UNVEILING PARTICIPATIVE ASSESSMENT
A CRITICAL EXAMINATION

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Figures

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[1] Argyris, Checkland, Senge and Schein cited in Edmondson, 1996, p.5

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ABSTRACT

Participative forms of assessment occupy some unusual education territory. In addition to challenging conventional canons of academia, they offer the potential to generate insights into individual and group behaviour in a crucial area of educational practice.

The problems of assessing traditionally taught courses has attracted considerable attention. Much of the evidence points to the inadequacies of the procedures and approaches currently used in management education. The view that appears to be emerging is that traditional assessment methods encourage a narrow, instrumental approach to learning that places the emphasis on the reproduction of what is presented at the expense of critical thinking, deep understanding and independent activity.

Participative assessment is often advanced as a corrective to the instrumentalist tendencies of traditional methods. However, much of this response is also dominated by the advocacy of techniques and procedures. Little attention is accorded to more fundamental underpinning processes.

The intention of this thesis is to highlight problematic propositions for alternative, more participative approaches to assessment and consider the complex political and social dynamics of student groups of mixed age, gender, ethnicity and experience, and the

ways these processes are implicated in assessment – particularly its more participative versions. The thesis provides first an overview of alternative assessment practices, their rationale and their influences from participative pedagogies more generally. Secondly the thesis questions the assumption that such approaches actually empower the students who take part in them, and explores the significance of social differences encountered during the process of participative assessment. Thirdly the thesis looks at the implication for participative assessment practice and the role of tutors, particularly in the context of more critically disposed educational designs.

It is argued that this critical treatment of the literature and research will deepen academic theorising and knowledge. By illuminating social and power relations embedded within participative forms of assessment, it will be possible to present a more contextual and processual account than the idealistic prescriptions that have dominated the study of this vital educational practice.

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Many others have listened to what must have been an often incomprehensible monologue. Clare Rigg, Monder Ram and Larry Meacham, more than any others, were always around to share enthused discussion that helped sustain me.

I am further grateful to those people portrayed in this account for agreeing to participate in this research, and for being so open with me.

And, finally this thesis could not have been completed without Val Bates, she has patiently typed this thesis, shared in my highs and lows and constantly met my tight deadlines, with good humour.

INTRODUCTION

In adult and professional education there has been significant interest in developing more participative approaches to assessment, whether peer (carried out by fellow students), collaborative (jointly evaluated by learners and the tutor), or consultative (collectively between self, peer and tutor but with ultimate responsibility resting with the tutor). These developments are particularly appropriate in the case of participative courses which are designed more generally to provide students with opportunities for influencing - for example - the content of the curriculum, the educational methods used, or the choice of topics for assignments.

Given the rapid pace of development and innovation in education, coupled with alternative approaches to learning, a re-evaluation of assessment methods might be expected to be a prominent feature of a critically-based educational programme involving less hierarchical procedures and relationships - particularly one which aims for pedagogical consistency between the curriculum and the teaching methodology.

Growing awareness of the influence of participative assessment in shaping pedagogical agendas has provided interesting impetus for the issue of learning in participative assessment. It was probably just a matter of time before well-established critiques of prescriptive approaches to assessment should filter through to the way in which managers are actually taught and assessed.

There has been a growing demand in the academic literature of the last few years for management educators to engage more critically with their subject than has been the tradition in Business Schools. The case has been argued for strengthening the critical

perspective in contributory disciplines within management (Reynolds 1999, Alvesson and Willmot, 1996) and for a revision of management education generally (French and Grey 1996). Yet, while examples of critical pedagogies are accumulating, they seldom exhibit corresponding changes in assessment practices. Where assessment does depart from mainstream practice, alternatives are typically based on humanistic, student-centred aspirations for social equality, rather than on an analysis of assessment in terms of institutional power and control over educational procedures.

Perhaps it is because of critical educationalists' general mistrust of the humanist discourse which characterises student-centred approaches, often to the neglect of the more social and political processes involved in classroom relations.

So while some form of participative assessment would seem necessary for any critically based approach to education, it is equally important to take account of the social and cultural bases of power which influence relationships among students themselves and which are likely to be central to their experience of participative assessment. In the same way, it should not be assumed that even if the tutor was not involved – as in peer assessment - equality would be ensured. While participative assessment is often advanced as a corrective to more hierarchical methods it is important to take account of the contradictions and complexities of advancing such an approach.

In the rest of this thesis I examine the aims of participative assessment in the light of the experiences of students on a Postgraduate Management Development programme in order to illustrate the interaction between participative assessment and the complex political and social dynamics of learning groups.

The structure this thesis takes is as follows:

Chapter One

Firstly provides an insight into the sites of study and gives an account of the two programmes (MSc in Management/Organisational Development and the MA in Management Learning). This chapter outlines key issues in their design and content, describing the core pedagogical processes which underpin the programmes, including assessment.

Secondly within this chapter I illuminate some of the issues inherent in participative assessment and highlight my main areas of interests for this thesis.

Chapter Two

In chapter two I present my literature review and highlight the problematic propositions for alternative, more participative approaches to assessment. Within this chapter I examine the significance of social dynamics and power relations and challenge the implicit assumption that such practices necessarily bring about equality.

Chapter Three

The aims of this chapter are twofold. The first is concerned with the formulating of 'Research Theory' from an ethnographical perspective. The second is to recount the experience of undertaking ethnographic research within the area of participative assessment.

Chapter Four

This chapter firstly highlights how stories are used to shape the telling of the ethnographic accounts, and discusses the ways in which ethnographic inquiry contributes to knowledge of participative assessment. Secondly the substantive part of the chapter focuses on the issues generated from the research stories to illustrate and elucidate the social processes that can emerge within participative assessment.

Chapter Five

The aim of this chapter is to consider the implications of the research material by exploring the contradictions and complexities associated with participative assessment, and consider the question. Is participative assessment too risky to contemplate in practice, despite its appeal in theory and the hopes and principles of Critical Management Learning?

CHAPTER ONE

An Insight into the Sites of Study

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An Insight into the Sites of Study

Introduction

This chapter firstly provides a generalised account of the two programmes (Postgraduate Diploma In Management/M.Sc Organisation Development and the MA in Management Learning) and outlines their design and content, describing core principles of the pedagogical process which underpin the programmes, including assessment.

Secondly I illuminate some of the issues inherent in participative assessment and highlight my main areas of interests for this thesis.

Postgraduate Diploma/M.Sc Organisation Development

30 years ago a marketing lecturer was told by his new head of department, recently arrived from working in industry, 'we're going to change the way we teach here. I'm relying on you to start. Go into that class tonight, give them some marketing materials and tell them to take them away, use them and learn'. The marketing lecturer entered the class, terrified, spoke as instructed to the 45 managers on a part-time post-graduate Diploma in Management, and walked out of the room with his heart pounding. In the classroom there was momentary stunned silence, followed by uproar, with angry cries of 'they can't do that; what are we supposed to do? What do they think we're paying them for?' In the uncertainty and apparent vacuum created by the tutors' abstention, students' anxieties ran high. However, as Vince (1996) argues, anxiety is the precursor to potential

learning, and in Lewin's terms it can be the unfreezing necessary to provoke change (Lewin, 1947). A year later, when the course was up for national revalidation, it was students' support which convinced the validators to agree it.

From these beginnings, the Management School at UCE's approach to management and organisation development has evolved. A fully integrated experiential and psychodynamic post-experience, part-time Diploma in Management Studies was designed in 1972, and has run on a part-time basis for almost 30 years. Over the past 7 years three Masters stages have been developed to follow the Diploma, one of which is an MSc in Organisation Development and Management Learning[2], which 25-30 students take a year.

Course Design and Practice

From its inception the UCE Postgraduate Management Development Programme (PGMDP) was designed for those who wish to become effective managers, action-researchers and internal/external consultants.

It is a programme for developing managers that incorporates both management development and management education. In management education the emphasis tends to be on the systematic understanding of relevant up-to-date knowledge and a critical awareness of key management issues. In management development the emphasis tends to be on developing relevant skills and techniques for managing, researching, consulting and for reflexivity. The programme recognises the need for linking practice and theory. Thus, students are given the opportunity to practise these approaches and skills in a

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[2] Entitled MSc Manager and Organisation Development until 2001.

relatively safe environment. The programme is radical and innovatory in providing opportunities for bridging the gap between the academic and vocational sides of management.

Figures 1 to 4 below summarise the content of each stage of the DMS/MSc, extracted from course brochures (UCE 2002). However, the learning process is considered as significant as the content in developing participants' capacity for organisational development and the principles underlying this are explored below the diagrams.

Figure 1. Postgraduate Management Development Programme (UCE, 2002)
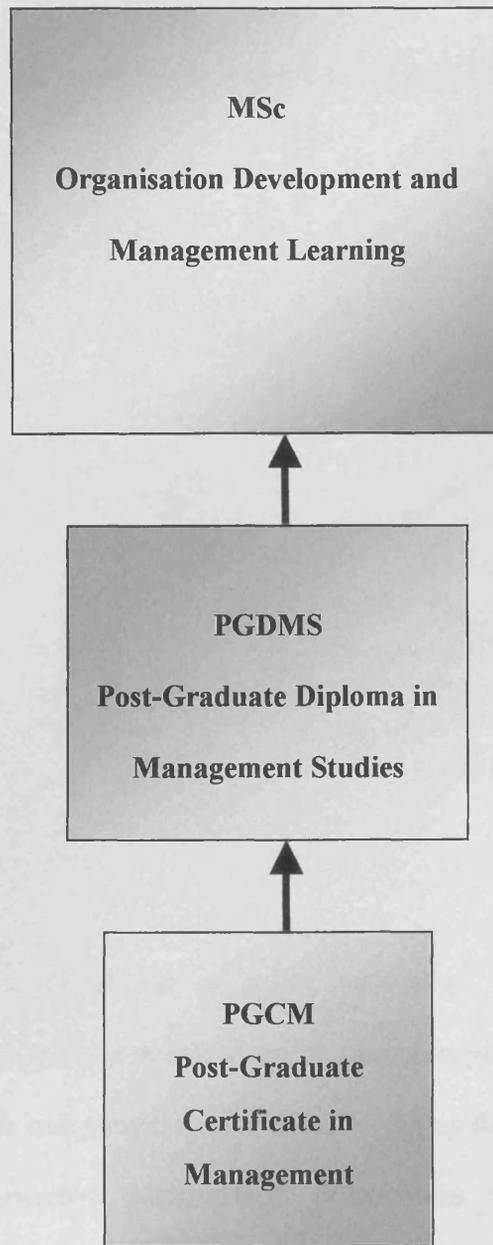
Figure 1 provides an insight into the structure of the three year part-time programme

Figure 2. Stage One: Post-Graduate Certificate (UCE, 2002)
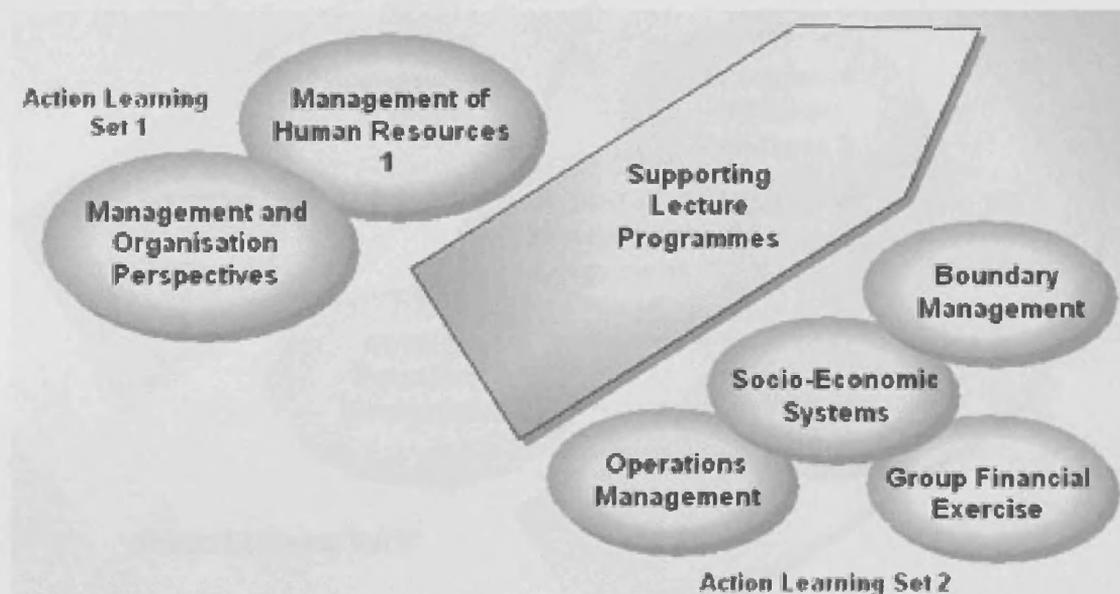
"Stage One offers a foundation in skills, knowledge and awareness for participants' management and personal development. A European perspective is used for studies into the private, public and voluntary sectors that will help develop competencies in managing teams, inter-personal relationships, organisation change and human resources."

Figure 3. Stage Two: Post-Graduate Diploma in Management Studies (UCE, 2002)
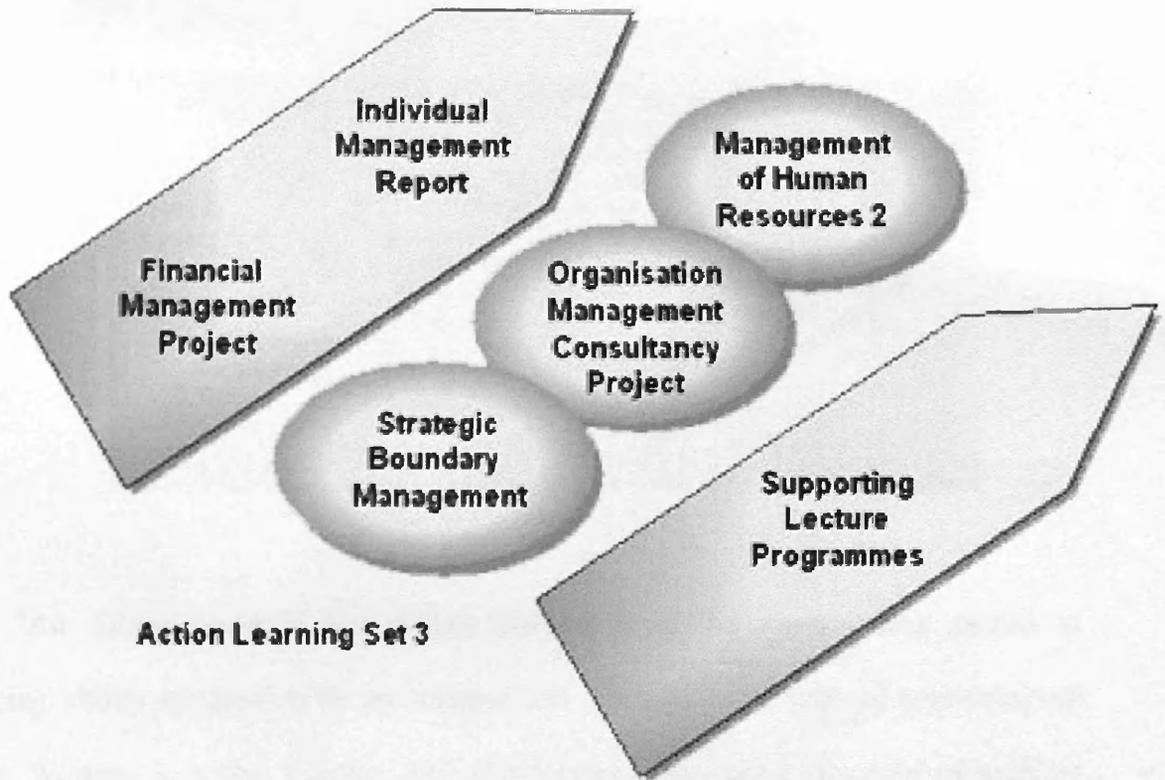
"The Diploma Year provides opportunities to study more complex and strategic management processes. Year Two focuses on corporate decision-making, policy development, financial management, strategic marketing and human resource issues through a mix of action learning groups, consultancy and individual projects."

Figure 4. Stage Three: MSc in Organisation Development and Management

Learning (UCE, 2002)

"An action research and action learning-based part-time course aimed at enhancing ability to develop as an internal and external consultant of organisational change. Working in action learning sets, participants experience a diversity of working styles and organisational practices to enhance capabilities to think and act strategically. Course work builds consultancy skills and encourages the use of action research to tackle live organisation issues."

As stated above, participants' learning about organisational development is as much from the pedagogical process as from the content. Core features of this are experiential learning and action learning, praxis, process, proactivity, reflexivity and self-development.

Experiential Learning and Action Learning

The entire programme takes an experiential learning approach (Weil and McGill, 1989)

where, supported by a small number of lecture inputs, students spend two thirds of their time working collectively in a specific action learning set (ALS) of 6-9 people, facilitated by a tutor. The ALS fulfils a number of functions for the course: undertaking group tasks; a community for individuals to exchange work experiences; as a source of support for individual course assignments and as a site of experiential learning about group process. In this sense students' dialogue, and social support are fundamental to the pedagogical approach. By experiential we mean 'learning that enables us to engage with the interrelatedness of self and the social context, inner experience and outer experience, content and process, and different ways of knowing' (Weil and McGill 1989, p.246). They go on,

> We currently interpret experiential learning as the process whereby people, individually and in association with others, engage in direct encounter and then purposefully reflect upon, validate, transform, give personal meaning to and seek to integrate their different ways of knowing. Experiential learning therefore enables the discovery of possibilities that may not be evident from direct experience alone (Weil and McGill 1989, p.248)

This epitomises common characteristics of experiential learning, based on purposeful reflection of personal experience.

The course team does not use pre-written case studies and we make very little use of examinations (10% in the Diploma and none in the MSc). Learning is through assignments that are almost entirely based on students selected live organisational issues, based on their interpretation of tutor-determined briefs. These are not organisational puzzles or problems with ready technical solutions, but are 'situations', in the sense that

Schon (1983) describes, characterised by uniqueness, uncertainty, instability, complexity and value conflict. Learning about managing and developing the capacity to manage comes experientially from working on these 'situations'. A prime example is a European residential event held towards the end of Stage 1. The students' task is to undertake a comparative study of the market environment of a product or service in the overseas destination in contrast to home. UCE organises the destination, accommodation and travel arrangements, but the participants have to identify client organisations and organise visits. Through this activity they not only learn about international market research in practice, rather than simply through lectures, but experientially they also learn about change, working outside their comfort zones; about difference and cross-cultural comparisons, as well as participative assessment.

Learning about Theory to Practice

Application of theory to practice, and an iteration of practice to theory is advocated throughout the programme. From the first brief papers (1000 word peer-assessed) and presentations (20 minutes peer-assessed) that participants prepare, to the full MSc 20,000 word dissertation, they are expected to relate concepts and models to live situations, and to make use of Lewin's adage that 'there is nothing so practical as a good theory' (Lewin, 1951). The approach is informed by three key assumptions about learning. Firstly, of encouraging participants to become aware of their theories-in-use (Argyris and Schon, 1974); secondly, to think critically, as Carr and Kemmis say of action research: '... a deliberate process for emancipating practitioners from the often unseen constraints of assumption, habit, precedent, coercion and ideology' (1986, p.192).. Thirdly, informed by Bateson's (1973) and Belenky et al's theories on levels of learning (1986), tutors also

encourage participants to value their own experience and insight, to develop their own models - in other words, to create theory from practice.

In both the DMS and MSc there are significant consultancy assignments, where groups have to identify a client, negotiate a brief and undertake a project. In the MSc this is specifically an 'Organisation Design and Development' consultancy. Participants are guided to consider differing models of consultation and in particular to explore approaches for organisation development (see, for example, Schein, 1987 and Cockman, 1998). At the Masters stage they get involved with implementation, not simply delivering a report, in 'expert mode'. As such they have opportunity to develop practical capabilities for organisational intervention and through 'reflection-in-action' (Brookfield, 1986), they are guided to learn as much from the process of doing consultancy as from the substantive content. This is extended on the MSc by an Action Research Dissertation during which students are encouraged both to practically engage in organisation interventions as well as to explore the epistemological basis of action research. They are required to conduct a work-based project that involves cycles of action and reflection, employing action research principles (Eden and Chris 2001; Elden and Chisholm, 1993; Rigg, Trehan and Ram, 2002).

Process

Process skills are fundamental to organisation development, as the many accounts of failed mergers and organisation change indicate (Hamlin, Keep and Ash, 2001). Throughout the DMS/MSc equal emphasis is placed on process as on task content. In undertaking course tasks, investigating organisational situations, participants are encouraged, through tutor facilitation, to reflect on how they work together and to work

through process issues in some depth. This is also reflected in the course assessment in that many of the assignments require participants not only to demonstrate learning about content (for example, organisation behaviour, performance management models etc.), but also to reflect on process issues they experienced in the course of undertaking the tasks, such as how they made decisions; what happened in their group, strategic exchanges that occurred in the course of doing their research, and how they felt, as well as issues associated with assessment. The action learning set itself is seen as a source of learning about organisation dynamics, what Reynolds and Trehan (2001) have termed 'classroom as real world'. Because of the population in Birmingham, UK, the ALS is typically a source of gender, ethnic, age and occupational diversity, where issues mirror some of the patterns in organisations and society. Students are encouraged to reflect upon, act on and learn from their feelings and experiences of the ensuing value and power dynamics.

Student evaluations (UCE, 2001a) of the group experience give some insight into their learning, with comments such as "it raised awareness of the complexities that exist within organisations", that "most events in organisations are influenced by the way individuals interact in groups". One woman wrote: "I would argue that my experience of being a member of these action learning sets has led me to experiencing a process of real personal 'change' which would not have occurred if as students we had been allowed to stay with the problem-oriented rationality of 'sharing' experience, rather than being made to 'work through' our experience within the group." (UCE, 2001a).

Proactivity

A key value of the course is that participants become proactive inter-dependent learners, able to handle uncertainty and complexity, confident in their own judgement, whilst

seeing others as a resource. Participants receive an abrupt induction into this approach when, in the first month of the first year of the programme, they attend a 5 day residential workshop. Based on a T-group model the purpose of which is:

>...to help students explore their experiences in organisations and to create, in the week, a small temporary organisation which can be studied itself. By bringing together students' past experience, developing and studying the shared experience of the week and some conceptual and theoretical findings from the social sciences, they will learn about aspects of organisational behaviour, interpersonal relations, group processes and management perspectives.   (UCE, 2001b, p.31)

The week is carefully designed and actually highly structured, but because it does not conform to participants' expectations of themselves as passive learners and tutors as the expert givers of knowledge, many initially perceive the uncertainty as chaos. It is their comments after the event that illustrates the power of the week, exemplified by one woman, for example, who said "It was like a great jolt. It made me sit up and think, what do I want to do with my life. I'm drifting along in a job I don't enjoy and nobody else is going to sort it out".

Throughout the programme many features aim to reinforce proactivity. The question of who owns the learning, diagnosis of issues or problems, and the solutions to these, is central to the staff roles. Tutors take two basic, mutually supportive roles, those of Task Consultant, offering information, models, or reading relating to the task, and

Process Consultant, making the participant/group aware of group processes.   Tutors

take care in their responses to participants' questions not to position them as dependent

and passive. The courses are structured around individual and group tasks, whose briefs

we frame in terms of learning outcomes. However, they have to be interpreted, which

provides considerable leeway for participants to determine the curriculum, but this is also

a situation of uncertainty, through which they have to direct their own paths, individually

and collectively.

One participant described this as the "total refusal, well not so much refusal, more

slippery than that, an avoidance of allowing the students to inscribe the tutors as

knowledge bearers or themselves as empty vessels to be filled with knowledge." Another

said "the loose style of the DMS acts more rigidly upon the student ... because I had to

pace out and set my own boundaries upon my learning..." (UCE, 2001a).

Self-Development through Reflexive Practice

A key principle of the DMS/MSc is that as a result of what Reynolds (1997) describes as

process radical pedagogy: through action learning sets, process facilitation, action

research and the idea of a learning community, not only do participants learn about others

and about organisational dynamics, but they also learn about themselves and examine

authority between tutors and students.   Reflexivity is seen as integral to learning and

self-development. On the DMS participants write reflective papers, both individually on

their learning about organising from their experiences within the corporate course

community, and collectively about their learning from the group process within their

ALS. On the MSc they write a critical self-reflection paper, an autobiographical

reflection on the manager's development. In this participants are encouraged to identify

core assumptions, to understand some of their patterns, and the contextual influences on them. Depending on their particular focus, individuals may be introduced to critical concepts derived from such areas as feminism, post-colonial literature, Marxism, social constructionism, or critical pedagogy. It has proved important to have individual knowledge of each student in order to gauge what might be appropriate for them, and help them make sense of their particular experiences. For example, some of the black students on the course attributed what they described as a sense of enlightenment, to the literature to which they were introduced.

This form of critical self-development is seen as embodying Kemmis' principles' of critical reflection, as a form of critical education, (Kemmis, 1985). As such it differs from the more instrumental reflection promoted by experiential learning advocates, such as Kolb (1984) or Schon (1983), which does not encourage such a fundamental critique.

