

## **Professional learning, professional knowledge and professional identity: A bleak view, but oh the possibilities....**

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*ABSTRACT: Picking up on Locke's (2001, 2004) somewhat bleak view of the erosion of teachers' professionalism, this article begins by inquiring into a range of current professional environments across the Western World. Many of these environments are driven by managerialist policy and discourses, which are contributing to a steady impoverishment of the professionalism of teachers and teaching. I identify some trends in recent teachers' professional development policy and practices in secondary schools and use a reading of a literary short story to critique these trends. I then proceed to take as a framework for closer analysis Freire's conception of knowledge and learning as banking, and consider the critical implications of such a conception for managerialist policy and practice. My argument is that much managerialist policy and practice assumes teacher knowledge and teacher identity to be fundamentally individualistic. Finally, this critique of managerialist policy and practice with respect to professional learning frames a reflexive analysis and discussion of one site of inquiry-based professional learning. My analysis and discussion suggest a paradigm of professional learning that may give cause for more optimism with respect to the future professionalism of teachers and teaching.*

*KEYWORDS: Professional learning, inquiry, professional identity, professional knowledge, literary theory.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

The introduction of performance management systems [in schools] has been accompanied by a raft of accountability measures at the very time that teachers have been asked to implement a range of state-mandated curriculum, assessment and qualification reforms that have marginalized the voices of many teachers. For over a decade professional development has been replaced by what I would call induction into ideological compliance. Never has teachers' work been so controlled, and at all levels, as deprofessionalisation has begun to work hand in hand with work intensification (Locke, 2004, p. 120).

Terry Locke, writing out of the New Zealand context, constructs a vivid and disturbing view of teachers losing ownership of their professionalism. In many ways it is a bleak view, but is corroborated by much recent research into teachers' work, teachers' knowledge and professional development practices throughout the western world. For instance, Cochran-Smith and Fries (2001) refer to a growing tendency toward the "utilitarianisation" of teachers and schooling in America. They suggest that professional development offerings and paradigms for teacher learning increasingly position teachers as mere implementers of predetermined, decontextualised tasks and strategies (see also Lieberman & Miller, 2001; Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2001; Delandshere & Petrosky, 2000). This would seem to affirm the

concerns raised in previous years by Michael Apple, amongst others, about the threats to teachers' professional autonomy. Apple (1983, 1987) warned, in unapologetically Marxist discourse, of the "proletarianisation" of the workforce (p. 37), and he drew attention to what he saw as the "de-skilling" of professional teachers (Apple, 1986). In England, Goodson (1992) had taken up this concern in his view of teachers being reduced to "objects which can be manipulated for particular ends" (Goodson, 1992, p. 188). Ten years later his concern is no less acute when he sees teachers as "interchangeable and essentially depersonalised" functionaries in an impersonal school system (Goodson, 2003, p. 23) (See also Goodson & Hargreaves, 1996).

In Australia, too, a steady impoverishing of teachers' professionalism – Terry Locke (2001, 2004) would call it "erosion of professionalism" – is happening week by week in policy-making, in schools, and in professional development programs. It is happening, but it seems to suit many stakeholders in debates about professional development to understate (or bracket out as insignificant) the evidence. It has to be admitted that the professional perspective of a researcher in education who is operating, officially or in effect, as an advisor to government policy-makers, is full of tensions and conflicting "voices". And so there are perhaps understandable reasons why certain researcher-advisors (e.g., Ingvarson, 2002; Lovatt, 2003) who are advocating a profound re-thinking and transformation of teachers' professional learning cultures and systems might understate the factors militating against their proposed changes. After all, they are trying to build momentum for change and to bring teachers with them. It is understandable that they would express some faith in the profession, some faith in teachers' willingness to embrace both the need for change and the changes advocated. However, when these researcher-advisors understate or bracket out the impoverishing of teachers' professionalism, they run the risk of appearing paternalistic, and thus they themselves may be contributing further to the impoverishment.

In a discussion paper for the Australian Council of Deans of Education (ACDE), "The role of the teacher: Coming of age?", Terence Lovatt (2003) says he is advocating "a seismic shift in the way education and teaching is understood". In this paper, he finds cause for optimism in Western governments throughout the world, who value education because it is "vital both to national economic prosperity and to social cohesion" (p. 1). We might join him in his optimism if we could be convinced that "economic prosperity" were not just a euphemism for crude economic rationalism in education, and if his blithe reference to "social cohesion" did not ring clamorous alarm bells for western societies which struggle to tolerate, let alone value, social diversity. Lawrence Ingvarson (2002), another researcher-advisor advocating large-scale change, mounts a persuasive case for a new system of teacher professional learning, in *Building a learning profession*. Yet he is surely more hopeful than serious when he seeks to reassure readers:

While stakeholders in education have their differences in other areas, they have a *common interest in promoting the quality of teaching*. Everyone has much to gain from a stable and effective professional learning system with capacity to engage all teachers ... (p. 18, my emphasis).

If only the interest in "promoting the quality of teaching", including quality in teacher professional learning, were more "common"; if only this term were not as

unproblematic as Ingvarson's statement suggests. Unfortunately, even a cursory consideration of recent trends in teacher professional development is likely to dampen down this effusion of optimism.

## **RECENT TRENDS IN TEACHERS' PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

As I read some of the plethora of literature recently published on teacher professional development and professional learning, I see competing discourses in action. On the one hand, there is the tendency for groups or networks of teachers – especially English/literacy teachers, I might point out – to work in ongoing professional learning teams working on the basis of variations on critical, dialogic, inquiry-based paradigms. In such paradigms, teacher-learners are knowledge-builders and generators as well as sharers of knowledge and expertise (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993, 2001; Wells, 1994, 1999). I consider a range of these paradigms elsewhere (Parr, 2003). On the other hand, there is the tendency toward managerialist approaches to professional development, intended to address the needs of teachers, as perceived by bureaucrats (Elmore, 1996). These approaches include:

1. professional development programs, content and practices that are closely tied to existing student learning outcomes;
2. an increased (and narrower) focus on “practical matters” in teachers’ professional development; and
3. the tailoring of professional development programs in order to satisfy requirements for greater accountability in teacher learning.

I will take each of the above approaches, in turn, and summarise the ways in which these tendencies are being enacted in professional development programs and “spaces”.

### **Professional development programs, content and practices closely tied to existing student learning outcomes**

An overwhelming trend in professional development programs, as identified by Ingvarson (2002), is for “professional developers” – a telling phrase (also used by Shulman & Shulman, 2004) – to frame professional learning programs around the dictates of already established student learning outcomes. As is well known, these student learning outcomes are often derived from curriculum documents in very different contexts (Homer, 2004) and their very status as centrally prescribed outcomes ensures that little heed is paid to the variations in teaching and learning in different local contexts. They exist ostensibly to help teachers identify and describe students’ learning for assessment and reporting in a coherent and rigorous way. The expectation is that, in order to improve students’ achievement of these outcomes, teachers should systematically focus in their professional learning only on the specific knowledge or skills they will be required to teach their students.

Underpinning this approach to teachers’ professional development is a conceptualisation of teacher knowledge as a stable and fixed commodity, unconnected to the social or cultural context of the learners, to be consumed and then passed on in a simple series of learning transactions (Wells, 1994). Elmore (2000)

critiques the inadequacy of this conceptualisation in terms of the potential for a sort of mismatch between a teacher's knowledge and his/her students' needs. He rejects the notion that teachers should think of professional learning as simply adding on existing knowledge and skills in the hope that this will *cover* future teaching and learning requirements:

What is missing in this view is any recognition that improvement [in teacher knowledge] is more a function of learning to do the right things in the setting where you work than it is of what you know when you start to do the work (p. 25).

