralysis). Therefore, as a supervisor I think carefully about how I structure feedback.

Lynne: I think the fact that it (my feedback) is all comments, that there are no lines drawn through the work if I had got it back and there were lines through it...

Jane: Or even red pen

Lynne: Yeah. I might have felt that was rubbish but there were words and because there were words beside mine it didn’t bother me. I showed it to my children one day when you sent me back a draft. They looked at it and they said you must be terrible. They thought that the teacher writing on it, it must be terrible but I said no...this is not terrible...

Jane: It is constructive...

Lynne: Yes exactly it never felt terrible

Jane: And it is personal, even reading it, it is like you are talking to me. There is always, first of all well
done, something positive first and then you feel the work can’t be bad so you keep going...

Charlotte: And you can negotiate it which is brilliant because if you feel strongly about a bit of it you feel you can fight for it...

(focus group 2004 (a): 4).

During the participant validation process for this focus group when Jane read her words here she was struck by them and she responded by underlining the phrases underlined above and wrote on her transcript:

This positive thinking has been one of the most powerful skills I have learnt. I’ve adopted it and I encourage it in others in training etc, it’s a very central aspect of self care.
(Jane: PG student e–mail correspondance 2004).

What was significant for me here was the potential influence, that students would see the value of respecting every opportunity to support others in a positive way and to translate this into their own practice.

6.9.1 Developing awareness of empowerment
As studies progressed our conversations delved more deeply into empowerment and deeper understandings of the complexity of empowerment emerged for students and indeed for me.

Lynne: Maybe you can’t give empowerment to someone maybe somebody can develop it from being in your presence. I am very conscious of my research participants that they will feel it. I can’t guarantee that and I can’t give it to them but maybe I can choose to take it from this process.

Charlotte: You can’t know if people have felt empowered but you can hope that their experience under our care will hopefully be a better experience for them that it would have been if we didn’t have this sense of care for them

(Focus group 2005:3).
As deeper understanding of empowerment emerged for students they also began to become more aware of this influence into their practice as health practitioners.

**Lynne:** If we just stop and make it part of our work and don’t just accept that just because I have given clients the help line number they are empowered.

**Charlotte:** I had a client today and he was given nutritional advice and he said God this is the first time I have been given this in my life. He was in his mid-fifties and he said to me well I might as well just tell you now if there is anything on that I don’t like I won’t do it. I answered him you are not doing this for me I am not telling you to do it. I am informing you so you can make the choice.

**Jane:** You know the medical model particularly in the hospital setting has made it so difficult for clients to feel empowered. You see it every day scare tactics work best. I am here standing over you and you better tow the line or we are not dealing with you, instead of saying here are the options what do you think what changes can you make...

**Patricia** Are you saying dialogue is important?

**Jane** Absolutely! Because you can see it in someone’s face they are taken aback if you say I am not asking you to change your whole life overnight let’s discuss where you can start, let’s make small changes first; see how you feel yourself...

**Lynne:** But the medical model is still powerful in our work

**Emily:** And dominant

**Lynne:** Yes and dominant in the sense that no matter how empowered we would like to think it is, it is still very much practitioner knows what is best. It is prescriptive, if you do what I tell you...you will get better.

(focus group 2005: 5).

These students (also health practitioners) work within a strongly expert driven model of health care. In their comments here it is evident that they are beginning to question the value of that practice for their clients in favour of a more dialogic and choice driven approach. Empowerment is a central tenet of health promotion.
the programme of study these students are engaged in). It is evident here that through exposure to a more critical engagement, with empowerment prioritised in content and process, students are influenced to alter their practice towards a more client centred one.

*I think the way we have began to understand empowerment here; we won’t see it in the same way as before. Patricia will see it in how it ripples out in our work*  
(Charlotte focus group 2005:5).

*If we challenge as a result of this experience, if we challenge the notion that we are holding the only truth around choice and change and lifestyle that will be a big step forward.*  
(Lynne focus group 2005:5)

Just how inherently problematic empowerment can be was captured by Lynne who pointed to the blurred boundaries between consultation, empowerment, persuasion and manipulation.

*Lynne*  
The empowerment issue is tied up in consultation really, but just how far does that consultation go? We will consult with people all right but really we still follow our own agenda they are just happier tagging along in it. I can say I have consulted but if they really dissent what then?

*Charlotte*  
We are restricted in our working environments. We have to show that we are effective. There is a volume of people that have to go through. If I do the real empowerment thing it is much slower than being prescriptive and for the powers that be that hold the purse strings you know it can be difficult to justify it.  
(focus group 2005:7).

One student also discussed with me the difficulties she experienced with regard to how the changes she was making in herself were perceived by others.

*Jane*  
I think back to my work setting and colleagues who don’t realise what is going on and sometimes if you take a step further to do a bit more you are looked at with suspicion…with there she goes again who does she think she is?, whereas in our group we have really appreciated each other and respected each other for what we were doing. And you can
sometimes feel God does anyone realise what I am going through here? They don’t want to I suppose.

*Patricia*  
When you raise your own consciousness and you reflect more on how you understand things to be you begin to approach your work differently. People may not be moving like you are, and they may not be making the conceptual leaps you are. They may perhaps look at you cynically and say is she doing that to get that promotion? This can be difficult. Do you remember when we started I said to you when you begin this process it may feel like you can leave others behind you so it is important not to do that, especially in your personal lives. You can become so caught up in what you are doing and maybe even change perspectives and those near you have not had the same exposure so bring them along. I guess it is like that in work too though we can’t always bring everyone along.

*Jane*  
Yes I remember it, you see this has become normalised for me at home which is great but work is not so easy...

*(Jane interview 2005: 5)*

Developing self understanding or awareness of self empowerment is not always an easy journey and may leave one feeling potentially vulnerable. Therefore, it is important to develop careful understanding of the magnitude of the process prior to engaging in it.
6.9.2 Lynne’s story

There is a complexity inherent in adopting an empowerment approach to one’s work, particularly given the subjective nature of empowerment for each individual. The following details the experience of Lynne who struggled with the group learning environment which I had created as a potentially empowering tool. I include it here in order to illuminate the development in my thinking but also to elucidate the learning that occurs for both student and teacher.

Lynne

Being part of a group during studies can be potentially motivating, in particular the momentum that it fosters can support students in the successful completion of their studies. The synergy that group discussion of research progress and content creates can greatly enhance the quality of student’s work but can also facilitate students to support each other when they encounter research challenges such as sampling or permission issues. For example, on one occasion when one student discussed in the group their dilemma as to how to gain access to a particular nursing discipline, another student in the group who was a practitioner in that field was able to inform her of their professional association meeting and of a method of access to their directorate in order to seek permission. Convinced of the merit of group process in MA studies I decided that I would organise an informal coffee/group meeting once a month and invited all those engaged in taught MA studies in health promotion being supervised by myself to attend. These gatherings were voluntary and all attended.

Clearly the group found the momentum created by the group motivating and generally supportive. Lynne decided on a grounded theory investigation. This was very much in keeping with her values-based approach. As the meetings progressed over the course of several months I was aware of Lynne becoming more and more withdrawn at the group meetings. While she engaged somewhat in discussion with her peers about their research she was reticent in discussion of her own and when gently pressed she would simply respond that because it was grounded theory research it was a much slower pace. She did not have a hypothesis that she was setting out to (dis) prove nor had she specific objectives that were guiding her, rather in true grounded theory style she was allowing the
data to emerge and lead her to an understanding of the phenomenon she was exploring. Her research sample was challenging behaviourally (at risk youth) and she had to make several forays into data collection before finding the right one for her particular sample. Lynne encountered several setbacks during the process specific to ethics, permissions, data collection, and the struggle of representation among others. Therefore, when the group would meet and report (often enthusiastically) their progress this had the converse effect of dampening Lynne's spirits even more. While Lynne admits freely that she is not effusive in groups to begin with, this all served to increase her reluctance. So convinced was I of the merit of the group process I had not even envisaged the prospect of it not suiting everyone. I made several tentative attempts to discuss the evident issue but Lynne kept me at arms length refusing to allow me to come close enough to broach the issue. We would discuss potential solutions to the problems that would emerge during her research but when I would move into the territory of the meetings Lynne would cut the discussion short and I did not press it (in hindsight this is a decision I would revisit).

As a supervisor I was struggling. I wanted to safeguard Lynne’s right not to engage with me should that be her choice but as an experienced group facilitator and I knew that in order to rescue Lynne’s work which was by now not progressing well I needed to find a way to open the dialogue with Lynne in a way that felt comfortable for her. I had the power as her supervisor to do it but I was unsure if I wanted to use it if it made Lynne uncomfortable. Thankfully, Lynne took that decision into her own hands following an attempt I had made to tentatively broach the issue as we walked together to our cars one Tuesday evening after a meeting. The following morning I received a phone call from Lynne asking to meet. I invited her for coffee that morning and in that conversation Lynne emotionally described her struggle with her research and with the group process. As I listened I was horrified to realise the impact that a simple assumption on my part had on her progress. I had simply decided that the group was the way to go and so it was. I had not thought about whether group engagement would suit everyone. I knew in the articulation of the issue Lynne was taking the step she needed to in order to resolve her dilemma and in support of that I offered Lynne the option to work with me individually. She declined
this option opting to remain in the group meetings but we also worked intensively on a parallel individual basis. In a subsequent interview for this research Lynne and I discussed at length the learning for both of us during this time. In particular we discussed my reluctance to press the issue with Lynne and her reluctance to engage with me about her struggle.

If I hadn’t told you there wasn’t anything you could do first of all. But when I did tell you, you listened and I came away feeling that it is ok....this is not necessarily my fault it is not necessarily anything I am doing wrong. One of the things that really struck me then was when you said do you want to opt out of the group and work with me individually? That to me was almost that I was free to not come back to the group and even though I did not choose to do that, to know that I could do that it was fine. After that I often said to myself do I want to go? And I went because I wanted to even though I was still feeling some inability around my work.

(Lynne interview 2005: 5).

What was striking to me is the existing power differential here, even though I was endeavouring to create empowering spaces for students Lynne still felt that my approval was necessary for her to feel comfortable not attending a voluntary meeting. While I did not want this however; it leaves me with the question that as long as there is a supervisor/student differential how voluntary would these meeting really be? Emily’s comment resonates for me “you are still the lecturer, you are the one who grades or recommends grades, and it is down to that basically you know that will never go away.”

Lynne and I also discussed the self learning that emerged for both of us and I became aware that gaining insight into ones own process of engagements, be they student, supervisor or colleague can aid empowerment.

Lynne: Maybe some of this Patricia, when I step back at it and look at it this process has opened up for me how I am in a group. I have had to look at how I am in a group and how much of myself I am willing to give in a group and how I even relate in a group....that is my own behaviour I was never going to say what I really thought, I was never going to allow myself that.
Patricia: I have learned a lot from you, you have made me think critically about things I was taking for granted. I took for granted that the group was the way to go. I took for granted that everybody would just slot in and I lost sight of the individuality of it.

Lynne: But I do think the group was the way to go, I think there was huge learning in it for me. I saw good parts and I saw parts to myself that were not as creative or efficient as I thought I was and that is not a bad thing for me. Some parts of this process lays you bare in some ways and isn’t that what learning is really about? We have both grown in understanding here I think

(Lynne interview 20005:6).

Lynne went on to explain how the learning she brought from the process could inform her practice:

Lynne: There is something about starting without preconceived ideas bringing that to my work in health promotion and our service planning if the work does not meet the needs of the people it serves then it is a loss. If I can bring the values I learned here to my work I have learned a lot. The feelings of personal growth and the feeling of getting something like this done, all this is very valuable to me.

Patricia: I am impressed by that I think you bring strong values with you they are implicit in how you are now.

Lynne: I wish I had discovered that about myself sooner, I would have worried less about making my research participants safe because I would have known that I could do it. I think that I will bring what I learned about myself to other pieces of research I will do at work. If I can bring what my personal learning was here and overlay it into the next piece of work then the price of my effort will have been successful no matter what.

Patricia: Yes they seem to have become consolidated as we went along in the whole group I would say.

Lynne: What I see is how Patricia would have done this and I see those values inherent and then I have learned to see it in other groups.

Patricia: It’s been a difficult journey but maybe a positive one after all?
Lynne: We all take away from the process our personal learning and you know what we took from the group and what we gave to it. You can’t take responsibility for that, we have to. If I didn’t say things or give things I should have in the group I have to own the responsibility for that.

Patricia: Maybe in the part of life’s journey you were on, it was not the time to say things or share for you in the group at that moment? If you were not ready maybe there was a reason for that, you know that is who you are and I would not like to change that.

Lynne: I have to say though I am glad I was there I am so glad to be a much different person for having been part of it.

(Lynne interview 2005:7-8).

6.10 Moving beyond the student supervisor relationship into productive collegiality

Moving from the student/supervisor to relationships of collegiate equality requires time, attention and much reflection. Developing this type of relationship requires investment and some hard work. Previous patterns of engagement may need to be altered. If the supervisory practice had empowerment as its central tenet the leap is not as large. However, this also is not as simple as it may first appear. The student also may feel vulnerable in the process so attention to the affective dimension of the relationship (how the student is feeling and their sense of academic efficacy) needs careful consideration. I encouraged one student to write a paper with me arising from her MA thesis. She was initially reticent and explains why:

*I really had enough of the MA when it came time to write the paper. Also I am a novice at writing articles for publication so may have shied away.*

(Carol PG student e-mail correspondence 2008).

Students may feel out of the loop or that they lack experience which may serve to hinder their motivation to continue the work. After the supervisory relationship, the processes of communication are important to maintain. In the hectic teaching and examination periods typical of semester structures there are weeks in which all that may be possible is teaching and little time for paper writing. Carol, in her
comments about her experience of power between us as colleagues in a writing relationship identified the absence of communication from me as actively disempowering for her.

_When there was no communication for a lengthy period of time I felt that I had no power at all and began to lose hope regarding the work. Once communication was established again by you I felt hopeful and felt I had some power this was sustained as the article was finalised and I was encouraged..._ (Carol PG student e-mail correspondence 2008).

There are stages within the semesters where teaching and correction workload leaves little time for anything else, particularly in the last weeks of teaching prior to exams and again at grading deadlines. Until I read Carol’s perception of my withdrawal from the paper writing process I had no idea of the impact of that withdrawal. I perceive there is little I can do about the increased workload at that stage but in order to militate against a negative impact for colleagues (especially those who have previously been my students) I realise that I need to explain the potential for this to occur and the short term nature of it. I saw in Carol’s comments how easily the relationship could slip back into the student/supervisor dynamic by a lack of attention to communication on my part.

That a power differential would be present in the supervisory relationship was perceived as inevitable by Emily when she wrote

_While doing the MA there was still an inevitable power difference (as in you being a supervisor and me your student, and that the project in the end was always going to be assessed) caused by the formal system we were in, but this was never abused in any way by yourself so that there was always a high degree of trust there._ (Emily PG student e-mail correspondence 2008).

Interestingly Emily differentiates the systemic power invested by the very nature of the structure of the university system and what she termed personal power.

_I have never felt there was any power difference on a personal level._ (Emily PG student e-mail correspondence 2008).
Developing a productive and collegiate relationship requires attention to the interpersonal engagements which do not always easily flow. For example Laura describes experiencing a lack of connection with me during her initial studies.

*I think I always felt a bit guarded around you as I thought we didn’t have much of a connection. While you were always encouraging during the lectures and helpful with assignments I always felt that there was something missing.*  
*(Laura PG student e-mail correspondence 2008).*

It was only during the research phase of our relationship that it seems Laura began to feel a connection with me. In a group meeting I happened to see her jot in a journal and as she turned the pages I saw that she had stuck in her journal printed e-mails. I commented that I do the same thing but did not see many other people doing it. Unbeknownst to me this was to be the ice breaker. In an e-mail she wrote to me

*Personally I think that we both had a part to play in this, perhaps me even more so. I have always had an issue with authority-be it teachers/lectures, managers at work or whatever and always felt beholden to them and maybe inferior if that is the right word. I think I gave away power to them and probably still do to a certain extent. I think it comes from childhood where I always complied with or obeyed my parents in order to avoid conflict.*  
*(Laura PG student e-mail correspondance 2008).*

Laura’s assertion that we both had a part to play was striking. I was also guarded in my interactions with Laura. She had intuitively picked up my lack of spontaneity and it had impacted on my teaching and learning relationships. As we worked together during her MA this changed significantly

*I think that during the MA those power relations were extinguished somewhat, perhaps as we developed more of a partnership approach. I always felt as though we were in the project together and felt supported in that.*  
*(Laura PG student e-mail correspondance 2008).*

Since completion of her MA Laura is now embarking on a part-time lecturing engagement on one of the programmes for which I am course director. This appreciably moves our relationship systemically into a collegiate model, but it has moved into that space already in that we are co-authoring a paper together
also. Even something as simple as keeping the communication channels open and my ringing Laura regularly enhances the collegiate connection. Clearly we will both benefit from the collaboration professionally but also interpersonally.

\[I\text{ believe it [our relationship]}\text{ will further develop as I begin lecturing and this new relationship develops. I am really looking forward to it and feel that it will be positive. We will both gain from the relationship and I think this will impact on power relations in that they will be negated. I think the fact that I can actually say these things honestly and send them to you is a testimony to the type of relationship that we have.}\]

(Laura PG student e-mail correspondence 2008).

It is also of note that even when a collegiate approach is prioritised between colleagues, systemically a hierarchy still may exist in the perception of others as Emily alludes to in the following communication.

\[\text{As joint course leaders, I feel we work well together. I think the distinction between you as permanent staff and me more on the outside actually makes a good balance. Your position (as permanent staff) officially puts you in a relatively higher position on the “hierarchy” (maybe viewed by others) but I do not feel that way. I feel independent and able to make decisions without turning to you for “approval”}\]

(Emily PG student e-mail correspondence 2008).

As Emily and I began a funded research collaboration which we tendered for as equal partners she captured what she perceived as the essential difference between our research relationship now as colleagues and then as student/supervisor.

\[\text{It differs quite a lot from the MA. It is much more a collaborative effort and a partnership approach. It is about two people’s ideas and decisions, not one person’s ideas which then gets direction (and is evaluated) by the other.}\]

(Emily PG student e-mail correspondence 2008).

6.10.1 Collegiate reflection as the key to productive collegiality

Initially my research focus was on facilitating the empowerment of my students. By critically engaging in this process my understanding of the nature of power in
educative relationships grew. Nowhere was this more salient than in the
dialogues with critical peers that took place during the critical peer focus groups
throughout the research. Understanding power and its uses was a recurrent theme
of the conversations with my critical peers about my work. In one particular
exchange my critical peers challenged my understanding of power and indeed
my (often) reluctance to even acknowledge it.

*Breda*  What you are talking about is the different types of
power. *What you are talking about is an
educational use of power it is not an authoritarian
use of power or a self serving use. You are using
your power in responsible ways even towards the
education on the issues of power itself.*

*Mary*  *You can put all these ideas out there about
curriculum but curriculum itself can be neutral it is
a piece of paper. What changes is when you put
people into the dynamic. You can’t forecast the
outcome we are all different…*

*Patricia*  *There is a discomfort in having power as course
director, marker, and supervisor.*

*Breda*  *But there shouldn’t be! That is my point Patricia, if
you acknowledge it, the reasons for it and you use
your systemic power in educational ways it is an
honest relationship then, but we have come to
associate power with discomfort because we have
come to associate power with negative use. Maybe
you need to move away from being ashamed of
power.*

*Mary*  *So with your students are you saying you
empowered them?*

*Patricia*  *No that is not it I guess like myself I am not
empowering them I am supporting them to
recognise their own power.*

*Breda*  *Yes we all have power and knowledge- even
students they just might not have recognised it yet.*

*(critical peers focus group(a) 2004 p10)*
In this excerpt I articulate my discomfort in having power. However Breeda challenges me to question where that discomfort is coming from. She articulates succinctly that the systemic power invested in course directors is there for a reason and for relationships with students to be characterised by honesty and integrity that must be accepted as part of the dynamic that exists. She also makes it clear that the discomfort and reluctance to engage with power may be linked to associations that are negative which require careful deconstruction. The exchange here shows how my thinking about power is deepening from my engagement with my critical peers. This theme was to re-emerge in a later focus group with this group. The development in my thinking in the seven months between these focus groups becomes apparent.

**Patricia**  
Maybe what I am saying is that even if the classrooms themselves are hierarchical in their structure where there is the expert knower transmitting content what you want to say is that you want to turn this on its axis...that is what I am focussing on that I am creating the environment and the space that it can happen in. I am not talking about physical location. It is the intangible part that you can’t touch but that you know is between you when you are engaging with someone.

**Mary**  
It is relational.

**Mairin**  
the web of betweenness.

(critical peers focus group(b) 2004 p5-6.)

And later in that same focus group I begin to discuss the negotiated nature of power.

**Patricia**  
I think about how power is negotiated within our relationships.

**Mary**  
Yes you cannot deny that you have power; you absolutely have it because you are the teacher....
Patricia But it can be that power is constructed in relationships between people. It is what we do with power that is the issue...you become aware of the power you can hold as a teacher and of how you reproduce it. Power is constituted in the relationship between you and your students as you are both engaged in the learning process and rather than you exercising it you give students the opportunity to do so too. It is constituted and negotiated at the personal level.  
(critical peers focus group(b) 2004 p8-9 ).

In this exchange, the discourse of my discomfort around the whole issue of power is replaced by a stronger and dynamic discourse of power as relational and negotiated in teaching and learning. The paradigm shift in my thinking in the seven months between these two focus groups was substantial in influencing not only the direction of the research but also my practice as an educator. The dialogues in the following year show an even deeper development in my thinking, as I move on from discourses of power into discourses of respectful interaction and sustainability.