Assessment

At UCE we define *participative* assessment as a process in which students and tutors share, to some degree, the responsibility for making evaluations and judgements about students' written work, gaining insight into how such judgements are made and finding appropriate ways to communicate them. The criteria for assessment may be given, or there may be an opportunity for students to influence them. At most, this can mean – as with students on the postgraduate course in Management Development at the University of Central England – being involved in peer assessment which takes the form of evaluation and commentary on written work, and in reaching agreement with student colleagues as to its grading.

Students work collectively in action learning groups, and peer assessment is intended to evaluate each student's understanding of their chosen topic area and how it relates to the practice of management. They are expected to record the comments and grades that result from group discussions. In this sense, students' dialogue and social support is fundamental to the assessment process. A member of staff is present to facilitate decision-making, but not to pass judgement on the assignments.

Summary

As the opening story of this chapter suggests, the learning process on UCE's Diploma in Management/MSc Organisation Development and Management Learning is considered as significant as the content in developing participants' capacity for organisational development. Core features of experiential learning, action learning, praxis, process, proactivity, reflexivity and self-development have been explored. The next section will consider the MA in Management Learning.

MA in Management Learning

The MA in Management Learning is a two-year part time programme for professionals in management education and development. Participants range in age from mid twenties to early sixties with most in the thirties and forties. Generally there is an equal spread of participants from the public, private and voluntary sectors and usually include people working from the social services as well as in further and higher education. Some people doing the programme work as independent consultants and the gender balance tends to be biased towards slightly greater numbers of female participants

All of the participants on the programme attend six residential workshops spaced throughout the two years and in-between the workshops they work in tutorial groups or 'sets' comprising, on average, five students plus one tutor. The intended purpose for the sets is to provide support for each individual to choose, plan and write course assignments as well as to discuss matters of interest arising from either the programme itself or from people's work or career experience. The sets are also part of the assessment process of the programme, which is collaborative and involves peer, self and tutor assessment of each assignment.

Participants choose during each workshop who and which set of people they will work with for the following period of the programme, that is, up until the next workshop. They also choose whether to work in a set that will 'meet' face to face or 'online' in Lotus Notes. The experience of doing the programme is quite different for those who choose to work in the online environment of the programme to those who choose to meet face to face. The latter groups meet together for a part day once every 5/6 weeks, very often in the place of work of one of the set members. The online groups, on the other hand, meet on a continuous basis in both their 'set' conferences, plus in a general group conference which is open to everyone on the programme. In practice the general conference is used most frequently, although not exclusively, by others who are currently or have in the past been members of an online set.

At Lancaster University the MA in Management Learning claims to base itself on a learning community approach and whilst, as Burgoyne points out, The Learning Community is something of an umbrella term, in practice the educational principles upon which the MA in Management Learning at Lancaster (MAML) is based can be broadly summarised as:

1. Participants should have as much choice as possible over the direction and content of their learning.

2. They are responsible for 'managing' their own learning and for helping others in theirs. (The notion of the 'learning community' is generally invoked to denote this.)

3. Work on the programme integrates the idea of critical perspective, central to the academic tradition, with the day to day professional experience of participants.

4. The opportunities presented to students on the MA should be equally for learning about and developing themselves in their professional role as for engaging with relevant ideas and concepts in the public domain and academic literature.

5. That the marked degree of participation inherent in the design assumes a commitment to take collective responsibility for attending to the 'process' of the community; in other words reviewing and modifying the design, procedures and ways of working.

In practice these principles mean that the responsibility for the design of the workshops is a collective one and activities are organised/planned on a collective basis. Topics that arise emerge from the interests of staff and participants, as do choice of methods and choice of tutorial sets. The topics for course assignments are the choice of each student and assessment is done collaboratively within each set.

Each workshop has three to five tutors, the number varying each year depending on numbers of participants and the time commitments of the tutors. The tutors attempt to work

co-operatively as a team in spite of sometimes different attitudes or approaches to Self

Directed Learning. The differences in their approaches is seen as potential material for

discussion and a resource to the course.

The Course Design

The course was designed,

>...on participative principles and intended to be developmental. It is concerned
>
>with enabling students to enhance not only their knowledge and skill but also
>
>personal self-awareness through a challenging and supportive learning
>
>environment. (Hodgson and Reynolds 1987, p.147).

The course is described as a 'community' and some of the tutors may see it as a

version of a 'learning community' in which learning is managed neither by the tutors nor

by individual learners, but rather through discussion and negotiation within the learning

community comprising staff and participants (Snell 1989). A Learning Community is

>...vastly different from that of the systematic teacher/taught situation. It is both
>
>more complex and more variable, posing problems for planning and control not
>
>imagined in systematic situations (Megginson and Pedler 1976, p.264).

There are. according to Megginson and Pedler (1976), four variables which need

to be considered. These are the task (the objective of the learning community), the

people (tutors and participants), the technology (the physical aspects, i.e. equipment,

rooms, spatial layout) and the structure which refers to systems of authority and control, information, communication, co-ordination and authority.

The MAML programme as a learning community has some elements of Freire's 'culture circles',

> ...we launched a new institution of popular culture, a 'culture circle' since among us a school was a traditionally passive concept. Instead of a teacher, we had a co-ordinator; instead of a lecture, dialogue; instead of pupils, group participants; instead of alienating syllabi, compact programmes that were 'broken down' and 'codified' into learning units (Freire 1973, p.42)

Tutors and Participants

Although like Freire (1973) the words 'teacher' and 'student' are avoided in order to break some of the traditional ways of making attitudes explicit, the words 'tutor', 'staff' and 'participant' are used, so largely the distinguishing elements of 'traditional' teacher and pupil are retained. Freire suggested the use of the terms teacher/student and student/teacher to overcome this problem

However there is an intention that on the MAML course, participants would be both learners and teachers. There is no originating syllabus but an open syllabus and there are modules or units. In these ways the Freire's 'culture circles' and the MAML programme are similar. But Freire also took the view that the teacher always is an authority.

> For me the question is not for the teacher to have less and less authority. The issue is that the democratic teacher never, never transforms authority into authoritarianism. He or she can never stop being an authority or having authority (Shor and Freire, 1987, p.91).

Such attitudes create complexity for both participants and staff on MAML in their endeavour to overcome traditional expressions of authority in education represented by the dichotomy of expert and non-expert. For example the staff do occasionally give lectures if participants request them or if offers by tutors to lecture are taken up by participants. Although this might be seen by some participants (and it occasionally is) as falling back into traditional roles there also is the case argued equally by other participants that the tutors do have specific knowledge of specific areas which they (the participants) would like them to share in a formal way.

These issues show some of the complexity of the MAML course. It is clearly different from a 'traditionally passive concept' but it retains aspects of traditional education. Not the least of these is that it is an academically accredited course and since selection, overall course structure and ultimate assessment are in the hands of the tutors, a more appropriate term might be 'partial' rather than 'open' as a descriptor of control over the learning environment.

Consultative Assessment

One of the most innovative features of MAML is the acceptance by the University of the consultative process of assessment. This is a fundamental part of the learning programme and this process can be seen as a direct development of some of the libertarian principles on which the course is based, i.e. not only giving information to students but giving them

an opportunity to understand how knowledge is constructed and assessed. An important aspect of education is to be able to make judgements, to identify how such judgement is being made and then to be able to communicate such judgement and assessment.

This consultative assessment – in which participants in learning sets together with a tutor assess each others' work – although difficult and disturbing for many participants, seems to me to be the pivotal point of the programme, as they experience themselves assessing their own and others' work.

In practice consultative assessment involves a process in which each student, their learning group of four or five colleagues and the tutor contribute comments on each paper or project and agree a mark. The criteria are part of the course 'givens', and a factor with which each group must engage is that, while students are expected to take part in marking each other's work, the tutor will have more experience of interpreting the criteria. The tutor is ultimately responsible for ensuring that the learning group agrees a mark and for recording both marks and comments. Rarely, a disputed case is carried forward to the examining board for resolution.

The learning set is the forum for consultative assessment. Members are responsible for providing constructive feedback, with the tutor needing to be comfortable with the marks proposed to the board of examiners.

The Structure of MAML

There are four formal structures within the MAML programme, these are workshops, learning sets, open structures and the open syllabus.

Theme Based Workshops

Extracted from course brochure (Lancaster 2002)

The MAML workshops have been devised around six themes. The content of the workshops emanates from the concerns and challenges that participants face in their current work situations at the time, but with the intent of viewing such issues through the perspective of the themes set out in the following workshop titles.

Determining Purposes

This introductory workshop provides essential building blocks for the course as a whole. It coves the nature and purpose of Management and Organisational Learning fields of enquiry; addresses interpersonal and collaborative learning skills and links these to associated theories. A particular focus in this workshop is to introduce the philosophy and design of the programme, and participants' professional and personal expectations in relation to their studies.

Research and Evaluation in Management Learning

This is an introduction to philosophies and practicalities of management based research and evaluation and political/ethical/legal issues encountered in their implementation. The aim is to make participants aware of the variety of approaches within management research, both quantitative and qualitative, and to give them opportunities to use a range of methods in order to provide research competence to their research projects and their dissertations.

Design for Learning

This workshop provides a critical review of learning theories relevant to management education and development and their ontological bases. It relates these to debates on the evolution of course design, teaching methods and learning processes and their effect on tutor/learner relationships.

The Dynamics of Learning Relationships

During this workshop an exploration through psychological and sociological perspectives of the social dynamics involved in policy, planning and implementation of management education and development will take place. This includes both macro and micro perspectives and emphasises the importance, for example, of understanding working with difference.

Special Interests

This workshop is intended to allow the special interests of the participants at that time to be planned. In particular, it is an opportunity to invite particular visitors (academics, writers, industrialists, 'gurus', etc.). Given the time and financial resources we will make every effort to satisfy these suggestions.

Review: Final workshop

The programme ends with a final review of the course as a whole and of participants' learning over the two years. It is also an opportunity to consider the future of Management Learning, within the organisations in which participants work, within society at large, and within their personal career plans.

The theme of the workshop is the starting point for the activities which follow. Participants as well as tutors request or offer sessions, or topics for study or discussion. The methods for putting the topics on the workshop agenda can vary between groups. However, one activity that always takes place within each workshop is the formation of learning sets.

Learning Sets

As well as attending the workshops the participants are asked to attend 'tutorial sets' during the two years of the course. The course brochure states that the sets

> ...will consist of four or five participants and one tutor. They will meet for a day at a time on up to eight occasions in each year. The time and place of each meeting will be arranged to suit those involved. (MAML brochure)

The term 'sets' has its origin in Action Learning where a group forms with a 'set advisor' who acts not as a teacher but as a facilitator/resource person. On MAML in the spirit of Action Learning the participants choose the issue they want to research and the set supports and helps the goals to be achieved.

These sets become important to the participants as strong friendships can develop, often enduring long after the programme has concluded. Within these sets assessment takes place and the power of this learning experience for me has been demonstrated by the length of time the participants often spend discussing the social processes that emerge from assessment, long after the marking process has been completed.

The Open Structure

There is no set plan within the open structure. The principle is that each individual states their individual areas of interest and study, as well as areas of knowledge and expertise which they are willing to share. They also choose who they want to work with, when, where and how.

Participants often report making such choices based on 'an affinity with' to work with 'those who share the same temperament', etc., which indicates recognition of the importance of social relationships in the learning community approach. However they also often state they are choosing to work with a person because they know a lot about a particular subject or work within an organisation which is of interest.

The value of the open structure is that there are no limits on when and with whom one can work, other than those constraints from within the group. For example a skeletal timetable may be constructed on the first day of a workshop with six events which appear to have a great deal of interest. However alternative sessions will also be added. Initially this may be an individual naming a topic of interest. Others may join and a session will take place, at a time decided by that group which may involve two people or the whole group.

This can create a dynamic learning experience with different sessions taking place and different ideas being recounted and described over meals or plenary sessions. Alternatively, and often at the beginning of the programme the group may tend to cluster together, possibly for fear of missing something, so that only one event takes place at any time.

The Open Syllabus

The MAML brochure explains the Open Syllabus:

> Given the emphasis on a high degree of self-directed learning it is not possible to
>
> pre-specify precisely what topics will be covered. It is possible, however, to state
>
> the primary focuses of the syllabus and indicate some of the topics likely to be
>
> included....

The Open Syllabus, intended as a facilitative element to enable participants to

choose the most interesting, appropriate topic for them at different stages of the

programme, also incorporates some uncertainty for the participants and a great deal of

challenge for the tutors.

Summary

The two programmes described above share an emphasis on a high degree of self-

managed learning. The DMS/MSc draw from influences such as the Tavistock

psychodynamic approach, Revans, and action learning, Lewin, and the experimental

ideas of the national training laboratories, and are infused by the values of the 'founding

fathers' who included two nonconformist preachers, a couple of ex-shop stewards, one of

them a Communist party member, and a worldly, ardent humanist. It therefore began

with multiple perspectives, and this has evolved further with infusion of post-

structuralist, post-colonial and feminist influences, yet the course remains imbued with a

strong shared ethos of the principles outlined above. Figure 5 summarises 'the

persistence of competing theories and multiple diagnoses' (Edmondson, 1996, p.5) that

underpin the DMS/MSc.

Figure 5: Multiple Perspectives[3]

Figure 5 summarises the Core Principles of the DMS/MSc

Psychodynamic organisation

Systems thinking (Senge) Soft systems

Power

Post-modern perspectives - Identity

Perspectives on organisation diagnosis and

Learning (Argyris) theories in use

Process consultation

Post-structuralist – network perspectives

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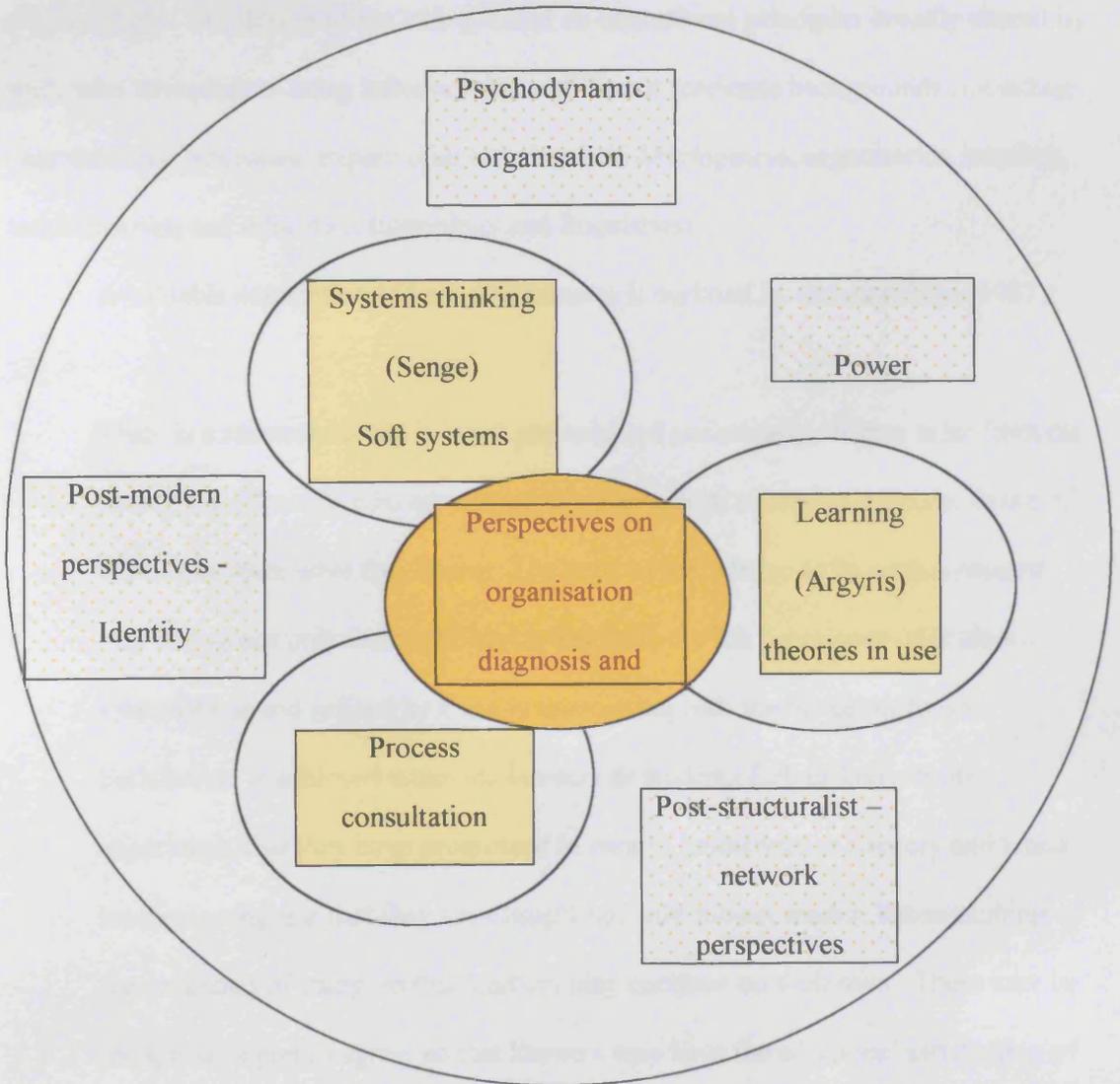
[3] Argyris, Checkland, Senge and Schein cited in Edmondson, 1996, p.5

The MA in Management Learning is based on self-directed learning principles. The programme's inception was an attempt to capture the values of educational liberalism within an academic qualification. It was a significant step in traditional higher education, attempting to achieve a 'Synergy of academic discipline and personal development' (Snell, 1989). The design of the MA is based on educational principles broadly shared by staff, who nevertheless bring influences from different academic backgrounds (including organisational behaviour, experiential learning, self-development, organisation learning, action learning and education technology and linguistics).

A valuable description of both programmes is outlined by Groombridge (1987);

There is a curriculum, but it is not promulgated unilaterally. It may arise from the prompting of people who are not regarded as expert, as well as from the desire of experts to share what they know. The body of knowledge to be communicated may derive not only from scholarship but from the life experience of students, systematised and refined by them in association with instructors or tutors. Satisfaction is achieved when the learners or students feel, or know from experience, that they have progressed in insight, sensitivity or mastery and when teachers recognise that they have taught not only subject matter, but something of the processes of study, so that learners may continue on their own. There may be tests, if both parties agree, so that learners may have the additional satisfaction of having their knowledge objectively and publicly assessed and accredited (p.15).

In this chapter I have described the two programmes as the setting for participative assessment. I have explained the principles behind the courses and highlighted some of the issues that emerge within the programme.

However, it is also important to clarify and emphasise the main objectives of the thesis, which are firstly; to understand the lived experience of students involved in participative assessment as it is practised on the DMS/MSc and the MA in Management Learning, whilst also questioning the assumption that participative assessment actually empowers the students who take part in them; secondly, to explore the significance of social dynamics encountered during the process of participative assessment. The exploration of these issues lies at the heart of this thesis.

The next chapter highlights the problematic propositions for alternative, more participative approaches to assessment. It examines the significance of social dynamics and power relations and challenges the implicit assumption that such practices necessarily bring about equality.

CHAPTER TWO

Participative Assessment, Power Relations and 'Critical Learning'

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Summary

Participative Assessment, Power Relations and 'Critical' Learning

Introduction

Participative forms of assessment occupy some unusual education territory. In addition to challenging conventional canons of academia, they offer the potential to generate insights into individual and group behaviour in a crucial area of educational practice.

The problems of assessing traditionally taught courses have attracted considerable attention. Much of the evidence points to the inadequacies of the procedures and approaches currently used in management education. The view that appears to be emerging is that traditional assessment methods encourage a narrow, instrumental approach to learning that places the emphasis on the reproduction of what is presented at the expense of critical thinking, deep understanding and independent activity.

Participative assessment is often advanced as a corrective to the instrumentalist tendencies of traditional methods. However, much of this response is also dominated by the advocacy of techniques and procedures. Little attention is accorded to more fundamental underpinning processes.

In adult and professional education there has been growing interest in developing more participative approaches to assessment, whether peer (carried out by fellow students), collaborative (jointly evaluated by learners and the tutor), or consultative (collectively between self, peer and tutor but with ultimate responsibility resting with the tutor) (Reynolds and Trehan 2000) These developments are particularly appropriate in

the case of participative courses which are designed more generally to provide students with opportunities for influencing the content of the curriculum, the education methods used, or the choice of topics for assignments. But assessment is not simply another aspect of education method. Its association with accreditation and its function in generating the grounds for withholding or granting of qualifications makes it a primary location for power relations. The effects of judgements made on individuals' careers as well as the evaluation by themselves or by others ensures that assessment is experienced by students as being of considerable significance.[1]

Usually however, propositions for alternative forms of assessment have been based on humanistic, student-centred aspirations for equality rather than on an analysis of the assessment process in terms of institutional power. A notable exception to this observation is Heron (1979) who argues that:

> Assessment is the most political of all educational processes; it is where
>
> issues of power are most at stake. If there is no staff/student collaboration
>
> in assessment, then staff exert a stranglehold that inhibits the development
>
> of collaboration with respect to all other processes (p.13)

In professional education, where there is a growing interest in more 'critical' pedagogies (see for example Barnett, 1997 – with regards to higher education, and French and Grey, 1996 – in relation to management education), correspondingly critical perspectives on assessment are, for the most part, absent.

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[1] Acknowledgement. The material on which this chapter is based was also presented at the 2nd International Connecting Learning and Critique Conference, Lancaster University (Trehan 1999)

More than any other aspect of education, assessment embodies power relations between the institution and its students, with tutors as intermediaries - custodians of the institution's rule and practices. A re-evaluation of assessment methods might therefore be expected to be a prominent feature of a critically based educational programme – particularly one which aims for pedagogical consistency in both curriculum and teaching methodology – and should involve less hierarchical relationships between tutors and students.

The case for some form of participative assessment would seem therefore to be a necessary prerequisite for critically based professional education, given its place as the most explicit site of power relations in the educational process. It is also necessary to take account of the social and cultural bases of power which influence relationships among students themselves and which are likely to be central to their experience of collaborative assessment. Yet these aspects are equally absent from accounts of such approaches and propositions for peer assessment seem to assume that equality is ensured simply by removing the tutor from the process.

The intention of this chapter is to highlight problematic propositions for alternative, more participative approaches and to consider the complex political and social dynamics of student groups of mixed age, gender, ethnicity and experience, and the ways these processes are implicated in assessment – particularly its more participative versions. The chapter provides first an overview of alternative assessment practices, their rationale and their influences from participative pedagogies more generally (*Participative forms of assessment within management education*). The next section questions the assumption that such approaches actually empower the students who take part in them, and explores the significance of social differences encountered during the

process (*The Significance of Power Relations in Participative Assessment*). The final section looks at the implication for assessment practice and the role of tutors, particularly in the context of more critically disposed educational designs.

Participative Forms of Assessment

Assessment is a difficult term to define and has a variety of meanings depending on the context in which the term is used. In education, assessment involves one or more persons taking responsibility for monitoring and making judgement about aspects of knowledge and learning. Qualifying terms like self-managed, peer, collaborative, participative, and consultative, are often surrounded by confusion and ambiguity.

This has resulted in a proliferation of terms which would be difficult enough if they were all exact synonyms, but the problem is made worse by the fact that authors use the same term to indicate different practices and sometimes use different terms to indicate the same practice. So when critically scrutinising any of them it is important to discover what is actually meant theoretically and practically. ***Within this chapter participative assessment is defined as a process in which students and tutors share the responsibility for making evaluations and judgements about their work and the work of others, gaining insight into how such judgements are made and finding appropriate ways to communicate them.*** The criteria for assessment may be fixed, or there may be an opportunity for students to influence them also.

At most, this can mean – as with students on the UCE Postgraduate course in Management Development – being involved in peer assessment in substantive evaluation of written work and in reaching agreement with student colleagues as to its grading. Students spend most of their time working collectively in an action learning set. Peer

assessment is based on each student's understanding of their chosen topic area[2] and how it relates to the practice of management. Assessment takes place through discussion in the learning set and a member of staff is present to facilitate the group's decision-making, but not to pass judgement on the assignments. The students are expected to devise and use an agreed pro forma appraisal and assessment sheet on which to record comments and grades. In this sense students' dialogue and social support can be fundamental to the assessment process. The learning set is also a source of diversity in gender, ethnicity, age and occupation, where issues mirror some of the patterns in organisations and society. Students are encouraged to reflect and learn from their experience of, and feelings towards, the social dynamics which result from this diversity, as described in chapter one.

The MA in Management Learning at Lancaster involves a consultative procedure for assessment in which each student, their learning group of four or five colleagues and the tutor, contribute comments on each paper or project and agree a mark. The criteria are part of the course 'givens', and a factor with which each group must engage is that while students are expected to take part in marking each other's work, the tutor will have more experience of interpreting the criteria. The tutor is ultimately responsible for ensuring that the learning group agrees a mark and for recording both marks and comments. Rarely, a disputed case is carried forward to the examining board for resolution.

It must be said that the introduction of both these examples of participative assessment predates the advent of the critical turn in management education, owing more

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[2] Footnote: Chosen topic areas can range from change management issues, Power Gender, Human Resource management, Organisational Development.

to influences from student-centred or self-managed learning approaches. However I would argue that in principle, the procedures are consistent with the emphasis in critical pedagogies on engaging reflexively with power relations in the classroom. Arguably there is additional value for the students who are involved in similar processes and dynamics as those which arise during their work as professionals who manage, select, appraise and make judgements of various kinds about other people.