Locke (2004) approaches his critique of this conceptualisation of teacher knowledge, on the other hand, through a sensitivity to both the sociocultural nuances of the construction of knowledge between individual teachers and learners, and an awareness of the ethical concerns motivating teachers who teach individual children, not just cohorts of students. So in considering what teachers might be learning, he wants to “start by accepting as a given that knowledge is plural, rooted in human experience” (Locke, 2004, p. 115) and that any question of teacher knowledge begins with “Who is the Other I teach?” (p. 116). The Standards for Teachers of English Language and Literacy in Australia (STELLA) ([www.stella.org.au](http://www.stella.org.au)) also foregrounds the perspective of students in conceptualising teacher knowledge. In these standards, two of the three encompassing statements about Teacher Knowledge that require detailed consideration are: “Teachers know how students learn and how to teach them effectively” and “Teachers know their students”.

Using Elmore's or Locke's or STELLA's frame for critique is sufficient to expose the danger of yoking professional learning to a set of centrally prescribed student learning outcomes, quite apart from the fact that this would be needlessly impoverishing the professional learning possibilities for teachers. It is always possible to find research that reports dramatic improvements in students' test scores as a direct result of employing this approach to professional development (see Supovitz, 2001). However, other research methodologies (such as employed by Elmore and Locke) that look beyond the simple reporting of test scores raise serious questions about the depth and value of professional learning in such a constraining paradigm (Petrosky, 2003). Meanwhile, the tendency in current policy and practices is often to ignore such questions.

### **An increased (and narrower) focus on “practical matters” in teachers' professional development**

As if the prospect of impoverished professional learning possibilities were not a serious enough concern, it appears that there is now also a decided tendency for teachers to focus more narrowly on “practical matters” in their professional development – concentrating on what Goodson (2003) calls the “technical things that teachers do in classrooms” (p. 19). Goodson derides the narrowness of this focus as the latest political “panacea” of the moment. Ingvarson, seemingly more wary of simpler explanations here, cites research with science teachers that exposes the inadequacies of the panacea:

The more successful PD programs focused first on influencing teacher knowledge, not practice. The effects of programs that focused first on promoting specific pedagogical practices were more likely to fade with time, because they did not

deepen teachers' understanding about the content and how students learn it (Kennedy, 1998, quoted in Ingvarson, 2002, pp. 7-8).

There are countless other studies from within different research traditions that reinforce such findings (e.g. Goodson & Hargreaves, 1996; Elmore, 1996, 2000; Wells, 1999, 2001). Some of this research reports on rich and generative debates about professional teaching standards that have developed momentum in recent years. There is increasing evidence of powerful and provocative professional conversations about standards and their relation to professional learning and growth (e.g. Doecke, Locke & Petrosky, 2004). Some research poses the question as to whether it is possible to address the deeply contextualised nature of professional learning that can occur in specific school communities in a set of professional standards, anyway (Burroughs, Schwartz & Henricks-Lee, 2000).

However, the generative potential of such conversations is being subverted by a third tendency in professional development practices: the imposition of performance management schemes such as referred to in Locke's epigraph, in order to ensure greater accountability for participation in professional development activities, and the tailoring of professional development programs to meet these performance management requirements.

### **The tailoring of professional development programs in order to satisfy requirements for greater accountability in teacher learning**

Across the Western world, these performance management schemes are typically conceived by bureaucrats, who tend to be distanced from the day-to-day work of teachers (Elmore, 1996). The schemes are supposedly designed to encourage professional learning and to measure the progress of this learning (of students and teachers). Partly, the effort to measure professional learning is intended to demonstrate administrative competence in, and control over, the inescapably messy and unpredictable dynamic of professional learning (see Morely & Rasool, 2000). This is a task worthy of Sisyphus, surely.

As disturbing as this, however, is the attempt, gaining significant momentum in the US, to measure professional learning (i.e. to make teachers accountable) and to reward "merit" in teaching with pay increases. This is claimed to encourage teachers' interest in their professional development. The problem is, as Kleinhenz & Ingvarson (2004) point out, such "managerial models of accountability rarely match their own rhetoric, either in terms of accountability or [their value as] professional development" (p. 35).

### **TAKING CONTROL IN TEACHERS' PROFESSIONAL LEARNING?**

So I am left wondering whether the supposed "common interest" of different stakeholders, with respect to debates over teacher professional learning, is really as "common" as Ingvarson first assumed. In these debates, there is a palpable culture of different stakeholders wanting to take control and, for many stakeholders, the first priority is to take control of teachers. Ingvarson asserts that everyone has "a lot to gain." But, it is worth inquiring as to whether some may be seeking to gain more than others, and whether teachers and teachers' professionalism are actually benefiting.

The rhetoric of Australian governments, at the national and state level, like so many Western governments, would suggest that they are valuing teachers' professional development and professional learning more highly than ever before. The mantra is along the lines that teachers' professional development or professional learning is high on the list of priorities (Department of Education & Training {DE&T}, 2003; Department of Education, Science & Training {DES}), 2003; Kleinhenz & Ingvarson, 2004). Notwithstanding the rhetoric, this has clear historical precedents across the world. I will refer to Victoria, Australia, but only as a means of illustrating through a specific instance something that has been enacted and re-enacted across the Western World under the banner of neo-liberal reform.

Don Hayward, Minister of Education in Victoria from 1992 till 1995, would have history record that during his ministry, secondary school policy-making in Victoria was characterised by an unremitting "focus on students". This was achieved, according to Hayward, by "applying the criterion 'Does this add value to a student's learning?' to every [policy] decision that had to be made" (Caldwell & Hayward, 1998, p. 166). It was a time when policy was driven, apparently, by a determination to be "pragmatic rather than ideological" (p. 135). Hayward claimed to be promoting the teaching profession and the professionalism of teachers, with his vision of the teacher as "individual professional", and in doing so he condemned what he saw as "a failure in teacher training programs, a failure in professional development, and a failure in commitment" (p. 53).

Invoking the "vision" of Osborne and Gaebler (1993), Hayward saw his government's role as "steering" rather than "rowing" in respect of changes in education, and he advocated governments "vacating the arena of actually delivering the service". This steering involved widespread school closures and amalgamations, the introduction of a "new" curriculum – the Curriculum Standards Frameworks (CSF) (DEET, 1995) – for students up to Year 10, and various changes to post-compulsory curriculum. As the Victorian government *steered* structural and curriculum changes, so Victorian teachers were required merely to *deliver* education (that is, to *row*). What emerged was an education system that more fully prescribed the content that was to be taught, that more narrowly identified the particular learning outcomes that all students across the state should achieve, and that more precisely articulated the levels that students should meet for each of these outcomes. Meanwhile, teachers in schools, those who survived large-scale school closures or being declared "in excess", those who were expected to do the "rowing", spoke of diminished morale and a feeling of their professionalism having been undermined (Berry & Loughran 2001; Lee, 2000; Parr, 2000).<sup>1</sup>

In the Twenty-First Century, reference is more frequently made in the literature to the uncertainties of our postmodern world (and its education systems); yet this characteristically only seems to encourage governments and some employers to search for greater and greater levels of certainty (Delandshere, 2004). If they are investing in professional development, they want certain and rapid "pay-offs" for their investments – a familiar fantasy of shareholders who want a quick return. In so many respects this would seem to explain the appearance of more and more managerialist policy and practices that promise to:

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<sup>1</sup> See also Goodwyn, 2003, for a similar story in the English context.