Patricia I am interested in creating ways of learning and teaching that are respectful of each person’s capacity to generate knowledge in relationship with others...I am careful that I actually model what I believe in so that when they are teaching, supervising, lecturing even research that they will carry forward important principles of respecting people’s intellectual freedom and peoples right to generate knowledge. I want to achieve a sustainable approach...

Mairin I have always been fascinated by how you talked about how you wanted to create educative relationships with your students... those values might not always underpin teachers own experience of education and in turn might not influence their work.

Patricia Yes

Bernie What Mairin is getting at is that if you can encourage people to question you might actually get people to really think about what they are doing that is contribute to their education....
After the focus groups or other communications with the critical peers I would invariably reflect on the insights I would gain. Often these reflections were captured in my research journal. Arising from the 2004(a) focus group I found myself questioning what exactly it was I was trying to do.

Much later as this research drew to its conclusion I was heartened to read feedback from a critical peer who clearly articulates her perception that my research shows an approach that was facilitative and mutual.

*What comes across from reading your work is a sense of the quality of educative relationships that you wish to have with your students...you do not wish to set yourself up as ‘the knower’ imparting knowledge to them, while they as consumers passively receive packages of knowledge. Rather you see yourself and your students as fellow travellers on a journey of learning together in a spirit of reciprocity. In this context you position yourself both as teacher and as learner.*

*(Bernie critical peer e-mail correspondence 2008).*

As I reflected on these questions repeatedly over the course of my research I came to one specific conclusion

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163
All my thoughts on empowerment bring me back to one thing the self as the anchor, whatever perspective I take influences the outcome, and it is the same for every educator. It is inherently subjective. (research journal extract 2005).

It was as I began to delve deeper into the motivations and to discuss with critical peers as to why I was engaged in this endeavour that I began to understand that the gain was self empowerment also. One critical peer raised the question that was to finally crystallise my understanding of the difficulties I encountered during the research. She wrote in response to some writing I had given her:

Have you explored that on the journey towards empowering your students that you realised that you needed to empower yourself but before you could even do that you had to develop and awareness of your own lack of empowerment. I have heard you say this before maybe it should feature here

(Mairin critical peers focus group 2007).

To some degree throughout the research I was aware that my own sense of professional identity and empowerment was shifting, but I had not articulated this even though my critical peers identified that they could see this happening on several occasions. Sometimes a critical peer would draw my attention to it often in response to some written piece I may have given them.

Since then (Critical Debates conference) you have been constructing your own identity and growing into your own voice. I have seen examples of this growth within our group. I experienced your ethic of care in your practical welcoming of us into the third level system but you also demonstrated subservience to the system, you positioned yourself as less important than what you perceived as the best interests of the top-down approach of the university. Over time I believe you have changed from expressing joy at being part of this group to a demonstration of equality – to engaging in a form of reciprocity.

(Caitriona critical peer e-mail correspondence 2006).
Here Caitriona is accurate in her perception of my approach. In joining the group of critical peers I was excited and partially in awe of them. Over time and exposure to their supportive critique I am aware of the changes in my perspective, in particular that now when I meet with the critical peers I engage in reciprocal dialogue about my work and their own in an egalitarian manner devoid of the self censorship that would have characterised my earlier engagements. This theme was also identified by an initially sceptical work colleague who opened up to the possibilities of my work and began to critique her own. In response to a paper I delivered at a conference which she attended she wrote to me about how she would like to hear my voice more within our work environment.

*Our working environment is part of the wider university and the forms of communication within our environment are influenced by power and control. Within your writing I see a power in terms of energy, clarity and vitality but I do not see any desire to control. At times I have heard this powerful voice which burns within you… and I would like to hear more of it*  
(Kathleen work colleague  e-mail correspondence 2005).

### 6.11 Influencing others

In the initial stages of my research when I first engaged with my critical peers I often spoke about my desire for the inclusive teaching philosophies and practices that I was reading about to become rooted in my own department. In response to my research proposal, one critical peer responded by writing

*Embedding work institutionally has always been one of your aims I know. Schön talks about the battle of snails so be patient. Embedding for us assumes by invitation and we may have to await the invitation but we can show by our work practices that our work is good. You cannot hammer in your ways of working into a system unless you step out of your values ...*  
(Mairin critical peer  e-mail correspondence 2003).

I was struck by this advice and responded

*Yes you are right I can’t hammer these ideas into my institution otherwise I will negate my own values. However it is hard and it results in dissonance to really believe in something and it not be the norm. Think of it like this we (you and I) have spent more of*
our lives in formal education than outside of it, a challenging thought. So we would only do this if we really believe in it.  
(Patricia e-mail correspondence 2003).

It was to take another two years before the invitation came. In 2005 a colleague who became interested in my research challenged the motivation behind my research and asked me

*What have you to gain by showing them (students) your hand?*  
(Kathleen work colleague e-mail correspondence 2005).

My response to her was sure. I was clear that I felt there was nothing to lose in facilitating the empowerment of student voice and everything to gain. This colleague, who herself is committed to care for students then began to correspond with me about my research but also about her own practice. She began to critique her own processes within education. At one point she articulated her disquiet in relation to critical student feedback

*During the course of this I realised that there is a danger in focussing on listening, valuing and accepting student opinion without giving them sufficient and appropriate critical feedback. The challenge for the next stage will be to do this while maintaining a positive learning climate.*  
(Kathleen work colleague e-mail correspondence 2005).

Kathleen went on to question issues such as whether she unwittingly attempts to colonise students and “instinctively encourage the type of answers that I want to hear.” She questioned how open with students she was prepared to be. She felt this particularly knowing that students may appeal grades she allocates. But also she began to understand my internal dilemma of how much of this is research and how much of it is part of my work. While I had arrived at the end of that struggle understanding both to be enmeshed inextricably she was embarking on that journey.

*I find this process of articulating my values highly stimulating and invigorating both emotionally and intellectually. I have done most of this writing at work over a period of a couple of days, during my working day and I am left with a moral dilemma: is this an integral part of my work, leading to an improvement in the educative relationships with my students, or is it self-indulgence on my part? I feel it is part of my work but I am left with the*
realisation that within the academy (rather a pretentious term but one which I have just discovered comes from Plato’s school for advanced education!) these reflections may be accorded little value

(Kathleen work colleague e-mail correspondence 2005).

In her response to a paper I had given she reacted strongly to my use of the phrase pedagogic discourses becoming carriers of power relations and patterns of dominance (Mannix McNamara 2005:2).

An issue which strikes me forcibly here is the way in which research literature is used as a way of domination: at times it seems that academics quote books, not to help their listeners or readers understand new worlds, but in an effort to show others their own superiority and their membership of an exclusive club – to exclude rather than to include

(Kathleen work colleague e-mail correspondence 2005).

Here, Kathleen seems to be reflecting the issue of the accessibility of academic language that students themselves had raised with me as a significant challenge to their learning.

Robin: One thing that struck me as I was reading last night was that the language of academia is very difficult. Why do they have to shroud it in so much jargon? ....

Jane You have to read and re-read...

Patricia When I started reading academic work at first I was frustrated too as I was reading I was thinking why is this so difficult. But the more I think about it and analyse it the more I think with good writers they are choosing their words carefully so that they are not open to misinterpretation. It is not so nice for an academic for someone to read your work and misinterpret it. But I don’t believe that we need to write in a language that is inaccessible. Making sure your work is not open to misinterpretation raises the level of writing but it is important also to remember you want other practitioners to pick up the work and read it too. You will find the right balance for you

(focus group 2003(a): 5).

In my response I had encouraged my students to find the right writing balance in order to write in an invitational style. Therefore it was quite a surprise to me
when one student (a practicing teacher on a professional development masters) who had attended a series of guest lectures that I had given on research methods sent an e-mail referring to my use of academic language as potentially challenging. While it was reassuring to read some positive responses to my teaching Conrad’s comment about my use of academic language stopped me in my tracks.

_I felt I had to drop you a note to say thank you for a wonderful class...Everybody was really inspired by your talk and a bit scared by your use of academic language, but empowered by your everyday examples of research methods..._

_(Conrad UG student e-mail correspondence 2007)._ Conrad’s e-mail gently brought home to me the realisation that I was capable of unwittingly using academic language that could potentially destabilise student confidence. This e-mail connected with me in a way this student was unaware of, but has served to gently remind me of how powerful the use of academic language can be. This theme of the potential power of language was to be reflected in my colleague’s reaction to the use of particular terminology that I had used in the paper.

_The notion of pedagogised is rather appalling-rather like lifelong learning from the cradle to the grave, where one has no other choice but to be a learner/object of teaching/victim!_

_(Kathleen work colleague e-mail correspondence 2005)._ Kathleen was insightful in terms of the complexity of power relations in teaching and learning and also demonstrated an openness to reflect on the ideas that this research was proposing.

_What this raised for me is not just the student-educator relationship but the colleague-colleague relationship which is complex and multi faceted and is certainly not free from issues of power and control so again you have caused me to reflect and question –by your unflinching statements_

_(Kathleen work colleague e-mail correspondence 2005)._ It was this comment from Kathleen which prompted me to make the conceptual leap into the complexity of power within collegiate relationships. I had not envisioned that taking on a PhD centred on teaching accountability and
transparency would be challenging not only to me but perhaps to some colleagues. In Kathleen’s email she not only makes reference to this but demonstrates how it can positively encourage reflection for others. As I reflected I saw potential for an action research approach such as this one to open up pathways of critical reflection amongst teaching colleagues as had happened here.

6.12 Conclusion

Educative relationships are by their very nature subjective and can be very complex. The data in this chapter shows my developing understanding of the qualities of educative relationships including the role of power and empowerment in teaching and learning relationships. It also illustrates how my traditional understanding of the teacher as expert was challenged and reconceptualised as a result of engaging in action research. The data present in this chapter were reflective of the data that emerged from sources other than my practice as presented in chapter four. The next chapter will discuss the significance of the data outlined in chapter four and five.
Chapter Seven: Results C
Towards understanding the role of action research in my supporting professional learning.
Chapter seven: The role of action research in professional learning

7.1 Introduction
This brief chapter will describe some of the personal insights gained during the research process. Some key insights were made in terms of researcher boundary, professional identity, thesis representation/academic voice, and research validity and influence. They are included in a separate section here as they are reflections on my personal research process.

7.2 Boundary and action research
Understanding the shifting nature of boundaries can be a significant challenge in action research. Initially focus of this research was clear; to examine the nature of educative relationships both generally and my own. However, this could not be done without reflecting on my educative and contextual relationships, thus the research became more and more complex. As a researcher I felt rather like an archaeologist digging deeper all the time uncovering new layers of meaning. Questions of boundary and transition can regularly require attention in action research, for example from teacher to researcher to academic and the boundaries between theory and practice, school and the academy, insider and outsider (MacLure 1996:273). It regularly felt like attempting to reconcile polar opposites such as the theory practice gap or the personal and the professional dimensions of myself as a researcher. I was exploring my own teaching and yet I was trying to draw out research conclusions as effective researchers do. MacLure captures the feeling of dichotomising well when she advocates that the process often:

recapitulates the oppositional dilemmas that are rehearsed in action research: between theory and practice: between the personal and the professional: between the organisational cultures of the academy: between ‘insider’ and ‘outsider’ perspectives: between the sacred languages of science, scholarship or research, and in mundane dialects of practice and everyday experience

(MacLure 1996:274).
In experiencing the internal contradictions of myself as ‘teacher’ and as ‘academic’ I began to understand that engaging in action research was going to require a paradigm shift in my sense of professional identity and this in turn would have an influence on the research. It also meant that I needed to reconsider these dichotomies. Perhaps they were not dichotomies at all but rather a continuum along which I moved given the circumstance. My challenge in understanding where I positioned my professional identity on this continuum was linked to how I understood teacher/academic identify.

7.3 Border crossing
When I moved from school teaching to university based teaching I felt that I was in a sense border crossing but only in as much I continued to understand teaching in both contexts to fundamentally differ or to exist somewhat oppositionally. I did not perceive that I was leaving teaching. In some sense I paradoxically felt that I was the teacher and I was becoming the teacher. I believed and still do that my research needed to evidence a narrative structure that offered me the opportunity to live on both sides of the border of my teaching selves. That my professional identity which this research was influencing was not to be understood in terms of a singular self but that I could as Derrida advocates both ‘become’ and in sense was ‘always already’ a teacher and action researcher (MacLure 1996:275).

Some school teachers who made the transition to university perceive that they somehow ‘left teaching’ and this thinking appears in published work such as MacLure’s (1996). This perception does not sit easily with me as a substantial element of the academic work is teaching. I did not leave teaching nor abandon my teaching self. The context has changed but my professional identity and practice remains strongly embedded in my understanding of myself as a teacher. For me this sense of ‘belonging and not quite belonging’ was intensified by the experience of being seconded to the University setting. McDermott et al. (2007:246) in referring to teachers who are seconded to the SLSS, described them as “like exiles viewing the familiar place with the eye of a stranger” when they are working with teachers in schools. I found myself relating easily to this notion, for although the university was a new setting to me, being a teacher was
familiar and yet I felt deep exile from that which I knew well. I was experiencing a sense of border crossing, and what felt like a crisis of identity. While I cherished the opportunities it afforded me to expand my knowledge and skill in the university I also felt uncertain because of the lack of contractual certainty that accompanied secondment for me. I clung onto my identity as a teacher and continue even now to do so. This self-study action research also mirrors this same stranger/familiarity.

Some education literatures describe the shift from teacher to practitioner/researcher as “potentially drastic” (Labaree 2003:16). Within the education community it can be common to perceive a dichotomy between teachers and researchers. Teachers teach in schools, academics do research. Teachers are understood as practitioners operating in what Schön (1983) describes as the ‘swampy lowlands’ of practice. There exists within the literature almost a call to arms for teachers who wish to be researchers to “transform their cultural orientation from normative to analytical, from personal to analytical, from the particular to the universal and from the experiential to the theoretical” (Labaree 2003:16). Such a stance implies the assumption that teachers are not already analytical, universal nor theoretical in their perspectives and practice. It positions teachers in a sub scale hierarchy of practice as opposed to inhabiting the universal world of the professional researcher or academic. This can be argued to be a limited understanding that could be understood as potentially elitist in nature and it may even contribute to the dominance of research above teaching.

As a teacher/researcher who made the transition to university I did not experience the ‘drastic’ change that Labaree predicted. Rather it was a growth filled and exciting prospect that created opportunities to reflect on and improve already existing teaching and analytical skills. While I did feel the discomfort of lack of belonging which secondment can engender, I felt the growth potential that also exists in the university. The transition simply opened up a vista of resources that served to support my constantly evolving understanding of educational knowledge. By including an exploration of this development in my research it meant I could come to a deeper understanding of teaching and
learning from both personal and professional perspectives. My self understanding as academic/teacher/researcher is enhanced by this research process. No such dichotomising exists for me; all three identities sit very comfortably together.

### 7.4 Crisis of representation

Denzin and Lincoln (2000) acknowledge that the presence of the researcher in research can often lead to what they term a crisis of representation. The struggle experienced was not in the transition from teaching to research but in the transition between *styles* of research. I was well experienced in the research paradigms typically understood as quantitative and qualitative from my work as a national evaluator of Social, Personal, and Health Education (2003) and Relationships and Sexuality Education (2007). However, the move to self-study where objectivity was replaced with data integrity and participant relationship meant that the usual clarity I had in representing data was challenged.

This crisis [of representation] has been created in response to the falling away of traditional notions of truth, reality and knowledge that previously provided us with familiar structures for presenting our ‘findings.’ What we have are the voices and experiences of our participants and ourselves and a need to find a new way of presenting them

(Etherington 2004:83).

My research felt ‘messy’ in the way that Mellor (1998) identifies from his experience of action research. While his struggle was to find his research question, mine was to find an appropriate form of representation that reflected the complexity and organic nature of the research process. The temporal boundaries implicit in the cycles of action research did not fit well. While the research did encompass reflection, planning action and more reflection, the time bounded cyclical patterns traditionally associated with action research did not always fit the enmeshed nature of the research. These cycles or processes most often were happening in tandem and parallel with each other. Mellor (1998:458) finally rejects the label of action research stating:

My research contained very much more uncertainty than my casework, but I felt able, with support to handle the ensuing insecurity. In the end I felt it was more honest to abandon attempts to hide methodological
struggles under the label of action research, and simply to write as openly and as clearly as possible about the very perplexing path of inquiry.

My research is a hybrid of methods, broadening the boundaries of traditional understandings of action research to include organic growth. It required unlearning the traditional rules of engagement in order to adopt a more developmental and participant led approach. Mellor (2001) cites St. Pierre (1997) who describes how she rejected a clear, linear process of research in order to represent how the activities of data collection, analysis and interpretation all happened simultaneously. Another dimension was also happening in that the research direction was organic and was influenced by the simultaneous processes. As the research progressed an emergent design took over similar to that discussed by Lincoln and Guba (1985) who indicate that in such emergent designs initial research questions may be found to be inadequate or inappropriate. In this case the initial question was neither inadequate nor inappropriate; rather it fitted well at the initial stages. The problem was that it needed to grow organically as my knowledge and understanding evolved.

7.5 Discovering my professional voice in writing this research

During this doctoral journey many factors coalesced in hindering my trust in my academic voice. This in turn created a writing paralysis. My research did not fit the traditional understanding of what action research should look like. I struggled with trusting the uncertainty that is integral in action research.

The metaphor of voice frequently emerges in action research. It is particularly evident in feminine perspectives of action research. Miller et al. (2002) explains that it can be associated with silence, talking back (hooks 1989), or having a ‘different voice’ (Gilligan 1982). When dealing with voice in action research it is usually linked to issues of empowerment. Maguire (2001) argues that it is not about giving voice to others, but action researchers see themselves as part of the process challenging the barriers that stop those in less privileged positions being able to speak out. It was much more internalised for me. This research challenged me to use my own voice with authority.
My personal use of power and authority has always been tentative. I experienced writing paralysis which felt symptomatic of my lack of certainty as to whether I really belonged within the academy. This hybrid research was yet another indication of not quite belonging. Attempting to find a writing style that was commensurate with my values and research approach meant that I eventually experienced a significant writing paralysis that lasted for quite some time.

7.5.1 Understanding my silence- insights from professional supervision training

I experienced a significant breakthrough in March of 2008 while in a professional supervision training workshop. I was the only academic in the group of twenty five people the majority of whom were psychotherapists. I worried that as an academic supervisor my skills and capacity to support others were not as valuable as the therapists approach. One participant challenged me by tapping into these internal questions. She articulated a reluctance to work with me as she felt that I did not have the skills to support a supervisee. Her opinion was that I was “too academic.” This was strikingly incongruent for me.

Her projection of what I stood for as an academic reinforced my sense that universities and their teachers are often perceived as elitist. Rather than challenge this person’s own projection I silenced myself and left the workshop that evening feeling dejected and misunderstood. However, the following day when I had returned to the workshop (after much deliberation and little sleep) I decided to participate fully to learn as much as I could. During that day, of all the participants I received the most positive feedback in my capacity to support supervisees and with such clear affirmation of my skills I began to question why I lose voice when challenged. I particularly questioned my lack of will to challenge the assumption that academics do not have the capacity to emotionally as well as academically support their students/supervisees when clearly they do. I was frustrated at the colleague’s assumptions that only psychotherapists offer professional supervision especially as my tacit knowing (Polanyi 1966) told me the opposite.
However, the challenges offered by this training were not over yet. In a different role play I was asked to play the role of a training advisor who had to inform a student they were about to fail a placement. The workshop provider (world renowned in the field of professional supervision) was to play the student. After setting the scene and welcoming the student I subsequently did not fare well. As the role play progressed the trainer suddenly stopped the proceedings mid flow his frustration evident:

*Workshop Facilitator:* Ok stop!! I am getting frustrated now, when are you going to tell me I am failing?

*Patricia:* After you have said some things about your successes so far.

*Workshop Facilitator:* Why are you setting me up to fall even further?

*Patricia:* What? I am not doing that!

*Workshop Facilitator:* I think you are! I have to be told I am failing and you are getting me to say all the other good things I have done well so far.

*Patricia:* (interrupts) ok... ok... look what is going on in my head all the time you were talking is how can I get to the point where I say the words that will devastate this person?

*Workshop Facilitator:* Yes and that is hard but as a course director you have authority and responsibility. Think about the clients this person will work with; think about the investment of the academy in the programme standard; think about the university relationships with the placement hosts. Even if you don’t like using power it is there for a reason and you must become comfortable in your own authority. Your voice is important why are you not using it with authority? You started well... I was bolshy and you set me at ease, I trusted you and that is not an easy thing to achieve with a difficult angry student, so that was no problem to you. Why did it change?
Patricia: It is painful to me, I fear being wrong and I worry what others think.

Workshop Facilitator: But think of how much growth will be there when you do decide to use your authority well. I need to know when I am going wrong as your student, you need to find the authority to simply say so whatever the consequences...yes?

His intervention was deeply challenging. He clearly stated his frustration at my prevarication and lack of will to exert authority even when needed. Exhausted I left the workshop, and felt a moment of huge realisation. This was the second time this had been made explicit to me, first by a critical peer and then in this workshop. The message was evident if uncomfortable. My unwillingness to engage with power and authority that was crystallising for me in my lack of voice was not serving myself or my students well. It certainly was not serving the writing up of my doctoral studies in any measure. Until I found my professional and personal authority my writing paralysis would continue. I needed to metaphorically unchain my mind and hands in order to trust my academic voice. This is a difficult process, one that is not yet complete but my growing awareness of issues of voice means that I am now more conscious of the need to exercise it. The completion of this thesis is in some measure indicative of my journey of growing into academic voice. This became an integral aspect of the action research process.