The emphasis on students learning from each other in small groups, and the opportunity for their evaluation of each other's work to influence the assessment outcome, would seem to provide the foundations for 'diffusing authority along horizontal lines' (Giroux, 1988, p.39). Giroux continues, 'under such conditions, social relations of education marked by dominance, subordination, and an uncritical respect for authority can be effectively minimised' (p.39). But does sharing in the procedures of assessment necessarily result in more critical or democratic processes? Do methods that are less hierarchical actually weaken 'the traditional correspondence between grades and authority' (p.38)? And as well as the more obvious distinctions between tutor and student, what of the cultural bases of power which influence relationships among the students themselves? Are they not also likely to affect the assessment process? These questions are absent from most accounts of participative approaches, propositions for peer assessment for example seeming to assume that equality can be ensured by removing the tutor from the procedure. There is considerable literature on assessment stretching back over sixty years. Work on student self-assessment was reported as early as the 1930s – much of it based in the United States – and most of this up until the 1960s was concerned with comparisons between the grades generated by students and those generated by their teachers. Interest in other aspects of self-assessment increased in the

early 1970s, especially in professional schools such as medicine and teaching. Here, a shift of emphasis occurred towards developing ways in which students and practitioners could appraise their own work. Although concern with grading still existed, other issues began to be examined, for example, engaging students in activities which related to their future professional work and the role of peers in assessment featured more strongly than self-assessment.

More conventional assessment techniques in use have been developed for courses in which teachers, or an external accrediting body, determine learning objectives and the curriculum, as well as the way assessment is carried out. Increasingly, however, it has been recognised that for many purposes it is educationally more appropriate for students to be more actively involved (see for example Heron 1979, Fry 1990, Cunningham 1991, Gentle 1991 and Race 1991), and this in turn has led to considerable debate and interest in alternative methods of assessment, prompted by concern that much conventional practice in the area of assessment is not consistent with such goals of education as 'developing independent learners and critical thinkers' (Boud, 1986 p.14). Engagement in such practice Boud argues, helps to encourage critical faculties and wean students from dependence on the assessment of others. Rowntree (1987), in his critique of mainstream practice, argues that traditional assessment processes are themselves contradictory. The notion of the assessor as an all-knowing, all-powerful entity is fundamentally flawed, because it fails to take sufficient account of the biases of the assessor and of the potentially prejudicial nature of the process. He argues that conventional assessment practices make the measurable important instead of making the import measurable.

As a consequence of these concerns, the 1980s and 1990s has seen a growth in the literature on self and peer assessment in the context of traditional teaching and in a

number of publications attention has been drawn to issues such as; comparisons of

teacher student ratings (Boud 1986, Falchikov 1989); the introduction of self assessment

practices into undergraduate courses (Boud 1986); work on peer, self and tutor

assessment (Stefani 1994); peer tutoring (Saunder 1992); and engaging students in self

and peer assessment (Howard 1991). And in the past twenty years, the topic of self, peer

and collaborative assessment has begun to be studied more critically (see for example

Boud, 1981 and 1989; Cunningham, 1991; Heron, 1981; Somervell, 1993 and Reynolds

and Trehan 2000).

Changing the role of the teacher has implications for assessment and vice versa.

The assumption that students are not only capable of learning for themselves but

competent to evaluate their own and others' learning challenges the traditional

interpretation of the tutor's role. Equally, if learners take substantial control over their

own learning, to then expose them to traditional modes of assessment seems

inappropriate (Cunningham 1991). This is true of many applications of experiential

learning where assessment methods often fail to reflect the changes in staff and students'

roles and relationships (see Boot and Reynolds, 1983 and the response by Hearn, 1983).

Some writers however have pointed out that a shift to less hierarchical

arrangements in education generally and assessment in particular, runs counter to the

increasing tendency for assessment in education to be linked to economic and political

considerations. As Guthrie (1990) argues:

> More than ever before, education and economics are linked. National
>
> educational development is increasingly a function of economic change,
>
> and conversely, educational change increasingly is intended to foster
>
> national economic development... this alters the assessment environment

and thus provokes tension between conventional evaluation norms and

procedures and the evolving expectation of the political system. (pp. 109,

110).

Similarly, Somervell (1993) has commented on the tensions between current systems and

evolving expectations of the political system, with greater accountability on the one hand

and on the other, trends towards more democratic modes of assessment, involving

students in more autonomous learning.

The Participative Tradition within Management Education

Participative approaches have played an important part in the development of adult, and

particularly professional education. Influenced by earlier educationalists Carl Rogers and

Malcolm Knowles, and more recently by 'radical' and feminist pedagogy, there has been

a growing momentum for more democratic forms of education, both as theoretical

propositions and to a lesser extent applications in practice. Within the last decade in

particular, an increasing emphasis on the need for a 'critical' pedagogy has given fresh

impetus to the development of a more participative, less hierarchical educational

methodology. But, as I observed earlier in this chapter, these propositions seldom

address assessment.

Management education, with a long-standing tradition amongst some of its

practitioners for drawing on participative influences, and the current interest being shown

in the development of a critical approach to (see for example French and Grey, 1996) is a

case in point. This area of professional studies exemplifies the inconsistencies between

more radical proposals for content and method and the tendency to leave the traditional

mode of assessment untouched. The adoption of participative methods into professional and management development has been due in part to the dispiriting effects of sending adults 'back to school', and the need for a greater sense of immediacy. On a broader front, participative approaches in the education of managers were also influenced by the 'organisational development' movement which began in the 1960s. Participative approaches were adopted in training programmes designed to support the democratisation in the workplace – at least in the management levels.

To a greater extent, however, interest in participative management derived from a more instrumental source. As Hollway (1991) points out, a less democratic management 'style' could result in resistance by subordinates 'which made it more difficult for management to exercise control' (1991, p.117). And, as Pateman (1970, p.68) had observed earlier, given that the interest in participation was as 'just one management technique among others' in the interests of organisational efficiency, it is not surprising that the concept of participation has become weakened to signify 'minimal interaction', such as merely present when a decision was made for example. In considering the place of more participative assessment approaches in management education, it is therefore important to note the distinction between participation as idealised and as practised.

The corresponding aim of participation in an education and training context has been based on similar reasoning that choice over what is learned makes relevance to work more likely. Whatever the motive, the participative movement resulted in corresponding educational methods being drawn from self-directed and student-centred learning. Through the 1960s and 1970s management and organisational development has become associated with simulations, role plays, sensitivity training or 'T' groups, team development and 'outdoor development'. Influenced by these developments – albeit to a

lesser extent, due to the dominance of the didactic tradition within academia –

postgraduate and post-experience management programmes, already incorporating the

case study method, came to emphasise the value of working with managers' day-to-day

experience, as in Action Learning (Pedler, 1983) Action Research (Sandford, 1981) and

Experiential Learning (McGill, (1989). Experiential learning has its roots in social

psychology (Kurt Lewin), and cognitive psychology (Jean Piaget), therapeutic

psychology (Jung), client-centred therapy (Carl Rogers) and gestalt therapy (Fritz Perl),

as well as having early recognition by John Dewey: '... Education is the intelligently

directed development of the possibilities inherent in ordinary experience' (1938, cited by

Weil and McGill, 1989, p.248). Experiential learning can derive from any event, in any

context that an individual does something, although it is not merely learning-by-doing, as

asserted by Weil and McGill: 'It involves the active transformation and integration of

different forms of experience. These processes lead to new understandings and the

development of a wide range of capabilities to behave more effectively, in what Argyris

and Schon refer to as 'situations of action' (1989, p.246).

David Kolb (1975) is usually accredited as the exponent of learning theory

underpinning experiential learning, although Reg Revans developed action learning, a

particular form of experiential learning, over the preceding two decades who described

action learning as 'learning to learn-by-doing with and from others who are also learning

to learn-by-doing'. (1980, p.288) '...it is by reflecting upon what one is doing that one

sees how to do it better' (1980, p.295). Weil and McGill argue:

experiential learning enables us to engage with the interralatedness of self and the social context, inner experience and outer experience, content and process, and different ways of knowing. (1989, p.246).

They go on:

We currently interpret experiential learning as the process whereby people, individually and in association with others, engage in direct encounter and then purposefully reflect upon, validate, transform, give personal meaning to and seek to integrate their different ways of knowing. Experiential learning therefore enables the discovery of possibilities that may not be evident from direct experience alone (Weil and McGill, 1989, p.248).

This epitomises common characteristics of experiential learning, based on purposeful reflection of personal experience.

Problematic aspects of these associations with experiential learning theory must be an important element of any review of participative approaches and, as pointed out earlier, highlight the question of the sense in which a particular method can be said to be participative. It is necessary to make a distinction between being 'active' (however enjoyable or entertaining or welcome that may be) and 'participative', in which authority and power is sufficiently shared so that all those involved are able to influence decisions and the procedures for reaching decisions which subsequently affect them. This principle is of no less importance in any critique of participative interpretations of assessment. The ways in which experiential learning is advocated within 'Critical' pedagogy offer

valuable insights into how people learn, but in not attending to the social dynamics of learning groups (e.g. Vince, 1996; Rigg and Trehan, 1999) they do not shed light on how social dynamics impact on the learning process. This is where ideas from 'Critical' pedagogy have been able to extend experiential learning.

Exploring Critical Management Learning

Management learning has emerged as a field that goes beyond ideas of management education. Burgoyne and Reynolds (1997) see as central to it an emphasis on 'understanding the whole person as mediated through experience', thus paying attention to 'more connectedness to daily personal and professional life and, in avoiding the passivity thought to be associated with more conventional educational methods, as offering managers more opportunity for development than seemed possible in focusing exclusively on the acquisition of knowledge and skills' (p.18). This fits with Watson and Harris' (1999) concept of the individual as an emergent entity, a concept which also sits well with the influential writing on experiential learning and reflective practice in management and professional contexts by Kolb (1984) and Schon (1983), Watson and Harris say

> …the process of how people enter managerial work and 'learn to manage'
> has to be understood in the light of the individual's life, identity and
> biography as a whole. There is a clear continuity between the
> management of one's personal life and the formal managerial work done
> in the organisation (Watson and Harris, p.527).

Similarly Reynolds and Trehan (2000) argue management education is an

educational domain where collaborative assessment might be expected, given increasing concern amongst management educators for introducing a more critical perspective into their practice. However, whilst illustrations are emerging that apply to the curriculum (Nord and Jermier, 1992); or to the introduction of critical analysis through the materials used (Thompson and McGivern, 1996); or through the selection of analytical frameworks (Summers et al, 1997); and through encouraging students to apply critical ideas to their professional experience (Grey et al, 1996), participative assessment is notable for its absence.

Critical learning has perhaps always been an aspiration of scholarly activity, as understood to be 'an activity engaged in by the wise scholar and the wise man and woman of action' (Watson, 1999, p.4) . A traditional view is that to be critical is to evaluate what is good and bad, to be 'concerned with giving reasons for one's beliefs and actions, analysing and evaluating one's own and other people's reasoning, devising and constructing better reasoning' (Thomson, 1996, p.2). Watson uses the term critical again to describe how

> *Critical commonsense* analysis tends to start from a consideration of the most obvious or likely explanation of what is going on: the everyday commonsense explanation in fact. But it then goes on to ask whether things are really as they at first seem. Alternative explanations are considered and attention is paid to available evidence in judging the various rival explanations.' (Watson, 2002, in preparation)

He goes on: 'being critical in the sense of constantly questioning taken-for-granted ideas and practices'. Here critical learning is a process, the essence of

questioning, the use of critique: 'the application of all the traditional scholarly criteria of rigour, challenge to taken-for-granted assumptions, debate, logical consistency and the setting of claims to valid generalisation and theories against the best evidence that can be mustered about what occurs in the world.' (Watson, 2002, in preparation)

Critical management learning combines roots in radical adult education, influenced amongst others by Freire (1972), Giroux (1981), and Habermas (1972), and in critical theory, such as feminism, marxism or poststructuralism. Some of the arenas in which critical learning has been most extensively written about and deployed include: Paulo Freire's 'Pedagogy of the Oppressed'; feminist and post-colonialist pedagogies.

Critical education broadly, is described by Reynolds as manifesting such key principles as:

'questioning the assumptions and taken-for-granteds embodied in both theory and professional practice;

foregrounding the processes of power and ideology subsumed within the social fabric of institutional structures, procedures and practices;

confronting spurious claims of rationality and revealing the sectional interests which can be concealed by them;

working towards an emancipatory ideal – the realisation of a more just society based on fairness and democracy'
(Reynolds, 1998, p.5)

Critical reflection, as a form of critical education, is also seen to embody these principles (Kemmis, 1985). As such it differs from the more instrumental reflection promoted by experiential learning advocates, such as Kolb (1984) or Schon (1983), which does not encourage such a fundamental critique, which Collins describes as the facility to:

> put aside the natural attitude of their everyday life-world and adopt a
> sceptical approach towards taken-for-granted innovations "necessary for
> progress", supposedly "acceptable" impositions as the price of progress,
> and seemingly authoritative sources of information... (Collins, 1991,
> p.94)

Processes of ' Critical' Thinking

Processes of critical thinking in practice are rooted in reflection, either in the form of self-reflection or as of the relationships between individuals, collectivities and society. For example, Carr and Kemmis suggest individuals 'reflect upon their own situations and change them through their own actions' (1986, p.130). For Alvesson and Willmot:

> Critical Theory seeks to highlight, nurture and promote the potential of
> human consciousness to reflect critically upon such oppressive practices,
> and thereby facilitate the extension of domains of autonomy and
> responsibility. (1996, p.13)

Alongside the cognitive tools of analytical critique and application of Critical Theory, the methods of critical thinking borrow from psychoanalysis, using 'critical self-reflection' as a means of 'bringing to consciousness those distortions in patients' self-formation

processes which prevent a correct understanding of themselves and their actions. (Carr

and Kemmis, 1986, p.138). For Collins critical reflection describes the facility to:

> put aside the natural attitude of their everyday life-world and adopt a
>
> sceptical approach towards taken-for-granted innovations 'necessary for
>
> progress', supposedly 'acceptable' impositions as the price of progress,
>
> and seemingly authoritative sources of information… (1991, p.94)

Perhaps the fundamental distinctions between critical thinking as informed by

critical theory, and critical thinking based on questioning and rigour, lie in the

conceptions of power, which is privileged within critical theory, but does not inform

critical thinking. How power might be conceived is a question I will return to later in the

chapter *(The Significance of Power Relations in Participative Assessment)*.

This contrasts sharply with the use of the term 'critical thinking' by critical management

writers, where it has a specific meaning, still partially referring to a process, but primarily

concerned with outcomes, namely to achieve a society with social justice and free from

oppression (howsoever defined). Critical thinking here is intertwined with the use of and

generation of Critical Theory (abbreviated by some authors as CT). As Alvesson and

Willmott see it:

> Critical Theory …challenges the rationality of the acquisitiveness,
>
> divisiveness and destructiveness that accompanies the relentless expansion
>
> of globalizing capitalism as nation states compete with each other to
>
> produce the most favourable conditions for investment …The intent of CT

is to challenge the legitimacy and counter the development of oppressive institutions and practices.

(1996, p.12/13).

Guba and Lincoln also emphasise outcomes, suggesting the aim of critical inquiry is 'the "critique and transformation" of the social, political, cultural, economic, ethnic and gender structures that constrain and exploit humankind'. (1994, p.113). Likewise, Carr and Kemmis exhibit a concern for the outcome of critical thinking; 'to articulate a view of theory that has the central task of emancipating people from the "positivist domination of thought"...' (1986, p.130). Within these views, there is an unashamed partiality in the use of critical thinking, which often appears to privilege outcome over process. It may be unfair to present the ends and means as a dichotomy, in that other writers centre on praxis, and an interplay between reflection and action, even to argue that the process of reflection is a transformatory action.

Reynolds (1997), drawing from ideas of Giroux (1981), introduces the concept of content focused radicals and process based radical pedagogies. Content radicals disseminate radical material, in the sense of critical theories and concepts, alternatives to technocratic management education. Typically there is no challenge to the contradictions in power relationships between lecturers/institutions and students, and no focus on the power dynamics within student collectivities. Process radicals attempt to address power asymmetries of the traditional teacher/learner relationship, for example, taking an experiential learning approach, using action research, the conception of tutors and participants as co-learners in a learning community or action learning set, and negotiated curricula.

The hopes of proponents of critical theory have been concerned with transformation, either of society, making it more democratic or 'just', or at the level of the individual, procuring emancipation. Some of the perspectives of critical learning, critical education or critical pedagogy are explored in relation to assessment.

For the most part, the critical curriculum in management education has been disseminated through traditional methods, but increasingly there is interest in the contribution which participative methods could make to a critical pedagogy. Giroux (1981) has emphasised the value of earlier androgogists because they have 'called into question the political and normative underpinnings of traditional classroom pedagogical styles' (1981, p.65). More recently there are a growing number of propositions for pedagogies which apply a critical perspective to method as well as to content. So, for example, the Learning Community (Reynolds, 1997) offers an opportunity for choice in the direction and content of learning through shared decision-making within the course. Students involved in this approach, as they would be in Willmott's (1997) proposal for 'critical action learning', have an opportunity to base their learning on their professional experience and to select the ideas with which to make sense of it. The learning community and 'critical' action learning illustrate possibilities of both a methodology and a curriculum which reflect a critical perspective.

A key rationale for encouraging management learners to be critical lies in the realisation of how powerful managers now are in the world, yet how poorly traditional management education has prepared them for considering questions of power and responsibility. Alvesson and Willmott argue (1992) that the practice of management has a dominant effect on the lives of an organisation's employees, its customers and wider society, extending even to the lives of unborn generations through the environmental

impact of an organisations processes. Because of the rise of managers' social importance, French and Grey (1996, p.2) reason that '...the management academy has, for better or worse, a crucial role in producing and reproducing the practices of management.'

The traditional view of management education and development has been a technocratic 'development of effective managers', as epitomised by the Constable and McCormick (1987) and Handy (1988) reports. Implicit within this tradition has been the presumption that management knowledge and practice is objective and value-free. Many writers have challenged this, and argued the need to deconstruct the discourse of practice; for example, Edwards (1997, p.155) says '..."practice" is already informed by overt or covert discursive understandings and exercises of power.'; and Schein, writing on shared assumptions about nature, reality and truth, states:

> A fundamental part of every culture is a set of assumptions about what is
> real, how one determines or discovers what is real...how members of a
> group determine what is relevant information, how they interpret
> information, how they determine when they have enough of it to decide
> whether or not to act, and what action to take.'   (1992, p.97)

In this sense a basis of critical management learning has been that it is no longer acceptable that management educators allow managers to maintain the illusion that their choices and actions are without political consequences. Porter et al, suggest that the purpose of critical management thinking is to develop in managers 'habits of critical thinking...that prepare them for responsible citizenship and personally and socially

rewarding lives and careers.' (Porter et al, 1989, p.71).

> For Willmott the challenge for critical management learning is:

> To envision and advance the development of discourses and practices that
> can facilitate the development of 'management' from a divisive
> technology of control into a collective means of emancipation. (1997,
> p.175)

My interest in the assessment process is because if it is not critically addressed, attempts to provide a less hierarchical education are undermined by reinforcement of the institution's control over the granting of qualifications and through unquestioned acceptance of the tutor's authority. Participative assessment would be more consistent with the aims and principles of a critical pedagogy than top-down or unilateral grading systems and could be incorporated into the course design. Otherwise, criticality may be claimed in content and method but assessment – the clearest manifestation of power within the educational programme – is unchanged. In the author's current experience, the application of the 'learning community' described briefly above does involve a participative form of assessment. The sections which follow are based as much on my concerns in observing such approaches as on my commitment to incorporating them.

The Significance of Power Relations in Participative Assessment

In this section I will explore the significance of power in participative assessment and the question of empowerment, drawing on the ideas of critical and feminist pedagogy. By illuminating social and power relations embedded within participative forms of

assessment, I hope it will be possible to present a more contextualised and processual account than the proceduralist recipes that Boud (1981) saw as dominating the study of this vital aspect of educational practice.

The Social Complexity of Power and Authority

The literature I have summarised so far *(The Participative Tradition within Management Education)* has highlighted that assessment is a complex and dynamic process. I would argue that the debates on alternative assessment methods raise a further and important issue. If we are to accept that the ability to assess one's own work as well as others is an important element in the learning process, then questions of power and authority in particular need to be examined.

Foucault's conception of power/knowledge can be contrasted with traditional economic concepts of power. In the latter not only is power deduced from, and in the service of, the economy, it is also seen as a commodity. Power is something externally held or possessed, embodied in a person, an institution or a structure, to be used for individual, group, organisational or class purposes. It is something to be acquired or seized , 'a system of domination exerted by one group over another', Foucault (1981).

Conceiving power as a commodity prompts the questions. Who holds power? Or where does it reside? It assumes a central organising focus or source. Traditional concepts of power pose a dualism between agency and structure.

Foucault's understanding of power relations operates on a different set of assumptions from economic models of power. He argues

I hardly ever use the word Power …when one speaks of power, people

think immediately of a political structure, a government, a dominant social

class, the master facing the slave and so on. That is not at all what I think

of when I speak of relationships of power.

(Foucault 1991, p.11)

For Foucault (1983), the analysis of power relations within a society cannot be

reduced to the study of a series of institutions, class or the state. Foucault states, 'in

analysing power relations from the standpoint of institutions one lays oneself open to

seeking explanation and the origin of the former in the latter' (p.222). Power, in other

words, is normally seen as emanating from and being in the service of institutions. Thus,

Foucault believes we need to analyse institutions from the standpoint of power relations

not vice versa. To understand power within participative assessment we have to

understand the mechanics of power relations within assessment. For Foucault, power is

associated with practices, techniques and procedures. Power is relational, it is not a

possession. It is exercised rather than held, a property of relations, manifest through

practices. Finally power does not have a necessary central point of locus, but is

employed at all levels, has many dimensions and is evident in all social networks. Thus,

power within participative assessment has to be analysed in all its diverse forms, in its

exercise or practice, and not limited to centralised institutional locus.

Reconceptualising power as a relational activity means power cannot be portrayed

as external, something which operates on something or someone. It is integral to that

relation. Power is positive and creative, not just negative or repressive. As Foucault

(1977) argues, 'we must cease once and for all to describe the effects of power in

negative terms: it excludes, it represses, it censors, it abstracts, it masks, it conceals. In fact power produces, it produces reality; it produces domains of objects and rituals of truth.' (p.194)

Within participative assessment understanding power as a relational activity means we need to recognise that power operates in areas which may be obscured by traditional theories. As Fraser (1989) argues, 'power is as present in the most apparently trivial details and relations of everyday life.' (p.26) This is further reinforced by Foucault (1991) who points out the identification of the nature of power, how it operates as a microphysics, and how it is experienced in practice is the foundation of a political agenda which 'allows for the questioning of the mode of existence and the functioning of discourse in the name of political practice.' (p.68) For Foucault (1983), power exists with three distinct qualities, firstly, origins (why), secondly, nature (what) and thirdly, manifestations (how). The implication of his work is that we broaden analysis from the 'what' and 'why of power to the 'how'.

> How not in the sense of how does it manifest itself? but By what
> means is it exercised and what happens when individuals exert power over
> others...'   (Foucault, 1983, p.217)

Thus a foucauldian analysis involves an ascending analysis of power, this means to delineate the way power is exercised, concretely and in detail. It is a study of how mechanisms of power affect everyday lives. In short, power must be analysed as a micro process of social life.

In his commentary on assessment models and processes, Heron (1981b) argues that the prevailing model for assessing student work in higher education is authoritarian.

Within this framework, staff exercise unilateral, intellectual authority by holding the power to make decisions. They determine what students learn, they design the programmes of learning, they determine the criteria for assessment and carry out the assessment of each student. Students do not hold any power in this process, and do not participate in decision-making about their learning at all. Heron goes on to argue that this entails a high degree of social control by an academic elite:

> The issue …is a political one; that is, it is to do with the exercise of
>
> power. And power is simply to do with who makes decisions about
>
> whom. (1981b, p.56)

The issue of power and social control is raised in a different way by Cunningham (1991), who criticises those liberal minded academics who espouse a radical stance in relation to assessment, but are then unable to de-emphasise their subject expertise and their presentation skills to break down traditional boundaries.

Freire (1970, 1973) argued that authority is more than the simple imposition of arbitrar y power by one group over another. For him it represented a combination of historical, contemporary, ideological and material practices that are never completely successful but always embody contradictions. In Freire's view, education represented both a struggle for meaning and a struggle over power relations. He placed the emphasis on a critical consciousness which emphasises a process of co-learning, as teacher/learner and learner/teacher. Nevertheless, Freire took the view that the teacher is never without authority.

> For me the question is not for the teacher to have less and less authority.
>
> The issue is that the democratic teacher never, never transforms authority

into authoritarianism. He or she can never stop being an authority or having authority (Shor and Freire 1987, p.91).

Similarly, Jarvis (1988) views social structures and their relationship to the learning process as a constraining force. He argued:

Every person is born into a society that has already established its own culture; a concept which may be regarded as the sum total of knowledge, values, beliefs, attitude of society etc. This culture appears to be objective to the individual and is, in part, acquired by everyone in society through their socialisation process, and through other similar processes such as formal education (p.32).