- (i) simplify and narrow the observable scope of what is considered central to teachers “performance”, for ease of measurement;
- (ii) set up systems for measuring the improvement that follows any and all teachers’ professional development events; and
- (iii) employ crude corporate marketing discourse such as “quality assurance” and “performance management” to exercise more control over the messy and unpredictable nature of teaching and learning.

If Terry Locke and others are right in their research into the effects of managerialist practices and policies throughout Western World, then the impact of similar managerialist practices and policy for teachers in Australia is likely to lead to further impoverishment of these teachers’ professionalism, an erosion of potential in their professional environments.

### **A TENTATIVE LITERARY METAPHOR**

I am reminded of a short story, called “Jacko’s Reach”, from David Malouf’s (2001) collection *Dream Stuff*. The story is about two and a half acres of “bush” in a modern urban landscape. These particular two and a half acres of territory have a colourful, sometimes disturbing history. Typically, in Malouf’s literary landscape, a contemporary urban culture is characterised by a tendency for dominant groups to take control of apparently disordered and uncontrolled aspects of a culture, including landscapes and people. As these dominant groups take control of the territory, they limit the potential for uncertainty and disorder, and so maintain their control. The narrator, in this story, begins by describing Jacko’s Reach in somewhat nostalgic terms:

It is a place you have to have seen and been into if you are to have any grasp of it. Most of all you have to have lived with it as the one area of disorder and difference in a town that prides itself on being typical: that is, just like everyone else. Or you have to have been hearing, for as long as you can recall, the local stories about the place, not all of them fit to be told....Or you have to have stumbled there on something no one had warned you of (Malouf, 2001, pp. 94-5).

Looking beyond the nostalgic tone, it would seem that Jacko’s Reach is a place full of contradictions. In one respect, it might appear to some as a messy and disordered environment, and yet this view ignores the complex structure of richly layered “local stories” and human histories that give the place its character. It’s worth pointing out that, for all of the propensity of Malouf’s narrator to romanticise and celebrate disorder and chaos, Malouf’s text still depends on, and so to some extent implicitly values, elements of structure and order – in this sense, a sophisticated literary structure. In another respect, Jacko’s Reach seems to spawn elusive truths; its identity is not reducible to simple explanations. Yet it remains open to all who may wish to investigate and inquire into this identity. As such, it lies like a provocative challenge for dominant groups intending to take full control and to establish certainty.

The attraction of Jacko’s Reach for me, as a tentative metaphor for current professional learning environments in Victoria, begins with the creative interplay between sophisticated, imaginative structures, the richness of its human stories, and the prevailing sense of openness to possibilities. There are plenty of rich stories of

powerful professional learning in teachers” lives, but the question arises as to whether outsiders (such as managerialist policy-makers and bureaucrats) can appreciate these possibilities? “You have to have seen into and been into [Jacko’s Reach] if you are to have any grasp of it,” the narrator says (p. 94). For teachers who are used to a richer and more open environment for engaging in professional learning, a professional space like this, notwithstanding its problems, may stand as a welcome alternative to the reductive and constraining managerialist structures and paradigms for professional learning evident in recent policy-making. But I want to resist any tendency to caricature this story as a romantic yearning for a disordered and fecund past, threatened by the rampaging monster of progress.

Lest the romantic lilt in the narrator’s tone in the passage quoted be over-emphasised, it is important to note that the “local stories” that emerge from this place are not all “fit to be told” – some stories can indeed be disturbing. This notion of disturbing has two possibilities, here. One reading suggests that, along with the notion of this place being open to possibilities come risks - disturbing, unfortunate risks at times. The space that is Jacko’s Reach, like the open-ended inquiry spaces affording professional learning, is not a “safe” place. And that’s disturbing. A second interpretation might focus on questions about who is disturbed. Elsewhere in the story, we read that Jacko’s Reach is a place that spawns “unruly and unsettling dreams”. “Who is unsettled and disturbed?” one might ask. The dominant groups, it would seem. They have deemed these unruly and unsettling dreams to be unhelpful, even destructive, and they would simply attribute this to the “disorder and difference” of the place. Here, again, the very openness of spaces – literally, in Jacko’s Reach, and figuratively in some professional learning paradigms – is disturbing to those who would seek to control them.

For a time in the story, Jacko’s Reach remains an unpredictable place, and its local stories bear witness to a powerful personal presence. (The metaphorical implications are that this is a far cry from the reductive, depersonalised, managerialist models of professional development that are contributing to the impoverishment of professional learning possibilities). It is a place for those who don’t want to be “just like everyone else”. A place where you are always likely to stumble upon something unexpected, something “no one had warned you of”.

In this respect, as a tentative metaphor for a professional learning space, it nevertheless bears a strong correlation with what I have elsewhere invoked as the “transgressive” in teachers’ professional practices (Parr, 2003). I have defined the transgressive in teaching as: “any social practice...which explicitly or implicitly, potentially or actionally, disrupts or challenges the norms of a predominant culture or dominating discourse in teachers’ professional lives” (p. 67). As a metaphor for teachers’ transgressive professional learning possibilities, Jacko’s Reach is appealing to me. Of course, it is not an ideal place. Fortunately, it is always open to change, to improvement, to transformations. Indeed, change would be welcome in order that....

But unfortunately, just as the dominant “professional developers” are wresting control away from teachers” professional lives, so too we read in Malouf’s story that developers are about to take control of Jacko’s Reach. It is to be “cleared and built on”, concreted over, replaced by “the bars of neon lights and the crowded shelves and trolleys of the supermarket, the wheels of skateboards, the bitumen walks and solid,



poured-concrete ramps” (p. 93). As part of the drive for more managerial control and certainty in Jacko’s Reach, rest assured there will be the equivalent of a performance management system set in place to ensure quality assurance in respect of the working lives of all those employed there. It all sounds eerily familiar.

## **SOME BACKGROUND TO INDIVIDUALISTIC PARADIGMS OF PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

It is one of the paradoxes that characterise education debates in the Western World currently that a spirit of optimism in professional learning – a willingness to fetishise apparently “new” approaches to professional learning systems or programs – should always accompany dramatic pronouncements of doom and disaster in schooling and in teacher education. Recently in Australia, echoing the public outcry in the USA and England, levels of public anxiety have apparently risen about the quality of teaching in our schools and all aspects of teacher education. These levels of anxiety are incited and encouraged by governments, and even some researchers, who feel the best way to provoke debate is to cast aspersions on “problem” teachers or parts of the teaching profession. Predictably, these aspersions are followed up by enthusiastic calls for the upgrading of teacher skills, or recommendations of crude measures for “value adding” to the performance of teachers (see Doecke, Locke and Petrosky, 2004, for a critique of this). This greater optimism is often accompanied by calls for “tightening up” accountability or increasing quality assurance measures for professional development programs (e.g. DE&T, 2003; DEST, 2003).

In Australia, it seems to suit some political agendas to declare the teaching problems in schools to be endemic (see Sawyer, 1997; Parr, 2000; Lee, 2000), or to indulge in some good old-fashioned teacher-bashing, as the current Australian Prime Minister and some sections on the media are predisposed to do (e.g. “The crisis in public schools”, *The Australian* editorial, 2004). Any solutions proffered in these instances tend to be cast in terms of dealing with the problems of *individual* teachers. The quality individual teacher is valorised, even mythologised, while a prescription is written up for those teachers who are not “up to scratch”.