7.6 Research insights on validity

As a researcher it is important to keep an eye on the big picture. That the process of participant validation would yield additional data in terms of participant reflection was an unexpected outcome. For example Jane who participated in the student focus groups was quite moved by reading her words and she responded to her transcript in writing:
Sometimes it is an ‘out of body’ experience reading these transcripts again. Reading over this one gave me a very warm feeling of a wonderful evening.

(Jane July 2003).

It was not initially intended to include such data however such a response provides insight into the affective dimension of the focus group. It gives a metaphorical feel for the warmth of the engagement as Jane perceives it. This is something that research does not often capture but is worth consideration by researchers.

This affective dimension was also felt by Lynn who responded to the transcript also in writing. In her response she makes reference to being present at my delivery of a paper on this research at a conference held in the University of Limerick (Mannix McNamara 2003).

There was something about sitting there and knowing that I was part of something that you were talking about that day, knowing that I was part of that process. I felt a bit sorry for the other doctoral students that their students were not there. Because there was just something about feeling there was part of you up there

(Lynn July 2003).

In response to her I referred to the conversation that I had with Jack Whitehead (keynote speaker at the conference) who had listened to my paper. Jack had mentioned that he was impressed that the research participants were present.

Jack mentioned after the paper that he was impressed that you were there. I explained to him that it was not orchestrated, that you just decided to come. But he had an interesting comment he said well...you can’t hide when people sitting there are part of the research. I had never thought of that.

(Patricia July 2003).

It became clear that the presence of the research participants at a conference in which a paper was being presented on the research added certain integrity or validity to the statements being made. This potential was picked up by critical peer Bernie:
In the process of your research, you have created a theory of practice based on valuing the contributions and opinions of your students. You have evidence of this from your students and verbally too in a public forum at the Critical Debates conference. You are contributing to a new form of theory, through your reconceptualising of educative relationships in terms of reciprocity, an ethic of care and intellectual freedom. You are enabling your students to create a space for the construction of their identities, as you also construct your own identity...

(critical peers focus group 2004 a).

This luxury is not available to many researchers for obvious reasons but for action research within the academy this is not such a difficult situation to achieve. Actively encouraging participants who are colleagues or students to attend paper presentations is potentially very rewarding for both.

7.7 Research insights on influence

Self-study action research is challenging. As a researcher one is gaining insight about the themes being explored, but given the nature of self-study, the self is also intricately interwoven. Research participants made specific reference to my personal educative influence. It became clear that even in teaching styles the scope for influence is ever present. While discussing the concept of influence the students were thinking about what aspects of working with others I held as important. This they saw as relevant to their practice with clients.

Charlotte: You have interacted with us and it is a ripple effect. If I bring one millionth of this way of working to the work that I do, it will really influence someone else.

Patricia: I guess that is my hope.

Lynn: It is not just for this term either, since the very first day we met you there are things that you have seen as a priority in working with the group and our own self discovery. When we did our presentations you would not hear what went wrong until we had talked about what went right first. I had to get myself to think... I actually did do something right. I want to bring that on to someone else, what it does for your self esteem is huge. It is not just for this term for
me it is going back to work with me I am building on it all the time...little things.

(Student Focus Group July 2004).

The critical peers also picked up on the theme of influence. Mairin saw the personal growth in terms of becoming more critically self aware:

You have outlined the difficulties of working to foster good educative relationships in the current move towards consumerism in education; this demonstrates to me your critical engagement in your research which you have located in theories of critical pedagogy and power. ...you are becoming more critically aware of yourself and you are hoping to influence your students to do likewise.

(critical peers focus group 2004 a).

7.8 Conclusion
Action research helped me to develop much higher levels of critical awareness. I gained much personal insight during the research process. Some of it was challenging, all was interwoven. In developing understanding of power and authority I was discovering my own disquiet about power. In supporting student engagement and democracy I was learning about how valid it is to recognise and explore the emotional dimensions of teaching and learning. In dedicating so much time to listening to student voice I was faced with the realisation that I had lost my own. In exploring educative influence, the depth and affective dimensions of my own influence became evident. The lesson that was most clear was that in action research self-study the self cannot and should not be separated from the research process. While this is possibly the most challenging dimension of self-study research it is also potentially its greatest strength in terms of developing critically aware teachers.
Chapter Eight: Research significance
8.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the significance of this research for teaching and learning in higher education. It outlines the implications of the results for higher education and for my own practice in terms of teaching, communication, trust, care, power, empowerment, supervision and productive collegiality.

8.2 Teaching

The traditional image of lectures is that of a lecturer standing at the top of a full room transmitting content with little connection to his/her audience. Because the traditional lecture format can easily lend itself to didactic communication of content, the potential for approaches that treat knowledge as a product to be transmitted to students that is ever present. One would hope that this image, which pays little attention to teaching as a relationship, is relegated to history but that hope may be somewhat idealistic. Committing heart and soul to teaching as Palmer (1998) advocates is not something that every higher education teacher may wish to do, however, it is not unreasonable to expect from lecturers some connection with and interest in students. Yet this expectation might be a stretch for university teachers, who may never feel the need to challenge their assumptions about how teaching can and should happen. The assumption that once an academic has completed a doctorate or a master’s degree, or that they have an established reputation in a particular field that they have the skills to teach, is problematic for some. Some academics may never have experienced pedagogical development and yet they have an aptitude for teaching and for supervision but this research suggests this may not be the case for all. Lorraine (chapter five page 103) indicates this when she says “just because they have written extensively in one area does not mean they have the necessary skills to help you develop in that area. It is a teaching role.” The pedagogical implications for higher education are more complex than assuming that everyone can teach or that they have a commitment to the improvement of their teaching. While teaching can seem to be quite natural for some, for others, it may be a
more significant challenge. Alan (Chapter five page 105) suggests this when he says “I think there are assumptions that because you gain a lectureship that you automatically know how to teach or supervise but I am not sure it is that natural for people.”

The literature (outlined in chapter two) is divided on the issue of pedagogical instruction for university teachers. Those who advocate for it suggest that pedagogical support for higher education teachers increases student centeredness (Postareff et al. 2007) and offers opportunities for educators to engage in professional development with regard to their teaching (Gibbs and Coffey 2004). Arguments against it point to the potential to reduce higher education teaching to a skills set, lacking authentic critical engagement (Rowland et al. 1998).

However, the potential for teachers to model the way they have been taught themselves is potentially cause for concern (Lortie 1975, Britzman 1991, Parsons 2005). This tendency to reproduce the experience that one may have had of being taught oneself in ones’ own teaching is what Lortie (1975: 61) phrases the “apprenticeship of observation.” If one has experienced student centred teaching that encouraged critical thinking and empowerment, this is not a problem. However, the potential to replicate experience is problematic if educators have experienced teaching that is not student centred and that lacked critical engagement and/or attention to developing their autonomy as an independent learner. Without the opportunity to reflect on what teaching means, or on alternative and more life enhancing ways of teaching than more traditional, didactic forms, how can an educator know that there are other ways of teaching that may be more educationally fruitful and sustaining for themselves and their students.

The same can be argued for supervision. The tendency also exists in supervision for supervisors to base their approach on their own often unexamined experience as a research student (Lee and Williams 1999 cited in Pearson and Brew 2002). If they experienced empowering and facilitative supervision it is possible that they may use similar facilitative approaches in their supervision of others. The vicarious learning about supervision that they learn through what was modelled to them by their supervisors may stand them (and their students) in good stead.
But if their experiences were not so positive it is possible that they may reproduce less positive supervision for their students. This research gives examples of how positive experiences of supervision can increase student confidence and belief in their work but it also indicates the range of problems less than optimal supervision can create for students and shows the potential negative impact on their work, and their confidence. This raises questions about to how to encourage academics to critically reflect on their assumptions about the nature of teaching and supervision. It also points to the need for teachers and supervisors to be critically aware of their potential influence and impact on their students learning.

The caution provided by Rowland et al. (1998) that pedagogical education should not be a transmission of sets of teaching skills is an important one. Imposing pedagogical certification on educators may serve only to defeat the purpose which should be pedagogical support that encourages teachers to develop their teaching strategies and critical reflection capabilities (Jenkins 1998). Pedagogical support can strengthen teachers’ self-efficacy beliefs about their teaching (Postareff 2008) which is important if universities wish to embed commitment to teaching as part of their mission. But how to do this in ways that are considerate of teacher empowerment is complex. While demanding that lecturers undergo certification in pedagogical instruction, would achieve the purpose of exposing lecturers to pedagogy, it would do so in a coercive manner which would do little to encourage personal commitment to teaching. Pedagogical development that engenders a spirit of commitment and enthusiasm for teaching is ideally done by choice. There is need for creativity and innovation in encouraging teachers in higher education to pay attention to the quality of their teaching in more mindful ways. The development of teaching awards have been a significant step in encouraging university teachers to examine their teaching in depth via the evaluation of their work. The emphasis on reflective teaching portfolios that is part of the candidature process in my university has been instrumental in encouraging academics to reflect in depth on the value they place on teaching and leaning in their role. It also has encouraged them to reflect critically on what it is they do when teaching and why. The introduction of local and regional excellence in teaching awards has fostered a
discourse of teaching in a much more public way in and between universities. Such initiatives as these awards are important in fostering a deeper commitment to teaching. They give external validation (which otherwise might not occur) to teachers who are mindful of their teaching. Yet my concern is that while excellence initiatives draw attention of many academics, what of those who are not engaging with evaluation? The challenge is to find attractive and creative ways to reach teachers across all faculties (who are not already doing so) to encourage them to place value on listening to their students voices and to evaluating the practice and philosophy of their teaching.

8.3 The micro dynamics of teaching
This research has drawn close attention to what can be described as the micro dynamics of teaching. The micro dynamics of group process are globally understood as incorporating skills such as listening and communication, respect, trust, care, while also paying close attention to interpersonal relationships (Johnson and Johnson 2009, Cannon and Griffiths 2007). The same micro dynamics play an important role in teaching and learning. Inter and intra personal dimensions, (also referred to as the affective nature) of learning are important in all teaching contexts and higher education is no exception. Good teaching is essentially about building relationships of learning with students so that they can learn in environments that are supportive and encouraging. This is more challenging in universities where the numbers in lectures are far higher than other learning environments, but it is not impossible. Even within larger lectures students can feel connected to their teachers because of the way in which the teacher approaches their teaching (Palmer 1998:11). This is related to what Palmer calls the heart of teaching, already outlined in chapter two, in which he advocates that good teachers are “able to weave a complex web of connections among themselves, their subjects, and their students so that students can learn to weave a world for themselves.” He suggests that the manner in which this is done varies widely from lectures, Socratic dialogues, laboratory experiments, collaborative problem solving, and creative chaos. This is what Lorraine is making reference to in chapter five (page 103) when she says “you can be sitting there looking at someone going what they are talking about? And then another person can come in, teach the exact same material and whatever teaching skill it
"is they have, straight way, it clicks." Here Lorraine seems to be identifying a teacher who is able to teach content in a way that supports students to make relevant connections and thus integrate their learning. This is not only about skill, it also to do with connectivity and commitment to teaching as a process of facilitating the learning of others.

When a teacher is supportive of student learning, it is not just about organising content in a way that is easily understood. The voices of participants in this study appear to call for more. They identify relationships of learning that are characterised by communication that is positive, they are looking for a balance between challenge and support, they are seeking to trust in and to feel trust from their teachers, and they do not wish to be subjected to negative exercises of power. Put simply they are seeking to feel cared for by their teachers, not in a matriarchal sense but rather a robust practice of teacher care that means they are challenged to achieve academic standards in a way that is respectful of their developing autonomy. Palmer’s unique contribution to education theory is that he articulates that good teaching is not just about methods but about the ‘heart’ that the teacher brings to the work. For the participants in this study, being a good teacher is not just about content delivery it is about a commitment to teaching and an ethos of respect. They are clearly looking for more than content transmission. They are in effect looking for the connectivity that Palmer (1998: 11) describes when he writes:

The connections made by good teachers are held not in their methods but in their hearts—meaning heart in its ancient sense, as the place where intellect and emotion and spirit and will converge in the human self

8.4 The role of emotion in teaching and learning
In my work with students the emotional nature of teaching also emerged as important in the teaching dynamic, something that Hargreaves (1991, 1998, and 2001) identifies in his research and what he terms the emotional geographies of teaching. While teaching is about external performance, content delivery and interpersonal engagement, how we feel as teachers also influences how we teach. How our students are feeling emotionally in the given teaching moment also is part of the learning dynamic. This something students appeared quite aware of in
their journaling. Clara (page 127) for example describes dealing with the “emotional rollercoaster that can occur in the classroom” something that she indicated she experiences as difficult. Rhoda, a student who has overcome the significant challenge of dyslexia describes the emotional impact of participating in class in her journal. She writes that she “got quite worked up when I had to speak about it (her class exercise). Afterwards I even think my mood has a lot to do with it.” Rhoda gives us quite a significant insight here because she is identifying that how we feel can impact on our participation and learning as students. In her journaling she makes a conceptual leap and connects her experience of emotionality to how she will teach herself “I need to be able to avoid talking about personal things when I am going through a hard time myself. I need to respect the way my body is feeling and adapt the class to suit this.” This is a noteworthy insight for any teacher to gain about themselves and their teaching and it is this type of self awareness that leads to better mindfulness in teaching. Here Rhoda is discovering that her moods affect her involvement and her learning and that she is subject to her emotions as any teacher can be. Rather than judge those emotions or suppress them she decides that she needs awareness of them so that the mindfulness that ensues will guide her teaching. She also discovers in her journaling that she needs to give her students the same emotional space.

The process of teaching can be quite a subjective experience for teachers who are reflective about their practice. Students also experience their own subjective responses and while some of these are related to the interpersonal dynamic in the classroom room, some are also influenced by the experiences that both student and teacher bring with them from outside that room. We never teach in a vacuum, there are a myriad of experiences and internal feelings, varying on a continuum from joy and enthusiasm to concern or fear that we and our students bring to the classroom. Rosenholtz (1989) makes this point when she argues that what happens in a classroom cannot be exclusively divorced from what goes on outside it. Given the range of concerns that students may be grappling with, it is important that we provide democratic and safe spaces for students to engage in learning. Teachers in higher education need to be aware of the role of emotion in teaching and supervision because it impacts on how they teach and on their
students learning. This is why it is important that teaching and supervision are not perceived as content transmission only because to do so denies the inherently personal dynamic that also is present in the process of teaching and learning.

8.5 Communication

8.5.1 My assumptions about dialogue
Communication plays a significant part in student learning. As indicated in the previous chapter I initially intended to use the term dialogue for this theme. Dialogue as a concept has important connotations in education theory (Freire 1970). It is characterised by caring and is focused on the developing knowledge of both the student and educator. Participation in dialogue by students and teachers is perceived to promote mutual intellectual growth (Bohm et al. 1991, Burbles 1993). Creating a dialogic climate requires thoughtful consideration. Dialogue is a robust engagement with specific communicative attributes identified by Burbles (1993) such as active listening, facilitating others to speak, and openness to both offer and receive critique. In this research I expected to find that dialogue was important for all students. My assumptions about dialogue came from the priority placed on dialogue in education theory (Freire 1967, 1973, Buber 1970, Burbles 1993, hooks 1994, 2003). However, I now realise that as an educator I taught about dialogue to my students from a subjective understanding and from my assumptions based on the theories that I subscribe to. Until I listened to the voices of the students in this research I did not really know the practical implications and importance (or lack thereof) of dialogue for students.

8.5.2 The presence of dialogue
In my interactions with my students, dialogue can be seen, especially where they are engaged in critically reflecting on their learning and on their relationship with me. On reflection it is more likely a product of my commitment to dialogue and was probably promoted by my style and approach to my teaching. My presence in the research potentially had a significant impact on this. While there is some evidence of dialogue with supervisors in the data collected from students whom I did not teach, it appears limited. There are some painful examples where communication has broken down, for example Lisa’s experience (chapter five
There is the example from Helen (chapter five page 107) who answers the question put to her about whether she could dialogue with her teacher, by saying “I could but it didn’t make any difference” which seems to suggest a distinct lack of dialogue. The interaction with Steve (chapter five) appears to show conversation but little in terms of the dialogue that Bohm (2004) and Burbles (1993) advocate. There are several possible interpretations as to why this might be the case. Students are really only beginning to develop their understanding of their personal agency and their academic voice, so they may be tentative about confidently engaging in dialogue with their teachers. It may also be linked to student reticence with regard to the expectation of critical thinking placed upon them as part of the argument culture that Tannen (1998, 2001) has identified. Steve (chapter five page 107) suggests that students need to develop awareness of what it is they need from their supervisors in terms of how they will relate and work together but that his takes time for them to know, so that the self understanding needed is emergent rather than readily available to the novice student. The problem is that patterns of interaction may have become set by the time a student has realised what it is they need and by then it may be more difficult to open up teaching and supervision relationships for scrutiny, so Steve’s iteration “that conversation may come later” may not happen for many. The lack of priority placed on dialogue by some participants may also be linked to their awareness that they are operating with a hierarchical structure. A teacher or supervisor is in a place of power relative to their student which may impact on a student’s capacity to exercise their voice, particularly in supervisory relationships where the supervisor’s good will may be at the forefront of a student’s mind. They may not feel free to articulate a need or to disagree with their supervisor. If a supervisor/teacher is open to feedback on their teaching and communication, then students may be able to articulate their needs more easily. However, if they are not open to feedback the impact on student empowerment can be significant and risking potential conflict may require more fortitude (as was needed by Lisa and Celine) than the student may possess.

As a teacher I spend much time and effort creating dialogical climates. This means that when I am teaching I have to be open to my students’ responses and critique and I must commit time to creating an environment where fear of
negative judgement is limited or in as much as possible removed. To achieve this has taken much reflection and “inquiry into, the sorts of processes that fragment and interfere with real communication between individuals” (Bohm et al. 1991:1). While the data show that I can achieve this with my students, it also shows the gap in terms of dialogue that possibly is more prevalent in higher education. In theory, dialogue should permeate the educative relationship with the student and teacher communicating freely without fear, rather like the Habermasian philosophy of ideal speech. The data seem to indicate that in practice it was possible for some students but not for all and that it did, not appear to be a priority for some of the participants. While they desired respectful communication, dialogue did not seem to emerge as significant, and participants did suggest that taking time to identify the communicative styles desired would be helpful but they were unsure about when this would best occur. They appeared hesitant and unsure as to how to go about it. The level of understanding of and the desire for dialogue appeared quite limited among participants who were not my students, which leads me to suggest that my students had more heightened awareness of dialogue because I had spent much time discussing the theory and practice of dialogue with them.

8.5.3 The implications of dialogue

Limited understanding and expectation in relation to dialogue from participants was a disappointing result for me and suggests some cause for some disquiet. Teaching relationships are enhanced by dialogue (Freire 1967, 1970, Burbles 1993, Bohm 2004). Student empowerment is best supported through dialogical practice and limited dialogue suggests more hierarchical models of teaching and learning. This result also suggests the limited impact of dialogue theory for teaching. It suggests that many educators within higher education lack a comprehensive conception of dialogue and its importance in supporting student learning. It is also possible that the lack of impact of dialogue may be more to do with lack of pragmatism in the literature. For example Habermas (1970) ‘ideal speech’ and communicative action, has been criticised for its utopian nature (Flyvbjerg 2000, Clegg 1989) perhaps the same may be argued in relation to dialogue theory. However, this thesis is a step towards showing how real dialogue can be achieved. The data shows that students felt that dialogue
facilitated growth (page 129). They saw it as ‘mutually beneficial’ and ‘fostering deeper understanding’ (page 130). Dialogue was facilitated because I made time to meet with and to listen to students, because I worked hard at ensuring the classroom climate was open, as Jane suggests (page 130) and because I was careful to ensure students did not feel judged, which was important for Emily (page 140-141). Even when an open climate characterised by lack of judgment is created, students still potentially experience fear and may have to work hard at expressing themselves as Sarah describes was the case for her (page 129). But they still wanted to learn in this way. This dialogue was a robust engagement with ideas and students respond well to challenge that helps their learning. An anonymous comment (page 127) shows that one student found being challenged enlightening, helpful but also tiring. Rhoda suggests that she found herself challenged but learned much from the experience, while another anonymous comment identifies that a student perceives they learn more by having their assumptions challenged (page 129). Providing opportunities for students to engage in discussion with each other and with their teachers gives students a chance to reflect more deeply. Jane (page 114) suggests that learning might not even be all that immediately evident but reflection supported emergent understanding “some evenings you might go away and think what did we really discuss? And you might sit back and think and things hit you...you got to look more deeply at yourself.” So the impact of dialogue on student learning is not limited to the classroom, it can continue for student and teacher after classes have ended.