However Jarvis notes that both the culture and the learners have a temporal dimension, in that not only is the person changing as a result of the experience of social living, but the 'objectified culture' that is being transmitted is always undergoing change. Change being the norm in social living.

More recently, and as a development – though not unquestioningly – of Freire's views, 'critical' pedagogists have argued that much more is involved than simply raising consciousness. Learning is not seen as solely an individual process, but should lead to social and political change. For example, Gore (1983) locates her work within the discourses of radical pedagogy in which are located the contemporary discourses of critical and feminist pedagogy. She is concerned with addressing questions such as 'How does discourse function? Where is it to be found? How does it get produced and regulated, and what are its social effects?' (p.62). Gore's focus is on practices within

institutions and disciplines of critical and feminist pedagogy. Those issues are then situated in social theoretical discussions about power and knowledge. She argues that critical approaches focus on pedagogy as constitutive of power relations, making power a central category of their analysis.

Proponents of critical pedagogy would claim that their view is not just another perspective on adult learning but a shift in ideology away from one based on individualistic functionalism, to one based on dialectics and collective action. Within critical pedagogy learning is embedded in an historical, social and material context. As Boud (1981) had argued earlier learners must seek to understand this in order to create an understanding which liberates both themselves and their fellow learners. Jarvis goes on to claim:

> Learning can never be value free, it must either work towards supporting
>
> the status quo or undermining it and replacing it with something which
>
> represents a better form of society (Jarvis; 1988; p.227)

Luke (1986) asserts that the dynamics of power and authority underpinning pedagogical relations are not easily dislodged by theoretical shifts from 'transmission to emancipatory or patriarchal to feminist pedagogy models, or from enlightenment concepts of undifferentiated subjectivity to postmodern difference' (1986 p.283)

Feminist and Post-Colonial Pedagogies

Feminist pedagogy shares with critical pedagogy, aspirations of individual and societal transformation, a desire for egalitarian classroom relations and the valuing of experiential learning (e.g. Welch, 1994). Gore (1993) argues that feminist pedagogy is concerned with

the teaching of feminism and methods that promote nonhierarchy, and Jackson - citing

Weiner (1994) suggests:

> Feminist pedagogy is one that questions the role and authority of the
>
> teacher, considers questions of difference, and considers personal
>
> experience . (1997, p.458)

Clearly within feminism, gendered power differences are fundamental, however,

several writers also highlight how women are not a unified category (Gore, 1993) and

discuss ways in which some women marginalise others (Acker, 1994), and how though

oppressed they can also be oppressors (Jackson, 1997). It is only within an anti-racist or

post-experience pedagogy that there has been elaboration of how black [3] women and men

experience marginalisation, the responses they make, and what a transformative

educational experience might be. Anti-racist or post-colonial pedagogy, like feminist and

critical pedagogies, also centres the idea of experiential learning, in the sense of starting

from the black student's social reality. However, the conception of oppression and of

power is different again. For bell hooks, who acknowledges great respect for Freire's

work, transformation is a struggle to work against a colonising mind-set towards:

> … that historical moment when one begins to think critically about the self
>
> and identity in relation to one's political circumstances. (1993, p.147)

---

[3] In choosing to use black, in preference to other terminology such as ethnic minority, minority ethnic, Black and Asian, I recognise its limitations and critics. I am aware that many 'postcolonial diasporic' women would not define themselves as black, and so in using it I am denying them the possibility of self-definition. However, the alternative language also suffers in this way. In using black I am also not assuming a universal sisterhood dichotomised from some fictitiously homogenous white sisterhood. I acknowledge religious, ethnic, cultural , class and other differences generate wide diversity amongst black women (Anthias and Yuval-Davies, 1992).

She suggests that the liberatory ideas which might contribute to this could mean the politics of race and class, not simply experiences shared by women. Omolade argues for the need to ground pedagogy in students' experience, in order to 'reveal the overlapping forms of oppression lived by women of color in this society.' (cited in Weiler, 1995, p.39). Collins (1991) rejects an additive approach to difference which starts from gender and adds on race or class, arguing the importance for analysing relations of domination of black women as arising from an interlocking system of race, class and gender oppression.

Empowerment or Manipulation?

It would be easy to assume that the problem of power and authority is simply confined to traditional assessment methods and that it is not so evident in more participative approaches. The dynamics of participative assessment would seem to suggest otherwise. Ellsworth (1992) points out that in the literature on critical pedagogy, there are central concepts – namely power, empowerment and student voice – which have become myths that, contrary to the rhetoric, perpetuate relations of domination. In the domain of management education, Dispenza (1996) voices the concern that by *'talking'* empowerment into existence we are adding to the politically correct language of the more modern education philosophies and techniques encouraged by Revans, Rogers, Pedler, Burgoyne and others (T Groups, experiential learning, action centred learning, problem-centred learning and the like) but that the articulation of such language often disguises a lack of imagination at an operational level in the classroom, and an unwillingness to change more comfortable didactic methods' (p.241).

Empowerment and enlightenment are contested terms. Empowerment and

enlightenment have both been criticised as implying there is a giver of power or light (the teacher) (e.g. Gore, 1993, Derrida, 1982) and the hegemony of the transformative intellectual is also challenged (e.g. Aronowitz and Giroux, 1985, Lather, 1991). Habermas' also uses terms such as democratic action and consensus to imply there is one best, obvious way people will act once they are enlightened as to the constraints on their lives. This is predicated on a simplistic, class dichotomised view of power in society, which has been challenged by feminist, postcolonialist and Foucauldian perspectives. Implicit within critical management learning is an assumption that new information or ideas will provoke a realignment within the learner that will lead to 'better' practice, in the sense of being less controlling, more democratic, and participatory in their managing actions. They may instead select to use their enhanced insights in more machiavellian ways.

It could be argued that critical approaches within management learning simply reflect and produce a more sophisticated exercising of control, whether intentionally or by default. Students are asked to believe they have a greater measure of control over their own learning and, whilst they may seemingly have greater control over operational processes, the nature of the underlying power relationships remain significantly unaffected. Gore argues that critical discourses on empowerment are presented as liberating because they challenge dominant discourses, not because they have proved liberatory for individuals or groups. Lather attacks what she sees as the current fashion for exalting empowerment as 'individual self-assertion, upward mobility and the psychological experience of feeling powerful' (1991, p.3). Ellsworth's (1992) challenge is that merely respecting difference does not lead to action that alters powerlessness of women or minorities. Learning communities can potentially create a hidden curriculum

of hierarchy and authoritarianism. Fostering both equality and community is difficult if people are caught in the trap of competing for domination and control alongside the struggle to survive psychologically. The ability to do so relies on members being ready and able to tolerate ambiguity and the loss of control, and to work with difference, not suppress it (Pedler, 1988). Anti-racist and feminist pedagogies also present many insights into ways in which critical management approaches are not necessarily inherently liberating or transformatory. Even when empowerment, self-awareness, raising consciousness and reflexivity are introduced, issues of power authority, consensus, peers, equality, race and gender remain problematic (Jarvis, 1987, McGill and Beaty, 1995, Vince, 1996, Reynolds and Trehan 2001)

Other voices also challenge the optimism of critical learning programmes, particularly along the interface with managers' work role. Reynolds (1998) articulates four possible pitfalls or hazards. The first is the potential for management students to resist engagement in critical reflection, because to do so would be to question their profession and challenge their status quo. Reed and Anthony (1992) suggest managers would find the approach 'irrelevant, unreal and impractical' (1992, p.607). Jackall (1988) implies managers would find it counter cultural to the pressures to conform to organisational ideologies. Reynolds (1998) secondly suggests that, relevant or not, management students might simply find the language of much critical theory impenetrable. The third hazard he outlines is the potential for managers to merely assimilate critical ideas into their existing perspective, without really unpicking the underlying assumptions and ideologies. The fourth danger relates to the potential adverse psychological and social consequences for individuals of engaging in critical reflection. As Reynolds cautions

it can prove unsettling, mentally or emotionally and a source of disruption at

home or at work...it carries the risk to employment and even – if we include

stress related illness – to life itself (1998, p.16)

Brookfield (1994) describes the dissonance produced by critical reflection, as the 'darker

side' of such an approach and drawing on Brookfield's ideas, Reynolds (1998) warns of

the production of cultural misfits, facing 're-entry' problems on their return to work,

feeling frustrated or powerless with their new awareness.

It would appear from these ideas that offering students more control over the

assessment process is not necessarily or inherently more liberating. Even when

empowerment, self awareness, 'raising consciousness' and reflexivity are introduced into

the assessment process, issues of power, authority and judgement remain problematic.

The more participative approaches to assessment can also represent a more subtle

disciplining technique for introducing power dynamics into play. Power relations within

participative assessment continue to condition people into accepting discipline by others

and to develop a type of self-discipline that can be understood through Foucault's

concept of governmentality. (Foucault,1979) It could be argued that governmentality is

exercised through the action of 'being one's own policeman', of managing one's own

practices. This understanding of 'self control' is an important aspect of the concept of

governmentality and can be applied to an understanding of the social processes involved

in participative assessment.

From this point of view it could be said that participative assessment represents a

process of normalisation whereby practices are sanctioned, not by an external authority or

an appeal to collective sentiments, but by mundane acts of self authorisation which

sustain in the practitioner as a compliant identity, a self-policing individual (Usher et al 1996, p.56). Applying Foucault's development of the idea of the panopticon as embodying the principle of surveillance, participative assessment could be seen as a shift from darkened cells of the traditional prison to the well lit panopticon cell, a device which, though seemingly more humane, has the more subtle effect of creating self disciplining subjects.

Orner (1992) argues that discourses of 'liberatory' pedagogy which claim to empower students do not overtly support relations in which students are monitored by others as they discipline themselves. However I would argue that Foucault's description of the panopticon does raise issues for whether participative assessment can be said to 'empower' students. Within a Foucauldian framework one would need to question the hidden curriculum of self-managed groups. As Orner highlights, the 'talking circle', which is a long cherished form of the democratic classroom, represents an expression of disciplinary power, the regulation of the self through the internalisation of the regulation by others. Similarly, Ball (1990) argues that confessional techniques used in pedagogical practices which encourage students to view the procedures of appraisal as part of the process of self understanding, self betterment and professional development is simply a more complex mechanism of monitoring and control.

Within the discourse of humanistic education, the learner is constituted as a meaning giving subject. Flowing from this are a number of pedagogical practices – student centredness, negotiated curricula and active learning. All of these are aimed at empowering the learner and encouraging autonomy. These terms are 'part of the everyday, taken for granted discourse that saturates (teachers') thought and action in humanistic education' (Usher and Edwards 1996, p.31). 'The learner', itself being a

particular subject position, is deemed to possess certain attributes, and thus a new, more 'humane' power/knowledge regime is hegemonic within educational discourse. These discourses empower students by constituting them as active learners, responsible for their own learning. The disciplinary regime of the academic institution is discerned in its deployment of assessment practices that entail surveillance (including self regulation), categorisation and recording, locating learners in a network which requires us to know ourselves, to reveal or confess ourselves. Therefore, as Foucault and others have argued, the disciplinary power and practices which decrease overt regulation, can in fact increase surveillance and regulation through covert and hidden means.

Vince (1996) argues that learning environments are a particularly telling arena for viewing negotiations on autonomy and dependence. Within participative assessment therefore, it is important to acknowledge socially constructed differences within learning groups and the inequalities of power that such differences can generate. As Vince highlights, active engagement with the consequence of such differences needs to be an integral aspect of educational processes.

I do not expect participative assessment to be comfortable, and as hooks (1993) points out, learning is unlikely to be without some anxiety or critical learning without a sense of personal struggle. But it would seem important to address the question of how students' assessment of each other might be affected by differences present in the learning groups. Unfortunately frameworks in common use are rarely adequate in the analysis of difference and power, let alone in acknowledging the part difference plays in participative approaches to assessment.

Operating assessment methods which encourage learners to be supportive to fellow learners, whilst at the same time developing their skills in critically evaluating the

work of others, is a challenging, complex process. At best participative methods empower students by constituting them as active learners, responsible for their own learning. Superficial applications in the interests of 'student involvement' within an unaltered disciplinary regime of the academic institution, engenders surveillance through self regulation, especially if students are required to reveal or confess themselves. While participative assessment can be supported from the principles of critical pedagogy, tutors need to be prepared and able to work with the complex social processes which are generated. If not, retaining traditional practice may be preferable, in spite of its inherent contradictions with the principles of critical pedagogy.

My support of participative assessment methods is based on the premise that they are more consistent with the aims and principles of a critical pedagogy than top-down, unilateral grading systems. If course content and methods are informed by a critical perspective, its assessment procedures should reflect examination and critique of power relations, not just in the abstract but in the lived reality of the classroom. There is the additional advantage for students in having to engage with similar processes and issues as they are likely to encounter in their professional worklife. Conversely, if assessment – the clearest manifestation of power within the educational programme – is unchanged and acceptance of the tutor's authority unquestioned, claims for a critical approach to the learning design are limited. It is also important to take account of the social processes which result from the application of participative methods to learning groups: ambiguities in tutor-student relations, potential contradictions in relation to the institutional context; and the power relations which emerge from differences within the student groups.

Summary

Whilst acknowledging the contribution of self-directed learning theory to the development of participative assessment, I have questioned the assumption that such practices are necessarily empowering. In student-centred methods, as to date with most critical pedagogies, even though the socially constructed nature of the teacher's authority has been acknowledged, there has been insufficient analysis of the institutionalised power relationships between teachers and students in assessment. As a consequence, alternative methods may provide the illusion of equality but for the most part an essentially hierarchical relationship remains intact. Intended modifications to assessment may after all be constrained by more powerful interests that argue for the preservation of traditional practice (Gore, 1993). Brookfield (1986) has highlighted how a number of institutional variables seem repeatedly to skew, distort, or prevent the application of empowerment through the means of curricular imperatives, grading policies and institutionally devised evaluative criteria which preclude student involvement.

If assessment procedures in the classroom are changed but the institutional context remains the same, the involvement of students can amount to a subtle exercise in control. They have been asked to believe they have a greater measure of control over their learning but the nature of the underlying power relationships remain unaffected. In which case, how much control do they really have over their learning, as well as in its evaluation? As Golding (1980) observed the *idea* of empowerment is a more acceptable prospect than being controlled, but if the language has been merely to make the exercise of control less contentious, the outcome may be the same. As Ellsworth (1992) argues; 'empowerment is a key concept...which treats the symptoms but leaves the disease

unnamed and untouched' (p.98). Participative approaches to assessment can be supported on the grounds of consistency with, and furthering the development of, a more critical approach to professional education, as well as supporting a pedagogy in which choice, and as a consequence, relevance to professional interests are valued. Such practice, however, demands a willingness and capability of educators to understand and work with its complexities and inherent contradictions. However, despite the call for such changes, what is still lacking, according to Apple (1988), is the offer of models or tangible guidance to move away from abstract and decontextualised claims for empowerment.

Gore (1993) points out that the institutional context may militate against changes such as these, begging the question as to how much freedom academic institutions really have to question and challenge existing structures. Similarly, within critical pedagogy, whilst there is an acknowledgement of the socially constructed and legitimated authority that teachers hold over students, there has been a failure to analyse in any depth the institutionalised power imbalances between themselves and their students, giving the illusion of equality while leaving the authoritarian nature of the teacher/student relationship intact.

A further aspect of participative assessment to which I have drawn attention in this chapter is the importance of attending to differences other than the distinctions between student and tutor. The research issues that I am interested in exploring is how social processes that are generated from differences of value or belief, or from differences of gender or educational background also affect the dynamics of learning relationships. Competitiveness, a sense of intellectual superiority over others or a lack of conviction in the validity of other students' opinions can affect the judgements they make of each

other's work, within participative assessment.

I believe it is necessary to explore these issues, both because of the effects which assessment has on learning and in the interests of students' further professional development. Understanding the ways in which the rhetoric of empowerment is used in the interests of control is relevant for students who will encounter similar ambiguities in the workplace – especially if they are likely to be involved in appraisal, selection or other aspects of management. (Collinson et al, 1990).

The next chapter is concerned with the formulating of research theory from an ethnographical perspective and also recounts the experience of undertaking ethnographic research within the area of participative assessment.

CHAPTER THREE

Methodology

Researching Participative Assessment: An Ethnographical Approach

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Methodology

Researching Participative Assessment: an Ethnographical Approach

Introduction

The aims of this chapter are twofold. The first is concerned with the formulating of 'Research Theory' from an ethnographical perspective. The second is to recount the experience of undertaking ethnographic research within the area of participative assessment. The chapter is divided into five sections.

Section A. Ethnography

- *Theoretical accounts*

- *Exploring Ethnography*

- *My approach*

The first section provides theoretical accounts of ethnography, explores the differences between ethnography, phenomenology and ethnomethodology and highlights my approach in relation to participative assessment

Section B. Access Entry and Field Relations in Practice

- *Gaining access*

- *Exploring field relations*

In the second section I review the issue of access, entry and field relations in practice. I will be arguing that ethnographical research is often significantly affected by the granting or withholding of access, as has been highlighted in ethnographic studies in the recent past.

The account presented in this section also draws attention to the power relations of the ongoing negotiation process associated with fieldwork.

Section C. Experiencing Fieldwork: Observing, Listening and Asking Questions

- *Observing, listening and asking questions*

- *Participant observation*

- *Listening and asking questions*

Within Section C I will describe the methods which were used to conduct the research, what sources of data were employed. In short, the character of the data employed may have implications for the kinds of threat to validity likely to operate on the findings. For this reason it is important to provide an account of the methods employed.

Section D. Collecting, Analysing and Interpreting Stories and Narratives

- *Collecting and analysing stories and narratives*

- *Writing the stories*

This part of the chapter focuses on the stories, that is the way in which social actors produce, represent and contextualise experience and personal knowledge through

narratives. In the recent past, storytelling and narrative accounts have been used by qualitative researchers as mechanisms for collecting and interpreting data. In this section I concentrate on the identification and analysis of narratives in observational and interview data, paying particular attention to theoretical insights and debates to highlight how I have utilised the literary ideas of stories and narratives to produce texts from my research.

Section E. Plausibility, Authenticity, Reflexivity

There is growing awareness of the importance and recognition of plausibility, authenticity and reflexivity within the research process. This section evaluates the role each plays and questions why reflections, feelings, emotions and the relationships between the researcher and the people studied are often hidden in research accounts.

Section A. Ethnography

Theoretical Accounts

If ethnography produces cultural interpretations through intense research experience, how is such unruly experience transformed into an authoritative written account? How, precisely, is garrulous, overdetermined, cross-cultural encounter, shot through with power relations and personal cross purposes circumscribed as an adequate

version of a more-or-less discrete 'otherworld', composed by an individual author?

Clifford (1987, p.1)

Ethnography is a particular method or set of methods which in its most characteristic forms involves 'the researcher participating overtly and covertly in people's daily lives for an extended period of time, watching what happens, listening to what is said, asking questions, in fact collecting whatever data is available to throw light on the issues that are the focus of research.' (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995 p.1).

Ethnography is both a method (data collection technique) and a methodology (a theoretical and philosophical framework). Atkinson and Hammersley (1994) argue that in practical terms ethnography usually refers to forms of social research having a substantial number of the following features:

- A strong emphasis on exploring the nature of particular social phenomena, rather than setting out to test hypotheses about them;

- A tendency to work primarily with 'unstructured' data that have not been coded at the point of data collection in terms of a closed set of analytic categories;

- Investigation of a small number of cases, perhaps just one case, in detail;

- Analysis of data that involves explicit interpretation of the meanings and functions of human actions, the product of which mainly takes the form of verbal descriptions and explanations, with quantification and statistical analysis playing a subordinate role at most

Atkinson and Hammersley also argue that the beginning of modern forms of ethnographic fieldwork are usually identified with the shift by social and cultural anthropologists in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries towards collecting data first hand. Often regarded as one of the most significant here is Maliniowski's fieldwork in the Triobriand Island, the distinctiveness of which lay in his concern to document the everyday social life of the islanders. However, some other commentators have taken a longer view, tracing elements of ethnography back to eighteenth and nineteenth century German philosophy (Hammersley 1989) to the Renaissance and even to the writing of the ancients, for example Herodotus (Wax 1971).

Ethnography's earlier history is illuminating as it highlights its controversial beginnings and opens up the debate posed by the methodological problem of whether and how other cultures could be understood, a problem that still lies at the heart of modern ethnography.

Interest in ethnography as an approach has grown, and this stems largely from the disillusionment with quantitative methods that for a long time have held the dominant position in most of the social sciences. There still remains however, strong disagreement as to what constitutes the distinctive features of ethnography. Is it for example elicitation of cultural knowledge (Spradley 1980); or the detailed investigation of pattern of social interaction (Gumperz 1981); or an holistic analysis of societies (Van Maanen 1988)?

Hammersley and Atkinson (1983) argue that sometimes ethnography is portrayed as essentially descriptive or as a form of storytelling. Sometimes, in contrast, the emphasis is placed on the development and testing of theory (Glaser and Strauss 1967; Denzin 1978).

From the early days of beginning this research the attraction of getting close to the

subject and 'seeking to describe and analyse the culture and behaviour of humans and their groups from the point of view of those being studied' (Bryman, 198, p.45) was appealing. An interest in examining how people on Postgraduate Management Education programmes made sense of their experiences and constructed their activities through interaction within participative assessment led me to ethnographic inquiry. Ethnography was an approach that would allow me to:

> Uncover and explicate the ways in which people in particular settings
>
> come to understand, account for, take action and otherwise manage their
>
> day to day situation. (Rosen 1991, p.12)

Exploring Ethnography

Ethnographic description however is not to be confused with ethnomethodology or phenomenology. Whilst much ethnomethodological research has been ethnographic (see Maynard and Clayman, 1991, for a review of other ethnomethodology studies), ethnomethodology pays especially close attention to the interactional, particularly discursive aspects of the settings studied. Ethnography generally assumes that language is a natural conduit for description; words represent or tell about culturally circumscribed relations (Atkinson 1990, Silverman 1989). In contrast an ethnomethodoligical approach treats objective reality as an interactional and discursive accomplishment; description, accounts or reports are not merely *about* social world as much as they are constitutive of that world.

Ethnomethodology, as an approach, does not attempt to generate information about interaction or discourse through interviews, but relies upon naturally occurring talk

to reveal the ways interaction produces social order in the settings where talk occurs. Although always concerned with the domain of talk and interaction, more ethnographically oriented studies emphasise discourse in context, looking more to the situated context of talk as constitutive of local meaning, with structure, context and content remaining central to an ethnographical perspective.

Phenomenology is a philosophical stance that stems from the ontological belief that the social world is a human creation. In this view, social life is constituted in the reasoning and everyday meanings that people create in routine social interaction (Pawson, 1999). In order to understand how people behave, the researcher has to become involved in these interactions. Ethnography is the method of facilitating this involvement. Definition of the term ethnography has been much debated, but it usually involves an exploratory approach to research rather than the testing of hypothesis; a tendency to work with 'unstructured' or 'semi-structured' data; concentration on one or a small number of cases; and an interpretative approach to data analysis (Atkinson and Hammersley, 1994, p.248).

Ethnography, as distinct from ethnomethodology and phenomenology, was adopted for researching participative assessment because it provided me with an opportunity to participate in people's lives for a considerable period of time, watching what happens, listening to conversations, and, importantly, being able to ask questions to explain and interpret the particular study focus. The advantages of ethnography are:

- Closeness to people

- Contextualisation

- Process analysis (i.e. process over time)

- Flexibility and openness

- Reflexivity (acknowledging the values, assumptions and the implicit conceptual thinking that influenced the research process.

Thus a key assumption within ethnography is that by entering into close and relatively prolonged interaction with people in their everyday lives, ethnographers can better understand the beliefs, motivations and behaviours of their researches than they can by using any other approach (Hammersley, 1992). An ethnographical approach 'enables researchers to place themselves at the interface between persons, stories and organisations, and to place the person in emotional and organisational context' (John van Maanen, Peter K. Manning and Marc L. Miller in Barbara Czarniawska, 1998, p.v).

Watson (1994) suggests ethnography is an extension of the processes we use in everyday life: 'Ethnographic research involves feeling one's way in confusing circumstances, struggling to make sense of ambiguous messages, reading signals, looking around, listening all the time, coping with conflicts and struggling to achieve tasks through establishing and maintaining a network of relationships. But that is what we do all the time as human beings'(Watson, 1994, p.8).

Perhaps what differentiates ethnography is the deliberate application of the researcher's conceptual frameworks, as Watson suggests:

There is a coming together of the 'every day' thinking of the 'subjects' of the research and the body of academic knowledge to which the researcher has access. And there is attention to meanings and the processes through which the members of particular worlds make those worlds meaningful to themselves and others' (Watson 1994, p.6)

Most writers agree that the idea of culture is central to ethnography, (although they do not necessarily define culture or recognise problematics with the concept). Wolcott (1995) argues ethnography is to engage with what culture is, generally and specific to the group studied. Van Maanan (1988, p.14) described an ethnography as a 'written representation of a culture (or selected aspects of a culture)'. However, there is considerable disagreement over whether the aim is a 'true' cultural description or construction of a particular vision which can be judged as 'good' (rather than 'true') ethnography if it 'will add to the general body of knowledge about the human social world and, at the same time, inform the practical understanding of all of those involved in the activities it examines' (Watson, 1994, p.6).