The research base for this approach constructs a view of schooling in which students’ backgrounds, and the socio-cultural context within which they learn, are much less influential than the individual teacher in contributing to students’ learning (Rowe, 2003, p. 1; Lovatt, 2003, p. 11, Hattie, 2004). Rowe (2003) for instance, affirms the value of quality individual teachers and their professional development – they “do make a difference” [Rowe’s emphasis] – but he repeatedly takes this further to insist that “it is not so much what students bring with them that really matters, but what they experience on a day-to-day basis in interaction with teachers and other students in classrooms” (p. 24). He acknowledges that there is a vast corpus of sociocultural research whose findings suggest that gender, class, ethnicity and other socio-cultural factors are highly significant in students’ learning (for instance, Slee, Weiner & Tomlinson, 1998; Teese, 2000), but this research is collectively dismissed as “claptrap”, “mainstream and ideologically-driven *opinion*” (pp. 1, 24, [Rowe’s emphasis]). In his view, it is the quality of the individual teacher that matters.

It would seem that governments and employers are taking the advice of these school effectiveness researchers, as represented by Rowe and Hattie, if we look to the increasing number of organisations (often government-subsidised) setting up courses and systems of professional development to improve the quality of individual teachers. Sykes (1999) identifies a pattern in this sort of professional development, where teachers “operate as consumers in a quasi-regulated market structured by bureaucratic service provision” (p. 154). Such professional development is characteristically presented as a treatment, or course of treatments, that will fix individual teacher deficits or fill gaps in their knowledge or skills (see the inoculation theory, Schmuck, 1997; and “one-or-two-shot, dog-and-pony-shows”, in Petrosky, 1998). The dispenser of a professional development treatment, the “professional developer”, may hone in on individual pathologies or problems in individual teachers – indeed Shulman (1999) uses this very term, “pathologies” in relation to teachers, without irony.<sup>2</sup> (See Clarke, 1992; and Little, 1993, for a critique of this discourse.)

Or else, the professional developer may promise to single out and reward a few individual teachers for specialised professional treatment and learning opportunities, such as through scholarships (Shulman, 1999; DE&T, 2003; General Teaching Council for England (GTCE), 2000). This singling out of individuals is motivated by the hope that an individual teacher’s improved knowledge and skills will subsequently rub off on, or filter down through, his/her colleagues in schools when he/she returns to school and engages in some form of collaboration. Sometimes this collaboration is framed as setting off a “domino effect” among school colleagues (Rowe & Rowe, 1999, p. 92). Unfortunately, the individualistic discourse that prevails through these paradigms severely limits the potential of any planned for, or hoped for, collaboration.

All of these approaches are premised on a view of teaching that is fundamentally individualistic in conception and in practice. It is a view of teachers and teaching that Hoyle (1975 in Locke, 2004) termed “restricted professionalism – that is, isolated teachers “doing their own thing”, or as Elmore (1996) puts it, “solo practitioners operating in a structure that feeds them students and expectations about what students should be taught” (p. 2). Of course, there have been researchers who have bemoaned the way in which certain cultural, historical and political factors have combined to make teaching an isolating profession. Connelly and Connelly (1995), for all their optimism in encouraging and enabling teachers to tell their stories and share them with colleagues, nevertheless have moments of pessimism, conceding that “In the end, teaching is a secret enterprise” (p. 13). Ingvarson (1998) suggests that this attitude emanates from within teachers themselves. He speaks of a “prevailing attitude among professional teaching cultures that successful teaching is an individual trait rather than a body of professional knowledge and skills deliberately acquired” (p. 14) (See also Elmore, 1996). Ingvarson, however, omits to mention that if such an attitude *is* prevalent, it may well be thanks to the relentless discourse of professional

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<sup>2</sup> It should be pointed out that Shulman seems to have moved on from this individualistic notion of teacher professional learning more recently. In the *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 36 (2), he and Judith Shulman (2004) claim that their “analysis of teacher learning...has moved from a concern with individual teachers and their learning to a conception of teachers learning and developing within a broader context of community, institution, polity, and profession” (pp. 267-269). Nevertheless, they still invoke the discourse of “professional developers” (p. 263), which would seem to undermine any socio-constructivist principles in their conceptualising of professional learning paradigms.

pathology directed at teachers by policy-makers, the popular media, some employers, governments, and some researchers, along the lines outlined above (See also Little, 1990; Sawyer, 1997).

Clearly, these sorts of attitudes have fundamental implications for the way that the knowledge of teaching is conceived of, and thus for the ways that individual teachers (or groups of teachers) will expect to generate, gain or transform knowledge. From here on, I will investigate the epistemological roots of this notion of teacher knowledge, a notion that would seem to separate off, to insulate, individual knowledge from any socio-cultural considerations. In order to do this, I will first take Paulo Freire's banking metaphor of learning, so often invoked with respect to students' learning, and use it as a frame for inquiring into teachers' professional learning.

## **THE INDIVIDUAL TEACHER AND A BANKING CONCEPTION OF LEARNING**

In banking education, according to Freire (1972), the student learner passively receives or absorbs an input of the latest information or knowledge banked in by the teacher; sometimes the transaction involves a new skill, or technique, or practice "input" that is banked into his/her current "credit" of skills, techniques and practices. The relevance of this metaphor to the conceptions of teacher learning as discussed above is clear. These conceptions clearly match up with narrowly practical, instrumental, or technicist conceptions of professional development, where teacher knowledge is a commodity to be traded or imported in a knowledge economy (Delandshere, 2004). The expectation for teachers learning in the crudest form of banking paradigm is that all inputs "banked in" during professional development can be withdrawn at appropriate moments in a teacher's workday, to best suit the required problem. The trends in professional development practices reported on earlier would suggest that this economic rationalist paradigm is increasingly enacted in teachers' professional learning in the early part of the Twenty-First Century. This is a situation that poses acute implications for the roles, work and professional identity of teachers.

In the following section, I will examine the relevance of this metaphor of professional learning with respect to: (1) teachers' prescribed roles in schools; (2) the nature of teachers' work in schools; and (3) teacher professional identity in the fullest sense of the term.

### **Teachers' prescribed roles in schools: Teacher as jester**

May not an ass know when the cart draws the horse? (*King Lear*, I. iv. 1. 229)

It sometimes seems that teachers in schools are in a position similar to the Fool in Shakespeare's *King Lear*. As jester to the King, the Fool is at the bidding of his master; he is required to keep the King entertained, and to "perform" this role according to the whims and fancies of the King. As long he does as he is bidden, he will remain in the King's employ. Being in the employ of the King, he is afforded some conditional rights and even some privileges, so much so that he seems to have a voice of his own – he can speak out and try to raise issues of importance, he can try to

teach his master some self-awareness, to see the potential error of his ways. This is what the Fool is doing in the quote, above. He wants Lear to realise that Goneril, the conniving daughter, is actually manipulating the King (the horse turned ass) to her (the cart's) full advantage. But in the end, the ideas and values of the jester (like the subjugated teacher in school), while mildly irritating, eventually lose their impact and so can be ignored. And so, the jester-teacher continues to play his/her role, to serve and to perform, faithfully, effectively and reliably...