8.5.4 Dialogue and metamessages
Dialogue is an important form of teaching communication, however where teachers are not familiar or comfortable with reconceptualising traditional teaching hierarchies that dialogue may suggest, they should at least ensure that the ‘metamessages’ (Tannen 2001) they are sending out are ones of respect, care and support. The metamessage is the messages that we take from the context, ‘the way something is said, or even the fact that it is said at all’ (Tannen 2001: 7). Metamessages speak louder than words, so they often trigger emotion and are felt more deeply (ibid). As teachers we need sensitivity to this affective aspect of our communication and we need to remember that students who are
developing their academic voice are potentially more vulnerable than we may initially perceive, for example Sheila (chapter five page 109) who struggled for weeks with self-doubt and despondency or James (chapter five page 119) who says “I didn’t really have the confidence to go and badger him every day of the week so I was kind of fighting against it at that point.” It can be easy to destabilise student confidence if they are feeling vulnerable about their studies, therefore the communication practices we employ as educators are very important. In this research, participants who found their teachers approachable seemed to speak more positively about their learning. So perhaps the metamessage that teachers need to ensure they communicate is approachability. This requires time and commitment on the part of teachers but it was suggested by all participants as an important need.

8.6 Trust

8.6.1 Interpersonal trust

In this research where trust was experienced, students’ perceptions of their learning appeared generally positive. Sheila (Chapter five page 110) articulates the importance of trust for her when she says “so far he has not let me down at all...that is important,” while Carmel (chapter five page 109) seems to link trust with loyalty which she feels as a result of the trust placed in her “she is quite free with me, she trusts me...I worry that I might fail her.” So while trust is important it brings with it responsibilities, which can be a positive way of encouraging student development. However, where trust is not built or where it breaks down, the potential impact for the student is significant. It can engender sadness as Lisa articulates (page 112) at the lack of trust she feels from her supervisor and it can create difficulties in terms of accessing resources for students such as Celine (page 112).

8.6.2 Institutional trust

Institutional trust also seemed to feature as an important dynamic. This relates to the trust that students experience from their educational institution. Alan’s example of the impact of being asked to sign a postgraduate agreement at the commencement of his studies (page 113), suggests that he felt under pressure by this request. He describes it as a ‘pity’ as it was in the initial stages of his studies
and it seemed to have a negative impact on his trust for his institution. The ‘metamessage’ here for Alan appeared to be one of pressure and lack of trust, something of which educational institutions need to be more cognizant. The literature review identifies that institutional trust is important and that it encourages student development (Ghosh et al. 2001). But Alan’s experience seems to suggest the need for institutions at a macro level to model the same ethos of trust that should be present in the teaching (micro) relationships (Sachs 2003). The specifics of the postgraduate agreement form were not explored as Alan explained that he wished to make the point about his feelings with regard to it but did not wish to discuss specifics to safeguard his anonymity. As a result it is impossible to make comment on the role of such a form however it is worthy of note that if such a form is necessary, how it is agreed upon with students requires careful and sensitive attention on the part of supervisors, otherwise it can potentially damage student trust.

8.6.3 Communicating trust
Developing a communicative and transparent process with students increases trust and requires educators to be mindful of student needs (Frymier and Houser 2000). Taking the time to communicate the reasons behind particular decisions such as assessment types or styles with students and offering students the opportunity to negotiate aspects of assessment such as presentation timings or themes can increase their commitment to their studies. Deirdre (page 139) wrote in her journal about the impact that negotiating the time of classes had on her learning instead of I as the teacher normatively deciding the time. She suggests that it made her feel I was there to facilitate her learning not just to teach the subject material, which made her feel more comfortable to contribute to class discussions. As she writes, her thinking appears to progress to the point where she notes “I now realise the need to involve students in the decision making within a class where possible.” This is an important insight in that it suggests that a simple negotiation can prompt a commitment to more democratic practices for students. Where academic timetables allow it, negotiating the time is a natural decision for me, but I was unaware of the potential influence of this act on students own future teaching until Deirdre drew my attention to it in her
journal. This suggests that, not only what is taught but also how it is taught has an impact on student learning.

The data suggest that being able to exchange ideas in an open and facilitative climate is important and it requires the engagement of both student and teacher. Students need to feel that they can articulate concerns, ideas differing opinions if necessary and that they can trust that their teachers will be open to them. Teachers can promote this through their energy, enthusiasm, engagement and belief in or passion for their work. One student’s entry in his journal reminded me that student trust is not necessarily automatic when he wrote “At first I didn’t think you were for real….but then when I began to trust you and got to know you I then realised you were for real” (page 133). Here this student is indicating his need for time to form an impression of my authenticity before deciding that I was genuine and could be trusted. The time when initial impressions are being formed can be very important because it is then that teachers can begin to model the values that are important to their teaching, for example authenticity, respect and care. The heightened attention that exists when students and teachers are forming initial impressions of each other is potentially an important teaching moment. It not only affects the ensuing relationship but it also gives the teacher a chance to emphasise the importance of developing student teacher relationships based on trust. When teachers do it students generally respond well. The data suggest that when I responded to students in time and when I did not approach them from an expert or hierarchical perspective but rather as interested in their learning they were appreciative as Emily’s comments (page 133) indicate. Paying attention to reciprocity with students helps to foster relationships of trust.

8.7 Care
Care and trust are interwoven and it could be argued that all the themes written about in this thesis are relevant to care. However, care as a concept in its own right is important to highlight. The data suggest that care is important as is indicated in comments like “you rely on a degree of care” (page 118) and “with no element of care there, well I think that just has the effect of de-motivating any student” (page 118). The potential for students to think that there is less care for students in higher education settings exists as Alan suggests “it is very easy to
leave the care thing behind as people become adults” (page 117). Perhaps for many students the caring dimension may seem more invisible in higher education than primary or secondary education settings, or it is possible that in reality they experience less care. Lisa and Celine’s experiences indicate the pressures experienced where care is lacking. Yet James illustrates the support that care provided in safeguarding his productivity when he describes his supervisor seeing his work go off track and gently guiding him back on target. The data seem to suggest a sense of lottery in terms of students having teachers and supervisors who care as Alan explains “there is different quality of supervisors. They have differing aims and targets and they handle the care issue very differently too” (page 118).

Given larger class sizes and the prevalence of transmission models of teaching it is unsurprising that some students may feel anonymous and uncared for in higher education. There is little evidence of a comprehensive conceptualisation of the pastoral dimensions of teaching in higher education, but it has and always should have a pastoral dimension to it. While we cannot prescribe for care and it is an ethos that should permeate our practice as teachers, there is much scope to open up discourse as to what exactly this means for higher education practice.

8.8 Power

While all participants in the research were aware of power imbalances in the teacher/student relationship, the experiences of some students in particular suggest the negative impact of inappropriate uses of power. When things are going well people often have little cause to reflect on the role of power in their interactions. However, when things are not going so well, it focuses awareness of the negative impact of hierarchy and structural power. It can also draw attention to lack of personal power or agency. James, for example (page 119) describes the impact of feedback when he says “I would get emails and the first response that would come into my head would be to survive.” Lisa describes her fear with regard to her supervisor “I started to be afraid of him... my voice is shaking when I am meeting him so I am actually trying to avoid that at the moment” (page 120). Later on (page 121) she describes the physiological and psychological effects as: lack of sleep, confusion, inability to say anything to her
supervisor, fear, and she describes feeling that she is fighting to maintain emotional equilibrium as she feels the need to call for the external help of a psychologist. What Lisa is in effect describing are the symptoms associated with experiences of bullying (Mannix McNamara 2004). It is of great concern that any student has such negative experiences. Yet help seeking in this type of situation also appears fraught with difficulty. Given the almost sacrosanct nature of the relationship between student and teacher (even more so between supervisor and research student as is the case for Lisa and Celine) it is difficult to know how to support students when many of them fear accessing help. Celine and Lisa’s attempts at seeking help (page 176) also point to the difficulties of help-seeking in cultures that can be collusive. It is a high risk activity for colleagues to challenge their peers if they are aware of bullying engagements towards students, but if they do not, who will? While Lisa and Celine’s cases are extreme, it is as reasonable to presume that there are commonly students who experience negative power engagements with their teachers/supervisors as it is reasonable to presume that Lorraine’s experiences of emergent empowerment is also common. It would be unfair to suggest that in all cases where students are recipients of negative exercises of power that it is intentional on the teacher/supervisor’s part. It may be intentional or it may possibly be a subconscious process, exacerbated by the increasing pressures with which academics find themselves contending. Whatever the motivation, our standards as supervisors within the academy must be above reproach and we need mechanisms in place that support students and supervisors interpersonally as well as in subject specific research ways.

The data also suggests that supervisors can still have a significant impact on the relationship between student and supervisor even after the student may have graduated. For example in my work on publications with my students post graduation the types of communication, or indeed lack of it, that I engage in can also engender positive or negative responses from those students. For example Carol identifies how a lengthy period of time without communication from me about a paper we were working on left her feeling powerless and losing hope about her work (page 151). I realised that Carol could not know that a busy schedule was causing my lack of contact and my oversight in not explaining this
left her out of the loop. My assumption that she would know the reason behind my lack of contact was in effect disempowering for her. This suggests that students do not automatically move beyond the supervisor/student hierarchy post graduation and that some attention to renegotiating this aspect of the relationship may be worthwhile.

Because of the traditionally hierarchical nature of teaching and learning in universities many students do not always feel able to address their learning needs with their teachers or supervisors. Students are often keenly aware of what may or may not be acceptable to their supervisor/teacher and may modify their voice to fit that acceptability. The data suggest that manifestations of power in teaching and learning vary from positive, where student empowerment is fostered to more difficult and authoritarian practices. Negative expressions of teaching and supervisory power can hinder learning and there is need to find creative ways to support the development of empowerment and help-seeking for students when they find themselves stuck in damaging learning relationships. Leaving ones studies prematurely is an option students should not have to content with but the data suggest that students will use this exit strategy if they are disempowered enough. This prompts greater questions with regard to accountability and as to how educational institutions respond to teachers who negatively exercise their authority towards their students. There is need to ensure that students are less fearful of help-seeking and it can be supported by clearly avoiding collusive cultures and by ensuring that we have humane student support and complaints procedures. But there is also need to create academic cultures where supervisors know that disempowerment of their students is not tolerated.

Teachers in higher education need to be aware of the impact of power in their teaching. The data indicate that power is an element of the teaching relationship as Emily (page 122) suggests: “you are still the lecturer, you are the one who grades or recommends grades...you know that will never go away” As an educator I strive to be keenly aware of how I exercise power but this has come as a result of much critical reflection and research. It is important that all teachers have awareness of the role power plays in their teaching and their supervision, if only to ensure they do not unwittingly disempower themselves or their students.
It is not only the teacher who may be exerting power in the classroom. Many educators experience pressure in terms of student expectations of availability, demands in terms of quality of teaching, being pressurised to give swift feedback. Teachers may experience discomfort with the power dynamics that students also set in play in their classrooms. Students are becoming less passive in the classroom and higher education teachers are grappling with managing lecture theatres of hundreds of students, and increased students demands on their time. The pressing need for discourses of teaching that deals with the complex and changing nature of teaching and learning.

8.9 Empowerment

Empowerment is deeply complex because it is subjective. Idealistically, it would be convenient to be able to empower another individual but this is a utopian vision. It is not within anyone’s capacity to empower another, all that can be achieved is the creation of a safe environment where individuals can develop their own sense of empowerment. As teachers and supervisors we need to have heightened awareness of the role of power in our relationships and in particular the impact of how we employ that power in our interactions with our students on their developing autonomy. Lisa, Celine, James, at times Alan (in terms of being under pressure to sign a form), Sheila (in terms of her needs not being met), Lynne and Carol (as a result of my lack of communication) experience disempowerment either because of authoritarian approaches by their supervisors or their institution or because of lack of awareness of the impact of behaviour. The approach does not always have to be authoritarian to facilitate disempowerment. In my efforts to support my students, I hindered Lynne’s learning because I made a decision that ‘one size fit all’ in terms of group Master’s supervision. What this example suggests is that in making a unilateral decision about what is best for student learning I can unwittingly hinder learning and create discomfort. In this instance Lynne’s voice became silent, not from fear of retribution but fear of letting me down which was in effect as powerful.

Another dynamic at play in Lynne’s story, which she identifies, was her reluctance to be helped by others. “Did I let other people support me? Maybe I didn’t…I didn’t allow the group to do that and I didn’t acknowledge that support was there either, I kept my anxieties around my work to myself as there was a
feeling for me of weakness” (page 136). Different dynamics collided in influencing Lynne’s lack of progress: for example my unilateral decision making, her dislike of group studies and her reticence to seek help and open her work for critique for fear of being perceived as weak, not an uncommon perception among students in institutions permeated by the argument culture (Tannen 2001).

It is difficult to find a pragmatic and comprehensive conceptualisation of empowerment for teaching and learning, perhaps because it is subjectively understood and practiced. However, teachers need to critically engage with what exactly empowerment means for their practice. Meaningful empowerment is not simply consultation it goes much deeper into altering perception and practice. It cannot be imposed nor can it be facilitated via a formula. Because I committed to empowerment in my practice it has meant that I have had to radically alter what I had learned as undergraduate teacher. Even now, as I prepare undergraduates for teaching practice I struggle with the contradictions inherent in the types of knowledge they are expected to achieve and the types of values I believe to be important in education. This is one example of how I experience the ‘living contradiction’ that Whitehead (1989) refers to. Student teachers hear that ‘good teachers’ are classroom managers; that teaching skill is in the management of student behaviour while meeting the cognitive and behavioural objective set out in their lesson plans. When I speak to them about the ‘heart’ of teaching, about student voice and empowerment it appears to them at odds with their goal which is to survive teaching practice. When I ask my postgraduate students what it is they want their teaching legacy to be, they find this a most challenging question. Nevertheless, I remain convinced that it is a very important question to ask. Empowerment is not about managing people, it is about providing space, challenge and encouragement, in a climate that is supportive and without fear in order to build student self-belief. I believe that if this can be done for students they in turn may begin to do this for others in whatever professional role they assume. When student teachers are encouraged, they are given opportunities to exercise their own educator agency. Students need to be supported to see the values behind practice, to reflect on the metamessages that they themselves want to portray. In practice empowerment is
achieved though attention to communication and dialogue, power and caring and interpersonal engagement. It is also done by the prioritisation of critical thinking even if it means that students’ voices may disagree with our own.

8.9.1 Empowerment – the implications for practice

Several key insights emerged both from and for my practice as an educator, but the most significant were related to power/empowerment. Underpinning this research is a very strong commitment to student empowerment. The interview data yields insights into some very supportive and productive student centred teaching, but they also illuminate less positive experiences. Listening to the stories that emerged was deeply troubling when students articulated accounts of lack of voice and disempowerment. It was clear that negative exercises of academic power were damaging to students’ progress and to their self esteem. It seems that some students were experiencing abuses of supervisory power and that they felt they could not seek help. They did not wish to disclose to heads of departments that there was a problem as they did not feel the problem would be resolved satisfactorily or they feared strong reactions from supervisors. The two participants who did seek help from their respective department heads were dissatisfied with the outcome. Celine described her first attempt to seek help as unsuccessful.

After six months or so I went to the Head of the Department about her and...yeah six months into it I went to the Head of the Department and asked him for another supervisor... to change supervisors or to get someone else to be supervisor with her and ah...he told me that he couldn’t because nobody else in the Department would work with her... but he expected me to work with her you know

(Celine interview 2005: 5).

She made a second endeavour three years later when the head of department changed with a different outcome.

I continued working with them for as long as I could... years and am......the Head of the Department changed after that and I went and told the other fellow about it and he couldn’t believe that I was left in that situation. Well it was too late then because I was after starting working in a job and everything but he did get the thesis corrected. I had it submitted almost a year at that stage and it hadn’t been corrected so he got her to correct it and sent out to me within three months, then I could submit my thesis.
Celine opted to graduate with masters rather than continue with her PhD studies. He (department head) encouraged me to leave. He said it to me to finish with the M.Sc. because he wasn't going to put anymore money into the project so it was either finish with the M.Sc. or struggle through going around like I was asking all the other post grads to buy me in chemicals from their budget ...

Lisa described what she was thinking in terms of seeking help;

.....thinking about a meeting with someone and asking for advice well it wouldn’t work...I started looking for a job...

She feared accessing help:

If I will speak to one of them, the other will know.... my supervisor will know and I am so afraid of this because we saw in the beginning there was a single conversation with another supervisor and it was terrible for us.... So we just try to do it and he has got the money, he has the funding so... so this is a problem ah......so at the moment I am looking for a job my friend actually doesn’t do anything she is staying......she is trying to cope with him...but I am going...

Both examples of help seeking seem to suggest that it is fraught with difficulty and can be quite disempowering for students. That students would opt to leave their studies rather than seek help outside the supervisory relationship seems a strong indictment of how research students who find themselves in relational difficulties with supervisors are supported. The reluctance of students to access external help suggests disempowerment. To see a student visibly upset by their experience of postgraduate studies was very troubling and to listen to a discourse of fear such as Lisa’s, was worrisome in terms of her health and well-being. In both the data extracts there was a sense of trying to access help in a relatively collusive academic culture. Lisa feared lack of confidentiality ‘the other will know,’ and Celine said ‘he told me that he couldn’t because nobody else in the department would work with her.’ Of course it is difficult for another colleague to step in and become involved in areas of relationship breakdown but it is certainly important for heads of departments to ensure that students are supported and that they gain help when it is sought. It raises questions as to who the
student can turn to when a head of department decides not to intervene. The insular nature of the supervisory relationship and lack of external accountability seem to indicate that when it goes wrong, it can go radically wrong and it appears to be the student who fares least well in the dynamic. But if academics value intellectual freedom as is espoused then academics must endeavour to challenge its absence or abuse. If an ethic of care was central to all academic practice turning a blind eye would just simply not be an option, and more importantly such negative interactions could not occur in the first place.

8.9.2 Empowerment - implications for my practice

These interviews point to the need to advocate for the evaluation of supervisory processes. The supervisory relationship should not be off limits for evaluation. Accountability is essential. For those who have nothing to fear this is no challenge, for those who do, a process of evaluation would mean external accountability and perhaps better supervisory practice. The interviews also reinforced my commitment to the attention that I pay to the development of educative relationships and empowerment for students. The voices of the two students in particular whose experiences were not positive have had a deep impact on my understanding of the effect of student disempowerment. The also suggest lost academic potential because of their decision to curtail or leave their studies because of dysfunctional supervisory practice. They also motivated me to be more critically reflective of how I establish and maintain my own supervisory relationships from the dual perspective of being a PhD student but also as a supervisor of others. The realisation that even with the best of intentions I too could unwittingly create situations where students became stuck in their progress was deeply challenging. I saw that in the desire to please me as the supervisor, my students might be tempted to hide a problem as Lynn’s story in chapter six illustrates. It suggests that while caring is deeply important the style of caring and relationship building must place student voice and independence at its heart. While caring is essential in educative relationships; the care engendered between student and educator must be within a framework of professional boundary and freedom to voice concerns otherwise it is potentially as oppressive as disregard.
At the initial stages of this research I intended to empower my students. A discourse analysis of my thinking at that time would illustrate quite a ‘powerful’ stance from my perspective. This research has fostered my realisation that you cannot empower another, that power is not an entity that one person can give another; such a perception in itself is paternalistic and problematic. The focus is more fruitfully placed on critical reflection, on how the educator (in this case myself) is using their power, on how they create a climate free from fear, and how they support students to overcome personal fears of conflict to understand that even in conflict the potential for growth is great. If teachers in higher education engaged in more critical reflection on their teaching, many of these issues could be resolved. Dheram (2007:1) argues that the absence of a tradition of critical enquiry prevents us from realising that pedagogy itself is a tool for empowerment.

The fact teaching is an interactive process between society and the classroom is often ignored…As a result, the teaching community has failed to evolve critical tools without which empowerment remains only a dream (Dheram 2007:1).

A critical pedagogy that advocates teaching as a critical encounter between teacher, student, context and subject is an important perspective that could greatly enhance the quality of teaching and learning in higher education.

As I explored what real empowerment meant for my practice I understood that as an educator I was paradoxically in charge but not in control (Shaw 2002:117). As the teacher and course director I was in charge of the process and was responsible for student learning. But the extent to which the students decided to learn, and to exercise their voices was within their control. I could not make them engage with me, I could not force their learning, no more than I could control what they interpreted from that learning. All that I could do was pay close attention to my use of educator power and agency and to be adaptable and flexible in my teaching so as to maximise opportunities for learning for students and myself.
8.10 Supervision

This research suggests that supervision is a complex process that has significant impact on student learning. Supervision is much more than achieving the academic output of a PhD or MA. The affective development of the student and the interpersonal relationship between student and supervisor are significant elements in the process. The data suggest that supervisors can have considerable impact on their students’ self esteem and their professional efficacy. Because supervisors can potentially uncritically reproduce the kind of supervision they experienced themselves (Pearson and Brew 2002), there is pressing need for a comprehensive discourse of supervision that reaches across the wide range of faculty. Supervisors need to become more sensitive to the impact of the types of relationships they foster with their students. Because empowerment is so subjectively understood, supervisors need to be supported to understand its implications for their practice in order to avoid experiences such as Celine’s (page 121) when she says “it broke my heart where she told me to do this reaction and I did it. I didn’t understand why I was doing it.” If students do not understand why they are engaging in a task it serves to increase frustration as Celine’s comment indicates. Celine needed to be supported to see the value of her experiment or be able to engage with her supervisor as to the direction of her research.