Wolcott (1995) makes a valuable clarifying distinction between ethnography as method and as outcome: 'The term refers both to the *processes* for accomplishing it – ordinarily involving original fieldwork and always requiring the reorganisation and editing of material for presentation – and to the presentation itself, the *product* of that research, which ordinarily takes its form in prose' (p. 82/3). He says '…a genuinely ethnographic approach provides both a sense of structure for conducting fieldwork and a commitment to cultural interpretation.' (Wolcott, 1995, p.108).

Production of 'thick description' (from Clifford Goertz, 1973) has prevailed as a fundamental outcome of ethnography. Here the account that is privileged is that of the researcher, and 'good' ethnography is seen as that which is as true a representation as possible. However, this perspective has been criticised as naïve and realist, assuming that there is something real which can be represented by the ethnographic writer, accurately and objectively. Wolcott, for example, criticises this, arguing it is not 'haphazard descriptiveness' but 'analytical sense-and-meaning-making' that is the 'essence of

cultural interpretation' (1995, p.85), because the aim of ethnography is 'not to recount events as such but to render a theory of cultural behaviour' (1995, p.86). He argues that the notion of thick description is inadequate because it lacks the intent of meaning-making or cultural interpretation.

Van Maanan, in more recent writing also moves away from the idea of representation, towards recognition of the creative role of the ethnographer, when he suggests that 'broadly conceived, ethnography is a storytelling institution' (1995, p.3). A common assumption in ethnographic texts is that the data will reveal its patterns, rather than that the researcher imposes an order. The idea of grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1967) makes this assumption. Watson also counsels against expecting the ethnographic research material to reveal its truths, rather to expect to construct a story from it.

When a non-representationalist epistemological approach is taken to ethnography there is interest in both the accounts of research participants, in terms of what they say and why, as well as the account the researcher writes. In other words there are two levels of sense-making contributing, that of the participants as they talk, and that of the researcher as she makes sense and constructs a written account.

My Approach

My approach can be broadly labelled as ethnographic. Like Marshall (1995) and Watson (1994) I do not believe that there is objective knowledge that we uncover, or that the researcher should maintain a distance from the issues they research on the participants involved. Marshall (1992) argues that research is often linked with the researcher's life process, as they pursue topics of personal relevance as well as intellectual insights. This

is certainly true of this research. My interest in participative assessment grew out of working with ideas from experiential learning and the learning community approach within a business school context, both as a student and tutor. My rationale for embarking on this research has been to try and understand some of my observations of students' experience of working with participative assessment, to better inform my approach as a management education tutor. The research themes are therefore directly relevant to me.

This focus lends itself to ethnography because of the possibilities to collect accounts, to observe actions and processes and to explore the feelings, thoughts and meanings students attribute to participative assessment, as it happens. In particular in this study I used ethnographic interviews and informal conversations at assessment days, workshops and weekly group meetings to study Participative Assessment.. I am defining informal conversations as generalised discussion of the moment. An example would be taking the opportunity at tea breaks, lunch or in the evening at the bar, of asking people what they meant, felt or thought about participative assessment. This combination of methods offered the possibility of taking an ethnographic approach, with its benefits of depth, as characterised above, whilst not being an ethnography in the sense of studying one organisation through long term immersion as a participant observer.

Although long term participant observation has been seen as the method of choice for ethnographers, on the grounds that it allows immersion which enhances authenticity, and that it enables the collection of unsolicited accounts, that was neither feasible for me practically, nor is it inevitably preferable. It carries a greater risk of the researcher 'going native' (Goertz, 1988). Long term observation may not lead to more significant material; it may be repetitive, or the early data may be surpassed by later material. An alternative is an ethnographic approach, with its benefits of depth as characterised earlier.

Thus research for this thesis is seen as a 'distinctively human process through which researchers create knowledge' (Morgan, 1987, p.7). But this does not mean that it is subjective in the disparaged sense of that term. Denzin (1992), and Stanley and Wise (1993), highlight that working with subjectivity is a complex aspect of being a researcher and attempting rigorous practice. The idea of critical subjectivity and reflexivity are further discussed in section E.

Ethnography as an approach and method was critical to my research. I recognise that my research is not based on statistical tests which others would be able either to independently examine or to test my interpretation and descriptions. However, in order to limit such potential criticisms, I have adopted the guidelines for good ethnography described by Stanley (1990):

- establish the wider relevance of the setting and the topic and clearly identify the grounds on which empirical generalisations are made, such as by establishing the representativeness of the setting, its general features, or its function as a special case study with broader bearing;

- identify the features of the topic that they are addressing in the study and those left unresearched, and discuss why these choices have been made;

- identify the theoretical framework they are operating within, and the broader values and commitments (political, religious, theoretical and so on) they bring to their work;

- establish their integrity as researcher and author, by outlining

  - the grounds on which knowledge claims are being justified (length of fieldwork, the special access negotiated, discussing the extent of the trust and rapport developed with respondents, and so on)

- their background and experience in the setting and topic

- their experiences during all stages of the research, especially mentioning the constraints imposed therein.

- the strengths and weaknesses of their research design and strategy

- establish the authority of the data by;

  - discussing the problems that arose during all stages of the research

  - outlining the grounds on which they developed the categorisation system used to interpret the data, identifying clearly whether this is an indigenous one, used by respondents themselves, or an analyst-constructed one, and if the latter, the grounds which support this

  - discussing rival explanations and alternative ways of organising the data (1990, p.102)

Section B. Access, Entry and Field Relations in Practice

Gaining Access

In discussing the interplay between ethnography as a method and the processes of research, Watson argues 'The good social science researcher is to be artist, scientist, professional and trades person all at the same time (Watson, 1994 p.78). The importance of some forms of trade and negotiation in gaining access is acknowledged in many reflections of qualitative research (Hobbs and May 1993; Shaffir and Stebbins 1991). This apparent magnitude of entry and access is explored now.

A great deal has been written about the process of gaining access, 'entering' and becoming established within a field research setting. Gaining entry to the research site is

an essential part of everyday field research endeavour. Fundamentally, access involves gaining permission to carry out research in a particular social setting. Far from being a straightforward procedure, it involves negotiation and re-negotiation throughout the research process. Accounts describing gaining entry, or getting in, vary with the fieldworker and the situation. Burgess (1991) argues in conducting ethnographic research it is the researchers themselves who stand at the heard of the research process. Indeed many of their ascribed characteristics; age, gender, social class, status and ethnicity, influence the extent to which access is granted or withheld.

In addition to the above considerations, entry also hinged on the personal judgements made of the researcher. Wax (1971) observed 'In the long run, his hosts will judge and trust him, not because of what he says about himself or about the research, but by the style in which he lives and acts, and the way he treats them.' (p.365). This emphasis implies that entering the field and cultivating rich relationships are attributable mainly to the researcher's personal attributes and to others' judgements of them as a person. Within my own research this proved to be a critical factor. I had to rely on my own resources to establish contact, using an 'opportunistic' approach recommended by Buchanan et al (1988) and Hammersley and Atkinson (1993) in which contacts, colleagues and friends were used to the full. Being a member within an academic community was an undoubted advantage, because it allowed access to individuals and universities to which I might have otherwise not been privy. Riemer (1977) believes that 'adoption of an opportunistic research strategy enables the researcher to use familiar situations or convenient events to their advantage' (p.467).

Opportunism is a common feature of qualitatively oriented research. Drawing on contacts and friends is regarded as a legitimate means of securing entry into the research

settings where intensive fieldwork is involved. At Lancaster University, I had been a part-time student on the MA in Management Learning and at the time I began my Ph.D. research, I was being supervised by a member of staff from the Management School. It was through his help and facilitation with other members of the course team that I gained access to the Part-time MA students for Management Learning (MAML).

The next stage of negotiating entry involved me drafting out an invitation to possible participants. I explained that I was primarily interested in individuals' experience and their stories on participative assessment. Although initially this categorisation seemed limited, I wanted the stories of their experience to emerge through the research process rather than set out with narrow preconceptions. I mailed the invitation to two cohorts of MA in Management Learning (twenty five students) and waited for responses. In parallel to this I also contacted tutors on the programme to ensure I had their support, and dealt with any anxiety that they may have had in relation to the research or my role.

The letters were then followed up by telephone calls. Explaining the research over the telephone proved to be much more successful because it allowed people to ask questions and voice their doubts or concerns. I was then able to respond to them by telling them who had given me their names and by explaining that I was carrying out research about participative assessment for a Ph.D. I would then say that I had undertaken the MA myself and talk about my own work role. At this point every person I contacted by telephone expressed interest in the research and needed little, if any persuasion to agree to take part. As a result I was invited to attend workshop events where, during my first introductory meeting with the group, I outlined my research interest. Whilst the group was sympathetic, some still enquired "What's in it for me?"

I was acutely aware that people would probably be cautious about letting

me bound into their workshops, observe them on assessment days and

intrude on their time. In retrospect this was probably as much an issue of

my self consciousness as an inevitable concern of the people I approached.

(Diary extract)

My willingness to run sessions on participative assessment, offer papers and act

as a sounding board was sufficient to secure initial entry to the group, but was not

without its fears. As my diary highlights:

I am fearful that I have nothing anyone might want to hear or receive. I

hope they might like me enough to give me some of their time and might

value the chance to exchange experiences. My fear feeds a reticence

which means I am procrastinating again. (Diary Extract)

However, reaching an agreement and gaining entry does not guarantee full co-

operation from research participants. Rather, the agreement should be seen as a

'continuous process of negotiation in which the promise between the various parties may

shift and even change over time' (Shaffir and Stebbins, 1991, p.21). Integral to this

process is the creation of trust between researcher and researched.

In my own institution, the University of Central England (UCE) the research

provided a superb opportunity to look closely at how ideas on participative assessment

were impinging on students' experiences of the programme as they attempted to put

participative assessment into practice. Access to students was not an issue, as the

research was seen as a natural extension to my teaching role, and the trust I had established with colleagues over the last ten years enabled me to pursue my interest in participative assessment.

During the course of the research trust was crucial to the whole process of the research, and its acquisition was down to the personal relations that I had developed within my own academic institution and at Lancaster University. Shaffir and Stebbins (1991) argue that field researchers pay scant attention to the personal dimensions of their research. Upon reading fieldwork accounts, the novice researcher may believe that feelings of unease and anxiety are largely a result of inexperience. When focusing on the person and social dimensions however, one discovers that various aspects of fieldwork are regarded as stressful and anxiety laden. Hughes (1960) admits 'I have usually been hesitant in entering the field myself and have perhaps walked around the block gathering up my courage...' (p.iv). Whilst Gans (1968) has written 'Despite my success in gaining entry, the process is for me one of great anxiety. Until I feel that I have been accepted, the research process is nerve racking...' (p.310). These sentiments are echoed by my own experiences. I recall one observation/feeling I wrote after my first afternoon in the field:

> I feel nervous and uncomfortable...I don't know why...I partly feel that I
> don't belong here...do they want me here? I am not a tutor on the
> programme or a participant...negotiating entry is a lonely business...I am
> finding it hard to make requests for help because I always anticipate
> refusal and then was amazed and scared when they said yes.   (Diary
> extract July 1998)

Exploring field relations

Understanding fieldwork from this perspective requires coming to terms with the fact that fieldwork relationships rarely remain static. They evolve over time and in so doing, develop distinctive dynamics and logics of their own. Formal research roles give way to myriad other more informal and variable relationships between the researcher and researched. This can be regarded as 'good practice' insofar that the ethnographer aims to 'deconstruct borders between himself or herself and the subject', and this involves the 'capacity on the part of the researcher to drift and reformulate in the research site.' (Rosen, 1995, p.7) These examples of 'friendships' (Oakley, 1981), exchanges of confidences (Dalton, 1959) and general 'helping out' (Adler and Adler, 1991 and Watson, 1994) provide ample testimony to the fluidity of research roles and the extent to which interpersonal experiences shape entry and experiences in the field.

Fieldwork relationships are central to the production of research, rather than a technical practice to be consigned to the margins of academic text and practice. Watson et al highlight:

> The basic position of the researcher in the organisation is one of trader;
> offering various things to various parties, formally and informally, in order
> to be provided with the access, information and experiences which the
> research requires (1991, p.9)

In this particular study I often found myself trading resources by offering literature and articles in the area of management learning and assessment that may be of use to the participants. To this end Livingston (1974) describes his role as a conveyor of

messages and materials in research carried out among members of Gamblers Anonymous. Similarly, Holliday (1995) was allowed access in exchange for her labour.

Often implicitly, some form of reciprocity has long been recognised as an integral feature of any intensive fieldwork study. 'Ethnographers use a great deal of people's time and they owe something in return…' (Fetterman 1998, p.143). This usually extends far beyond the provision of an end of research report that Bryman (1998, p.15) identifies as common practice in many forms of social research.

These insights into entering the field highlight the contingent, fluid and developmental nature of encounters in the field. Three points emerge of particular importance. First, securing access is not a one-off activity that prefaces the 'real work': rather it is a continuous process that is negotiated and re-negotiated throughout the study (Burgess, 1991 and Shaffir and Stebbins 1991).

Second, 'trust' is central to fieldwork relationships and is also a cumulative process (Adler and Adler, 1991 and Van Maanen, 1991). Thirdly, the researcher's relationships with participants cannot be detached from the politics of research and have to be established throughout the project. (Burgess 1991, Shaffir, 1991). Despite increasing acceptance of these points, accounts explicating the dimensions of entering the field; their evolution during fieldwork; and their contribution to theoretical developments are still comparatively rare within the arena of participative assessment research.

This research then is not usual in either the conduct or the outcomes of the access dance. As Ram (1994) and Anderson et al (1989) imply, making the most of what one has may be more useful than engaging with the complex and perhaps irrelevant natural science debates over generalisability, size of sample and research population. This research consciously adopted an approach which was based on opportunist access,

anecdotal data, observations and interviews. Regarding the process of the research project, the style is centred around getting as much data and hence listening to as many accounts of students' as possible.

Section C. Experiencing Fieldwork

Observing, Listening and Asking Questions

This section recounts the approach and methods which were used to conduct the research. At one level this is a fairly straightforward process. The data was obtained through observational fieldwork and unstructured interviews. By this I mean entering into dialogues with students about their stories of participative assessment. I wanted this thesis to be a qualitatively rich study, telling the stories of about thirty students in some depth. Like Marshall (1995) in her work on women managers and Watson's (1994) work on managerial activity, I was not searching for some fundamental truth about participative assessment. It was more a search for a way of giving an account of what participative assessment is, in a way which might be closer to the realities of the student experience than much of what is on offer in textbook and articles. Although an accurate presentation of the research design and chronology, the above account depicts an exceedingly sterile account of the actual research process. The way in which the research was conducted did not follow some goal-directed, linear path. As Bell and Newby (1977) and Bryman (1988) have pointed out, the actual process of research often deviates from the prescribed and brittle formulae contained in conventional approaches to research. Yet accounts of actual and 'messy' research are probably more useful than pristine

prescriptions, for they provide valuable insights into a range of real issues that researchers face in the field and different ways in which they can be addressed.

In this study, the experiences of managing and working with participative assessment, and the meanings which are attributed to and made of those experiences, is accessed primarily through the analysis and interpretation of observation and interview data. In some ethnographic studies this 'participant-observation' method is the keystone of the claim to authenticity. In some forms of study, in-depth interviews are the means by which to gather detailed life-histories and life-stories which could never be obtained simply by 'hanging around' and 'watching the action'. Not uncommonly, different methods are mixed together; interviews might, for example, offer the background to the direct observation provided by fieldwork which acts as foreground or, as in the case of this research study on participative assessment, the methods advocated by Hobbs and May (1998) were deployed. That is, informal fieldwork observations were used to illuminate the study which rests largely on detailed interviews. Similar methods have been used by Watson (1994), in looking at the nature of managerial work, Cannon's (1992) research on women with breast cancer, Woods' (1981) research on secondary school students. Accordingly the next section catalogues my approach and the way in which the research was carried out in reality, while drawing on theoretical insights from ethnography.

Participant observations

Ethnographic methods, relying substantially or partially on participant observation, have a long and chequered history in the social sciences. They have been employed in various guises by researchers. Definitions of participant observation are not easy to pin down. A

distinction is sometimes drawn between participant and non-participant observation, the former referring to observations carried out when the researcher is playing an established participant role in the content studied. A more subtle typology of observation is portrayed by Junker in Figure 1 below.

Fieldwork

Comparative Involvement
subjectivity and sympathy

Comparative Involvement
subjectivity and sympathy

Participant
as Observer   II

III   Observer
as Participant

Complete
Participant   I

IV   Complete
Observer
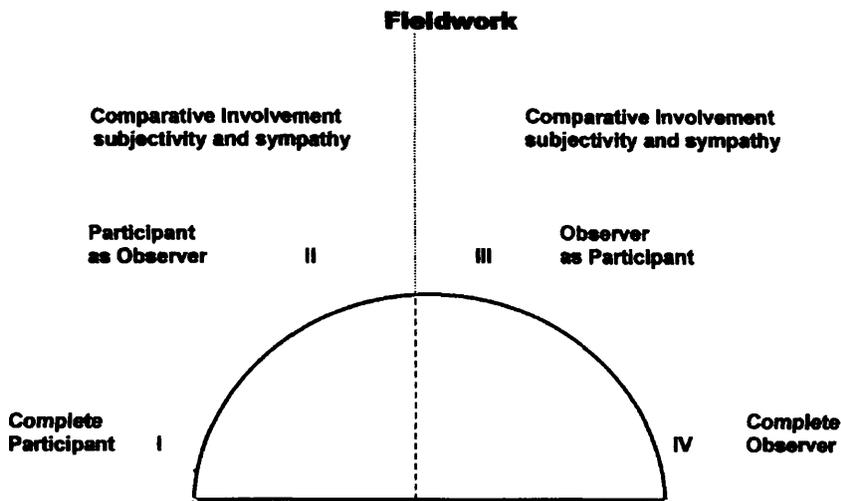
Source: Junker 1960, p.36

Figure 1: Theoretical social roles for fieldwork

In this model Junker (figure 1) attempts to map out the various roles that ethnographers

may adopt in the research setting. Junker distinguishes between the complete participant,

participant as observer, observer as participant and complete observer. In the 'complete

participant' role, the ethnographer's activities are wholly concealed. Here the researcher

may join an organisation or group —Alcoholics Anonymous (Lofland and Lejeune 1960),

Penticostals (Homan, 1980), an army unit (Sullivan et al, 1958), a mental hospital

(Rosenhahn 1973) – as though he or she were an ordinary member but with the purpose

of carrying out research. Alternatively, complete participation may occur where the

putative researcher is already a member of the group or organisation that he or she

decides to study. This was the case with Holdaway's (1982) research on the police, and Dalton's (1959) work on 'men who manage'. An extreme example is Bettelheim's (1970) account of life in German concentration camps.

In the research method used for this thesis, the role I adopted was participant as observer. I was not a 'full' participant observer in the way, for instance, that Holdaway and Armstrong (1981) were, but rather a participant as observer, in that I was participating in events as an observer rather than a resident member (Bryman 1988) or active participant. I did not disguise my identity or the purpose of my presence, my intention was to undertake research, and those around me were aware of it. This role essentially involves the researcher developing relationships with key informants. By adopting this method I was not confined to a particular approach and I had the freedom to pursue any line of enquiry that I felt would be germane to my investigation. What is important in ethnographic enquiry is the need to participate in people's daily activities, observe what they do and listen sympathetically.

Moreover, although the participant as observer role was crucial to the study, it was not the only research method used. The observational work was complemented by interviews and informal discussions, as well as opportunistic conversations as discussed earlier. Whilst not diluting the potency of the observer role, these other approaches afforded a certain methodological heterogeneity which guarded against the problems of partiality that is sometimes seen as a significant drawback on the pure participant observer method (Bryman 1988). Similarly Hammersley and Atkinson (1996) highlight the drawbacks to adopting a role of complete participant.

The range and character of the data that can be collected will often prove restricted in practice. The participant will, by definition, be implicated in existing

social practices and expectations in a far more rigid manner than the known researcher. The research activity will therefore be hedged around by these pre-existing social routines and realities. It will prove hard for the field-worker to arrange his or her actions in order to optimise data collection possibilities. Some potentially fruitful lines of inquiry may be rendered practically impossible, insofar as the complete participant has to act in accordance with existing role expectations (Hammersley and Atkinson 1986, p.94-95).

However, in my particular case, by adopting the participant-as-observer role I was able to gather valuable data to understand students' experience of participative assessment. In addition it was not difficult to take notes during my time in the field. At my own institution it was accepted practice for members of staff to observe the assessment process and facilitate the group dynamics. At Lancaster observations would take place at workshops, where I would find myself rushing back to my room to record observations or interchanges in my field notes. At Lancaster, as participant – as observer - yet not a member of the tutor group was not without its drawbacks. During informal conversations in the bar, the participants would often engage in criticism about various aspects of the course, assessment, role of tutors and teaching or learning methodologies. Whilst such information was interesting and useful I often felt uncomfortable in this role, as the following extract from my diary note highlights:

What am I doing? Why did I agree to have this discussion? I am anxious about discussing issues about tutors, feels like role conflict.

(October, 1998)

The observations on participative assessment were conducted over a period of eighteen months. I was primarily interested in observing the dynamics of participative assessment, before, during and after the process. During this period I sat among students at five residential workshops, ten assessment days, and in their action learning sets for one day a week for eighteen months. I kept accounts of my observations from the workshops and action learning set meetings and tape recorded assessment days. Sometimes during assessment events the students would be intrigued and curious as to what I was observing and why I was taking notes. I would often spend time explaining what I was trying to capture through the observations and tape recording of their dialogue. Through such interchange the participants came to understand something of my research perspective, although such exchanges were not without tensions as the following diary extract highlights:

> I arrive at 9.30, having sat on a hot stuffy train for nearly 2 hours. I'm
> excited and anxious at this opportunity of observing my first MAML
> assessment day. I am eternally grateful to the group for allowing me to
> come.
> I wait outside the station when a voice from nowhere says "You must be
> Kiran". I smile as this complete stranger greets me as a long lost friend.
> We exchange small talk about my research and his anxiety about the day
> as we wait for the others to arrive.
> I notice as everyone arrives there are a lot of hugs, polite kisses, and
> banter about the day. I reflect back on my own memories of assessment
> days and pick up on a sense of unease and initial anxiety with the group,

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as there is some wry joking about the day. A case perhaps of humour

revealing real fears.

When the assessment day begins there is no apparent agenda and no one

seems to want to initiate the start of the meeting. I wrote in my notes, the

meeting is muted.. John (tutor) then says "I think it would be useful if

Kiran introduces herself and says why she is here and to check out if we

are all o.k. with that." I feel embarrassed at being put on the spot but

nonetheless talk briefly about my research and check again to ensure

everyone, including the tutor, is still comfortable with me observing the

event. Everyone smiles cautiously and says its fine.   (Diary extract)

Listening and Asking Questions

'Ethnographic interviewing is such a special kind that employs questions to discover the

cultural meanings people have learned' (Spradley 1980, p.123). I wanted this to be a

qualitatively rich study telling the stories of about thirty students in some depth, whilst

also allowing the students' experience to emerge through the research process. Letting

the research process inform me about the topic is rather different from many forms of

traditional social science research in which the topic area has to be defined in advance.

For these reasons I decided to adopt an unstructured approach, during which I asked

people to recount their stories on their experience of participative assessment.

Stories are an important source of data for ethnographic research, because as

Shwatsman (1993) highlights, they often provide 'natural answers to the recurring

questions that individuals ask themselves'. (p.62). Stories may appear naturally in the

flow of an ethnographic interview, or they may be encouraged by questions as suggested

by White (1984). By this he means encouraging informants in interviews to expand on their experience using examples. One of the differences between ethnography and other forms of research is that ethnographers do not automatically assume that they know the right questions to ask in a setting. In fact, as Spradley suggests, in ethnographic fieldwork 'both questions and answers must be discovered in the social situation being studied' (1974, p.32). This was certainly the case in my research. For example, during the unstructured interviews and informal conversations, participants would often take the opportunity to vent their feelings about other aspects of the course. In U.C.E. there was also, not surprisingly, given my normal 'facilitation' role within the formal learning process, a great deal of discussion and curiosity as to why I was doing the research; about the philosophy of the DMS programme and about my role as a facilitator within the programme.

Similarly within the second case study (MA in Management Learning), people would often want to engage in conversations about the course and my prior experience on it as a student. I was regarded as someone who would give them 'inside information'. Thus the discussions and conversations were precisely that; they involved me answering questions and relating my experiences as well as the respondents. Many of them, for instance, were amused at my occupation. They could not understand that watching them and talking to them constituted real research. All of those factors had implications for the interviewing process. Rarely, if ever, did I adopt the role of 'textbook' interviewer, which exhorts the interviewer to remain aloof while seeking to extract information from the respondent. It would have been totally absurd, but more importantly, counter-productive if I had attempted to remain indifferent to questions from people whom I knew. Like Marshall (1995) I found listening to people's stories about participative

assessment interesting, stimulating and often moving. The meeting sometimes felt like shared journeys of exploration, because of my past experience as a student on MAML and my inside knowledge as a tutor on the DMS.