Where teachers' professional learning is conceived of as receiving inputs and credits like banking, it should not be surprising to see their role constructed by some governments and employers serving and performing, faithfully, effectively and reliably. Recently, Australia's Prime Minister in an announcement filled with contradictions, nevertheless seemed to be taking to task teachers in state schools who were not performing and serving according to his expectations. There was too much "political correctness" or "values neutral" in state schools' teaching, and this was not the sort of thing that he (or parents) expected or desired, apparently. Don Hayward, the Minister for Education in Victoria in the 1990s referred to above, tried to convince teachers of their place in the system. Looking back on his time in office, he explained his argument in the following way:

The customers of education are the students and their families. It [is] the responsibility of the school to meet the needs of these customers....Teachers and schools...clearly [see] that the only reason for their existence [is] to add value to a student's time at school" (Caldwell & Hayward, 1998, pp. 45, 79).

Some might say that the issue here is just who decides what "value" is. Indeed, the implication is clear in this statement that parents should decide what is of value, and that teachers are undeserving of any intellectual contribution to debates about what should be valued. All this had been foreseen by Drucker in 1995:

There is very little doubt that the performance of schools [and teachers] will increasingly become of concern to society as a whole, rather than be considered "professional matters" that can safely be left to the educator (p. 205).

And this concern of society, especially of parents, can be seen enacted in the concerns of some autocratic principals who would seek to suppress in their schools any critical questioning or inquiry, or differing views or values voiced by their teachers. Hargreaves (1994) warns of managerialist cultures in such schools where the only views or values with respect to education that count are those of the principal. In such an environment,

Management becomes manipulation. Collaboration becomes cooperation.... Having teachers conform to the principal's vision minimises the opportunities for principals to learn that part of their vision may be flawed, that some teachers' vision may be as valid or more valid than theirs... (Hargreaves, 1994, p. 250).

In such an environment, the choices for individual teachers are invidious. They can: (i) remain and conform to the prevailing vision, and thereby become somewhat anonymous; (ii) remain and maintain their views (privately), but forfeit any right to a "voice" or agency within the school community; or (iii) resign or be "forced" to

leave. Indeed, in such an environment, the implications for teachers' professional identity are troubling to say the least.

### **Teachers' prescribed roles in schools: Teacher as technician – “in the service of implementation”**

There is another paradox of professional learning that concerns the individuality/anonymity of teachers within professional teaching cultures in some schools. One effective way for a teacher to raise his/her professional status in a heavily hierarchical organisation is to compete with his/her colleagues in being seen to cooperate more enthusiastically and assiduously with the principal's vision than others do. Where professional learning takes place in such an environment, it requires teachers to accept and, as it were, to ingest information or knowledge or skills or visions, without serious question. The paradox is that the more comprehensively one cooperates in implementing the vision and ingesting what is on the PD menu – essentially complying with someone else's values or rules (see Locke's “induction into ideological compliance”, 2004; also Goodson and Hargreaves, 1996) – the more one gains notional professional status in that environment. But in so doing the individual teacher must subjugate his/her own ideas to those of another (Apple, 1986), thus forfeiting his/her professional voice or individuality in any meaningful sense. Little (1993) draws attention to the dangers in a school of any program of professional development built on such a premise. He calls it professional development “in the service of implementation” (p. 130).

Through such programs of professional development, teachers can be positioned and rendered as voiceless and anonymous technicians; they can become “just like everyone else”, and the Faustian pact that they have entered into by transacting in a banking metaphor of professional learning, leaves them burnt, with little to show in the end in the way of meaningful, professional integrity.

### **Teachers' work in schools: Teachers receiving and purveying knowledge and skills**

Up to this stage, my focus has been on the broader socio-cultural implications of the banking metaphor for teaching and teachers, and how the construction of the role of teachers as effective, faithful and reliable implementers actually discourages the very individuality that it claims to endorse. At this point, I want to draw attention to some of the specific, situated, work-related issues of teachers in their various teaching and learning contexts, issues which undermine, from within, the very notion of individuality touted by managerialist discourse.

Apple's and Goodson's warnings about teachers being treated merely as technicians have been reiterated in many ways by those advocating the development of cultures of critical inquiry in schools and in education communities. The warnings can take the form almost of caricature, such as Ritchie and Wilson's (2000) “additive model” of teachers' professional development, in which teachers remain constant and faithful (and anonymous) receivers, endlessly adding strategies or methods to their repertoire of teaching practices (p. 17). The caricature is less extreme, but no less demeaning to teacher professional identity, when Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1993) see some teachers positioned as “increasingly sophisticated consumers of other people's

knowledge [of teaching and learning]” (p. 88). Wells (n.d.) explores the idea differently again. He inquires into the potential for paradigms of professional development to be positively linked with the *ways* that students learn in democratic classrooms. He does this by revealing the flaws in any suggestion that knowledge (students’ or teachers’) is merely “a commodity that is stored in individual minds or in texts or other artefacts”. He pursues this line of logic to expose the absurdity of the implications of such a view.

Like other commodities, it [knowledge] can be transmitted from one person to another; it can also be itemised, quantified and measured. On this transmissionary view, classroom dialogue is...seen as an unnecessary waste of time; all that students [and by implication, teacher learners] need to do is to read and listen attentively to the knowledge conveyed through authoritative texts and lectures and absorb and remember it for subsequent reproduction.<sup>3</sup>

Any instrumentalist or technicist construction of the work of teachers (including both their teaching and their learning) is premised on what Dewey (1916/1961) calls a “static, cold-storage ideal of knowledge” (p. 158). Advocates of collaborative critical inquiry are still agreeing with Dewey almost ninety years after he wrote that such an “ideal” is “inimical to educative development” (p. 158). In fact, Wells’s caricature of dialogue being “an unnecessary waste of time” is almost universally rejected by researchers of all traditions.

Differences of opinion do emerge, however, when these researchers discuss the details of how open-ended or efficient this dialogue should be. Frequently, policy makers, researchers or employers will enthuse over the need for collaboration. For instance, Lovatt (2003), in the earlier mentioned, discussion paper for ACDE, contends that his paper should contribute to “enhancing the professional status of teaching, to transform teaching into a mature profession on a par with medicine, engineering and social work, a modern profession” (p. 1). As part of this enhancing and transforming, he urges a “reconceptualisation of teacher education...underpinned with a commitment to collaboration” (p. 2). He cites government research in Victoria, in the belief that this would be congruent with his call for a “commitment to collaboration”.

*Public education: The next generation. Report of the Ministerial Working Party* ...found broad support for PD to be delivered at the level of the school rather than centrally. This is so that the special needs of the school and its students can be addressed in light of the recognition that PD for teachers is most effective when teachers can learn from each other (Lovatt, 2003, p. 21).

It looks promising at first glance. However, problems begin to emerge when we look more closely at the discourse here. Teachers are described as learning “*from*” each other, suggesting they are transmitting knowledge *to* each other. This would be fine as far as it goes, except for the continued absence of any mention of teachers learning “*with*” each other, collaboratively generating or transforming knowledge. Throughout this document, Lovatt himself speaks of professional development as something which is “delivered”. Whether it is delivered from outside or delivered from within

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<sup>3</sup> For further critiques of transmissionary views of knowledge, see also Barnes, 1976; Beach & Myers, 2001; Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993, 2001; Nystrand, 1997; Wells, 1999, 2001.

the school ends up being of little consequence. This is keying into a discourse of knowledge as commodity and professional learning as banking in a knowledge economy. Importantly, Lovatt goes on to report on the rich professional learning that can be generated and enacted when teachers engage in graduate studies (such as action research) that have them reflecting on their classroom practice. But when he refers to the subsequent collaboration or interaction between these researching teachers and their peers “back” in schools, he significantly slips back into a knowledge-as-commodity discourse and a transmissionary discourse of collaboration; “Valuable knowledge,” he explains, “is *transferred* to the school and *used* to resolve problems and induce change” (2003, p. 22 [my emphasis]).