8.10.1 Pedagogy of supervision

It is not easy for supervisors who have not had exposure to learning theory to understand how best to motivate and facilitate learning. That is not to say that they are not capable of doing so but supervision is currently learnt by experience. The prevalent assumption is that is once the academic research qualification has been achieved then one automatically has the skills to supervise and can know what it is that makes supervision successful (Rudd 1985:79, Gatfield 2005). However, not everyone makes a naturally good supervisor, and there is need to find ways to support supervisors to be more comfortable in supporting the empowerment of their students and to be more person-centred in their communicative practices in order to avoid negative experiences such as those identified in this research. Teaching pedagogy is an important aspect of the professional development of teachers and yet we hear little of supervision
pedagogy. Pedagogy of supervision would be a significant development in the opening up of discourse and reflection on academic supervision. Academics should be encouraged to perceptually place supervision as central to their teaching role, so that they understand the integral role that teaching plays in the supervisory process. They need to be supported through exposure to supervision pedagogy to understand the role of empowerment in supervision where a balance of teacher presence and encouragement can help students to fulfil their learning potential. Supervision pedagogy could aid the emergence of more equitable and empowering teaching relationships by encouraging supervisors to understand the complexities of power, empowerment, communication and agency, important for student and supervisor alike.

8.10.2 Scholarship of supervision
Along with supervision pedagogy, a scholarship of supervision would help the development of what is known about academic supervision. Scholarship is about achieving excellence in the practice and theory of teaching and research through critical engagement and critical reflection. The scholarship of teaching initiated by Boyer (1990) has served teaching well by encouraging teachers to critically reflect on teaching and it has been instrumental in fostering a substantial discourse in the field. However, there is little in terms of supervision scholarship. Supervision scholarship would facilitate academics to address the deeply complex educative issues surrounding supervision. Advancing a scholarship of supervision could aid the quality of supervision practices. Encouraging research and reflective practice on supervision across the disciplines and making that work public could well serve the development of new knowledge with regard to supervision. It could aid the dissemination of knowledge about and for supervision. It could also encourage supervisors to expand their practice by making their supervision a research informed practice rather than the ‘learn by doing’ model currently in operation. A scholarship of supervision could increase the reflective practice engagement of supervisors and consequently improve the quality of student experience.
8.10.3 Supervision- the implications for my practice

Creating empowering supervisory relationship is very important and requires recognition of the role power plays in the supervisory relationship. In my practice I pay close attention to the early stages of the supervisory relationship. I have engaged in a contracting process with students post proposal completion and successful registration. The data suggest the benefits of a more spiral process to this contracting which I have adopted. There is an initial meeting to discuss the types of supervision they perceive they may need from me and also to let them get an affective ‘feel’ for how I work and communicate. As the meetings progress the depth of engagement with the students about their needs increases as they become more familiar with their research. This is not discussed at every meeting but at key junctures throughout the process. As supervisors the importance of initiating discussion about roles and expectations cannot be over-estimated (Deuchar 2008) but the timing of this is essential. It is incremental and open to negotiation. At the first submission of work for review it is important to have a conversation about the types of feedback students may wish from me. This is important in giving the student control of how they wish to receive feedback. This process was learned from my own supervisors who gave me the opportunity of framing the manner in which I wished to receive feedback during this research. In so doing I have experienced personally the empowering potential of such a conversation.

Styles of teaching and supervision are influenced by how academics have been supervised ourselves. That is not to say academics supervise in the exactly the same way as their own supervisors, this may possibly happen or it may be that they determine to create different styles of supervision to that which they have experienced. Grant (1999:8) suggests that the supervisor is influenced by the ‘shadow figures and relationships’ from her past. This prompted me to consider how I myself have been supervised and how that influences the supervision style I now adopt. As this doctoral study is my third postgraduate study I have experienced various styles of supervision, some less positive than others. The personal understanding that each experience has brought me influences my current practice as Grant (1999) indicates. Hasrati (2005:558) advocates a model of cognitive apprenticeship where supervisors model and coach, they make
explicit their tacit knowledge and they support students as they do their tasks but ultimately they ‘fade’ as the students become empowered enough to continue independently. This is an important perspective for my practice. As a supervisor what I do and how I do it is very important for my professional boundaries and for my students’ learning. However, the data suggests cause for some disquiet at the current lottery that supervisory allocation is. It should be more than a question of luck. The quality of supervisory relationship is not something that should be left to chance in the assumption that everyone makes a good supervisor, there is urgent supervisors to prioritise reflection on styles of interaction that are appropriate for supervision.

8.11 The implications of this research for my professional identity

Developing teacher identity is very much about exploring personal understandings of the self and ones’ teaching role. Teacher identity formation requires the development of understanding of the self and the roles we adopt (Yebama 2009). It functions on several levels and includes teachers feeling connected to their subject, to their students, but also to themselves (Gordon 2008). Many teachers are undoubtedly aware of their teaching role in terms of functions such as content transmission, assessment and student learning. However, awareness of the teaching self, the quality of teaching relationships and teacher professional identity for teachers in higher education is often absent. Indeed teacher self-understanding is possibly the most neglected area of research and of teacher development (Noddings 2006:10).

Prior to engaging in this study my perception of my professional identity seemed to be almost dichotomised: a ‘professional split personality’. As suggested in chapter seven the development of my professional identity was given careful consideration. As a teacher all of my professional life, and as an academic who now supports initial and in-career teacher development of teachers, I have perhaps experienced more exposure to the importance of pedagogy, teaching scholarship and reflective practice than many of my colleagues across other faculties. Because of this I remain convinced of the importance of all academics to have access to pedagogical support and to be encouraged to explore teaching as an integral part of their professional identity. This doctoral study has served
to develop my understanding of my professional identity even further by testing the boundaries of my understanding of and commitment to teaching and learning. Through this work I have reflected on my ‘many professional selves’ the secondary school teacher, the university teacher, the PhD student, the MA supervisor, the course director. All are concurrent, real identities and all are shaping my understanding of teaching and learning in unique yet inter-related ways.

When I moved contexts from school to university I clung to my identity as a teacher, and struggled with being called a ‘lecturer.’ For me the terminology of ‘lecturer’ had connotations of a transmission model of teaching. I made assumptions that it was indicative of a more strongly technical rationalist approach than I was comfortable with. My perception was that this term did not do justice to the building of educative relationship that I perceive to be important in university teaching. I believed that there was need for educators in higher education to critically examine what it means to be a lecturer/teacher in higher education and in particular the epistemologies to which they subscribe. I now realise that while transmission models may permeate higher education, there are other more empowering and student centred ways of teaching happening also and many educators who are committed to the promotion of excellence in teaching. My belief in the need for critical reflection remains; however my assumptions about lecturing have changed. I believe that if lecturers in higher education can be encouraged to be reflective about their role and impact as teachers that the teaching landscape in higher education could change radically.

Being a researcher is also an important part of my professional identity. Published literature on the role of academics points to the tensions between teaching and research, often positioning them as irreconcilable polarities. It is as though in dichotomising them one can focus at excelling in one rather than the other. Such dichotomising can potentially facilitate academics to abdicate responsibility for the one given less priority (often teaching). Yet the academic role is one of teacher and researcher, both of which should be important to the academic role. In my practice research informs my teaching and teaching informs my research as this thesis demonstrates. Lee et al. (2007) critique the
assumption that one has to be a better teacher or researcher and found that exemplary teachers were also exemplary researchers. Teaching and research are not mutually exclusive. The commitment that an academic brings to teaching and/or research is the important factor that decides the priorities they are given. The debate that academics have less aptitude for one rather than the other is somewhat misleading, it is a choice to prioritise research over teaching (Lee et al. ibid) albeit one that the culture of many universities facilitates. Therefore, the culture that we promote within higher education needs to explicitly prioritise the importance and quality of teaching in the same measure as it does research.

8.12 Implication for my practice -voice

It can be difficult for students to exercise a dissenting voice as Grant (1999) has identified. It can also be difficult for academics to exercise their critical voices as “the construct of voice carries with it the individual perspective which is often silent in large institutions” (Thesen 1997 cited in Barkuizen 2002:96). This reticence can be manifest in varied ways, for example in the reluctance to challenge colleagues or students. Giving constructive feedback to students can be challenging even for experienced academics but it is essential for the growth of student and educator. The critical peers’ who offered such feedback during this research suggested that the issues of voice were a recurrent theme in my work. Learning to trust and use my academic voice to best effect is not something that comes easily. For example, I worked hard to encourage my students to use their voices in my teaching and supervision, yet I paradoxically was reluctant in the use of my own. Power and voice are interlinked and this research led me to reflexively engage with what these mean for my teaching and learning. This will be a continuing journey that began with this research. I have discovered that for my students to exercise their voices I need to:

- a) ensure they felt comfortable with their personal agency (power to say what they think and feel and to act on it)
- b) be comfortable with whatever challenge it may bring up for me, positive or otherwise.

But this is a parallel journey for me as well as for my students and I also need to
- a) be comfortable with my personal agency
b) be comfortable with whatever challenge it may bring for me as I engage with students and colleagues.

The insights I gained about my reluctance to use power and to challenge others was central in facilitating my own sense of empowerment. It has also meant that once I understood where this reluctance was coming from I could overcome it. I discovered that challenging my students did not necessarily mean conflict but it did mean better use of my academic voice in ways that promoted deeper student learning.

8.13 Productive collegiality - implications for my practice

When former students become our colleagues, it offers opportunities for further collaboration but this process also requires some awareness of the affective dimensions of this transition. Laura (see page 135) is one such student who has now become my colleague. In her evaluation of our relationship as teacher and student she describes a lack of connection between us in the early stages of her study, and wrote “I always felt there was something missing.” This she attributes to two factors, she perceived some guardedness in my interactions with her but she also identifies her own reticence with regard to authority figures which she perceived me to be. As I reflected on her insights I realised that she was right in her assumption of my guardedness which did exist as I had intuitively picked upon her reticence and it influenced my engagement with her. Laura is quite reflective in her evaluations when she explores what she terms her potential to give away her power to those she perceives to hold authority. As the relationship grew between us, the genesis of partnership began which supported Laura to exercise her voice honestly without fear of conflict, something she often struggles with. Even for Laura to write to me to say “I always felt a bit guarded around you” is a significant step towards authentic dialogue, for someone who fears conflict. What this example suggests is that relationships between teachers and students are not always immediate. The connection that Palmer (1998) and O Donohue (2004) advocate can take time to mature and cannot be rushed. Students may need time to decide to trust and to engage with their teachers but we also have to decide to reciprocate and to be approachable.
The transition when a student is moving into more collegiate interaction is a time that requires much mindfulness on a teacher’s part to ensure that their communication and their metamessages are those of collegiality so that previous hierarchies are left behind. This redefining of the relationship is often overlooked but moving beyond the student/teacher phase in ways that are mindful can yield very productive collegiate partnerships. I find developing collegiate relationships with those who have formerly been students is a fulfilling aspect of the academic role. As a supervisor seeing students do well is motivating and sustaining, something I often mention to students.

*I have seen how you are with each other and how you are with your work and I am in the privileged position of seeing you the first day and seeing you now.*

*(focus group 2005: 10).*

If real empowerment has been achieved in the teaching relationship the transition should happen quite naturally. A supervisor who pays little attention to student empowerment may find this process more challenging. Supervisors should approach their supervision bearing in mind that their students are their colleagues of the future. This might encourage them to think about the types of values that are important to bring to their interactions. When students change roles to become colleagues of their former supervisors, the power dynamics change considerably, and supervisors need to pay close attention that they do not hold on to previous hierarchy or continue to think of their new colleague as their ‘student.’ Empowerment for new colleagues is an important contributory factor for their academic success (Thorndyke et al. 2006). Several factors are important in facilitating that empowerment, such as the relationships people encounter in the workplace and access to support, information and resources (Kanter 1993, Sarmiento et al. 2001). Therefore, redefining and negotiating this new collegiate relationship is important and can be very worthwhile. Often this is implicitly achieved rather than explicitly so, but is important to do nonetheless. I have discovered that if former students understand that I have made the transition from being the supervisor to being the colleague it fosters more collegiate interaction. Former students and I need to move beyond whatever conceptualisations about previous power dynamics exist in terms of the supervision process. As the supervisor it is important that I demonstrate that I have made that transition and
this is done by practicing an inclusive collegiality. This requires that I approach the changing nature of the relationship with mindfulness and authenticity.

Productive collegiality is also about being able to interact critically with established colleagues who may have a lot to offer in terms of critique. The data suggest that opening up one’s work to colleagues or peers can potentially be an enlightening experience. In this case it supported me to develop deeper understanding of the intricacies of educative power. The critical peers in this research played a significant role in the development of my thinking and they formed a productive community supporting my work. They supported my situated learning as Lave and Wenger (1991) advocate, by forming a reflective community of peers who knew my context and my research approach well, but also were not afraid to challenge me. This was not a collusive engagement; the data suggest that it was robust and deeply challenging for me. There are moments when the challenges such as Breda offers (page 137) were difficult to hear. She challenges my discomfort in relation to power issues in teaching by pointing out that it is my assumption that power is negative that is causing the problem. When Breda says “we all have power and knowledge- even students they just might not have recognised it yet”, she significantly moves my thinking along to understanding the implications of Foucault’s (1980) work for my practice. Breda was challenging my reluctance to use my voice. She prompted my realisation that if power is neutral, as Foucault suggests then my reticence needed to change because it was not serving me or my students learning. What I needed was to use my power and agency as a teacher ethically and in a way that promoted deeper student learning through challenge and critique. There is great potential support in communities of colleagues or peers who can challenge academics to improve their understanding and their practice (Wenger 1999). My community of practice of critical peers’ contributed to my professional learning and growth. This was not easy to do, it meant I had to develop robustness in being able to listen to and integrate critical feedback but it supported me in my developing scholarship of my teaching and learning.

Being open to collegiate reflection has challenged me in this research but has also unexpectedly opened up conversations with a colleague (Kathleen) in my
department about the nature of educative relationships and about the role of power in education. I believe that it is important for educators within higher education to engage in reflective conversations about teaching and learning in order to continually strive for educational experiences for students that are potentially empowering and inspirational. A colleague attended a conference at which I was giving a paper. In response to the paper Kathleen wrote to me and in that communication she refers to the exploration of power with students that I was attempting:

_The fact that you clearly explored with them [my students] how you use your power within the relationship must have been an extraordinary experience_

_(Kathleen work colleague e-mail correspondence 2005)._

The language that Kathleen uses here, that of ‘extraordinary experience’ suggests that is can be unusual for academics to open up their work for critical feedback from students and colleagues. Kathleen asked if we could continue to discuss my research. Because I was committed to the criteria advocated by Schulman (1999) for scholarship of teaching that we make our work public and test it with others, I agreed to the Kathleen’s request.

Learning is least useful when it is private and hidden; it is most powerful when it becomes public and communal. Learning flourishes when we take what we think we know and offer it as community property among fellow learners so that it can be tested, examined, challenged, and improved before we internalise it (1999:12).

Schulman also argues that educational research is a powerful resource for educational change and more widely societal change, and that “research that renders one’s own practices as the problem for investigation is at the heart of what we mean by professing or profession” (Schulman 1999:15). Hearing the responses of my colleague to my work was important in terms of gaining the perspective of another who worked within the same culture and environment but who perceived and approached it quite differently. This colleague understood critical pedagogy as something quite radical. So this collaboration gave me some opportunities to explore how she understood her teaching but it also meant that I influenced her to reflect on some of her closely held assumptions about teaching and learning. The reciprocal dimension of such work is invaluable. While I welcomed sharing my work with Kathleen I also feared it. This relationship
needed to be one of trust and I needed a distinct lack of hidden agenda to be comfortable otherwise I feared it might lead to conflict. There was a risk here and while it was turned out to be a productive interaction for us both, one must be careful with the choices made about opening up work for critique. The colleague needs to be one who is not collusive so they can challenge closely held assumptions but they need to do it in a supportive manner. I have also learned from engaging with critical peers that if one makes ones work public as Schulman (2000) advocates one must be robust enough to engage with the critique that may come, therefore it is a process not undertaken lightly.

8.14 Conclusion
Self-study action research brings with it much insight for professional practice. As I gained understanding of the implications of this research for higher education generally there were also parallel insights for my practice as educator. Teacher professional identity is influenced by many factors such as subject expertise, beliefs about the nature of teaching and learning, experiences of teaching and learning and critical reflection. Throughout ones’ teaching career ones’ professional identity is constantly being shaped and reshaped. Teacher identity in higher education is a field of inquiry that gains little attention.

Student empowerment is linked to educator empowerment and agency. This is also a field of inquiry receiving little focus in terms of practice or research. This research encouraged me to engage in reflective practice about issues of power and agency in my educative practice and it benefited my teaching and my students learning.

It is difficult to open ones’ work up for the critique of peers, colleagues and students. There is potential vulnerability in the process, but this research suggests that if it is done with mindfulness and care the outcome can be improved practice and broader thinking for all who engage in it. Making my critical reflection public decreased the individualistic and sometimes even isolated nature of my research and it increased opportunities for the fostering of discourses of teaching within my department. It also supported the development of my teaching/supervision scholarship.
The insights gained here about empowerment, advocacy and voice have shaped my practice in positive ways making it a more critically aware and socially sensitive endeavour. Self-study action research can foster empowerment. Critical reflection on the nature of teaching and learning was essential to my process of empowerment which I believe contributes to the improvement of the quality of my teaching and supervision in higher education. The next chapter draws the ideas contained here together in terms of my living educational theory of my practice.
Chapter Nine: My living educational theory of my practice as a teacher in a higher education setting
Chapter nine: My living educational theory of my practice in a higher education setting

9.1 Introduction
This chapter will outline the conclusions arising from this research process. It will firstly draw together the ideas contained in the thesis in the form of my living educational theory of my practice. Whitehead (1989) identifies the uniqueness of each person’s living theory, because it is grounded in their own practice and reflection. He defines a living theory as an explanation produced by an individual, in the process of influencing their own learning, the learning of others and “in the learning of the social formation in which they live and work” (Whitehead 2008: 103). This chapter will discuss my living theory of my practice as a teacher in higher education. It draws on my already existing embodied educational knowledge (Whitehead 2009); the theories of others that have influenced this research (as discussed in chapter two) and on my interpretations of the data that also helped influence my thinking.

My living educational theory claims that teaching in higher education is a subjective practice that is improved by critical reflection. It claims also that teaching is much broader than classroom practice and that in reality it is a communicative process that happens as much in the opportunistic conversation as it does in the classroom. As educators our attitudes to our teaching and how we approach our teaching has a significant impact on student learning. My theory advocates that teaching is inherently relational in nature and that the current prevalence of the argument culture in universities does little to enhance teaching and learning. Student voices should be central in how educators shape their teaching and we need to find reflective, creative and life enhancing ways of developing students’ critical voices. These ideas are elaborated further in this chapter. They are presented in a style commensurate with my belief that educational theory should be accessible and should speak to the reader by being represented in a form that makes some connection with their values, beliefs and experiences of education.
9.2 Teaching attitude

As academics how we integrate teaching within our role is influenced by internal and external factors which have significant impact on our practice. These influences may not be to the forefront of our awareness, but they shape our decisions about our teaching. Our attitudes to teaching are formed very early in our human development, from our first impressions of schooling, the types of teaching we experience throughout our schooling, to the teaching we experience as undergraduate and postgraduate students. It is subsequently influenced by the attitudes to teaching that prevail in the institutions in which we work, in my case from the espoused mission of the university to the culture in practice in our departments and faculties and the types of conversations we have with colleagues about the role of teaching in our professional practice. Therefore, as academics our attitudes to teaching have been shaped and defined by the cultural socialisation we have experienced over a long number of years and these have significant impact on our classroom practice and by consequence on the learning of our students. Because our teaching attitudes and styles have significant impact on student learning, it is important for academics to explore the unarticulated assumptions that they have about teaching. For example if academics perceive their teaching as content transmission they may spend less time building teaching relationships with students because content transmission is not reliant on relationships between teacher and student. If however, academics view their teaching as a process of mutual knowledge generation then the types of learning relationships they foster with students becomes very important. This thesis is making a strong case that university teaching is not just about content delivery; and that the acquisition of subject knowledge is only one part of the educative process. While it is an important part of what we do as teachers, the acquisition of content should be the outcome of an educative process that also has the interpersonal and intrapersonal development of the student at heart. Teaching is a communicative act that should be grounded in the relationships that teachers foster with their students. It is about the development of the whole person, including their social and emotional as well as cognitive development.
9.3 Teaching is not limited to the classroom

Teaching is more than classroom performance; it operates at a much deeper level. All communications that we have with our students are potentially teaching moments, for example the conversations at the end of classes, as students and teachers walk to and from lectures together, those that happen between supervisor and student over a cup of coffee even the simple recommendation of a good book, there are a myriad of possibilities. The common tendency is to perceive teaching as a classroom based activity and communications with students outside the classroom is not generally perceived as teaching, but this is a somewhat naive dichotomisation. Informal conversations are often the catalyst for learning where one person (student or teacher) may follow up on a comment, suggestion or recommendation and find great learning in the journey. If we continue to understand teaching as only classroom based then we limit the potential for student growth as we remain less mindful of the possible teaching moments that the casual conversations also hold. Ideally a teaching ethos should permeate the university. If teaching is valorised and prioritised as a central function of the academic role it should be assumed to permeate all communications with students. How we teach is as important as what we teach, and how we do it portrays an affective message for students. We implicitly communicate our attitude to teaching and learning in how we approach our students and our teaching. This affective communication is interpreted easily and quickly by students. Developing a teaching style that is conversant with one’s identity and values takes time and reflection, but it is a worthwhile process that can impact on how we teach. Keeping the traditional image of lecturer as disinterested teacher, or subscribing to the understanding of teaching as relational but only within the classroom practice severely limits the opportunities where university teaching can and should occur and it limits the potential of academics to really experience the reciprocal benefits of teaching.