The term 'rapport' does not accurately describe the connections established between myself and the participants I interviewed. Very quickly our talking about the participative assessment process recalled some of the anxiety and excitement of my periods of involvement in the process. The interviews typically became two-way exchange processes, and often the divergence or similarity of our opinions and experiences became a topic of discussion in itself.

The utility of this exchange process in the field has been remarked upon by many others where they share some kind of experience or characteristic with those being researched, particularly in the case of gender research; Finch (1984); Hollway (1989); Marshall (1994); Oakley (1981). In making this point I am also highlighting how this exchange process equally applied to my research. I subscribe to Oakley's contention that ' the...goal of finding out about people through interviewing is best achieved when the relationship of interviewer and interviewee is non-hierarchical and when the interviewer is prepared to invest his or her own personal identity in the relationship' (1981, p.41).

Oakley further points out, in interviewing there is 'no intimacy without reciprocity' (p.49). Interviewers can show their human side and answer questions and express feelings. As Rienherz argues 'much important information is gathered in this way' (1992, p.25). I had therefore to find a balance between hearing what they wanted to tell, whilst securing answers to more specific experiences around assessment. The comparative ease with which conversations developed, my relative unobtrusiveness and the speed with which I was generally accepted on workshops, assessment days and in the

classroom, owed much to my background as a tutor at UCE and an ex-MAML student at Lancaster, as this was crucial in enabling me to understand and appreciate the unwritten rules of group work culture, enabling me to judge when it was appropriate to intervene and when I should hold back. In order to unravel complex issues it is necessary, as Oakley claims, to '...get inside the culture'.

In beginning the interviews with the participants (which were all tape recorded), I suggested that they tell me about their feelings and experiences of participative assessment. It was very easy to get them talking and I was surprised just how quickly they relaxed and began to tell their stores. A second source of data came from informal conversations that I managed to strike up with the participants whilst they were engaged in informal tasks (e.g. over coffee breaks, in the bar or at dinner). I would wait for the most opportune moment and then start a conversation in order to elicit information. Gubrium (1991) suggests that, in order to establish rapport and learn the ropes of field-work, it is important to 'keep your eyes and ears open' (p.31). What is important then in ethnographic inquiry, is the need to participate in their daily lives, talk to them, observing what they do and listening sympathetically. Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) argue that interviews in ethnographic research range from spontaneous, informal conversations in places that are being used for other purposes, to formally arranged meetings in bounded settings out of earshot of other people. However, in the case of the former, the dividing line between participant observation and interviewing is hard to discern. Thus, the difference between interviewing and participant observation is not as great as is sometimes suggested.

In this section I have discussed the importance of observations and ethnographic interviewing and highlighted how the two methods worked in tandem. As Lofland

(1971) argues, many of the data gathered in participant observation comes from informal interviewing in the field. Also I have shown that ethnographers do not usually decide beforehand the exact questions they want to ask, and do not ask each interviewee exactly the same questions, though they will usually enter the interviews with a list of issues to be covered. Nor do they seek to establish a fixed sequence in which relevant topics are covered; they adopt a more flexible approach, allowing the discussion to flow in a way that seems natural. Nor do ethnographers restrict themselves to a single mode of questioning. On different occasions, or at different points in the same interview, the approach may be non-directive or directive, depending on the function that the questioning is intended to serve; and this will usually be decided as the interview progresses. In these senses, as I noted earlier, ethnographic interviews are closer in character to conversations than are survey interviews (Burgess 1984a and 1988b). However they are never simply conversations, because the ethnographer has a research agenda and must retain some control over the proceedings.

This is true even in the case of non-directive questioning. Here questions are designed as triggers that stimulate the interviewee into talking about a particular broad area; in this case participative assessment. Therefore, an important source of data for ethnographers is the accounts participants provide.

Section D. Interpreting and Analysing Ethnographical Data

Collecting and Analysing Stories and Narratives

This section focuses on the storied qualities of ethnographic textual data, that is the way in which social actors produce, represent and contextualise experience and personal

knowledge through narratives. In the recent past, storytelling and narrative accounts have been used by qualitative researches as mechanisms for collecting and interpreting data; Watson (2000); Marshall (1995); Polkinghorne (1991). In this part I concentrate on the identification and analysis of narratives in observational and interview data, paying particular attention to theoretical insights and debates to highlight how I have utilised the literary ideas of stores and narratives to produce texts from my research.

This thesis uses storytelling to contribute to our understanding of students' experience of participative assessment. I sought something similar to an approach adopted by Marshall (1995) and by Watson (1994) to make sense of the data which would set the stories at the heart of the thesis and to make my processes of working with them more explicit. Conventional scientific accounts are all story-like to some extent (Czarniawska, 1997; McCloskey, 1990). They have a narrative shape to them, even if the genre conventions which they follow and the stylistic device which they use make this less than obvious. Not only is there a narrative dimension to the conventional scientific research, but the research is also the construction of its author – as opposed to a straightforwardly 'written up' description of 'what happened'. Writers in the ethnographic tradition of social science are especially conscious of this (Atkinson, 1990; Watson, 1995). This is not really surprising, given that the depth of the ethnographer's involvement in their research setting and the mass of research material which they gather make them particularly aware of a need, consciously and actively, to 'shape' their research account.

Polkinghorne (1995) argues that the aim of a narrative is to 'combine a succession of incidents into a unified episode' (p.7). However, whilst the term 'narrative' has been deployed, in qualitative approaches, within a variety of meanings, it is within the

meanings of narrative as a story that this thesis wishes to explore. Hughes (1999) highlights that central to a story is the plot. This is '...the context through which individual events and actions can be drawn together to make meanings in our lives and to convey meanings to others' (p.283). Similarly Czarniawska (1998) points out '...a narrative needs two things. First, it must have the sequence of an "original state of affairs", followed by "an action or event", which leads to "a consequent state of affairs". Second, a story must have a plot which will bring these elements into a "meaningful whole" ' (1998, p.2).

As Weick puts it 'what is necessary in sense-making is a good story' (1995, p.61). However, as Watson highlights, narratives and stories reject epistemological realism and the belief that the story-teller can 'tell it as it is' (2000, p.523), in an objective manner. Van Maanen (1995) calls this confessional and impressionist tales. This means seeing fieldwork as an interpretative act rather than a mirroring one. That is reality cannot be mirrored, represented or captured by the researcher. The researcher must use the language of the culture of which they are a part, both to make sense of what is before them and to talk about it. This means that I inevitably talk or write about a reality which is my own construction.

The student stories in this thesis are presented as empirical evidence but the aim is (processual) insight not (procedural) truth (Czarniawska-Joerges, 1992). This follows the ideal that 'increased understanding is the ultimate goal of research' (ibid, p.11). Meanings and motives read off the stories are the key analytical tools of the researcher faced with a bundle of narratives from the research setting (Coffey and Atkinson, 1996).

With each story I started by reading through my observation notes and interview transcripts several times. Adopting Marshall's approach, once I had some initial

impressions I started to make notes on it in highlighter pens in the margins and to underline key words and themes. The process was descriptive rather than analytical in the initial stages.

Then I began to explore different ways of conceptualising as a basis for the commentary, reflection and questions which I wanted to incorporate on the themes and issues presented in the final write-up of the stories. In practice I adopted the principles of a grounded approach to conceptual sense making. Easterby Smith, Thorpe and Low (1991) argue that grounded theory provides a more open approach to data analysis (p.108). As Jones (1987) comments, grounded theory works because 'rather than forcing data within logico-deductively derived assumptions and categories, research should be used to generate grounded theory, which "fits" and "works" because it is derived from the concepts and categories used by social actors themselves to interpret and organise their worlds' (p.25).

A grounded approach to research argues against the early pre-definition of variables and conceptual categories in field research because of the danger of 'deflecting attention away from the social processes through which the participants themselves assemble stable features of their social world' (Silverman, 1994, p.36). However, to be theoretically informed is important still, because it provides the research with a set of 'animating questions' (Silverman, 1994). In this way 'the researcher has some notion of where she or he is destined, but is willing and expecting to explore uncharted ground encountered in the process' (Rosen, 1991, p.7). As Silverman (1994) states, to describe things as they are is a false exercise because 'the facts do not speak for themselves' (p.36). Thus, theory has a role to play in interpreting the accounts as they are communicated to the interviewer.

In practice, therefore, in organising, describing and interpreting the material I felt it was important to continually review and revisit conceptually what models, concepts and theories I could draw from to guide my understanding. As Watson (1994) argues:

> I believe that researchers are much aided in "keeping their act together" throughout their project if they have in their mind a mental map. As they proceed they may redraw that map time and again. But without a map at all they will face the danger of becoming an explorer stumbling about in the pitch-black dead of night, in the depths of a never ending forest (Watson 1994, p.80).

Plausible and Authentic

This chapter would not be complete if I do not explore issues of plausibility and authenticity. The question of subjectivity, internal validity, (the degree to which findings can be generalised to other settings similar to the one in which the study occurred): reliability (the extent to which findings can be replicated, or reproduced, by another researcher); and objectivity (the extent to which findings are free from bias) needs to be addressed. For this piece of research, familiarity with the site of enquiry and the participants was an aid rather than impediment to critical analysis. Hollway (1989;11) argues as much in discussing her study of gender difference, much of which involved discussion with people that she had known over a period of time:

> I did not feel skilful because it came so easily...it was easy because the research participants were people like me...now I can believe that this made for good research practice.   (Hollway 1989, p.11).

Thus I believe that merits of familiarity and subjectivity can be viewed as a valuable resource in the production of 'quality research'. This thesis is consciously and rigorously grounded in subjectivity. Weedon (1991) argues:

> Subjectivity is used to refer to the conscious and unconscious thoughts and emotions of the individual, her sense of herself and her ways of understanding her relation to the world (p.32).

An ethnographic study allows for the presentation of field work accounts and provides opportunities for thick description, i.e. distinctive forms of knowledge (Geertz, 1973) of field work at the same time as exploring theoretical aspects. It allows for the possibility of testing theory and generating new modes of theorising. By tying emergent concepts from the field work to existing theories within the academic literature, internal validity is enhanced (Eisenhardt, 1989). The importance of ethnographic research therefore is not to make statistical generalisations but instead make generalisations in relation to the analytical categories explored. Good theorising is enhanced by reflexive inquiry and by amalgamating concepts and language which have been inter-subjectively constructed and shaped in the research setting.

A further way to enhance ethnographic inquiry in this research is through making explicit the process through which the ethnography has been constructed. Watson (1994b) suggests that the discerning ethnographer will 'show the puppet strings which have orchestrated the research process' (p.78). It is the responsibility of management researchers therefore, to show the process through which they have cultivated and nurtured their ethnographic story. Further, Van Maanen (1987) indicates that '...fieldworkers' silence about, and sleepy indifference to the writing conventions of their

craft has been shattered in recent years and there is now no going back to the complacent and blissful days...' (p.138). Van Maanen suggests that the task of all ethnographic writers is to produce a text which 'balances, harmonises and mediates a tale of cultures' (p.128) and to produce a story that is 'persuasive, melodic and empathetic and aimed at some general insights' (p.128). It is important therefore that the ethnographer takes ownership for the shape of the story, because in illustrating the accounts presented on people's experience of participative assessment, it is critical to note the accounts are my construction, anxious as I am to represent the views and feelings of those being researched. I make no claim to be a natural reporter. However I do attempt a *degree* of objectivity by allowing the reader to judge for themselves something of the way I influenced the events and accounts I am writing about. For this reason, much of the narrative that occurred during interviews is displayed within the ethnographic accounts. The value of an ethnographical approach does not rest on whether an alternative theory/explanation can account for the same data. But instead it rests on whether the theoretical framework and explanation given accounts for the fieldwork data in a plausible and authentic manner. In ethnography the researcher is aware of the representational nature of the work, the self-conscious nature of the data collection, the interpretative aspects of analysis and the techniques of construction by which she persuades her reader.

> In interacting with people in the field, listening to their accounts and
> stories, I am able to re-construct these accounts and stories within an
> ethnography. This ethnographic account there, as construed through

interpretations and interactions in the field, has much more potential than "telling convincing stories". (Silverman, 1994 p.82)

In the next section I evaluate the role of reflexivity and examine why reflections, feelings, emotions and the relationship between the researcher and people studied are often hidden in research accounts. I also highlight how these issues were particularly important to this particular piece of research and how reflexivity is central to the practice of ethnographic research.

Reflexivity

Reflexivity has implications for the practice of social research too. Rather than engaging in futile attempts to eliminate the effects of the researcher, we should set about understanding them... (Hammersley and Atkinson 1983, p.17)

Kleinmann and Copp (1993) highlight the importance of researchers acknowledging their feelings and emotions in doing field work and question why a record of reflections and feelings are often ignored in the written ethnographic account. They argue that, as observers, researchers cannot detach themselves from the research situation. Even though there is a sensitive balance between showing empathy with research subjects and retaining some professional distance, they argue that it adds greater richness to the research accounts if emotions are acknowledged and explored in the written account. This, the authors suggest, is an important part of field work. They criticise the traditional scientific approach to ethnographic research in which researchers attempt to neutralise

their (self) identities. In so doing, researchers are assumed to be more professional and this means transcending both gender and sex defined behaviour. But Kleinmann and Copp remind fieldworkers as they enter the field, that identities and life experiences shape the political and ideological stances that are taken in research settings. Denying or suppressing their experiences detracts from the honesty and integrity of the ethnographic accounts. This is a persuasive and interesting argument which is further explored by May (1993) who argues that ethnography is supposed to be about the study of people, their interactions and environment. However, in the language of objectification, research can easily move away from this aim. 'What is required is an alternative approach which is both appreciative of the researcher's experiences (and this includes feelings) and those of the people they are studying' (p.73).

Steire (1991) argues reflexivity lifts ethnography from naïve first order Constructionism to second order social constructivism by moving it from being:

> ...an 'object' of study other persons' constructions of reality as some
> things to be studied in an objective manner, somehow apart from the
> researchers' own tools and methods with which the researchers' study is
> accomplished (p.4).

to the subject of study in which the researcher herself is included in the research and also incorporating how that inclusion is constructed.

In this thesis, for example, I have made no attempt to disguise or hide myself. On the contrary, writing the self can form an integral part of the research, before, during and after the empirical data collection (Kanda 1990). It is no longer seen as a direct route to

undermining the validity or objectivity of social research. Perriton (1999) argues that for many research communities reflexivity represents a turn in the representation of research and researcher and is a fundamental part of why and how they research. A belief that research is socially constructed creates a tension between traditional textual practices of hiding the author in the research and the belief that it is dishonest to do so.

However, one of the difficulties with reflexivity is that the process of research is usually presented as self-transforming, the fieldworker must be ready for embarrassment, affection, misfortune, revelation, deceit, confusion, isolation, warmth, adventure, pleasure, surprise and insult, Van Maanen (1988). The confessional tale which can result from reflection on the research process is often isolated from the substantive account of the research itself in some way, perhaps due to doubts about the status or validity of this kind of exercise.

Similarly Perriton (1999) reviews reflexive strategies and characterises them as 'seemingly accidental in which the use of reflexivity is an identifiable tone and style of writing within which realist validity tales are couched' (p.9). The 'methodology chapter' which sees reflexivity as an accepted part of research writing as long as it does not stray outside of its designated site within a text. 'Benign' reflexivity inches towards a more philosophically robust approach to research writing and is becoming associated with particular areas of research interest, and textual 'guerrilla warfare' is a more calculated and conscious deployment of reflexivity with the aim of disrupting the realist tale (p.10).

The significance of reflexivity has long been an established part of feminist research methodologies. 'Reflexivity here is located in treating one's self as subject for intellectual inquiry, and it encapsulated the socialised, non unitary and changing self

posited in feminist thought' (Stanley 1993, p.44). This thesis draws on feminist

principles with regard to reflexivity in its desire to seek egalitarian processes in the

research process characterised by authenticity, reciprocity and empathy. Drawing on

Reinhardt's (1994) work, I believe that feminist fieldwork is predicated on the active

involvement of the researcher in the production of social knowledge through direct

participation in and experience of the social realities she is seeking to understand.

England (1994) also highlights that feminist researchers:

> ...usually favour the role of supplicant, seeking reciprocal relationships
>
> based on empathy and mutual respect, and often sharing their knowledge
>
> with those they research. Supplication involves exposing and exploiting
>
> weaknesses regarding dependence on whoever is being researched for
>
> information and guidance... (England 1994, p.82).

Whilst the issues highlighted are not specific to research on participative

assessment, there are methodological explanations in feminist approaches which are

equally applicable to my own research. For example, in ethnography the researcher aims

to 'deconstruct borders between herself or himself and the subject' (Rosen, 1991, p.7).

This often-noted instances of friendships (Marshall 1995) and generally helping out

(Watson 1995) provide ample testimony to the fluidity of research roles and the extent to

which interpersonal relations shape experiences in the field. My research was also

marked by the increasingly informal and personalised nature of fieldwork relationships. I

was often referred to as part of the group and invited to join in during the evening or

residential activities. The following extract from field notes taken at a residential

workshop provides further evidence of this facet of the reflexivity process.

(Sue) "hope you're staying for dinner, it says a lot about you that the group want you to join them...perhaps you might share your feelings about the course when you have had a drink or two."

Kiran "Thanks, dinner would be great, although I had better check with the staff; as for sharing my experiences, I'm happy to do so if it helps ...(June, 1999)

It should be noted that there is no inevitable trajectory in fieldwork relationships, and their development cannot necessarily be presented in a linear fashion. Rather the 'day to day' reciprocities (Shaffir and Stebbins 1991, p.29) of ethnographic work contribute to a more diffuse state of affairs; for example, despite my acceptance within the groups, the pressure to demonstrate the benefits to them was never far from the surface.

The above accounts provide differing insights into the importance of reflexivity in the research process. Reflexivity within ethnographic research provides a forum for shared discourse and communications between the researcher and the subject of the research and acknowledges that the researcher 'brings to the world forms of intelligibility by which the world is made meaningful' (Gergen and Gergen, 1991, p.80).

However, Baszanger and Dadier (1997) argue that ethnography has become very reflexive and more 'preoccupied in fact with questioning and reporting on the operations performed by the ethnographer in their attempt to confer some meanings on activities, than really acknowledging the existence of the other' (p.15). Similarly, Silverman states

that the 'reflexive card is now being played too regularly in the social sciences' (1997, p.13). Taking this argument forward Hughes (1999) asks '..if it is possible to think too much and too deeply about the meanings in our work? And if it is, what are the implications for research practice and research products?' (p.281).

Within this thesis I have attempted to write 'myself' into the narrative of the research at all stages, by revealing the process through which the research is constructed. I have also tried to ensure that the 'I', the researcher, is not only identified in the methodology section, but that reflexivity is included as an integral part of the whole process. In research practice this is relatively rare (Coffey, 1999) and can lead to accusations of narcissism and self regard, in place of substantive thought and reflection on the real issues of research studies. However, the '...monastic conceit of disinterested objectivity in the ivory tower, where the dispassionate, panoptical gaze of a master subject surveys all' (Koondo, 1990, p.303) is of necessarily limited use. If the researcher is to enter these settings and to write of them, then the demand to integrate that narrative into the collection of 'other' narratives is difficult to resist, but equally difficult to achieve. As Ely (1991) highlights, 'doing qualitative research is by nature a reflective and recursive process' (p.179).

From the material presented above, I would argue that reflexivity is an important part of ethnographic research. It is essential for researchers to reveal their own hand in their investigations. Reflexive styles of research writing; 'One which lets the audience see the puppets' strings as they watch the puppet show' (Watson, 1995, p.578) illuminate ethnographic research.

Within this study, when I write about events and people in my research on participative assessment, I am not simply describing or reporting what happened. I

cannot be objective in that way. But equally I am not making up what I am writing. As an ethnographic researcher I select, interpret, colour, emphasise and shape my findings. Thus, to judge whether or not the research accounts produced are worthwhile to them, readers need to know as much as possible about the nature of the researcher's role in creating them.

Summary

In summary, this research study is concerned in exploring the processes through which students in participative assessment processes attempt to understand, create meanings and make sense of their experiences within the context of management education: the ethnographic position adopted within this research is distinctive in two ways. Firstly, there are no distinct stages of theorising, hypothesis construction data gathering and hypothesis testing. Instead the research process is one of a constant interaction between problem formulation, data collection and data analysis, and theory developed out of data analysis. Secondly, ethnography brings a variety of techniques of inquiry into play, involving attempts to observe things that happen, to listen to what people say and to question people in the setting under investigation. So it involves, as McCall and Simmons put it:

> Genuinely social interaction in the field with the subject of study…direct observation of relevant events, some formal and a great deal of informal interviewing…in the directions the study takes. (1969, p.1).

Thirdly, a narrative approach has been adopted because it enables me to place myself at the interface between persons and stories.

The next chapter firstly highlights how stories are used to shape the telling of the ethnographic accounts, and discusses the ways in which ethnographic inquiry contributes to knowledge of participative assessment. Secondly the substantive part of the next chapter focuses on the issues generated from the research stories to illustrate and elucidate the social processes that can emerge within participative assessment.

CHAPTER 4

Understanding Participative Assessment: Presenting the Research

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Signposting to what follows

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    Conformability to pressure

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Section Two: Power Authority and Classroom Politics

Introduction

Part A. Power and Authority

Part B. Classroom Politics

Summary

Understanding Participative Assessment: Presenting the Research

Introduction

Firstly this chapter summarises the use of stories to shape the telling of the ethnographic accounts. This is approached in two ways; firstly in terms of the role of the writer in constructing the accounts and secondly, an account of the choices made about what is the story to be told and what aspects or themes should be included. Secondly, the substantial section of this chapter provides an insight into the lived experience of students involved in participative assessment through stories, extracts and commentary.

As discussed earlier in Chapter three, an ethnographic account is only a partial record of the issues studied. It is not possible to present a composite picture of a total way of life, as I do not claim to have this knowledge. However, it is my intention to show aspects of the dynamics of participative assessment which are drawn from the research questions and conceptual framework. But the next issue to be faced is that having undertaken months of fieldwork there is a vast amount of field notes that have the potential to yield many stories and insights about aspects of participative assessment and critical management learning. This raises the question of how to manage the 'heavy glop of material we call fieldnotes' (Miles and Huberman, 1994, p.118). The material needs condensing and shaping into a coherent and empathetic story. At this stage therefore, the researcher has to make decisions about which themes or patterns to pull out and which evolving story to tell. (Miles and Huberman, 1994) The following discussion accounts for how the decision was made to focus on the stories presented in this chapter.

In this chapter I use storytelling to contribute to our understanding of students' experience of participative assessment. I sought something similar to an approach adopted by Marshall (1995) and by Watson (1994) to make sense of the data which would set the stories at the heart of the thesis and to make my processes of working with them more explicit.. Conventional scientific accounts are all story-like to some extent (Czarniawska, 1997: McCloskey, 1990). They have a narrative shape to them, even if the genre conventions which they follow and the stylistic device which they use makes this less than obvious. Not only is there a narrative dimension to the conventional scientific research, but the research is also the construction of its author – as opposed to a straightforwardly 'written up' description of 'what happened'. Writers in the ethnographic tradition of social science are especially conscious of this (Atkinson, 1990; Watson, 1995). This is not really surprising, given that the depth of the ethnographer's involvement in their research setting and the mass of research material which they gather make them particularly aware of a need, consciously and actively, to 'shape' their research account.

Polkinghorne (1995) argues that the aim of a narrative is to 'combine a succession of incidents into a unified episode' (p.7). However, whilst the term 'narrative' has been deployed, in qualitative approaches, within a variety of meanings, it is within the meanings of narrative as a story that I wish to explore in this thesis.. Hughes (1999) highlights that central to a story is the plot. This is '…the context through which individual events and actions can be drawn together to make meanings in our lives and to convey meanings to others' (p.283).

Learning from stories

There are many different ways in which experience and learning of participative assessment could be conveyed. Telling stories is one vehicle. Exchanging anecdotes, gossip, dialogues and jokes is often central to the way in which we make sense of our experiences. As Fineman and Gabriel (1996) highlight, this process goes on incessantly in workplace corridors, offices, coffee rooms, and continues at home in accounts of 'what happened at work today'

Stories and storytelling has been used by qualitative researchers as mechanisms for collecting and interpreting data. This approach has recently been adopted in the study of Management, (Watson, 1994), Marshall,1995), Organisational Studies, (Czarinawska, (1997) and in Human Resource Management, (Hughes,1999, Sambrook, 2001). Stories are an important ingredient of an organisation's culture; they express personal and organisational meanings and feelings, especially in terms of the metaphors people use. Stories can tell something of the myths that participative assessment preserves, as well as deeper-seated conflicts and anxieties. In short, stories can be regarded as an expression of how people naturally code their feelings, experiences and expectations. Stories are a rich mixture of the storytellers' needs and wishes, as well as their reconstructions of a particular event. The truth or truths, of each story lie not in its accuracy but in its meanings, since stories are reproduction of lived realities rather than objective descriptions of facts.

The student stories in this chapter are presented as empirical evidence but the aim is (processual) insight not (procedural) truth (Czarniawska-Joerges, 1992). This follows the ideal that 'increased understanding is the ultimate goal of research' (ibid, p.11).

Meanings and motives read off the stories are the key analytical tools of the researcher faced with a bundle of narratives from the research setting (Coffey and Atkinson, 1996).