Although many of Lovatt’s ideas are welcome contributions to policy debate, his discursive slippage should spell danger for those who value a socially-situated conception of professional learning. While calling for a radical rethinking of professional learning, Lovatt and others are in danger of reinforcing reductive and reactionary notions of the individualistic nature of teaching and teachers as learners. And this, in turn, has serious implications for both the roles and the work that may be constructed for teachers in schools by policy-makers and employers. Ultimately, it undermines the complexity and the richness of possibility in the formation of teacher professional identity.

### **Teacher professional identity**

My argument to this point has highlighted the depersonalising influence of a discourse of professional learning-as-banking on individual professional identity. I have argued that, despite the liberatory, individualistic rhetoric, the more likely effect of professional learning-as-banking is to produce a workforce of anonymous, voiceless teacher technicians. However, if there is any substance to the individuality that is encouraged by the banking discourse – that is, if the individual is not rendered utterly anonymous – then this individuality would seem to be informed by humanistic notions of a rational, singular and autonomous psychological identity (Ritchie & Wilson, 2000, p. 9).

One wonders how this nostalgic view of identity still has any currency. There exists a vast amount of psychologically based, educational research literature, which posits the individual self as fragmented, multifaceted and subject to change. A socio-cultural perspective on identity as problematic is hardly radical thinking these days. A quick survey of a range of socio-cultural perspectives on identity reveals that there is no sense of a monolithic, unitary socio-cultural conception of identity. Rather, it points to a considerable body of research literature that contests, if it doesn’t actually debunk, humanistic notions of individual identity.

Early in the Twentieth Century, Dewey was a long way (chronologically and theoretically) from any postmodern notion of the “dispersal” of social identity that was gaining support by the Century’s end. However, it is salient to note that the beginnings of a socio-cultural reframing of identity had begun in the early part of that century, at least. In “The individual and the world” (1916/1961), Dewey was beginning to explore “the social quality of individualised mental operations” in communities of learners (p. 297). Later in the century, with the emergence of the work of Vygotsky and Bakhtin (amongst others) – and notions of identity being

embedded within a dialectic or complex dialogic struggle between the individual and society – the broad notion of a socio-cultural identity was no longer a marginal theory in education literature.

The Twentieth Century subsequently saw the evolution of discourses associated with activity systems. For instance, Engeström, Miettinen & Punamäki (1999) propose that “all human cognition and behaviour [is] embedded in collectively organised, artefact mediated activity systems” (p. 380). And Latour (1993), in outlining actor network theory, speaks of socio-cultural networks of actors (human and non-human) who all contribute to hybrids rather than individual identity. Adorno’s (1973) contribution to debates about identity was to challenge what he called “identitarian thinking”, encouraging instead a consideration of the irreducibility of human beings. In particular, he took issue with “the fictitious claim ... that what is biologically one must logically precede the social whole” (p. 134). And, of course, there is the much longer tradition of Marxist critical theory (such as in the work of Williams, Eagleton and Jameson), applicable to literary and education studies, in which the notion of the individual is always mediated by and within particular political, historical and cultural contexts, and as such is the site of ongoing struggle and tension. In a related tradition, critical pedagogy, Giroux (1991) advocates a critique of “the Enlightenment notion of reason” (p. 51; see also Habermas, 1972) and charges learners to “explore knowledge/power relations”, rather than simple individual identities, and to engage in collective efforts to “resist the abuse of power and privilege, and construct alternative democratic communities” (Giroux, 1991, pp. 48-9).

Needless to say, none of these socio-cultural perspectives on identity could allow for a simplistic notion of a single unitary individual gaining or possessing a detached and asocial commodity called knowledge. Nor would any perspective mentioned above accept the notion of a decontextualised teaching practice or technique, as the banking metaphor of teaching and learning suggests happens. There is a further ethical concern. Complementary to the tendency to conceptualise identity as a socio-cultural construction, there is often (but not always) an ethical or socio-critical edge. This edge, coming out of a concern with social dynamics, recognises the links and interconnections between the social construction of knowledge, the social construction of identity and the power inequalities that exist throughout western so-called democracies.

All this amounts to an emerging awareness of the dangers, not to say the irrationality, of trying to demarcate the construction of knowledge from social context or social dynamics. At the level of the personal this was already worrying to Dewey (1916/1961):

When knowledge is regarded as originating and developing within an individual, the ties which bind the mental life of one to that of his [sic.] fellows are denied or ignored. When the social quality of individualised mental operations is denied it becomes a problem to find connections which will unite an individual with his fellows (p. 297).

My brief gesturing, here, toward various socio-cultural perspectives on the construction of knowledge and identity inevitably does not do justice to these ideas. However, I hope it has drawn attention to the yawning inadequacy of the banking



metaphor with respect to any socio-cultural perspective on teacher professional development. And yet, as I suggest, the banking metaphor continues to inform the dominant discourses (and policy) in debates about professional learning.

### **AROUND THE UNCONTAINABLE EDGES – INQUIRY-BASED, PROFESSIONAL LEARNING**

I recognise a danger that my own bleak account of much recent policy and research with respect to learning-as-banking may serve to reinforce and even normalise (through repetition) the inevitability of such a perspective. For this reason, I want now to turn away from evidence of banking metaphors of professional learning, away from evidence of individual transactions of professional knowledge commodities, to inquire into a particular “place” or site of professional learning, but using the learning-as-banking paradigm as a critical frame. This site of professional learning involves a group of senior English/literature teachers and one teacher educator. The participants in the group came mostly, but not exclusively, from one school – a well-resourced, independent, single sex girls’ school in Melbourne, Australia. Initially, seven teachers came together because they shared a professional desire to inquire into and learn more about literary theory, including its role in their classroom practices and in their notions of their professional identity.

At the end of 14 months learning together, the group (with some changes in personnel) had met six times officially, roughly once every term. Over and above this, it was characteristic of the group that conversations from official meetings inevitably merged into less official professional conversations, ranging from those around a photocopier to email exchanges to social get-togethers. Our official meetings, scheduled at the end of the school day, generally lasted up to two hours, and were conducted in relaxed, even convivial mode – with coffee, tea and cakes, or wine and savouries thrown in for good measure. All sessions were audiotaped, and records were kept of any resources or artifacts generated for the meetings. Any email communications were also archived.

Members of the group were all experienced teachers of senior English, although experience in teaching senior literature classes ranged from 1-9 years across the group. One colleague was teaching senior Literature for the first time. There was a wide range of previous knowledge of, and confidence in respect of, literary theory.

The nature of my involvement in the six sessions evolved over time. It was clear to all in the group that, in one respect, the nature of my involvement in the group was mediated by my role as a researcher. For everyone, there was a formal process of reading official explanatory statements (to meet requirements of ethics bodies) about my intentions as a researcher, and all who participated agreed to sign official consent forms. In other respects, I began as a colleague who was teaching literature and senior English, just like everyone else in the group. Having said that, it seems important to point out, here, that my sense of my own professional identity at this stage was undergoing significant change. In years leading up to this research, I had seen myself more and more as a teacher-researcher, and so the decision to initiate this project was an important one in my professional life to that point. Six terms later, I had left the

school to take up a full-time position as a teacher educator-researcher in a faculty of education.