9.4 To teach or to research- living the contradiction?

There is a tendency to teach as we have been taught ourselves as the literature demonstrates, and this is why it is important that teachers in higher education become familiar with pedagogy. Exposure to pedagogy and in particular critical pedagogy encourages the exploration of assumptions and values with regard to
teaching. The notion that subject expertise is enough for academics to be able to teach well contributes in some measure to the relegation of teaching to second place in the academic hierarchy of priorities. The attributes that seem to be most valued by universities and that play a significant role in promotion are not teaching related but appear to be those of research, funding and publication. All are important in their own right and add to the international reputation of an institution, but teaching is a core function of the university. It is unsurprising if little time is spent by academics reflecting on their teaching when the metameessage of the institution within which they work is to research and publish. So this internal tension for academics is a challenging one that is influenced by the values of the larger institution. Teaching appears to be tagging a little behind in the current ethos. Expecting academics to develop their teaching by experience with limited access to feedback and critical reflection is not the best model to employ if we are really committed to good teaching in higher education. There is little doubt that academics will learn teaching strategies that will work for them but without critical reflection as to the impact of those strategies on students’ cognitive and affective learning, if those strategies are disempowering (as the data suggest) there is little incentive to change them. They could in fact continue teaching uncritically in this manner for their full teaching career. This is why it is so important that academics are supported in their teaching by providing them with access to professional development in pedagogy that is critical, empowering and reflective. In order to develop more inclusive teaching and to support academics to have a sustained enthusiasm and commitment to their teaching, academics need exposure to different ways of understanding teaching and learning. Becoming aware of the potential influence we have as educators and of the impact of our teaching styles on our students should bring with it a stronger motivation to adopt student centred teaching.

9.5 Teaching as critical engagement
In order to increase the quality of our teaching and its effectiveness there is need for teachers to become critical about their teaching. Adopting an action research approach facilitated me to become critical of my practice as this thesis suggests. It was not something undertaken lightly and involved some risk on my part as I opened up opportunities for students to be critical of my work. The benefits far
outweighed the risks in this research. Action research offers much potential for academics to research their teaching and in so doing to improve it. While action research might not be an attractive approach for all academics, being critically reflective about the impact of our teaching should be. Being critically reflective would mean that educators would be more mindful about their teaching and being critical can help allay student fears about critical thinking and argumentation. By becoming critical of their practice as teachers, academics can actually teach critical thinking (through their modelling of it) to their students in a way that is not threatening for students. When teachers open up their practice for critique and encourage students to engage in real dialogue with them, they show students that critical engagement does not necessarily have to be adversarial. Teachers can demonstrate that critique is not something to be feared but can actually be invited and interpreted in life enhancing ways. Becoming critical of our own teaching can actually support the development of students’ critical voices and while doing so continues to contribute to the improvement of our teaching.

9.6 Teaching as a ‘power-full’ process

This thesis advocates the need to rethink the impact of power on teaching in higher education in order to have more critically aware educators who are committed to student empowerment. There is little doubt that power is present in higher education teaching and it significantly impacts on teaching and supervision practices. Teachers need to critically engage with their unchallenged myths about the nature of teaching and learning. They need to name and robustly engage with issues of power in their practice. They need to understand that what happens within the classroom is influenced by what goes on outside of it. The power dynamics that permeate universities can actively hinder the development of critical thinking unless teachers actively choose to engage with issues of power in their classrooms so as to support the development of student and self empowerment. Becoming aware of the dynamics of power in educational practice helps us to understand that social and cultural influences in society or in the university intrude into the classroom (Brookfield 1995).
When we … notice the oppressive dimensions to practices that we had thought were neutral or even benevolent. We start to explore how power over learners can become power with learners (Kreisberg, 1992). Becoming alert to the oppressive dimensions to our practice (many of which reflect an unquestioned acceptance of values, norms and practices defined for us by someone else) is often the first step in working more democratically and co-operatively with students and colleagues (Brookfield 1995:9).

Critical awareness of the place of power in their educational practice will also facilitate educators to understand how they may, however unintentionally, silence their student voices. The nature of what it means to be an academic ‘expert’ needs to be actively deconstructed. Teachers and supervisors have an essential role to guide and support the developing knowledge of their students. This is by nature an unequal power relationship. This is a functional inequality that should be short-lived. According as the learning relationship progresses and the student becomes more knowledgeable and comfortable with their increasing knowledge the inequality should decrease. However, when teachers use their power in ways that disempower their students, it silences their students’ voices and creates climates where students are fearful of exercising their academic voice. The functional hierarchy of the student/supervisor relationship is not a problem in its own right, it is the misuse of educator power makes the inequality of the relationship a problem for students some of whom fail to overcome it as this research suggests. Many teachers in higher education may go through their professional lives without ever having explicitly engaged with issues of power in teaching and supervision. Given that the impact of negative use of power by educators can have significant impact on student’s progress it is important that all teachers in higher education are provided with opportunities to raise their awareness of the impact of power in their practice.

9.7 Teaching as an empowering process
Teachers in higher education need to be mindful of how they build learning relationships with their students. Students are clearly seeking the positive relationships with their teachers that Palmer (1998) identifies. As human beings we learn in all types of circumstances. In climates of adversity lessons are learned, and lessons are also learned in safer climates also. There is little reason as to why students should experience adversity in their learning relationships in
higher education. Learning in higher education should happen in life enhancing ways that are empowering for both student and educator. This is not to say that they are not robust and challenging for students but they are mindful of the affective dimensions of the learning relationships, to the building of trust, of mutual respect and of care. These attributes are as important in higher education teaching as they are in all other educative contexts.

Empowerment in higher education is about educators and students critically engaging together as a community of learners. For empowering practices to flourish, educators need to address their assumptions and their current practices relative to power. Empowerment requires a commitment from academics to ethically employ their power and agency in the support and guidance of their students, but also for themselves and with their peers. This thesis advocates empowerment as a personal and professional value and process that is important for those who are responsible for the education of others.

There are specific characteristics to an empowering educative relationship that are important for it to be authentic: trust, care, attention to the impact of power and openness to reciprocity and empowerment can all significantly contribute to the building of sustainable educative relationships. Educators who are committed to their teaching and who teach with ‘heart’ as Palmer (1998) advocates usually find their students responses to them to be affirming and motivating. There is a reciprocal dimension to teaching, and students are receptive to and motivated by teachers whom they believe to have an interest in their progress and who care about their learning. If teachers allow this level of reciprocal interaction to occur they open themselves to potentially quite rewarding teaching experiences. There is need to let go of the need to be the ‘expert’ enough to allow that openness to occur. This takes confidence and holds an element of risk that some educators may find daunting. But the experience of this research suggests the tremendous insight into teaching and learning that can result from engaged and reciprocal teaching.

Empowering educators are respectful of their students’ voice even when that voice is one of dissent. Critically reflective teachers are open to the possibilities
that questions and the interrogation of ideas offers. They see the inherent value in the question and are not threatened by the possibility of being wrong. The importance of being able to exercise student voice is even more pertinent in supervision relationships where so much more is invested. Empowering communication “aims to create a rich mutual understanding of each others points of view or values beliefs without either party feeling obliged to adopt the others position simply because of a power imbalance in the relationship” (Taylor and Dawson 1998:114). This type of communication is essentially what Bakhtin (1981) identified as dialogical discourse.

Empowering educators adhere to particular values in their practice. They ensure that they are available to their students. Availability is the main priority that students identify as essential for their learning (Lee et al. 2007). In this study also availability was deemed important and was identified as a significant problem for those whose student/supervisor relationship had broken down. Empowering educators are committed to an ongoing ethic of care and perceive a strong duty of care to their students (Noddings 1984). They open themselves to the potential of reciprocal engagement knowing that while their students will gain much from their educative practice, they themselves will also gain new knowledge, increased motivation, and sustained enthusiasm for their own practice by virtue of this reciprocity. They commit to dialogical discourse safeguarding their own and their students right to dissent by creating environments where students can disagree without fear of their teacher withdrawing support and care. But perhaps most of all, empowering educators understand that empowerment is not just a summative goal. It is the inherent ethic characterising the educative process. But this may require transcending traditional ideas of teaching and learning in higher education so that we can support university teachers to reconceptualise the priority of teaching in their role and to adopt more empowering pedagogies.

9.8 Teaching as a practice informed by student voices

Listening to students’ voices should be central to teaching in higher education. Many academic institutions have student representatives on committees in order to act on behalf of student interests but this barely scratches the surface and is not
a realistic way to listen in depth to what students need in terms of teaching and learning. We need to find more meaningful ways of really listening to student voices. While students sometimes gain opportunities to exercise their voice in anonymous evaluations this is usually after a course is completed and is at the discretion of the teacher to invite the opportunity for students to make comment. The student voices in this research suggest some important messages for higher education teachers. They are interested and engaged students who are not seeking passive engagement but rather are seeking to build learning relationships that are safe while also challenging them to learn. Students want to trust in their teachers and to feel trusted by them. The depth of feeling they elicited in terms of supervision was unexpected and the focus of that feeling was not related to the subject they were researching but rather it hinged on the quality of relationship that their supervisors fostered with them.

The hierarchical nature of academia and the prevalence of the argument culture can rob student voice before it has even begun to emerge. An empowerment culture barely exists in academia relatively speaking to the argument culture that prevails and this argument culture is contributing in no small measure to student disempowerment and loss of student voice. There is need to find creative and empowering ways of changing the current emphasis of argumentation in order to prioritise the student and to place their needs at the centre of the teaching process, rather than the transmission of content. There is need to find creative and supportive ways of developing their critical thinking. This is not an impossible task. Tannen (1998) and Elbow (2008) have already initiated this discourse by suggesting the adoption of more positive engagement with the ideas of others. This does not mean blind acceptance of ideas, it means that the deconstruction of the idea is done in a more caring and less adversarial teaching style. If the quality of student experience is to be taken seriously then the creation of a climate where student voice is actively solicited, listened to and employed to drive improvements in how we do things is an important first step. Students’ voices must be listened to in evaluation processes that are safe and comfortable for students. But there is also need to listen to the voices of those students who do not complete their studies in order to understand their reasons so as to avoid repetition of this attrition where possible. Importantly also students
must be heard when they are in difficulty so that they experience a culture of respect and empowerment, and not a collusive culture some suggest that they currently do.

9.9 Teaching as a reflective practice

Reflective practice, the capacity to critically reflect on ones’ teaching in order to improve it, has the potential to significantly improve the quality of teaching in higher education. “Reflection is an important human activity in which people recapture their experience, think about it, mull it over and evaluate it, it is this working with experience that is important in learning” (Boud, et al. 1985:19). Critical reflection facilitates academics to understand what they already know, to identify what they need to know to improve their practice, to ascertain strategies to develop that new knowledge and to try out those new strategies. While some academics already engage in such reflection, for others it is a new and perhaps daunting task, but supporting teachers to interrogate their teaching in order to improve it will significantly enhance their teaching and also as a consequence the quality of student experience.

Pedagogical reflective practice in higher education as Hall (1997) identifies is potentially a positive way forward:

Pedagogical reflective practice, as used here, is essentially teaching practice in which the teacher undertakes deliberate and sustained reflection and action for the purpose of improvement. The term pedagogical serves two purposes here. It not only implies that the reflection is based in teaching, it also indicates that it takes place within a learning program. The learning program is a self-directed program towards the improvement of one's own teaching (1997:124).

Hall argues that this pedagogical reflective practice has strong affective attributes as it brings groups of reflective academics together and provides a sense of ‘soul’ to their work, it offers coherence and a sense of community. There is great potential for pedagogical reflection communities of practice to enhance the quality of teaching within higher education. Communities of practice can be understood as “groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly” (Wenger 2009:1). Such communities of practice share three characteristics, the have a shared
domain of interest (in this case teaching), they are a community in that they meet “engage in joint activities and discussions, help each other, and share information” (ibid). In so doing they build relationships based on their mutual interest in pedagogy. As they meet and discuss, they “develop a shared repertoire of resources: experiences, stories, tools, and ways of addressing recurring problems…in short a shared practice. This takes time and sustained interaction” (ibid). The development of pedagogical reflection communities of practice in higher education settings would support academics that already are keenly aware of their teaching and are committed to improving it but it might also be attractive to others who may not otherwise be able to develop their teaching repertoires.

Pedagogical reflective practice should be a valued aspect of teaching in every discipline and faculty. It is not only for those with a keen interest in education as may commonly be thought. All faculties need to be encouraged to see the benefits of engaging in critical reflection on their teaching and on their students’ learning. Reflective practice is important because it enables people to learn from their experiences. The longer that one teaches in a particular field does not necessarily equate to more learning about teaching, As Beaty (1997:8) argues “20 years of teaching may not equate to 20 years of learning about teaching but may be only one year repeated 20 times.” Critical reflection needs to be integrated into normal practice so that it consistently contributes to the professional development of teachers. Engaging in critical reflection on practice and commitment to a process of continuous learning is an important characteristic of professional practice (Schön 1983). When academics engage in critical reflection on their work, awareness of issues of power, democracy, and empowerment frequently emerge, and as critically reflective practitioners academics can increase democratic trust between themselves and their students (Brookfield 1995). Because critical reflection on practice can illuminate the often opaque aspects of teaching relationships such as power and voice it can also serve to further empowerment strategies in academic teaching.

Academics need time to reflect on the nature of teaching in their institutions and on their personal philosophies of teaching. They also need time to reflect on the
underlying structures that either enhance or hinder their teaching. If promoting critically reflective teaching and supervision is left to chance, or is something that is suggested as helpful but without strong endorsement by the institution there is slim chance of academics substantively engaging with it as more immediate pressures will be prioritised. Academics need to be supported to become more committed to their teaching and this is made possible by institutions themselves valorising teaching. Embedding excellent teaching as an institutional priority would be a significant step towards achieving the commitment and prioritisation needed.

9.10 Conclusion
My theory of my practice as an educator in higher education is grounded in the belief that good teaching blends strongly inter and intra personal dimensions. The quality of our teaching is linked to our attitudes about our teaching and because these have been shaped by our experiences of learning, it is important that educators are aware of the influence of attitudes upon teaching and importantly on student learning. Teaching is a communicative act that I believe should be grounded in positive learning relationships. The traditional image of teaching as confined to classroom performance has little to do with the real nature of teaching and learning in higher education.

Teaching that is mindful of ourselves and others requires critical engagement. In order for students to experience education as empowering, teachers need to be critically aware of the role power plays in teaching and learning. Reflective teaching that includes within it a commitment to listening to the voices of students is important. In order to support academics to strengthen their teaching identities, the institutions within which they teach need to explicitly champion quality teaching by positioning excellence in teaching as an institutional priority.
Chapter Ten: Key insights and recommendations
Chapter ten: Key insights and recommendations

10.1 Introduction
This chapter outlines some key insights and recommendations arising from this research process. The key insights suggested here are more conversant with principles that should underpin academic practice in higher education. The insights are presented in four broad themes of fostering commitment to student empowerment, educator agency, reflective pedagogy and supervision pedagogy. Then four specific recommendations are made relating to pedagogical engagement and evaluation and legitimisation in academic practice. Finally implications for further research are suggested.

10.2: Insight 1 Empowerment as the prevailing ethos in higher education

Empowerment should be at the heart of teaching in higher education. This might be considered quite a challenge given the current hierarchical nature of higher education and the prevalence of technical rationalism and cultures of argumentation. However, there are specific actions that can facilitate the integration of empowerment as a central principle of academic practice. It requires a paradigm shift in thinking for academics so that their focus becomes centred on communication and listening, and on considered use of their educative power and influence. This change in perspective is not only for teachers within higher education but also those involved in the institutional structures themselves need to adjust their approach to become more student centred in nature also. The data in this research suggests the need for more humane responses for students in difficulty and the need for institutions to evidence a strong commitment to facilitating students who seek help and support. An empowering university is committed to the building of the individual and collective capacity of teachers and of students. This is an ethos that is rooted in commitment to the intellectual as well as the interpersonal and affective development of both staff and students. It prioritises the importance of educative relationships as a core function of university teaching. Empowerment needs to become central to the institutions
mission and should be enshrined as a strategic goal of the organisation. When empowerment is espoused as a key principle within a university, all those within it and those who access its services should experience person centred ways of working, of teaching and of learning.

10.3 Insight 2: Facilitating educative agency

As a teacher I perceive that little attention is paid to the idea of educator agency and yet I believe it to be an important dynamic in teacher motivation and in the sustainability of teacher commitment and enthusiasm. All teachers have the potential to be powerful agents for change particularly as they have significant influence in the lives of their students. It is questionable as to how many teachers are aware of their educative influence. While much research has been carried out in terms of teachers as agents of change in schools (Fullan 1991, 1995, Hargreaves and Goodson 1996) little is evident in relation to educator agency within higher education settings. Yet there are many educators within higher education who seek to bring about organisational change. They are actively open to change, opting to be agents for that change rather than be passive recipients (Fullan 1991). Universities need to promote the development of educators who seek professional stimulation in their teaching (Smylie 1999) and who open themselves up the possibilities that innovative teaching can offer, rather than see their teaching as passive content transmission. Educator agency is derived from the teachers’ sense of personal control and from their sense of efficacy to engage in successful tasks. It grows from their interactions with their social environment and their classrooms. It is also developed by learning from past experiences of education and actively choosing to commit to better educative experiences for their students.

Educators need to be supported to develop their abilities to use their power and influence to effect positive change in their organisations. Universities which offer support, access to resources and that encourage their educators to be reflective practitioners can increase educator agency within their organisations which in turn serves to increase empowerment and student centeredness. It is questionable as to the level of knowledge of pedagogical and educational theory that higher education teachers may have or be exposed to and this may influence
their awareness of the potential of their educational agency to effect positive change for themselves and their students.

However, when teachers are committed to listening to students’ voices and when they become more critically aware of their teaching as a potentially empowering action, teachers are potentially engaging in positive educative change. Whitehead’s (1989) work on educative influence (2009) encourages educators to understand that they have power and influence to create change in their educational institutions. Creating change can begin when teachers make clear decision about how they wish to engage with students and how they facilitate listening to and really hearing their students’ voices.

10.4 Insight 3: The importance of pedagogical reflection for higher education teachers.

All teachers in higher education should be encouraged to engage in pedagogical reflection on their teaching and at the very least have some opportunities to explore the implications of pedagogy for their teaching. How this is best achieved is a complex process and must be commensurate with an empowerment ethos. Imposing pedagogical certification is not the answer and it will do little to encourage academics to commit to critically reflective teaching. However, pedagogical development does support teachers to improve their practice therefore it is important that opportunities to engage in pedagogical development are provided by higher education institutions. The provision of such opportunity is important because it will demonstrate the institutions commitment to excellent in teaching.

Institutions can also increase motivation to become critically reflective teachers by adding the expectation of commitment to teaching and learning as an important promotional criterion. This can be achieved by the development of teaching portfolios for all teachers that include an expectation of critical reflection and a commitment to teaching excellence and student centeredness.

Pedagogical development should focus on adult learning, critical pedagogy, reflective practice, and academic practice, personal scholarship of teaching,
pedagogy of supervision and personal scholarships of supervision. Many universities already have centres for teaching that are committed to encouraging academics to take their teaching seriously and to strive for teaching excellence. They may be supportive settings for the facilitation of this pedagogical development. Creating a focus on the development of pedagogy across faculties should also facilitate the creation of a community of academics with a commitment to their teaching who wish to engage in dialogue about teaching and learning in higher education in order to enhance their practice.

10.5 Insight 4: The importance of supervision pedagogy in facilitating critically reflective supervisors

We hear very little about supervision pedagogy because supervision is frequently perceived as different to teaching. The notion that supervision and teaching are unrelated is problematic and we need to reconceptualise supervision as teaching and more so, teaching that is done in an intense one to one relationship. Because supervision is assumed to be a private, indeed an almost sacrosanct relationship between supervisor and student little is known about the quality and practices of supervision. This does little to enhance supervisory practice or indeed the quality of student experience. What is needed is more public discourse and scholarship of supervision. There is urgent need to develop appropriate pedagogies of supervision which can begin with increasing attention to supervisory practice and scholarship. This should in turn prompt more research is needed into supervision styles and supervisory practice. Opening up our supervision to critique would greatly enhance current knowledge and practice in this field. Supervisors can learn from exploring issues such as building student/supervisor relationships, the giving and receiving of feedback and facilitating independent and empowered students. Developing supervision pedagogy also needs to pay attention to encouraging supervisors to become critically reflective practitioners. When supervisors reflect on how and why they supervise, they may begin to recognise that supervision should not be something one does by virtue of academic appointment but becomes a more meaningful aspect of their academic practice. Higher education pedagogy needs to engage critically with teaching and supervision in order to support academics to become
critically reflective about the impact and influence they have on their students’ learning.

10.6 Recommendation 1: Development of more student friendly support seeking structures

This research suggests reluctance on the part of some of the students who participated in this research to seek help when their relationship with their teacher or supervisor gets into difficulty. Institutions urgently need to listen to student voices about what they need when they find themselves in difficulty. Support structures need to be more open and humane and student friendly so that the student need not fear accessing them in order to resolve any difficulties they may experience. Formal complaints procedures should be a last resort but when they are needed students need to feel that they will be listened to rather than be perceived as awkward or problematic, as the data in this study seems to suggest that some felt to be the case. Student centred support may be as simple as a student resource centre that has a faculty member skilled in interpersonal communication who can aid the student to develop the necessary strategies to solve their problem themselves and who may be able to provide intermediate and confidential mediation between student and supervisor if necessary. Empowering students to find the answer themselves is the best solution, providing skilled and neutral listening for student and supervisor can deal with the issue at a relatively low level before it escalates.