Deriving and Presenting the Story

As a starting point (as highlighted in chapter three), I reviewed several books and articles which had used story-telling and narratives as a method of organising and analysing text. Some told of individual stories, one after the other (Hobbs and May, 1998), others organised their material around themes or issues, including short vignettes as illustrations (Watson,1994; Hughes 1999). I decided that I wanted to tell each story in some fullness, as Marshall (1995) did in her account of women managers moving on, and that I wanted to incorporate some general commentary on the themes and issues raised. In telling the stories in this chapter I have tried to be aware of the process of sense making. The stories presented have been created through an iterative and consultative process. But equally I recognise that there is no one true story, there are many possible tellings (Denzin, 1989; Mann, 1992). Denzin highlights that all stories are organised in some way, which imposes a structure and covert sense of order. This affects what is said and not said, what potential meanings are made available or excluded.

As indicated in chapter three, with each story I started by reading through my notes and interview transcripts several times. Adopting Marshall's approach, once I had some initial impressions I started to make notes on it in highlighter pens in the margins and to underline key words and themes. The process was descriptive rather than analytical in the initial stages.

Secondly, I re-read all of my field notes and interviews and began to engage with the material by making more in-depth notes in the margins, attaching pieces of paper to

the material that contained my notions about what I could do with the different parts of the data. Identifying key features and how different aspects of the material seemed to relate to each other, I then worked through the material by mapping out recurring themes, similar and contrasting experiences on to large sheets of flipchart paper. It is important to highlight that during this process I was also interested in explicating unique or different anomalies that the material uncovered, because in the final writing up of my stories my intention was to include as much detail and illustration as possible, and not to reconcile the differences.

Thirdly, I began to explore different ways of conceptualising as a basis for the commentary, reflections and questions which I wanted to incorporate on the themes and issues presented in the final write-up of the stories. In practice I adopted the principles of a grounded approach to conceptual sense making, as discussed in chapter three.

Thus in organising, describing and interpreting the material I felt it was important to continually review and revisit conceptually what models, concepts and theories I could draw from to guide my understanding.

When writing the story for each person, I wanted to ensure that the stories presented were told in some detail and to speak from the perspective of the person concerned. It is critical to note that the stories presented are my construction, anxious as I am to represent the perspectives of those being researched. I make no claim to be a natural reporter. However, I do attempt a degree of plausibility and authenticity by allowing the reader to judge for themselves something of the way I influenced events and stories I am writing about (as discussed in chapter three).

As I wrote the stories I was aware of how I was responsible for shaping the stories. The final result of my research would be by ordering and the stories (describing students' experience of participative assessment) entails crafting an interpretation from available data, and constructing an argument in relation to a theoretical framework for presentation to an academic readership.

This phase of the research was demanding and time consuming. Marshall (1995) highlights writing stories requires concentrated and sustained time, energy and attention (p.33).

To recap, the primary aim of this research is to understand the lived experience of students involved in participative assessment. The key stories are the heart of the chapter and exemplify the focus of each section. Each individual story was transcribed exactly as it was told, and then initially sorted into groups of similar issues. The process for making sense of the stories was inductive and inclusive, by this I mean that extracts from the stories could be assigned to multiple groupings, which in turn were then refined and revised, following the emergence of ideas grounded in the data. The story excerpts that related to a particular issue or issues were then pooled together. Next all of the research material was reviewed to examine and uncover the issues, patterns and differences that had been generated from the data. The issues presented reflect various students' experience of participative assessment.

In the discussion that follows, the extracts (including short vignettes) are used as illustrations to illuminate a particular issue or issues within a particular theme. Interspersed with the stories and extracts is commentary, reflections, theoretical insights and questions which portray my sense-making of the issues raised. The issues have been grouped on the basis of the key features they contain and are divided under two sections:-

Section One: Dangerous Liaisons: Emotional Learning and Participative Assessment

Section Two: Power Authority and Classroom Politics

Signposting to what follows

The section on *Dangerous Liaisons: Emotional Learning and Participative Assessment*, argues that any consideration of participative assessment needs to take account of the emotions experienced by the students in the learning context.

Participative assessment is inextricably emotional and yet little attention is accorded to the role or process of emotions in participative assessment. The stories presented highlight how students undertaking participative assessment learn different ways of defining and expressing their own feelings, whilst also having to manage the emotional arena of group dynamics.

The section also draws attention to the ways in which emotions intersect with power relations to illustrate the emotional dynamics of participative assessment, and secondly to review the way in which the process of learning may be affected by emotions.

The second section *Power Authority and Classroom Politics* explores the aims of participative assessment in the light of the experiences of students on a postgraduate Master's programme to illustrate the interaction between participative assessment and the complex, political and social dynamics of learning groups.

Within this section I examine the importance of power relations and empowerment, drawing on the ideas of critical and feminist pedagogies as discussed in my conceptual framework in chapter two.

However, it is important to recognise that there is considerable overlap across the parts and sections. It is characteristic of stories that their themes, details, emotional content and messages are not neatly compartmentalised or continuous. My attempt to organise the material has produced by no means the only sequence possible, and the reader may well seek, and find, other connections and juxtapositions. Buchanan (2001) argues getting the story straight is an illusory goal. He goes on to argue that there is no one authentic 'true' story. This is not, however, a counsel of despair, as this argument is consistent with the view that stories are an important, if overlooked, source of insight and understanding in their own right As Putnam et al. observe

> Narratives are ubiquitous symbols that are prevalent in all organizations.
> Also referred to as stories, scripts, myths, legends and sagas, narratives are
> accounts of events, usually developed chronologically and sequentially to
> indicate causality. [...] They are the vehicles through which
> organisational values and beliefs are produced, reproduced, and
> transformed. They shape organizational meanings through functioning as
> retrospective sensemaking, serving as premises of arguments and
> persuasive appeals, acting as implicit mechanisms of social control, and
> constituting frames of reference for interpreting organizational actions
> (Putnam et al, 1996, pp.386-7).

The value of an ethnographical approach does not rest on whether an alternative theory/explanation can account for the same data. But instead it rests on whether the theoretical frameworks and explanations given accounts for the fieldwork data in a plausible and authentic manner.

My own background and perspective as highlighted in chapters two and three obviously colours what I 'see'. I believe that social life is very much interpretative and depends in this case on how the students undertaking participative assessment experience and perceive their worlds and the kinds of formal and informal ways they negotiate, and adapt to, their interpersonal relationships. This can be conflictual or collaborative, smooth or painful involving personal preferences and concerns, and inextricably linked to this process is power and group dynamics.

A large number of the stories which follow have an intimate, confessional quality, as students reveal things which they suspect are not normally aired openly. Some of the stories are humorous, others painful, encompassing a broad range of emotions – joy, despair, frustration, anger, pride, anxiety, fear, relief and amusement.

Section One: Dangerous Liaisons: Emotional Learning and Participative Assessment

Introduction

One of the intended purposes of participative assessment is, amongst other things, to encourage and support participants to become more critically reflective about their own practice in the professional context. This partially involves the development of the necessary skills to be supportive to fellow learners, whilst at the same time developing their skills in critically evaluating their work and those of others. This challenging process also involves the ability to articulate, recognise and check both their own and each other's feelings and thoughts. In this section the following stories highlight that for some participants, engaging in participative assessment is often emotional, anxiety provoking and at times painful. As the stories unfold, this section explores how emotions in participative assessment impact on the learning process.

Section one is divided into three parts.

Part A. Emotions in Participative Assessment

This part captures the intense activity of the lived experience of emotions in participative assessment. As emotional arenas, participative assessment provides valuable insight into individuals' feelings and emotions, be they of anger, confusion, vulnerability, uncertainty, fear, irritation, frustration or warmth, and explores how emotions shape the course and outcome of Participative Assessment.

Part B. Emotional Learning in Participative Assessment

In the second part I focus on the stories that elucidate issues associated with emotional

learning in participative assessment, and highlight how anxiety and fear can promote or

discourage learning within participative assessment.

Part C. Silence as a response: Conformity to pressure; Having no voice; Silence as

resistance

Within part C I explore how pressure to conform within participative assessment can

create anxiety and stress, which affect students' ability to contribute. This section

examines silence as interconnected with questions of status, power and identity to

illustrate how silence can be used in participative assessment as a response to conformity,

as having no voice or as resistance.

Part A. Emotions in Participative Assessment

First Story

Issue:　　　　*Emotions in Participative Assessment: Andrew's story illuminates how*

　　　　　　　exposure to fear and anxiety can create anxiety, vulnerability and

　　　　　　　uncertainty which can impact on the learning process.

Andrew's Story (DMS student)

During assessment there were moments when events began to spiral out of my

control in my own mind, out of which there seemed no escape. Confusion

quickly turned to anxiety and doubts. These demons began to destroy my

confidence and put the assessment of my papers at risk. I retreated into a

defensive, dysfunctional shell, not confronting or understanding what had detonated such uncharacteristic behaviour that led me to remain silent in the group. I was caught in a frenzied accelerated assessment cycle, avariciously devouring books, trying desperately to produce paper utopia by reaching some make believe learning terminus and destination that did not exist. My feet never came to rest on the neon flashing 'Welcome to the theory of everything' mat. My work always felt vulnerable and open to dreaded accusations of ignorance. It seemed paradoxically to make assessment futile. The more I learnt the less I knew. I could not detach myself coolly from what was happening to me and open up peace talks with the protagonists of confusion and disorientation that were blocking the flow of learning and causing me emotional anguish, so I remained silent. However, as time went on, the experience of peer assessment provided many insights. I began questioning assumptions about the process that I had previously unexamined, it was immensely exciting, frustrating and humbling. I came to think of this serious condition as premature revelation. It had all been going on around me, and more poignantly, by me, and I hadn't even noticed. I remember thinking with humility and embarrassment of how I must have looked to others in the group and the tutors. I felt like an intellectual pigmy with the vision of a myopic mole, plankton in the sea of knowledge, an enlightened vulgarian. Writing papers and a product in the midst of this ideological turbulence with the natural messiness of participative assessment was emotionally challenging. Today there is a very different voice inside my head. It is softer and less impetuous, it stays silent longer as it listens with more humility and understanding. It no longer looks for all the answers in books, but inside itself. (Andrew: DMS Student)

Andrew's story exemplifies how fear and anxiety can interfere with learning. Organisational psychoanalysts highlight the prevalence of unconscious fears concerning security and self worth that can shape people's behaviour and emotional responses in ways that seem anything but rational in terms of the objectives of the task.

Literature and practice on learning in organisation and in group work often seems to ignore the expression of fear. Fulop and Rifkin (1997) highlight that some fears that individuals experience and reveal to others will propel collective learning, some will inhibit learning and some will have a mixed or an insignificant impact. Andrew believes as a result of his fears he has learnt an important lesson "nobody's knowledge is ever complete and discovery takes time".

As a result of participative assessment I have come to understand myself better through a greater understanding of my own behaviour and the forces that influence it. (Andrew, DMS)

Fineman (1997) highlights that 'working in groups openly, axiomatic to team based participative management, can raise feelings of vulnerability, embarrassment and fear, creating agendas that divert managers from their manifest purposes' (p.15). Kanter (1979) reinforces this debate by arguing that collaborative and participative processes can reinforce the very power differences they intend to dissolve. This can result in managers feeling threatened, which creates a culture of mistrust and fear, which in turn leads to silence, as a mechanism for individuals to protect themselves.

This fear of exposure is also discussed by Schein (1993) in terms of preservation of face and its effect on learning in organisations. Schneider (1977) argues that exposure

reveals the limits of the self, and talks of disruption, disorientation and painful self-consciousness which can create silence as a response to such fear. Andrew believes that despite these fears it is important to overcome them.

> *I began to confront rather than turn my back on this shadow of anxiety, the more you confront it, logic told me, the quicker and easier you will learn. I slowly began to see the confusion and fear as a natural, physical entity and friend rather than an enemy, that was part of me, a silhouette rather than a shadow. At this stage I felt myself not just learning but developing.*
> *(Andrew, DMS)*

Second Story

Issue: *The next story explores how tutor facilitation styles can impact on emotional learning within participative assessment, such an inquiry can be useful in identifying the boundaries and limitations of student-tutor relationships. Emma's story explores how feelings of exposure, fear and anger are facilitated by tutor styles and interventions.*

<u>*Emma's Story (MAML student)*</u>

> *My first assessment experience on MAML was very emotional. I was in a set led by Mary (tutor). The main words that come to mind when I think about the experience is that it was just intense, emotionally charged. I remember coming out of the assessment process feeling angry, upset, tearful, hurt and very low. On the train home I just felt this ringing headache coming on because I had been so tense the whole time.*
>
> *I was pretty nervous before the assessment process started, I felt I had put so much of myself into writing the paper and now I was handing over the*

'baby' to be marked and assessed by nine other people. There is an uncertainty about the whole process, you feel as if a part of you is being exposed, so you become vulnerable. I also think the tutor's style had an impact. Mary's style (tutor) was very personal. She engaged with everyone at quite an emotional level and she wanted to connect quite strongly with the people in the group, and Mary also expected everyone to engage at an emotional level, which put additional pressure on us.

The second assessment process was very different. I was talking to David (tutor) about assessment days and comparing the two processes. The main difference was that with David (tutor) there was not that level of emotional intensity or emotional engagement. I think he is a much cooler character, David did not come across as a very 'touchy, feely' character. Instead he has this very cool, sharp razor like intellect, which gets right to the heart of what needs to be reviewed and assessed. He did not bend over backwards to make sure that we were not upset or anxious about the feedback and assessment. He conveyed a caringness, but without all the emotional waves. So for me the second assessment process was not an emotional roller coaster ride like the first, and for some reason this made me feel less exposed and anxious. *(Emma: MAML student)*

Emma's story highlights the importance of the tutor role and the kinds of understanding that are required, both in redefining authority and in making sense of the processes which are generated by participative assessment. The dilemmas and contradictions involved in participative assessment need to take account of the power dynamics which can arise from the tutor-student relationship, whilst also recognising that emotions are not simply

excisable from participative assessment, but characterise and inform them.

Part B. Emotional Learning in Participative Assessment

The above stories illustrate the emotive nature of participative assessment. Thus, any consideration of learning needs to recognise the emotions experienced by learners in the learning context.

Vince (1996) argues that individuals can respond to their anxiety, either by entering a cycle that promotes learning, or a cycle that discourages learning. The first cycle moves from anxiety, through uncertainty, to taking risks, struggle, and reaching insight or authority, and a sense of empowerment. However, if the fear of uncertainty is too great, an individual will resist, responding with fight or flight, denial, avoidance, defensiveness, and ultimately maintaining willing ignorance (Vince, 1996, pp.122-123).

Clearly, one major contributory influence to which cycle of emotion a learner moves through is their individual boundaries around, for example, being in control and feeling comfortable (Claxton, 1984) As the following extract demonstrates:

My frustration increased as I began to feel helpless. Helpless, because I was finding it difficult to come out with any suggestions I had. In as much as I wanted to, a part of me did not want to add to the confusion. I unconsciously withdrew and I noticed that a few of the members were not saying as much as before.

(Sharon: DMS)

In other words, each individual has different degrees to which they are open to uncertainty and change, which they will bring to an experiential learning context.

However, another key influence on an individual's emotions within a learning context will be the nature of that context, including the social dynamics within the group and the status and influence the individual has within the group.

The social context is an oft-neglected perspective on learning, although acknowledge at least from a content Perspective in Critical pedagogy. Some authors have argued that learning should always be understood as occurring within a social context (e.g. Jarvis, 1987), and Vince, (1996) criticises Revans' and Kolb's lack of analysis of the social and political context of experiential learning. Experiential learning requires students to take responsibility for learning, which Vince (1996) suggests has psychological implications in the sense that the individual may need to overcome fears of, for example, speaking out, challenging, risking negative responses from others.

Third Story

Issue: **Risk Taking**

Sue's story highlights how risk taking and its consequences can lead to new insights into learning and development.

Sue's Story (DMS student)

I found myself regularly struggling with the consequences of risk within my group, which tended to involve struggling through other people's reactions, or my own emotion at having aired something long suppressed. The result of this cycle of uncertainty, risk and struggle was sometimes a feeling of empowerment involving either a new personal insight or increased authority within the group. There were occasions when the risk seemed too great and my intuition towards defensiveness and resistance won through.

Anxiety about assessment tended to lead to feelings that set in motion reactions of either fight or flight; there was more than one occasion when I had been tempted not to turn up for group meetings as a result of anxieties about how other group members might react to something I had said or done. As a group during assessment we were also inclined to create a scapegoat in order to avoid and defend decisions.

I can recall incidents when my own uncertainty, that feeling of being on the edge of change, created the conditions for risk and it was in these situations that I think I learned most. (Sue: DMS student)

Sue's story illustrates that risks are many and varied in learning groups, the expression of powerful feelings like anger; the risk of speaking or not speaking, the risk of leading, fear and anxiety all have important implication for participative assessment. Vince (1996) states that it is the anxiety created from fear that gives rise to the uncertainty which can lead to learning and change, as is illustrated by the story below:

Fourth Story

Issue: *Avoidance and denial of the emotional or political processes within group dynamics*

   David's story explores what impact denial and suppression of emotions can have on the learning process..

<u>*David's Story (MAML student)*</u>

My experience on MAML with reference to assessment in particular, was that members of my learning set tended to lean strongly towards what they perceived about their experience, rather than what they felt about their

experience. This emphasis allowed anxiety to be denied and dismissed. My perception of assessment on MAML was that we failed at a collective level to acknowledge at any time throughout the assessment process, the emotional or political processes which were occurring within the group. It did not feel sufficiently safe to openly express emotions at set meetings and I believe that, as a result, this tended to be suppressed by group members. We began to mirror those constraints on knowledge and understanding which present themselves in organisations. The result was that, as a collective group, we failed to develop an understanding of the learning which can result from the emotion of anxiety, although I believe that this did occur for some group members at an individual level or in sub-groups. I certainly experienced both movement in the direction of self-empowerment and self-limitation throughout the course of the year. (David: MAML student)

David's story exemplifies how the broader interrelationships between individuals in groups can generate fear and anxiety. Shifts in the balance of power can create uncertainty in one or more of the group. Emotions that signal that their vested interests are being threatened in some way can create a resistance to learning.

Vince (1996) argues that the encounter between people in a learning environment is a political process and that the power and powerlessness of individuals within learning groups is an integral aspect of the group process. Both power and powerlessness can be avoided and denied, they can become fixed, or they can change and evolve, Vince states that the impact of the relationships between power and process constantly shapes the agendas and the practice of experiential management education.

Consequently, it is important to consider how power relations and emotions are acknowledged and worked with. David continues:

> *Our MAML group put little, if any, emphasis on the political aspects of power within the group and certainly did not openly acknowledge the power differentials between group members which reflected socially constructed inequalities. Within the group there was a high investment in defending against and avoiding these issues, due to anxieties about how to deal with the power relations within the group. At various stages in our interactions, however, we moved backwards and forwards between positions or roles as the powerful and powerless. (David: MAML student)*

David's story highlights that within participative assessment action learning sets are imbued with and surrounded by social power relations, which contribute to the construction of individual and group identity. As McGill and Beaty say:

> Action learning sets have a political dimension in that they replicate interpersonally and in the set, the sense of power and powerlessness that is found in any other group or organisation (1995, p.191).

All groups develop norms and establish a dynamic of influence and hierarchy, despite any rhetoric around equality. Such norms derive from the most influential members, those with higher status within the group, and act to create a boundary of inclusion/exclusion. Bourdieu's concept of habitus, "'a socially constituted system of cognitive and motivating structures" which provide individuals with class-dependent, predisposed ways of relating to and categorising both familiar and novel situations'

(Brubaker, 1985. p.758) is useful in explaining the origins of patterns of thinking and their potential subconsciously to exclude those with 'other' ways. Our habitus is the way we have developed and internalised ways of approaching, thinking about and acting upon our social world; it is;

> Formed in the context of people's social location and inculcates in them a 'world view' based on, and reconciled to, these positions. As such it tends towards reproducing existing social structures (Shilling, 1993, p.129).

Similarly, for those whose position is constructed as marginal within a group, they are likely to feel vulnerable, and avoidance or acceptance can become a survival strategy, as is demonstrated by Jo's position as the only female in a predominantly male group.

Jo's Story (DMS student)

> *At the beginning I was determined not to lead the group, as, in my previous experiences at university, this had not helped me to feel peace and satisfaction and lead to much stress instead. Having found, through self-learning, that I have a tendency towards strong control of any situation which subsequently can come across badly in groups, I am better adopting a facilitating approach, not a leading approach.*
>
> *Some group members did not get along and (I think because they were men) they regularly expressed their animosity towards each other. As the only woman in the group who regularly attended the sessions, they encouraged me in acts of smoothing ruffled feathers and empathy. I was encouraged to be diplomatic and guide the group. I believe this was my way of becoming a superior being in the group, the act of facilitation being a very*

powerful way of achieving what I wanted most, recognition and acceptance.
(Jo: DMS student)

Jo's story underlines the importance of how different survival strategies affect students' experience of participative assessment and the learning they gain from it. By being aware of her own position and her social capital, Jo is able to manage the conflict within her group to her own advantage.

Bourdieu (1987) argues that the level of prestige or status individuals are perceived to have within social settings is associated with their symbolic capital, a combination of their economic capital, cultural capital (derived from 'legitimate' knowledge and behaviour) and social capital (derived from relationships and connections). Whiteness, blackness, culture, class and gender all afford greater or lesser amounts of capital in different contexts. Some black women do have status within mixed groups, perhaps because of their high social or cultural capital, but for others their position is constructed as marginal, and they feel vulnerable. Participative assessment requires students to take responsibility for learning, of which Vince says:

> Such responsibility has both psychological and political implications; psychological because the individual may need to overcome fears, for example, 'getting it wrong', or 'taking a lead'; and political because getting it wrong or taking a lead always has an impact on the social system within which the learning is taking place   (Vince, 1996, p.122)

The following extract highlights the ways in which taking a lead can have individual consequences.

Previously in my group I recognised the need to take a lead role, I saw myself as the manipulative politician, not always using power overtly but seeking it nevertheless. However, my experience during participative assessment has taught me not to put yourself in the firing line, as you only get shot down and it can affect your marks. (Tracy, MAML student)

The social context of learning is inevitably shaped by race, class and gender and Bourdieu's concept of capital helps us understand that there may consequentially be more emotional risks for those who are not part of the dominant group. In that sense the habitus different students may carry into a mixed academic environment may reinforce "the feeling of being a stranger in the academic universe" (Boudieu and Wacquat, quoted in Mirza, 1997, p.230, describing black women's experiences in white male academia). Davies (1982) argues,

It is not by accident that most people...seem usually to prefer superficially, maybe even hypocritically harmonious relationships with their fellow human beings. No doubt that preferences exists in part because of the kind of socialisation by our society to safeguard existing institutions, and dominant ideologies (Davies 1982, p.184).

An experiential course should by its very nature touch participants' emotions but how do students manage the emotional experiences associated with participant assessment. Taking part in assessment can be a gentle, carefully orchestrated process, or a sudden immersion in deep water. The following extracts illustrate that entry into participative assessment takes place with minimal assistance and is a major culture shock

for many students. Almost before they have fully crossed the boundary of participative assessment they are propelled into its emotional politics. Learning happens fast, and sometimes furiously and it does not always leave them at ease with what they discover. This is a point made by Ann (MAML student), who describes how she felt about participative assessment.

> *I began questioning the whole process, during assessment I felt emotionally and psychologically drained. I was at my lowest ebb before assessment days and often felt unable to cope with the pressure. Each assessment was difficult, I was in constant turmoil. (Ann: MAML student)*

The next story further reinforces the underlying sources of difficulties students face when engaging with participative assessment, but on the other hand also highlights how for Robert emotions in participative assessment can be a valuable learning process.

Fifth Story

Issue: *Understanding conflict and tension.*

Action learning requires students to take responsibility for learning and within participative assessment this can create conflict and tension. As the following story highlights:

Robert's Story (DMS student)

> *It is anxiety provoking not to be taught or told because it means we are confronted with the responsibility for what and how we learn. We have to manage assessment and the whole process is so complicated. I was*

discovering so much, revelation after revelation. On reflection most of my

significant learning occurred as a result of my involvement in peer

assessment on the DMS. This has not, however, always been a comfortable

experience. In fact quite the contrary, on a number of occasions entries in

my reflective diary describe specific incidents which are charged with

emotions and vivid descriptions of how I was feeling at the time.

(Robert: DMS student)

Robert's story, and extracts presented so far, highlight that the challenge of participative assessment produces a number of characteristic emotions; anxiety, guilt, threat, fear, hostility and aggressiveness and anxiety. Within the above accounts there is certainly dissonance, in the sense that the students felt unsettled, had their perspectives disturbed, and experienced uncertainty and anxiety. However, most of them combine, in the same sentences, a coincidence of pain and pleasure. Alongside the uncertainty and fear was elation, learning and a sense of empowerment. This resonates with ideas of Mezirow (1981) and Taylor (1986) that feelings of alienation, disorientation, and struggle are to be expected, are even necessary for transition. The scope offered to students to determine their learning within the framework of the two Masters' programmes presents considerable uncertainty and ambiguity for them to handle. This typically provokes strong reactions, often negative initially, but is frequently one of the most powerful sources of learning, as the course progresses. For example: *"revelling in ambiguity was not my idea of a good time…I began to realise that the disorientation was part of the learning process, not detached from it."* (John: DMS student).