To some extent, whether I was a secondary teacher colleague in a senior English department or a university colleague in a school/university partnership, my role in the group seemed to me to be unchanged. I continued to take responsibility for the administration of the group, looking after the logistics and catering for meetings. I created and distributed an agenda for each meeting, partly on the basis of expressed needs in the group and partly on the basis of my own vision of what would best serve the professional learning of a group such as this over longer periods of time. I suggested and distributed readings/resources, but members also contributed and shared their own resources from time to time.

To some extent I chaired and facilitated the discussions and learning in the meetings themselves, but it would have been contrary to the democratic, collegial culture of this group for me to assume greater explicit leadership than any of my colleagues. I mention these details, partly to give some professional context to the brief excerpt of our professional conversation presented below. It is, after all, but a mere moment in what was a complex, rich and extended period of professional learning, and I recognise the danger in presenting such a moment here. In no way do I wish to give the impression that this snippet of conversation represents or adequately characterises the multifaceted learning of the group over 14 months of collaboration.

The excerpt is from our fourth meeting, in July 2003, entitled “Post-colonialism and colonialism – unpacking the discourses”. The session began with a reading from, and discussion about, De Brunhoff’s children’s story, *Babar the Elephant*. Subsequent activities involved the whole group constructing and contesting understandings of various colonialist literary terms, and some participants reported on the ways they had used the ideas of colonialism and post-colonialism in their reading and teaching of literature. Particular texts discussed included David Malouf’s *Dream Stuff* (which includes the short story, “Jacko’s Reach”) and Patrick White’s *A Fringe of Leaves*. Most in the group had taught these texts at some time, and some members of the group were actually engaged in teaching one or both texts in the very term that we were meeting.

In the lead-up to this excerpt, the conversation had moved to consider the ways in which notions of civilisation in literature and in modern societies were reliant on simple constructed binaries such as order and disorder, coherence and chaos. Members of the group proceeded to relate classroom stories of how they had explored these sorts of ideas with their students. I contributed an anecdote from one of my own Year 12 English classes, some years before, when the students were preparing for an oral presentation. I was musing with members of the inquiry group, as I had done with these Year 12 students, about how chaotic and disordered these orals preparation periods might appear to an outsider. I explained to my professional colleagues that when these same students came to present their orals to the class and then to inquire into the significance of the ideas explored therein, I was struck by the quality of their learning – it was emerging as rich, coherent and complex. Perhaps, I suggested, the students needed this sort of freer intellectual and social “space”, the freedom to be chaotic and disordered for a time. Perhaps, such a space was an essential part of the process of inquiring into, and trying out, ideas before ordering and making sense of

them. (I need to point out that Sam and Jan<sup>4</sup>, two members of the inquiry group, had been sharing the interim roles of co-coordinators of their English department – as Jan ironically characterises it, “Running the English department” – at the time of this session.)

Before critically analysing some micro-elements of the conversation, I want to inquire into the nature of the professional learning dynamic or atmosphere here. Without any directive from a higher authority to justify the professional learning of each member of this group – there was no performance management imperative looming – the dynamic appears to be informal, convivial, even light-hearted at times. Yet, despite the light-heartedness, the ideas being discussed are serious and challenging, and the rapid movement of the discussion across a range of topics would seem to have required a reasonable level of intellectual engagement.

There is a personal warmth which lies just beneath the surface of the otherwise serious topic/s, and which regularly bubbles up in outbursts of laughter (ll. 2, 15, 20). All colleagues seem to know each other very well, judging from the comfortable turn-taking between members of the group. Occasionally colleagues finish off or verbally punctuate each other’s sentences (ll. 9-10, 13-14, 16-8). Notwithstanding this personable atmosphere, there is no shortage of confidence or willingness in any member of the group to contribute ideas and opinions. The dialogue is halting or staccato in effect, regularly shot through with succinct assertions – “But chaos is a good place to be” (l. 5), “Sexuality is chaotic” (l. 10), “It’s a great opportunity” (l. 19) – or a type of abbreviated syntactical structure – “Yearnings and hopes anyway” (l. 4), “Aboriginality...” (l. 11), “In English classrooms” (l. 24), “Exactly. In all seriousness” (l. 25). This is reminiscent of Vygotsky’s (1962) notion of “inner

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|----|---|
| 1  | <b>Graham:</b> .... Maybe that’s an important part of the creative process.   |
| 2  | <b>Sam:</b> It’s a bit like the way we run the English department. [ <i>much laughter from everyone</i> ]             |
| 3  | <b>Jo:</b> But oh the possibilities!  |
| 4  | <b>Jan:</b> Yearnings and hopes anyway.   |
| 5  | <b>Sam:</b> But chaos is a good place to be.  |
| 6  | <b>Graham:</b> It’s <u>potentially</u> a good place to be. And the repression [of it] is...by definition undesirable? |
| 7  | <b>Jo:</b> Yeah, well it’s problematic. Because if you repress chaos, well, what else are you repressing?             |
| 8  | <b>Sam:</b> Well, sexuality for a start.  |
| 9  | <b>Jo:</b> Yes, exactly. Sexuality...   |
| 10 | <b>Jan:</b> Sexuality is chaotic.   |
| 11 | <b>Jo:</b> Aboriginality...   |
| 12 | <b>Sam:</b> Well, it is. It is.   |
| 13 | <b>Jan:</b> And that’s another thing....You know almost every man that ever appears in <i>Fringe of Leaves</i>        |
| 14 | Ellen looks at...as a ...you can see, you know...   |
| 15 | <b>Graham:</b> ...as a possibility...   |
| 16 | <b>Jan:</b> ...that she looks at him as a possibility. [ <i>laughing</i> ] You know this is...it’s fantastic.         |
| 17 | <b>Gill:</b> I think that’s really liberating for the girls to understand too, isn’t it? ...                          |
| 18 | <b>Jan:</b> Yes.  |
| 19 | <b>Gill</b> ...that they have such enormous expectations and yet rigid boundaries. And even to be able to             |
| 20 | talk about their dreams and what they might mean has been great.  |
| 21 | <b>Graham:</b> It’s a it’s a great opportunity...to talk about the sort of contradictions which are inherent in       |
| 22 | this [school] here: the <u>drive</u> to more and more order, and more and more neat packages, and more and            |
| 23 | more [control]... as against the sort of subversive things that happen in local pockets ..                            |
| 24 | <b>Jan:</b> In English classrooms!  |
| 25 | <b>Graham:</b> For instance! Exactly. In all seriousness. It’s a great place for contestation.                        |
| 26 | <b>Jan:</b> That student... [ <i>says first name but can’t remember surname. Some discussion in the group until</i>   |
| 27 | <i>Jan remembers the surname</i> ] ...Her mother who was a Marxist and so ashamed of sending her                      |
| 28 | daughter here [to this elite independent school], said that the one thing that was...that gave her heart              |

<sup>4</sup> All names of participants, except for mine, are non-gender specific pseudonyms.