Students in difficulty in this study seem to feel that they are one individual seeking help in a large organisation that will not be receptive to their complaint. When students need to progress an issue further they need to be met in an open and non collusive manner. Some participants in the study seemed to feel they encountered collusion and that it hindered their help seeking. Lee et al (2007: 792) identify the need for sensitivity when lack of progress in work becomes evident arguing that “when a student or colleague exhibits unusual behaviour or lack of progress, there will be a reason.” Those who deal with relationship breakdown or lack of student progress need to read the motivation behind the behaviour so as to support students and supervisors to reach solutions that
safeguard student progress. Students’ fears, (either real or projected) with regard to seeking help need to be addressed.

However, there is also need for supervisors to be more accountable for the types of interactions they have with students and this area is of particular importance given the lost potential of students who do not complete their studies due to interpersonal or relational issues. “It is very important to be as enthusiastic about your students work as your own (Lee et al. 2007:791), and it is not that difficult to do. It does however require a commitment to building student capacity and a student centred approach to supervision. Supporting supervisors through pedagogical development would help them to recognise the importance of their supervision approach in facilitating student learning and empowerment.

10.7 Recommendation 2: Prioritise the evaluation of teaching.

There is little doubt that student evaluations can lead to improved teaching (Marsh et al. 2002). By the adoption of an expectation of evidence based teaching faculty would become more aware of the importance of the quality of their teaching and of the impact of their teaching on the learning of their students. Such an expectation would also demonstrate an institutional commitment to the quality of teaching and learning by their institutions. Faculty should be encouraged to develop teaching portfolios that incorporate their evaluations of their teaching. Evaluations can and should include diverse sources of evidence that optimise opportunities to listen to students’ voices. The anonymous evaluations currently carried out by the Centre for Teaching and Learning in my institution are a helpful and independent way to optimise student opportunity to give feedback on how they experience teaching and learning. Because they are independent and anonymous and carried out without the presence of the teacher, students potentially feel freer to give their responses. Teachers can learn from these evaluations and can incorporate the students’ insights into their teaching. Universities should actively encourage academics to evaluate their teaching in this way and because it is a confidential service the climate of evaluation is safer for the teacher.
Teachers should be encouraged to build creative evaluation strategies into their teaching as early as possible. In the initial planning of a module, formative evaluation should be built into the teaching plan. When students see that a teacher is open to critical feedback it makes the process of teaching more democratic. Student journaling is another effective way of evaluating teaching. It is a method that I use predominantly when teaching experiential learning and facilitating group process modules. This type of evaluation serves two functions. It provides a record for students to keep track of their insights because in the busy interaction of experiential learning much of the learning does not get the chance to be explicitly articulated otherwise. Secondly, it serves as a dialogic springboard where the journal can often become almost like a letter where students communicate to me their responses to my teaching, as the journal extracts in this study suggest. These are just two examples of potential evaluation. There are so many more evaluation methods that can be employed and teachers in higher education need to be encouraged to use them so as to create more democratic and student centred teaching approaches. Linking a commitment to excellent teaching to promotion would certainly encourage faculty to take their teaching more seriously and maximising the potential of teaching portfolios could significant aid the prioritisation of teaching for academics.

At the macro level universities themselves need to engage with evaluating the general quality of teaching that occurs within their organisation. Consistent and independent evaluation post student graduation would help universities gain insight into the quality of student experience. Australia is leading the field in this endeavour, with their implementation of their government initiated Course Evaluation Questionnaire in 1991. This evaluation is carried out at programme completion and examines the “characteristics of good teaching and effective learning such as enthusiasm, feedback, and clarity of explanations, the establishment of clear goals and standards, and the development of generic skills, the appropriateness of the workload and assessment, and an emphasis on student independence” (Marsh et al. 2002:320). Such an evaluative process would be beneficial in order to gain insight into the quality of student experience. This should be an anonymous evaluation that does not identify any particular teacher
or student, so as to safeguard both, but it would serve to give great insight in student experience and current teaching trends in higher education. By virtue of doing it, universities would demonstrate an active interest in the quality of teaching in their universities and send a meta-message to all that teaching is important and that good teaching is valued.

10.8 Recommendation 3: Prioritise the importance of empowering supervision practice through evaluation.

The graduation of a postgraduate student and publications arising from their research are usually considered evidence of a successful process. But this measures only one aspect of the supervision process. We need to judge postgraduate studies success on additional criteria rather than the summative criterion of degree award. Attention to the student/supervisor relationship and what has been affectively learned through this relationship is also necessary. Currently in Ireland there is no evaluation of the actual supervision process. There are in existence tools such as postgraduate student progression forms but these are filled in by supervisor and student during the supervision process. Implicit in this is the assumption that a student is empowered enough to voice dissent should there be a relational issue. Given what is at stake for the student and supervisor and the power dynamics inherently in play in supervisory relationships, even if students are unhappy they will more than likely not use this tool in the presence of their supervisor to illuminate that unhappiness. Because of the privacy of the student/supervisor relationship and the notion of collusion that some students seemed to perceive in this research there is pressing need to strive for accountability in the supervisory relationship. Evaluation could aid this process and could help supervisors become more aware of the types of engagements they have with students.

Again the Australian’s are leading the field with their evaluation tool similar to the teaching evaluation they have instigated a Postgraduate Research Experience Questionnaire (PREQ) to evaluate supervision. This questionnaire examines supervision, skills development, intellectual climate, infrastructure, thesis examination, goals and expectations and overall satisfaction (Australian National
University 2008). This PREQ has been adapted by Oxford University in the UK as an evaluation tool. Such evaluation could potentially help increase the transparency of supervisory relationships and thus facilitate students to give feedback on their experience. In order for supervision evaluation to really get to the heart of the process it also need to engage with issues of power, voice, trust, care and intellectual freedom, in other words to examine just how empowering students found the supervisory process.

Evaluating supervision could serve to facilitate the opening up of discourses of supervision within higher education institutions which is much needed and long overdue. If universities committed to evaluating supervision, and teaching they would send a clear message to the academic and student community that student centred supervision is expected and valued.

10.9 Recommendation 4: Legitimisation of self-study action research in higher education

While much has been written about the potential of action research to contribute to the development of teaching and learning in schools and in higher education, it still remains a form of research that is not quite conventional. Action research still remains a researcher’s personal choice rather than a form of research that is considered legitimate, rigorous and worthy of funding. It is considered appropriate on a small scale but rarely would one see action research well resourced in terms of funding from either government agencies or indeed within many universities themselves. Yet this study suggests that the depth of critical engagement that accompanies action research. It has meant that my understanding of teaching learning and of research itself have been significantly shaped by choosing such a research approach. Action research approach can contribute very positively to activity within higher education (Riding, Fowell and Levy 1995; Zuber-Skerritt, 1982). Encouraging academics to engage in action research on their practice could greatly help to foster change with regard to teaching learning and supervision in higher education.

Action research is often associated with disciplines such as education. However, the potential of action research for any discipline is significant. The benefit of a
research approach such as action research is that the focus is on the practitioner improving their practice themselves. A great strength of action research is that when authentically engaged in, it is professionally life enhancing. It is also important that examples of action research are published and that action researchers contribute to international knowledge not only in action research journals but also in higher education journals so that the potential of action research is recognised by academics and by those who inform policy in our universities.

10.10 Implications for Further Research

10.10 1 Action Research

Choosing an action research approach for my doctoral research was important to me because it meant I could improve my practice as a teacher. But in choosing this approach I am aware that it is a form of research that is held in high regard in some academic quarters and holds little sway in others. Yet the potential for the development of professional practice that action research brings with it is underestimated as is its capacity to foster organisational change in teaching in higher education should enough academics choose to employ it as a research approach. There is need to legitimise research such as this so that it can have greater impact in shaping academic practice. This is a form of research that transcends the traditional boundaries of quantitative and qualitative research (Eliott 1991). In so doing it offers greater potential for researchers to engage in meaningful research that can benefit their understanding of their practice and also contribute to enhanced student experiences as a result of that developed understanding. Action research such as this provides academics with opportunities to integrate their research and professional development. It perhaps could play a significant role in the encouragement of teaching to explore their commitment to their teaching and their impact on student learning. A mentoring programme supporting academics to engage in action research projects focused on their teaching could help develop a discourse of teaching and research into teaching within universities. These could be motivated via a seed funding strategy to encourage academic participation.
10.10.2 Listening to higher education teachers’ voices
It would be interesting to examine academic’s understanding of their practice as teachers. This would add another layer of understanding to the issues raised by this research. It was decided to focus on the action research dimension for my doctoral studies. While this research looks at my teaching in some depth, it is my subjective experiences and perspective of teaching in higher education and the review of literature yielded little in terms of research that explored academics lived experiences of their teaching in higher education in any depth. It would be of great benefit to have a comprehensive study from the perspective of higher education teachers about the role of teaching in their professional lives and about the value they place on teaching.

10.10.3 Exploring academic professional identity.
It would be interesting to comprehensively explore the development of academic professional identity and the roles that research and teaching have on its development.

10.10.4 Illuminating higher education teachers understanding of their agency as educators.
Research into higher education teachers’ understanding of their personal and professional agency within their work settings would greatly illuminate their interest in and potential to act as agents of change within their institutions.

10.10.4 Exploring academic attitude to pedagogy
Comprehensive research that examines the attitudes of faculty towards exposure to pedagogy would be greatly beneficial in understanding academic openness to this as an area of professional development. It would also be beneficial in influencing the development of such initiatives.

10.10.5 Researching Supervision
Very little is still known in any depth about the nature of supervisory relationships and the data suggest issues in need of research. Simultaneous insights into supervisor and student experiences of the supervisory relationship from a triangulated perspective could help illuminate themes such as power and
empowerment in supervision. Of specific interest also are types of communication, experiences of autonomy and empowerment/disen empowerment that may be present during various stages of supervision relationships.

Also of interest is research that examines the interrelationships between postgraduate students and their higher education institutions, in particular how they experience power and empowerment as postgraduate researchers.

Further research that explores the potential for supervision pedagogy would greatly aid the development of more empowering supervision practices. Comprehensive research that examines the attitudes of faculty towards supervision would be greatly beneficial in understanding academic openness to this as an area of professional development.
Chapter Eleven: Reflections on the personal and research dimensions of this thesis, post-viva
Chapter eleven: Reflections on the personal and research dimensions of this thesis, post-viva

11.0 Rationale for this chapter
In the course of completing this research I have discovered that there will potentially always be new ideas, themes and avenues of research that can be incorporated into this doctoral work. Murray (2002) points this out when she writes that one is often left with several questions that one would like to explore further. However, she advocates that one use these unfinished questions as “a springboard to looking ahead to future work” (Murray 2002:235). This is the case here. On completion of the viva voce examination several new potential avenues entered my thinking and I also have realised that in action research, even the viva voce itself has potential theory generation opportunities. This is what McNiff and Whitehead (2005) mean by the ‘generative transformative potential of theory’, that is that theory can continually evolve and transform, in this case through the dialogue generated in a viva voce examination. This chapter explores some of the themes that I have been reflecting upon since the submission of the thesis. In particular it addresses ethics in self-study research and the challenges of doing self-study action research in ones’ own organisation. It also makes reference to ethical imperatives arising from this research. It examines self-study action research, theorising from action research and discusses issues of professional identity in higher education. This chapter also makes explicit the conceptualisation of care employed in this thesis. It discusses the significant challenges with regard to care in higher education and in particular dominant ideologies of managerialism and cultures of carelessness. It also discusses the implications of multiculturalism, gender, cultural and social capital for supervision.

11.1 Doing action research in your own organisation
Doing action research in ones’ organisations brings with it a set of particular challenges. Punch (1994) argues that doing research in general is political but doing research in ones’ own organisation is particularly so. Coughlan and Brannick (2005) go so far as to suggest that doing action research in ones’ organisation might be considered subversive.
It examines everything. It stresses listening. It emphasises questioning. It fosters courage. It incites action. It abets reflection and it endorses democratic participation. Any or all of these characteristics may be threatening to existing organisational norms, particularly in organisations that lean towards a hierarchical control culture.  
(Coughlan and Brannick 2005:71).

By doing action research in my own organisation I was choosing to be more deliberate and reflective about my practice as a teacher and a researcher because teachers who engage in action research often become more critical and reflective about their own practice (Oja and Pine 1989). When doing action research in ones’ own organisation, Coughlan and Brannick (2005) argue that it is very important to pay attention to the types of relationships that the action researcher fosters with their peers, their managers and their subordinates. For my research close attention was paid to the types of relationships that were fostered with students (which was a key focus of the research) and with peers including those in leadership roles. This research did not involve researching the work of my colleagues and I was extremely careful to ensure that boundary was clearly safeguarded. However, any time those colleagues asked what my research was about, I took time to answer and where possible to show them that the focus of my research was on my own practice and on the educative relationships that I foster with my students. Perhaps because I work in a department that supports action research and the teacher-as-researcher movement as advocated by Stenhouse (1975, 1983), I did not experience the resistances that Coughlan and Brannick (2005) have identified can be experienced by action researchers in their organisations. But I also believe that my transparency about the focus of my work and my willingness to engage with colleagues who offered critique such as Kathleen (as shown in chapter six) meant that generally my colleagues were confident that I was adhering to ethical boundaries. Therefore they did not feel threatened by the work but rather approached it with curiosity and often sought opportunities to ask me what I was doing and why. It was also noteworthy for me to realise the good-will they communicated post the viva voce examination and their continued encouragement to me to publish my work because of their commitment to action research for educational change.
11.2 Doing action research in your own organisation – ethical implications

Blaxter et al. (2006) identify some of the strengths and limitations of researching in ones’ organisation. They argue that it helps the researcher to gain greater and deeper insight more quickly but they also suggest that it can create significant difficulties, particularly in maintaining anonymity. The ethical dilemmas raised by researching in ones’ organisation featured in the discussions during the viva voce examination with particular reference to the interviews conducted with students that were not known to me. Where it became of particular relevance was in relation to the students who articulated experiencing difficulties in the supervision process. I conducted interviews with students who were completely unknown to me. None of the students were registered in my own department and I took pains to remain unaware of their research fields and their supervision arrangements. One could argue that ethically it was important to triangulate their data by conducting interviews with their supervisors. However, it was important to me as an action researcher with a commitment to empowerment and to democratic research practice that I needed to approach my ethical decisions in a manner that was not condescending (Eikeland 2006) and so decisions that were made were influenced by the needs of my research participants as articulated by themselves. Non-maleficence (to do no harm) is an essential ethical requirement for all researchers (Parahoo 2006) and therefore my primary focus for participants who discussed being in difficult circumstances was to protect their anonymity at all costs. I believed then and continue to do so now, after much reflection that if I had attempted to test their perceptions with their supervisors that I may have left them much more vulnerable than they were at the time of interview. Not knowing who supervisors were was important particularly because this research was conducted in my own organisation. Coughlan and Shani (2005) argue that in action research issues will emerge during the course of the research which the researcher will need to face and resolve in the context of their particular actions and project. I needed to ask myself two questions that Stringer (1999) suggests an action researcher ask in times of dilemma:
Who will be affected?

How will they be affected?

The answer that I arrived at was that following up with supervisors could potentially exacerbate already difficult relationships. My ethical responsibility was that if there were even a potential risk of this happening that it was best to avoid putting participants in this situation. It is of note however, that the discussion on this point in the viva voce examination left me with more questions because I am struck in particular by the discomfort that these students’ voices created in my readers. I believe these student voices are important and that in sharing their stories that they in some measure have given my institution the gift of their shared experience. I believe their voices will foster a stronger discourse about the postgraduate student experience and indeed about supervision generally. These students have in effect aided me to do what I sought to do as an action researcher which was to facilitate discourse and to initiate need for reflection and change. I also believe, as do the research participants, that the discomfort that their voices created can be a great catalyst for change.

11.2.1 Future directions-ethical imperatives

The ethical imperatives relating to the issues raised by this research do not end with this PhD. Arising from this process, it is now my intention to engage in further research and dialogue in relation to the issues raised, the outcome of which it is hoped will be the strengthening of my commitment (and the commitment of others through the creation of further discourse) to enhancing best practices in teaching and supervision in my own educational context and more widely. The voices of the students contained in this research have prompted a joint commitment between my PhD advisors and myself to continue to research these issues. In particular, I intend to address the recommendations made in this thesis through further research. It is intended to examine these issues in more intense and focused detail in order to contribute to developing better supervision practices that are educationally enhancing for both student and supervisor.
11.3 Theorising from action research

Brennan (1999) argues that in action research, theory belongs to both the moments of action and research and she argues that it is often wrongly assumed that theory is only associated with the research (or in this case the thesis dimension of the work) but this is a limited view of the action dimension of the research. In action research the tendency is to theorise about the focus of the practice or what Brennan (1999:56) calls ‘theorising in situ.’ This is important not only for the action researcher but also for their wider organisation. Indeed Brennan advocates that “there is a great deal yet to be understood about such situated knowledge and theory work (ibid). A great strength of action research is in the generation of theory that can actually change the practice and culture of the organisations in which the theory is generated (McNiff 2000). Brydon-Miller et al. advocate strongly for the role of theory in action research as understood and generated through practice but they also argue that the theory must be in the service of the improvement of that practice.

Action research goes beyond the notion that theory can inform practice, to a recognition that theory can and should be generated through practice, and, as the earlier discussion of values would suggest, that theory is really only useful insofar as it is put in the service of a practice focused on achieving positive social change (Brydon-Miller et al. 2003: 15).

It can be argued that a limitation of the theorising exists if dissemination does not happen beyond the organisation. It is important that action researchers take the learning from their practice and disseminate it at conferences, in journals and by networking with other sites and organisations (Brennan 1999). In action research it can be difficult to move from the local theorising to the more global. Brooker et al. argue that we need a way of:

...thinking about and acting upon the issue of making localised qualitative data available to interpretation and application in more global arenas. Such an approach values the subjective nature of our work and the ways in which collaborative efforts (involving a range of critical friend networks have the potential to harness the "checks and balances" within iterative conversations to take localised data authentically into broader arenas. [Such theorising] is concerned with such matters as standards of quality, authenticity/evidentiary warrant, ethics and responsibility.

(Brooker et al. 1999:3).
The role of theory is not limited to the output of action research but is an integral aspect of the knowledge generation process. In this thesis, not only do I generate my living theory of my practice (chapter nine) but also my immersion in theoretical frameworks such as critical theory aided the development of my knowledge and Brydon-Miller et al. (2003) argue that it is important that we articulate inclusive theoretical foundations on which we more extensively build our knowledge.

11.4 Action Research and self-study
Self-study action research refers to a practical way of looking at one’s own work to examine if it is as one would like it to be (McNiff 2002). Self-study has been defined as researching the “the space between the self and the practice engaged in” (Bullough and Pinnegar 2001:15). It requires commitment to personal reflection on one’s practice as a teacher but also to reflect upon the influence of one’s context on the professional self (Northfield and Loughran, 1997). Self-study can also be understood as an educative activity (Feldman 2003) focused on the improvement of one’s teaching. Therefore, reflection on the self as a practitioner pays a central role in self-study. In essence self-study “is an enquiry conducted by the self into the self” (McNiff 2002:6), where a practitioner, thinks about their life and work, and it involves asking reflective questions such as why one does the things they do, and why one holds particular values in relation to one’s work (ibid). Bullough and Pinnegar (2001:13) argue that self-study has broadened traditional understandings of research and that it represents a “trend away from modernism and its assumptions about legitimate knowledge and knowledge production toward broadening what counts as research.” Self-study requires negotiation between the role of the self and one’s work. It requires depth of reflection on one’s actions and motivations and yet it requires balancing of that reflection in order to avoid it becoming overly focused on the personal.

There is always a tension between those two elements, self and the arena of practice, between self in relation to practice and the others who share the practice setting. Each self-study researcher must negotiate that balance, but it must be a balance—tipping too far toward the self side...
produces solipsism or a confessional, and tipping too far the other way turns self-study into traditional research.  
(Bullough and Pinneager 2001:15).

By critically reflecting on the self, one can gain deep insight into ones’ professional identity, as this research has done for my professional self-understanding. Beijaard et al. (2004) argue that future research on teachers’ professional identity, needs to focus on the relationship the ‘self’ and ‘identity’, and that perspectives other than the cognitive and positivistic have a role to play in research on teachers’ professional identity.

11.5 Action Research and the development of professional identity
Action research can have a significant impact on professional identity and self-understanding for higher education teachers. Walker (2001a) argues that collaborative and reflexive dialogue can contribute to what she calls a reconstructed professionalism. This reconstructed professionalism is in effect a more critical professionalism in teaching and learning practices in higher education. For her “reflection and improvement is integral to professional work in higher education” (Walker 2001b: 2). Drawing on the work of Inglis (1989) she promotes action research as a process by which academics can rebuild their professional identities to be more consistent with their educational values. Walker (2001:3) also points to action research as supporting academics to “assume some forms of human agency in relation to structures and social processes albeit constrained by the circumstances in which we find ourselves.” I believe that the action research employed for this doctoral study influenced the development of my professional identity as an academic as Walker suggests. It made me more cognizant of my agency as an educator but it also heightened my awareness of my professional identity as evolving, developmental “not something one has, but something that develops during one’s whole life” (Beijaard 2004:107). This research has illuminated for me the complexity of my professional identity and how it is influenced by a broad range of factors including how others perceive my work and their expectations of me, the broader conceptualisations of what a higher education teacher is, but also what is important in my professional work and my professional experience (Tickle
2000). There are multiple ways by which higher education teachers can develop their professional identity and be more effective teachers and supervisors, and action research is one such way. For me, action research has been a critical process that has significantly aided my developing understanding of my academic identity.

### 11.6 Supervision

Bernard and Goodyear (1992:195) advocate that the supervisor is responsible for assuring that multicultural issues receive attention in supervision and that they avoid what they call the “myth of sameness.” There are a range of different influences that impact upon the supervisory relationship, for example race, gender and ethnicity. Overall, effective communication (verbal and non verbal) is a key element in establishing good student/supervisor relationships, where the boundaries of the relationships are negotiated between student and supervisor and where both are engaged in collaboratively working towards their research outcomes (Cryer and Okorocha 1999, Knight 1999). However, international postgraduate students and their supervisors can face communication challenges when they begin the supervisory relationship (Adams and Cargill 2003). In terms of student/supervisor relationships where the student is international, difficulties may arise which can be related to differences in expectations and beliefs about the type of relationship and communication that are needed for effective supervision. These differences can be linked to past academic experiences of the student or supervisor, differing understandings of the supervisory process and cultural differences in verbal and non verbal communication (Adams and Cargill 2003). When students and supervisors have different languages and cultural backgrounds the potential for misunderstandings in face to face communication increases (Ballard and Clanchy 1991). While international students may have passed a standard language proficiency test, they may not be prepared for face to face interaction with their supervisor which can lead to ineffective communication, cultural misunderstanding, and what Thomas (1983) calls a pragmalinguistic failure on the part of academic institutions. Therefore, developing effective strategies to encourage international students to communicate their needs and to resolve problems with supervisors can help to ensure that their communication difficulties are minimised (McLure 2005).
Miscommunication due to cultural difference can lead to altered perceptions of cooperativeness, of degree of initiative or even intelligence (Coupland, Weimann and Giles 1991). Students may be vulnerable to a mismatch between their expectations of a supervisor’s role and their supervisor’s perception of their role, especially if they come from more hierarchically structured educational systems in their country of origin. For instance, Asian international students have reported concerns with regard to insufficient guidance and attention from supervisors, unfamiliar approaches to the students, changes in student perceptions of learning and distance of supervisors (Spencer-Oatey 1997, Aspland and O’Donoghue 1994). Chinese students are used to more “high power distance” in the supervisory relationship (Spencer Oatey 1997). This high power distance according to Spencer Oatey (1997) refers to teacher centered practices where the student follows the intellectual path set by the teacher (ibid). This contrasts with the more student centred western approach (Hofstede et al. 2002). Also international research students have the added challenges of adjusting to learning how to research in an unfamiliar culture or conducting research in their home country using new research approaches (Robinson-Plant 2009). Also international students are faced with a set of new academic practices to which they much adjust (Sandeman Gay 1999).

Additionally, many international students reflect on their sense of changed identity and disempowerment when having to write in a second language and to assimilate into a different academic culture (Robinson-Plant 2009). Meeting the expectations of critical thinking when reading and writing in a different language has been cited as challenging by international students as it can be counter-culture for some who come from cultures where questioning of teachers or authority is not encouraged (ibid). However, academic institutions can support supervisors and students by encouraging attention to the development of shared communication and meaning making and fostering a discourse related to the function of supervision within their institutions particularly during the intial stages of postgraduate studies (McLure 2003).
Gender also appears to impact on postgraduate supervision (Henirich 1991, Phillips and Paugh 1994, Booth 1994, Hulbert 1994, Hammick 1994) with the literature evidencing that women have different doctoral training experiences to their male counterparts (Acker 2001). Gender has a powerful influence on the social organisation of higher education (Wall 2008). According to Seagram et al. (1998) female PhD students compared with their male counterparts, report significantly less supervisor interest in their research topic and significantly more conflict among their supervisory committee members, more delays in feedback and that their gender affects their progress. Shakeshaft et al. (1991) argue that gender expectations determine how supervisors interact with those they supervise and it is particularly evident in the communications processes and perceptions of competence

Perceptions of competence may also influence supervisory styles and effectiveness. Women are initially evaluated less favourably than equally competent men (Shakeshaft, 1987). These perceptions may unknowingly affect supervisory interactions, both when the woman is being supervised and when she is the supervisor (Shakescraft et al. 1991:135).

Seagram et al.’s (1998) research into the gendered nature of postgraduate studies identifies the university environment as a “chilly climate” for women, and they report that their research participants held perceptions of differential gender related experiences and inequalities in terms of completion rates (ibid). Research into gender equality in the Faculty of Law in the University of Helsinki showed that satisfaction with supervision was clearly gender oriented with only 14% of women and 41% of men citing their supervision as satisfactory (Ahtela 2004 cited in Kantola 2008). Phillips and Paugh (1987) draw attention to the gendered nature of supervision and argue that in supervision, male supervisors are more likely to promote their male rather than their female students. Kantola (2008) argues that PhD supervision by men can be a particularly strong structural barrier for women because of the gendered nature of interaction in supervision and the difficulties that female PhD students have in male dominated environments. Phillips and Pugh (1994:118) argue that cross gender supervision can create problems, such as fear in male supervisors to give feedback to female
students in case emotional responses will ensue, or fear of accusations of sexual harassment if giving criticism. They also make reference to sexual attraction as potentially influencing academic supervision, arguing that little is known about this area. Discomfort with issues of sexuality potentially contributes to lack of knowledge (Shakescraft et al. 1991). Of what published literature is available in this field Booth (1994) argues that getting the balance between friendship and attraction can be challenging, while Hulbert (1994) argues that distance between the genders is often maintained in order to avoid intimacy. Hammick (1994) who examined sexual harassment of students found that female students feared complaining in case it might adversely affect grading.

Female academics are expected to be more nurturing of their students than their male counterparts (Knights and Richards 2003, Meerabeau 2005). Female students generally expect more nurturing in terms of frequency of meeting and feedback from their female supervisors, especially at the initial stages of the PhD (Heath 2002). However, while it may be helpful to have female to female supervision, Leonard (2001) argues that not all female supervisors have the expected empathy or social interactions style that students seek. Some adopt the values of competitiveness and struggle with the interpersonal dynamics of supervisory relationships (Banoub-Baddour 2002).

Given the multi faceted nature dynamics that influence supervision, it is important that academic institutions are mindful of the varied influences upon academic supervision. Supervisors can be supported to develop more critically reflective supervision styles that are aware of the varied influences upon their practice. The development of supervision pedagogy can support supervisors to be more critically aware of these issues but also attention to the importance of care and what this means in higher education would also serve the development of more empowering supervision for supervisor and student.
11.7 Care

Care has been linked to the interpersonal connections between people (O'Donohue 2004) and Clement (1996:11) advocates that “care begins with an assumption of human connectedness.” The work of Gilligan (1982) was instrumental in creating a discourse of care that has subsequently influenced the literature on care in education settings. Gilligan (1987:24) advocates the interconnected nature of care and argues that an ethic of care “has a view of action as responsive and, therefore as arising in relationship.” Gilligan also argues that care is associated with the feminine because women are more traditionally socialised into caring roles, which Lynch (2010a) suggests is a factor in how care is manifest in higher education settings. It can be argued that globally, caring and the emotional aspects of caring have been dismissed and trivialised in philosophical and intellectual thought (Lynch 2010a). However, some authors such as Gilligan (1982, 1987), Noddings (1984, 1992, and 2006) and Lynch et al. (2009, Lynch 2010) have championed the role of care in education.

Noddings (1984) argues that in educational settings we need not only to “care about” but to also “care for” others. Care can be defined as: attention to the uniqueness of the individual cared for (Noddings 1984), as requiring a “greater sense of connection between the self and other, or the sense that the well-being of the self and other are linked” (Clement 1996:33) and that it has a reciprocal dimension to it in that “acting in the interest of the other is also to act in the interest of oneself” (Kroger-Mappes 1991 cited in Clement 1996:56). The notion of care conceptualised in this thesis, is not a paternalistic conceptualisation, but is a robust engagement that is expectant of standard, of work ethic and commitment to study in a manner that prioritises the uniqueness, dignity and respect of each individual, but it also relates to the interconnectedness between student and teacher and the role of emotion within that dynamic.

There is an ambivalence about care and emotion in higher education (Lynch et al. 2009) which has resulted in their becoming negatively associated with the feminine (Mannix McNamara et al. in press, Lynch 2010a) and thus devalued by the academy because of this association (Mookherjee 2005). The trivialisation of
love, care, emotion and feeling has profoundly impacted upon thinking in education and has resulted in a significant neglect of the affective dimensions of education (Lynch et al. 2009). Care has become relegated to the realm of the private with no discourse of care present in the public sphere unless connected with a specific care function in a particular profession such as nursing or social care (ibid). Woods (2009:12) makes a call for the recognition of emotion in higher education. She argues that research focused on emotion in higher education is under exploited and she makes the link between recognition of the role emotions play in academic work, in sustained enthusiasm for academic work and ultimately the health and well being of academics.

Lynch’s (2010a:56) work on care in higher education has shown the gendered understanding and manifestation of care in this setting, drawing on the work of Henkel (2000) she argues:

Women are also disproportionately encouraged to do the ‘domestic work’ of the organization, and/or the care work (e.g. running courses, teaching, thesis supervision, doing pastoral care) neither of which count much for individual career advancement even though they are valuable to the students and the reputation of the university.

Grummel et al. (2009) used the metaphors of ‘care commanders’ and ‘care foot soldiers’ to illustrate the argument that in academia those in managerial positions (usually male) delegate the caring to those in roles such as teaching and course leadership (usually female) creating what they term ‘affective inequality’, which has led to less care in higher education. Lynch (2010a:54) has drawn attention to what she terms as ‘carelessness’ which she argues has become a “hidden doxa of higher education.” She links the advent of what she calls new managerialism in higher education to lack of care and argues new managerialism accords a moral status to carelessness (2010a:59). According to Lynch (ibid), the increasingly competitive and individualist nature of academic life has been motivated by the Cartesian view of education which sees “scholarly work as separate from emotional thought and feeling, and that the focus of education is on educating an autonomous, rational person, homo sapiens, whose relationality is not regarded as central to her or his being” (ibid).
An ethic of care can be a significant resource in addressing issues of power because caring relations are characterised by responsiveness to need, sensitivity, empathy and trust (Held 2005). Care for students is important because it relational and yet it recognises the autonomy of the student and educator (Held 2005). The data in this thesis suggests the need for more humane and caring engagement with students. They suggest the need for teachers and supervisors to be sensitive to the care needs of their students by recognising the impact of their decisions on their students who are in effect vulnerable to those decisions. The recommendations from this research advocate the need for research that listens more carefully to students’ voices in this regard, a recommendation that is also made by Lynch (2010a:62):

> Given the fact that much of human mental health and well being is dependent on having supportive and rewarding personal relationships, and that nurturing affective relations are central to this, the neglect of care as a subject for research and teaching is a serious educational deficit.

**11.7.1 Care, supervision and citizenship**

The role of care in supervision and the function of citizenship are also of interest. Mookherjee (2005:37) argues for what she calls ‘affective citizenship’ which is respectful of the beliefs that “emotional connections and dispositions support citizens’ most important reasons for action.” Inherent in Mokherjee’s argument is the recognition of interdependence and relationality. But citizenship in its broadest sense, in terms of access to cultural and social capital is complex and multi faceted and Lynch (2010a:62) argues that “there is a deep disrespect for the relationally engaged citizen.” Hodson (2001) who writes about dignity at work argues that citizenship becomes suppressed in situations that are abusive. Therefore one’s active citizenship and capacity to act can become hampered by psychological factors such as fear. Hodson further links his concept of citizenship to workplace supervision and argues that citizenship and agency are more common under indirect supervision but that direct supervision (by this he means monitoring) decreases independent motivation and initiative. In effect he is arguing that abusive supervision controls citizenship and agency. However, this is not limited to the student, Lynch (2010a) also points to excessive surveillance and monitoring in higher education, which emanates from the increasing consumerist and managerial culture now dominating in higher
education. “Surveillance, and the unrelenting measurements of performance, are institutionalised and normalized in everyday life” for the academic. According to Lynch this is having a significant impact on the professional autonomy and creativity of academics. The pressure of constant performance indicators may also impact on the types of relationships academics foster with their students, not least in terms of the time available to foster these relationships (Lynch 2010b). She argues that “A care-less academic culture sends out a strong message also to graduate students and postdoctoral scholars as to who is and is not an appropriate candidate for academic life” (Lynch 2010a:58). But it also negatively impacts on academic freedom “Working under constant surveillance breeds a culture of compliance: there is little incentive to innovate or to challenge prevailing orthodoxies, necessary though it may be” (2010a:55). If as Lynch writes that “to be successful as an academic is to be unencumbered by caring” (2010a:63), then the development of student autonomy is even more difficult. My research makes a case as does Lynch, for care as integral to educative relationships for sustained learning for both educator and student.

11.7.2 Care and rights

One could argue that by virtue of citizenship, individuals have the cultural capital to access and utilise organisational structures to meet their needs. This assumption does not cater for the complexity of factors that influence empowerment such as race, ethnicity, gender, orientation, disability, power and hierarchy. One might expect that if organisations have procedures and protocols in place then people should not be disenfranchised, or that if procedures do exist, then people should not fear accessing them. In providing legislative and systemic equality or rights that it could be perceived that systems of complaints are sufficient. Ironically, while gender inequality continues to persist in Ireland, “the enactment of equality legislation has silenced the debate about gender, including inequalities in higher education” (Grummell et al. 2009:195).

The enactment of legislation has facilitated a silencing of differing opinions on gender and care issues (Lynch and Lyons 2008). Thus the provision of legislative or system structures is clearly not enough. For students also we cannot assume that they all may have the individual capacity or cultural capital necessary to confidently access procedures when in difficulty as this
research suggests. Mookherjee (2005) identifies this is also the case for women from minority cultures. The recommendations of this research support the necessity of such protocols; they also suggest that they are in themselves insufficient. Minnow (1990) also makes this case when she advocates that citizenship, equality and rights legislation and protocols, while limited are important but that rights need to be reconsidered in terms of how they exist within relationships among mutually dependent members of communities. Therefore, what is needed in terms of higher education is space to challenge the assumptions that the existence of protocols are enough for students in difficulty and to consider the affective dimensions that also are present or not such as care. This research argues for care as an educational imperative that enhances higher education as an educational environment in conjunction with rights, regulations, procedures and guidelines for best practice. It calls for the need to challenge dominant assumptions about the role of care and emotion in higher education.

11.8 Conclusion
Self-study action research has been a useful methodology for my doctoral studies. It has moved my thinking into a much deeper and critically reflective mode. It has significantly contributed to my understanding of my professional identity and of the myriad of influences that contribute to its developmental nature. It has also helped me to understand more deeply the complexity of the issues impacting on teaching and learning in higher education. Because of the critically reflective nature of my work and of my commitment to student empowerment I now understand that the culture of higher education is increasingly consumerist and managerial in nature and is not serving students well. It is also placing significant pressure on academics to be accountable in terms of performance and output but less so in terms of student teacher relationships and care. This thesis advocates for empowerment as a prevailing ethos in higher education and in order to do so space for dissenting voices that champion the role of care in higher education is needed.

Lynch’s work on carelessness in higher education points to the increase in academic compliance as a result of excessive surveillance in relation to performance and output which is a distinct challenge to the exercise of educative
agency which this thesis suggests as an important aspect of the educator role. It remains an educational imperative nonetheless because if we are to seek to promote care and empowerment in higher education, academic autonomy and the exercise of academic critique are essential.

The reflections in this chapter have moved my thinking significantly in terms of pedagogical reflection for teaching and supervision and the further research that I intend to undertake with my colleagues will now be cognizant of the cultures of higher education and the impact of dominant ideologies on the range of academic practices that includes teaching, supervision, research, publications and public service.

This thesis illustrates that self-study and action research deepened my understanding of my practice and led to the improvement of my teaching and of the relationships that I created with students. It made me more mindful of my practices as an educator and also of the reasons behind the challenges that I experienced. I became more aware of the culture of higher education as a result. The potential of this type of research for the improvement of academic practice is significant, particularly in times where compliant acceptance of dominant ideologies such as managerialism can negatively impact on the affective realm of education such as care, emotion and the relational dimension to teaching. These reflections do not end here but will now form the basis of my future research which will continue to champion the role of the affective in higher education.
Epilogue

Looking back on the research process from this point of completion I wish to offer some final insights.

Within academia disciplinary prowess prevails as an important feature of academic reputation and practice. Research and publications feature strongly as significant contributors to academic reputation and unfortunately teaching less so. Teaching is potentially life enhancing and empowering for students and for educators. Research such as this is my effort to show how academics within higher education can choose to do things differently. Academics can choose to engage critically with their teaching and research in a scholarly way as this research has done. The potential for the improvement of teaching and learning in higher education make it worthwhile.

This research has contributed greatly to improving my teaching and increasing my awareness of how and why I listen to students voices but also to my own. Action research can be a powerful way to effect change especially if it makes educators more mindful of the impact they have on their students’ learning. This research required openness and commitment on my part. It was challenging to open up my practice to students and colleagues for critique, but it was done with faith in Palmer’s work about the heart of teaching and as the research shows it was well placed even in the challenging times.

As a result I am more convinced of the power and influence that educators have. This research has shown me the importance of using it wisely.
References
References


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267


282


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Appendices
Appendix A
Interview Schedule
Interview Schedule

Introduction

Can you tell me how you find being a student? What are your experiences of being a student?

What works well for you in your studies?

What doesn’t work so well for you?

What are the things you would keep about your experiences if you could?

What are the things you would change about your experiences if you could?

How would you characterise your relationships with your teacher/supervisors?

What are the aspects that you think are important in teaching/supervising?

In my role as a teacher what advice would you give me?

In my role as a supervisor what advice would you give me?

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1 Note that prompts will be used and these prompts will be intuitive and will be guided by the responses of the interviewees. Key prompt words to be used will be interesting…tell me more…how…why…
Appendix B
Information Sheet
Exploring empowerment and educative relationships in higher education

Interview Information Sheet

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What is the study about?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>This research is for my PhD studies and it is seeking to explore your thoughts and experiences of being a student. It also seeks to hear about your thoughts about teaching and learning.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What will I have to do?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>You are asked to take part in a recorded interview with me about your experiences of being a student.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What are the risks?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>It is not envisaged that there will be any risk to participants. Students will not be asked for any personal or sensitive information.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What if I do not wish to take part?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participation is entirely voluntary and if you do not wish to take part there is no pressure to do so.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What happens if I change my mind about participating during the study?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>You can withdraw your participation and consent at any time. If you choose to do so your recording and transcript will be returned to you.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The data collected will be transcribed and analysed and will be used for my thesis document. Papers may also be submitted to peer review journals from the research. However no identifying information will be included and you will be given the transcript for you to check that all identifying information is deleted.

Students who volunteer to participate in the University of Limerick.

The University is subject to the Freedom of Information Act and the research procedures will adhere to the provisions of Data Protection legislation.

If you wish to ask any more questions about the research process you can contact the principal investigator at the following:

Patricia Mannix McNamara,
Course Director Health Education and Promotion
Faculty of Education and Health Sciences,
University of Limerick,
Tel: (061) 202722.
E mail: patricia.m.mcnamara@ul.ie
Appendix C
Interview Consent Form
I agree to participate in an interview with Patricia Mannix McNamara to discuss my experiences of being a student.

a) I understand that this interview is confidential and that there will be no identifying features in the transcription of this interview or in the overall study.

b) I also understand that I will be given a copy of the transcript to read before it is included as data so that I can edit it as I perceive that I need to (if at all).

c) I understand that I can withdraw from the study without prejudice at any stage.

Signed: _________________________________

Date: _________________________________
Appendix D
Student Focus Group Information Sheet
This research is for my PhD studies. It is an action research project that is seeking to explore your thoughts and experiences of studying with me, about your responses to my teaching, my research and about your thinking in regard to your empowerment and learning.

You are asked to take part in recorded focus groups and/or interview with me about your experiences of being a student. We will be discussing issues as they emerge during the research.

It is not envisaged that there will be any risk to participants. You will not be asked for any personal or sensitive information.

Participation is entirely voluntary and if you do not wish to take part there is no pressure to do so.
What happens if I change my mind about participating during the study?

You can withdraw your participation and consent at any time. If you choose to do so your interview recording (if applicable) and transcript will be returned to you. If you have participated in a focus group all data pertaining to you will be removed.

What happens to the information collected?

The data collected will be transcribed and analysed and will be used for my thesis document. Papers may also be submitted to peer review journals from the research. However, no identifying information will be included and you will be given the transcript for you to check that all identifying information is deleted.

Who else is taking part in the interviews?

Students who volunteer to participate who are being taught by me. In particular health promotion students will be asked, Diploma in Drug and Alcohol Studies students and undergraduate students that I am teaching.

Freedom of Information

The University is subject to the Freedom of Information Act and the research procedures will adhere to the provisions of Data Protection legislation.

What if I have more questions or do not understand something?

If you wish to ask any more questions about the research process you can contact the principal investigator at the following:

Patricia Mannix McNamara,
Course Director Health Education and Promotion
Faculty of Education and Health Sciences,
University of Limerick,
Tel: (061) 202722.
E mail: patricia.m.mcnamara@ul.ie
Appendix E
Student Focus Group Consent Form
Exploring empowerment and educative relationships in higher education

Focus Group Consent Form

I agree to participate in focus groups with Patricia Mannix McNamara to discuss my experiences of being a student with her.

d) I understand that the focus groups are confidential and that there will be no identifying features in the transcription of them or in the overall study.

e) I also understand that I will be given a copy of the transcripts to read before they are included as data so that I can edit as I perceive that I need to (if at all).

f) I understand that I can withdraw from the study without prejudice at any stage.

Signed: _________________________________

Date:____________________________________