29 was that the school was so big that it was uncontainable. And around, in the uncontainable edges,  
30 some wonderful things happened.

speech”, and specifically “predication”, which he argues can often characterise conversations between people who know each other well and who therefore do not need to fill out the details of the subject/s the other is talking about. In *Language and Thought*, Vygotsky illustrates this by allusion to a passage in *Anna Karenina*, showing how Levin and Kitty are capable of almost reading each other’s minds (Vygotsky, 1962, pp. 139-141). Reading each others’ minds is clearly taking the idea too far in this instance, but there *is* an element of inner speech in the excerpt above. And yet the net effect falls well short of “contrived collegiality” or “group think” (Fullan & Hargreaves, 1991).

Most of the questions that are asked might be deemed more rhetorical than explicitly requiring information or knowledge (ll. 6, 7, and 16). With a different social dynamic, this might result in a spirit of one-upmanship or intellectual point-scoring. In each case, however, these rhetorical questions, as with the other staccato contributions, seem only to encourage others in the group to explore an idea further or prompt them to inquire into an alternative perspective on the topic.

But inquiry into what? What were these professional teachers supposed to be learning in what seems a rather idiosyncratic discussion? Something about chaos in classroom practices (l. 1)? Something about notions of chaos in literary contexts (ll. 13-16)? in human psychology (ll. 7-10)? and in society (ll. 11)? Something about the novel, *A fringe of leaves* (ll. 13-16)? Something about the sort of students we were teaching at this school (ll. 17-20). Well, I would say *all* of these things. Indeed, I might add that the speed with which the conversation moves through each of these topics, and then lurches into a critique of the culture of the school (ll. 21-30) appears chaotic in itself. As in the Malouf story, however, there are some underpinning structures (such as the formal way in which the sessions are scheduled, the fact that there is some sort of agenda set down – albeit tentative and open to negotiation), which serve to support and allow for some of this chaos. This is a notion of professional learning characterised by a productive tension between underpinning structures and a propensity for “chaos”. As such it contests a “model” of managerialist-inspired professional development where the focus is on a narrow set of prescribed student learning outcomes or where teachers are only interested in the “practical matters” of a particular pedagogical practice they can “take into” their literature classrooms.

It might be argued that some details in this discussion are relevant to their pedagogy. This exchange could encourage teachers to take more risks in their classroom practices, especially when experienced colleagues’ classroom stories are seeming to validate a certain (if brief) descent into disorder in pedagogical dynamics. Apart from this, how could teachers in this professional learning session demonstrate the required improvement in their teaching performance (if they are forced into such managerialist discourses) as a consequence of their participation in this session? To answer this question, it is worth examining closely how readings of the abstract concept, “chaos”, were realised or concretised throughout the excerpt. Chaos is explicitly linked to: school classrooms, sexuality, aboriginality, a literary novel, adolescent lives, and the wider school community. By raising, and to some extent investigating, such a diverse range of readings of chaos, the group was collectively building a sound basis to construct richer

post-colonial understandings of chaos. If one were looking to demonstrate the relevance of this discussion to particular teaching practices, then it could be argued that such an understanding of chaos could be applied to a post-colonial reading of Ellen Roxburgh's character in *A fringe of leaves*. It could inform a sophisticated appreciation of the value of disorder (and the threats posed by an obsessive desire to impose a culture of control and order in contemporary life and work) in Malouf's story "Jacko's Reach". And, in terms of some contribution to a teacher's own professional identity, it could contribute to the long process of learning about and clarifying beliefs or values in teaching; part of this might develop through an increasingly complex awareness of the implications of stifling orderliness or perhaps creative disorder in the professional context in which teaching and learning happens.

My purpose in presenting this particular excerpt is not to showcase it as a benchmark or "best practice" for professional conversations, in the tradition of managerialist pinning down of quality! Let's be clear about it. There are aspects of this discussion that are somewhat idiosyncratic, however. I would argue that much powerful and engaging learning (for students and teachers) is just that – idiosyncratic, especially in inquiry-based paradigms such as this. Teachers who have taught in and/or learned in an inquiry-based space can attest to that. To appropriate the words of Malouf's narrator: They've seen into and been into it; they've lived with and in it. So, if teachers are given some flexibility, scope and intellectual space to inquire into and reflect on such a conversation, they could greatly benefit from such an opportunity. Through such a process they may well prove themselves "accountable". It may be through the medium of open-ended, collaboratively generated, critically focused, professional portfolio entries or it may be through other collaborative, critical and creative options. I can conceive of a myriad of rich, multi-layered accounts of the professional learning that took place. However, if the mandates of (i) restricting professional learning to student learning outcomes; (ii) maintaining a focus on "practical matters"; and/or (iii) tailoring professional development to the narrow requirements of quality assurance measurements were in place, one wonders whether such a conversation would have even begun.

I want to add one further personal professional perspective to this discussion. I have come to see how the process of learning about the process of professional learning, that is to reflexively inquire into it, can be similar to the learning process for my year 12 English students who were giving oral presentations. Indeed, in the process of writing this article, and in collaborating with colleagues about it, I myself have worked in, through and out of stages of intellectual chaos in order to achieve some level of clarity and meaning, some understanding that made sense to me. I'd like to think that by publishing this piece for others to read, I can engage further in meaningful communication with colleagues, near and far, and thus contribute to a culture of ongoing critical, collaborative, inquiry-based professional learning across the profession.

## CONCLUSION

If the tendency to exert more managerial control and impose more constraints over teachers' professional learning opportunities continues, the consequence will inevitably be to confirm Terry Locke's bleak view of teachers' eroded professionalism. My metaphor illustrates the effect differently, but the effect is related: It will be the professional equivalent of concreting over the rich and problematic spaces that constitute

teachers' transgressive professional learning "spaces". The outcome might appear to be a more controlled, more highly managed force of teachers, but these teachers will tend to be impersonal technicians, inhibited in the development of a rich, professional identity. Indeed, it may be, as Goodson (2003) says, that such an environment will turn teaching into a job "attractive only to the compliant and the docile, and conversely unattractive to the creative and resourceful" (p. 84).

My experiences as a secondary English/literature teacher, as a teacher educator, and as part of the group of teachers inquiring into literary theory and our professional identity/ies, have taught me the value of leading and directing through critically focused debate. All these professional experiences have encouraged in me a predisposition to be optimistic, to be excited by possibilities, even while I confess to occasionally despairing over recent moves to impoverish teachers' professional identity and the deleterious effects this might have on students' learning. It is this same optimism that fuels my hope that the managerialist project of controlling (and thus contributing to the impoverishment of) teachers' professional identity through the utilitarianising of their work is always going to be too big, beyond the scope of even the most obsessive and assiduous managerial bureaucrat, employer or politician. In the words of the parent reported in the professional conversation: the task is "so big that it [will be] uncontainable. And around, in the uncontainable edges some wonderful things [will] happen".

So it is vital that teachers, teacher educators and researchers critically contest and persuasively challenge the recent emergence of managerial discourse and policy that is impoverishing teachers' professional identity. As professionals, we need to continue to pursue and enact the transgressive potential of inquiry-based paradigms in teachers' and students' learning spaces. To do otherwise is to usher in an even bleaker future. On the other hand, I do hope for better. In my more sanguine moments I want to believe that, just as the spirit of Jacko's Reach will continue "pushing up" under the poured concrete (Malouf, 2001, p.100), so too will the teaching profession find ways to resist and subvert managerialist strictures and structures, thus opening up possibilities for creating richer learning environments for all. It's hard to get the balance right, but that's part of the tension animating my sense of a professional identity and my ongoing professional learning.

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