For some writers, anxieties, fear and pain can hinder the learning process (Beech, 1978; Diamond, 1993, Miller, 1993). Working in groups openly, axiomatic to group

based participative assessment can raise feelings of vulnerability, embarrassment and fear, creating agendas that divert students from their main goal. Sometimes it safer for group members to seek dependence on a tutor, collude with supportive fellow students for mutual protection, or simply absent themselves from group discussions. The irony here is that some participative processes may reinforce the very power differences they intend to dissolve; students learn to distrust, even fear, participation and the self expression it is intended to liberate. As the following story demonstrates.

Kim's Story _(MAML student)_

My journey through participative assessment has been a mixture of emotions, that sometimes felt never-ending, and yet was challenging and rewarding. On numerous occasions I had to face and manage my own feelings and emotions, not only privately, where I would have preferred, but also publicly in the learning set. Along this journey I felt there were many instances where I wanted to disembark or, putting it bluntly, ...jump off.

There were times when I'd had enough. I was seeking to take flight as the ride was becoming more uncomfortable, confronting my own feelings, attitudes and emotions was not part of the contract. During assessment I felt disorientated as my personal expectations were not being met. During assessment activities I kept silent in meetings, only speaking when I had to. (Kim: MAML student)

Kim's story illuminates how different forms of anxieties manifest themselves within participative assessment and can be experienced with discomforting consequences, even to the extent of individuals becoming marginalised or silenced on the basis of them.

In participative assessment, those who stay silent or make little or no contribution frequently get labelled as "social loafers", riding on the backs of other students' efforts. Traditional educational groupwork literature, as well as that from critical management, are virtually silent on this issue. More sympathetic views see silence as a result of oppression. The next section draws from feminist and post-colonial literature to explore silence as interconnected with questions of status, power and identity, to argue that silence needs also to be understood as being emotionally frozen in response to anxiety within the participative assessment learning context.

Part C. Silence as a Response

Conformability to pressure

The following stories explore how silence is used by some students as a mechanism for resisting the potential pressure for coercion and conformity that emerges within participative assessment. Within this section I evaluate how silence can contribute to an understanding of being emotionally frozen as a response to fear and anxiety.

Sixth Story

Issue: **Pressure to conform**

Gay's story illustrates how the pressure to conform can create anxiety

and stress which affects her ability to contribute.

<u>**Gay's Story (DMS student)**</u>

Within my group strong pressure was exerted towards achieving

uniformity, with group members practising self-censorship by refraining

from mentioning doubts about group choice to create an illusion of

unanimity. In many instances direct pressure is brought by self-appointed

'mind guards' who take it upon themselves to keep others in line with an

assumed consensus.

Within my group these characteristics became accentuated during

assessment because of external pressures to succeed, levels of stress and low

self esteem. Also the pressure to conform to group norms and expectations

also induces an intense individual involvement, with members vying for

recognition and affection. The cult of group participation is sufficiently

powerful to bring most deviant members to heel, stifling individuality in

consensual mediocrity.

I feel participation means different things to different people. I often

experienced and felt the pressure to conform, the stress and anxiety was very

uncomfortable. I often felt I had no real voice, which affected my ability to

contribute.   (Gay: DMS student)

Gay's story exemplifies the different ways anxiety is experienced and managed

within participative assessment. In participative assessment, so much that takes place in

the learning context is hidden from public view. Thus the social processes which participative assessment generates can undermine possibilities for a democratic learning community.

As Giddens argues

Those who think of community only in a positive sense should remember the intrinsic limitations of such an order. Traditional communities can be, and normally have been, oppressive. Community in the form of mechanic solidarity crushes individual autonomy and exerts a compelling pressure to conformism (Giddens, 1994, p.126).

Within participative assessment fostering both equality and community is difficult if students are caught in the trap of competing for domination and control alongside the struggle to survive psychologically. One of the hopes of participative assessment is that it seeks to reverse the alienating effects of traditional assessment methods. Participative assessment is regarded as egalitarian, democratic and empowering of the learner. This epitomises a prevalent notion that students come together non-hierarchically and constitute learning communities.

The following story illustrates some of the tensions involved in creating more democratic processes through participative assessment, whilst being aware of the hierarchical tendencies that lurk within them.

Seventh Story

Issue: **Equality in communication**

The next story provides insights into the emotional undercurrents of individual and group behaviour and illustrates the lack of equality in communication than critical theorists aspire to. The story illustrates how gender differences through interaction, lead to female voices being undermined.

The story of Men with Attitude

When the group first formed it consisted of eight men and two women and uppermost in our mind was to decide upon a name that aptly described the group. After much deliberation the group settled upon the name 'Managers with Attitude'. Within a year the two female members had left the group and a female from another group was to later describe us as 'Men with Attitude'. Within the eye of that statement lies an element of truth.

The original composition of the group was very interesting because it incorporated several strong individuals and it was clear from the start that there would be conflicts and tensions. Individuals were fighting for positions of power and domination within the group, coupled with their own hidden agenda. Males were competing against males, males against females, females against males and female against female. This made for a volatile cocktail.

When a male group member was competing against another male group member nothing was said but it was clear what was at stake, i.e. power and domination, as mirrored in any male orientated organisation and the men in the group knew instinctively what the

rules of engagement were without it being stated. When the men engaged in conflict with women in the group the attitude of the men was that it was down to their unreasonable behaviour, mood swings, being too emotional, wrong time of the month, being illogical and not rational. The women felt that they were not being listened to. They were not given enough respect. And they felt that the attitude of the men meant that it was difficult to contribute and that when they did contribute something, there was an expression of surprise if they presented something that was considered good, which made them even more resentful, which meant as time went on they contributed less and less and consciously withdrew from discussions.

(DMS Group)

Marshall (1995) argues women's voices are often ignored or silenced. The ideas they generate are unlikely to become established and accepted in the culture unless they coincide with those of men. Gilligan (1982) believes women are often speaking in not only a different voice, but one that is socially and culturally devalued. These reinforce the male domination of culture, and undermine women's confidence in their own perspectives. Within participative assessment, whether or not individual male students use this power consciously and deliberately, their actions will tend to reinforce cultural norms and values which are held in place by covert patterns of power, which can marginalise women.

Whilst this research is not solely focused on female students' experience of participative assessment, I feel it is important to acknowledge the voices of students who feel on the edge or margin, as well as those at the centre of dominant educational

orthodoxy. Sinclair (1997) argues the experience of being in a minority cultivates consciousness about the politics and purpose of teaching practices which those situated in the mainstream of management education may be slower or more resistant to understanding. (p.314). Being aware and taking account of the experience of those students on the margins can promote the kind of liberating approach which Willmott (1994) argues should be brought to management education because it illuminates aspects which are taken for granted by those who are more comfortably embraced within culture.

hooks (1994) describes how with 'a fear of 'losing face'', of not being thought well of by one's professor and peers, all possibility of constructive dialogue is undermined. Even though students enter the 'democratic' classroom believing they have the right to 'free speech', most students are not comfortable exercising this right to 'free speech' (hooks, 1994, p.179).

Lewis (1993) suggests that silence is one of the social codes through which women can comply with acceptable demonstrations of femininity. To be silent from this perspective, is to seek to fit in, to avoid censure. Similarly, hooks describes how

> ...to avoid feelings of estrangement, students from working-class backgrounds could assimilate into the mainstream, change speech patterns, points of reference, drop any habit that might reveal them to be from a nonmaterially privileged background (1994, p.181).

Here again is a partial silencing as individuals construct an identity and forge a social position.

Silence as a response

Having no voice

Belenky et al (1986) described some women students as silent in the sense that they experienced themselves as having no voice and being subject to external authority. They invested this authority in others, typically parents or partners, and their way of knowing the world was through repeating the 'truths' of these others. Here silence is the outcome of having no (or not daring to have any) independent sense of self. The following extract highlights the implications of having no voice within participative assessment.

> *I remember that similarity seems to be promoted by individuals, such that they have like minded people around them.*
>
> *My frustration increased as I began to feel helpless. Helpless, because I was finding it difficult to come out with any suggestions I had. In as much as I wanted to, a part of me did not want to add to the confusion. I unconsciously withdrew and I noticed that a few of the members were not saying as much as before.* (Joy: DMS student)

Judi Marshall talks of muted voices in a dominant context (Marshall, 1984). For those whose identities, as a subordinate group, are constructed in the world and language of dominant groupings, silence has also been theorised as inevitable in a context which makes it difficult to issue challenges (Rakow, 1992), i.e. some people are silent within a group because they cannot find the language with which to be heard. This is reinforced by the following student's comments:

I was struggling a great deal at this point, with the feeling of low self

esteem...I felt unable to contribute and made a conscious decision to remain silent

and withdraw.

(Sally: Black woman in a DMS mixed group)

Audre Lord wrote:

> In the case of silence, each of us draws the face of her own fear – fear of
>
> contempt, fear of censure, of some judgement, of recognition, of
>
> challenge, of annihilation. But most of all I think, we fear for the very
>
> visibility without which we cannot truly live (1980, pp. 20-21).

Silence as resistance

Some students deliberately adopt a strategy of instrumental engagement with the

group process, whilst being highly attuned to the political dimensions of group

dynamics, for example, as influenced by race or gender. They are political, yet

adopt a strategy of non-challenge, or quiet resistance, towards the other students.

For some students, e.g. Black women, this can be seen as a political act, as

'inclusive acts' (Mirza, 1997), in that they are choosing to engage on territory

they have been excluded from, but where their focus is not on individual

transformation rather on social transformation, achievement to produce change for

their family or community.

This approach is a resistance to the call to engage openly and honestly, because as

Mirza argues, to challenge is tiring, it means you are always defined as the 'other' (1997).

Jarrett (1996) argues this kind of delicate balance between asserting self whilst maintaining a sense of security, is always present for Black women in higher education where they are within a minority context, if not totally isolated. Similarly, Brookes (1992) discusses ways of silence which women have appropriated as an act of resistance and transformation. Lewis argues 'women repeatedly tell me of their conscious decision to stop speaking in classrooms where sexism is a non-negotiable dynamic of the curriculum and classroom practice' (p.194). Whilst other examples highlight how women in the classroom have made a conscious decision to refrain from the discussion as a form of resistance to being silenced (Lewis and Simon, 1986). This is further highlighted by my observations and discussions with Claudette, a black woman on the DMS.

Claudette's Story (DMS student)

Within my action learning set, and the wider course community, I was initially challenging of behaviour I felt was discriminatory, drawing attention to power dynamics between the students, particularly during assessment.. Although supported by some of the other Black students, others, and most white students, were intimidated by me and a few were hostile. My action learning set was full of conflict. On entering the second year I made a deliberate decision not to comment any longer on process issues within the group. I felt that to challenge was a personal cost – having to educate others at my own emotional expense, was emotionally draining.

(Claudette: DMS student)

It is interesting to note that much of the critical research theorising pedagogy from a resistance perspective comes from teachers of women's studies courses and from these concerned to bring about gender-inclusiveness in the curriculum (Lewis 1993, Konrad, 1993, Luke and Gore 1992). A general conclusion is that teaching which is consistent with feminist principles in unveiling and working with power differentials is no easy undertaking. Similarly, growing awareness of the influence of power relations in shaping pedagogical agendas has provided considerable impetus to question the hopes of experiential learning as a pedagogy that is egalitarian, democratic and empowering of the learners

Spender (1980) argues that language in general, and particular patterns of communication, have been legitimised and institutionalised to suit men's broad preference and interests. Spender highlights women are more likely to declare their emotions and vulnerability, and initiate exchanges which minimise status difference, whilst Ianello (1992) maintains that women learn how to adapt to dominant practice in order to survive.

Lewis (1993)develops the debate by exploring how it might be possible to formulate a conceptual understanding of women's silence and resistance not, as has been traditionally the case, as a lack that concretely reaffirms women's non-existence, but rather as the course of an active transformative practice. Giroux (1992) argues that, for such changes to take place, feminist pedagogy needs to address and confront the conditions of learning for women in the whole 'construction and organisation of knowledge, desires, values and social practices' (p.24).

This section has highlighted that emotions in participative assessment has to be appreciated as far more significant than traditionally understood within assessment

literature. I have also argued for a fuller recognition of how power relations are critical in constructing individual positions with groups and how this shapes communication and interaction in participative assessment. Emotions can be used by individuals as a strategy of resistance or of survival. Emotions can also lead to silence. Silence can be socially imposed; can be the outcome of having no voice, or having no space to speak. Through emotions particular social interests get promoted, whilst others are rendered invisible. Emotions within participative assessment has been a neglected area, but provides an opportunity for learning about and working with the complexities of emotions, power, inclusion, contribution and resistance within assessment and education more widely.

It is argued that a crucial aspect of facilitation is recognition of this emotional dimension of learning, and rather than emotions being overlooked or obscured, the learning milieu of participative assessment should encourage understanding of emotions, recognising it as the basis for change both within the programme and, as a consequence, in the workplace.

The next section presents a range of stories and extracts that illustrate the interaction between participative assessment and the complex, political and social dynamics of learning groups. The stories and extracts will explore power, authority and classroom politics to illuminate the emotional and social dynamics of participative assessment, drawing on ideas from critical and feminist pedagogies as discussed in my conceptual framework in Chapter Two.

Section Two. Power Authority and Classroom Politics

Introduction

In this section I will examine the importance of power, authority and the tutor's role in participative assessment. The discussion will be illustrated by stories and extracts which illuminate how the social complexity of power and authority is embedded within participative forms of assessment and its impact on classroom politics. Section Two is divided into two parts, Part A: Power and authority; and Part B: Classroom politics.

It could be argued that questions of power and authority are clearly confined to traditional assessment methods, and that they are not so problematic in more participative approaches. The nature of the dynamics of participative methods generally would suggest otherwise (Reynolds and Trehan, 2000). Ellsworth (1992) points out, contrary to the rhetoric of critical pedagogy, that concepts of power, empowerment and student voice have become myths that perpetuate relations of domination. If for example interpretations of 'participative' education result in an increased emphasis on self-awareness, consciousness-raising or reflexivity in the assessment process, but power, authority and judgement-making are not examined, students have even less control than in more traditional methods. At least within traditional methods the notion of the assessor as an all-knowing, all powerful entity who has the intellectual authority to make assessment decisions is transparent, with the tutor-student role clearly defined. However, in participative assessment the individual boundaries are not so transparent, which can create tensions. Certainly in practice, a participative approach is unlikely to be straightforward, as the following story and extracts will demonstrate.

Part A: Power and Authority

Within participative assessment, a critique of the student-tutor relationship needs to be considered. Assessment is a critical part of the learning process in any educational method, traditionally exercised by the tutor but in participative learning by the student also. However, the following story and extracts will highlight that such apparent transition of power may not necessarily be empowering.

First Story

Issue: Student-tutor dynamics

Rachel's story provides insights into the intricacies and ambiguities in tutor-student relations within participative assessment, the contradictions in relation to the institutional context and the complex social process generated.

Rachel's Story (MAML student)

The assessment process in my case was quite short, principally because there was a tutor who was a member of the group and she put her marks in first, which everybody then kind of fell in with because, you know, we just weren't experienced, not up to arguing and actually I still have quite unpleasant feelings about that. There is also the tutor/student bit where there is a leaning on the tutor's mark over others. To what extent is this collaboration!

I was thinking about this whole question of collaboration and being equal and then thinking about marks, which isn't easy, and yes, the tutor's marks were lower than I would have expected and I didn't

feel that I could challenge them because I know that the tutors always

argue that they need to justify the marks to an external examiner, so I

didn't feel I could argue. The tutor's role was important and

powerful, it was not overtly stated but that certainly was my view of

how the group worked ... there are university criteria in which you

are not well-versed.

There seem to be a number of issues all jumbled up to do with

the mark, how it is arrived at, how fair, the judgement of one piece of

work against another, quality, standards, etc. alongside the process

and the emotions of the feedback itself, fear of failure etc. as well as

the dynamic of the group, personalities, styles, interests, the tutor's

perceived and real role etc. (Rachel: MAML student)

Rachel's story highlights the difficulties that can emerge due to the ambiguities that result from the redefinition of the tutor's role and disconfirmation of expectations of the extent and basis of authority associated with it. Bilimoria (1995) notes the shift which takes place, from a tutor's role based on the 'exercise of control, expertise, and evaluation' to a concept of authority as shared among participants, expressed through collective generation of knowledge and in the 'ownership' of its evaluation (p.448). But this is not necessarily how students experience it.

It is important that tutors are aware of the power they hold over resources, sructuring the agenda or controlling assessment. So for example, within the philosophy of the two programmes, it is hoped that learning will be initiated by the student exchanging ideas freely with the tutor. The two embrace the process of reflection and potentially, of

action, described by Freire (1972) as 'problem posing, where the traditional assumption of teacher supremacy and student compliance is dismantled' (p.42).

The research material suggests however, that although tutors may support this model of learning from the outset, it can take some time before the student fully adapts to it. One could argue therefore that within this problem posing approach there is a point in time where the student feels there is still a power imbalance, because while the tutor understands the philosophy, the student, initially at least, is to a great extent 'in the dark'. There is an underlying belief that some form of unspoken but expected authority is still present. This belief is particularly reinforced through the experience of assessment, as the following story illuminates.

Second Story

Issue: *Bill's story explores whether sharing in the procedures of assessment necessarily results in more democratic processes, between tutor and student.*

<u>*Bill's Story (MAML student)*</u>

The marks went out, the tutor's mark went in last and produced a sharp intake of breath from all of us because the tutor marks were higher than any of our ...throughout I felt the tutor's voice was quite loud.

I then just assumed that everybody in the group would not bother discussing the issues because [the] tutor had the final say. I just thought fait accompli, let's go with her marks.

Afterwards, however, there were a number of disgruntled whispers, saying you might as well just let the tutor mark the paper. I think this had

an effect on others in the group because everyone in the group started to

question the process and as a group we were asking what this is all about.

The anger of the group continued for days with strong communication [to

each other] challenging the assessment process and asking what's the point

of assessment days if we are going to rely and accept the tutor mark as read.

(Bill: MAML student)

Without recognition of the ambiguities associated with a redefinition of the tutor's role, and support in making sense of them, participative approaches to assessment may be experienced as a more subtle technique for disciplining, as the next extract indicates.

The contribution and involvement of the facilitator felt to me ... to use an analogy,

like having an arrogant hierarchical senior manager constantly present and

expecting great things from you and then disappearing for a round of golf ... still

expecting everyone to believe his claim [to be] 'part of the team'. (Cathy: DMS)

Reynolds and Trehan (2000) argue that to challenge the nature of the tutor's authority is not to refute its legitimacy. However, such an investigation may be helpful in identifying its bounds or limitations. The distinction that seems important to make is between expectations that seem reasonable.

I feel quite dissatisfied with the way assessment has happened on MAML,

particularly with the role of the tutors. I can see that the ambiguity of their position

makes things difficult, but I feel that they could have given more guidance about

assessment, especially the first time round (even if it was simply to prompt a

discussion about assessment in advance of the assessment meeting). (Clare:

MAML student)

Similarly the second extract also reinforces students' desire for greater input from tutors.

Before we started the tutors should have schooled us in the techniques, because

the whole process always seemed fairly arbitrary to me. I would have liked to see

some more rules regarding marking schemes imposed by the tutor group. I don't

think the experiences gained would be diluted in any way but there would probably

be a greater sense of achievement from the marks awarded. (Mark:

DMS student)

And explanations of unquestioned deference to tutors' authority. Then the conviction that tutors should 'impose…rules regarding marking schemes' is replaced by an equally unquestioning regime of self-discipline.

As long as the facilitators did not interfere we felt we must be on the right lines

and therefore felt secure. (Paul: DMS)

In order for participative assessment to grasp in practice what it promises in principle, it needs to be alert to the tendencies for hierarchical relations to persist in the shape of disciplines which students come to impose on themselves and on each other. This, it could be argued, is a form of governmentality (Foucault, 1979) exercised through the action of 'being one's own policeman', of managing one's own practices, as the following extract implies:

There was one paper that was noticeably weaker than the others. I felt some anxiety as to whether it should be a pass or not, we all felt it was a fail really but in the end we chose to moderate it and push the mark up. (Simon: MAML)

In as much as these extracts indicate that students will take responsibility for critically examining each other's work, participative assessment might reasonably be considered a success, confirming the observation that participative assessment is as likely to result in tough as in generous grading (Heron, 1979). On the other hand, students' experiences can indicate a less constructive process, as the following story illustrates:

Story Three

Issues: ***The next story explores the complex political and social dynamics of learning groups, and the way the process of participative assessment may be affected by them, and questions the implicit assumption that participative assessment necessarily brings about equality. The story highlights that there is always more going on in the collective experience of participative assessment than is ever made explicit.***

<u>*Rod's Story (DMS student)*</u>

Although I was experienced in assessment within my job and had undertaken many presentations I was very nervous when I was being peer assessed within my own group. Why? I am not sure. Maybe because it was the start of a new course and I wanted their approval, or respect. I did not want to make a fool of myself. Maybe it was because I was trying to establish myself within the group and a good performance would help my cause. In addition I felt that if I was being assessed by a tutor or a lecturer they would

know exactly what they were looking for and I felt more secure in that knowledge when I was being assessed by them.

At the beginning of the course when one group was assessing another group a competitive factor came into play. 'It was us against them' scenario. The mentality was that we had to get a superior grade to other groups. In a group that was predominantly male the environment cultivated the innate competitive attribute we all had. The mentality was that we wanted to be 'top dog'.

I do not believe that when we first started peer assessment we critically evaluated the work we did. We were pleased to say that someone had passed. Gave very little criticism either at an individual or group level.

Another point of observation regarding peer assessment. At the beginning we were careful not to be too critical of other groups because we feared retaliation, i.e. if we gave them a low mark they would repay the compliment. Nothing was stated but it appeared to be an almost unwritten rule. This situation was exacerbated by the mistrust and suspicion we originally had for each other as individuals and as groups.

I did not like peer assessment. Groups and individuals were operating on different levels and some students took the course seriously and others wanted an easy ride. The outcome was that some individuals put enormous effort into group and individual presentations but the marks, particularly in the early stages of the course, did not reflect that.

(Rod: DMS student)

The above story illustrates the importance of understanding how power and social processes at play within participative assessment can generate a new set of complex power relations which need to be reviewed. Simply to exchange one situation of power relations. (tutor-student) with another (student-student) does not of itself guarantee quality.

Giroux (1988) argues that providing an opportunity for students to work together in the evaluation of each other's work and to sway the assessment outcome, would appear to provide the foundations for 'diffusing authority along horizontal lines' (p.39). Giroux further states that 'under such conditions, social relations of education marked by dominance, subordination, and an uncritical respect for authority can be effectively minimised. However, as a result of this research Reynolds and Trehan (2000) ask:

> Does sharing in the procedure of assessment necessarily result in more democratic processes?...and as well as the more obvious distinction between tutor and student, what of the cultural bases of power which influence relationships among the students themselves. (p.271)

The concept of participative assessment within a learning community approach involves increased levels of participation; each individual is recognised, their presence valued and their contributions produce resources which enhance the collective good. Learning community-based educational philosophy and practice requires a sharing of responsibility for learning methods, the curriculum followed, and assessment procedures adopted. And, while these participative practices take time, they allow participants to customise their own pursuit of learning, helping to prevent the estrangement of the person from the knowledge they produce and own.

Participative assessment is an important stage for observing negotiations on autonomy and dependence. Through participative assessment, it is critical to recognise socially constructed differences within learning groups and the inequalities of power that such differences can generate. Vince (1996) argues, active engagement with the consequences of such differences need to be an integral aspect of educational processes.

Part B: Classroom politics

The issue of classroom politics is central to our understanding of power, difference, the social processes at play within participative assessment. Individuals have status and influence within the learning set, informed by who they are in wider society, in relation to age, gender, race and class. These differences will surface through participative assessment as the next story indicates.

Fourth Story

Issue: *This story explores reciprocal relations, individual accountability, contribution and gender.*

Participative assessment relies on reciprocation, each person involved has to give to their peers in addition to receiving from them. Without this reciprocal relationship, goodwill diminishes and competition is likely to emerge (Axelrod, 1990; McConnell 2000).

The place of individual accountability in the group participative work needs to be addressed by the community (tutors and participants). It is sometimes left to each individual to determine what they can offer the group or work towards. And it is the responsibility of the group to look after itself and its members and to find a level of

performance (and therefore also individual accountability) which they feel is acceptable to them. When learning groups are working with such an open contract, the degree to which it successfully works out can vary from group to group. In some groups there can at times be a tangible feeling of discontent due to the marked differences in contribution, performance and ability.

Sam's Story (DMS student)

On the course, peer assessment invariably includes feedback from a wide range of intellect and knowledge within which the person assessed probably falls in at some point with the range ... this implies that some assessment is made by individuals of a lower intellect/knowledge ... how valid does that make this assessment? In a group of peers one usually finds that only a proportion of them contributes to the assessment. Some will not contribute at all or just say "I agree with so-and-so", therefore is this true peer assessment or trial by a few/minority/majority. Also there was no agreement of criteria in advance, individual prejudices and coalitions become the norm. One consequence of this approach is that in my group people would make allowances for some of the women's experience and abilities, or rather lack of it. I was disappointed with the level of engagement of the females in the group, because some people [the men] were spending a lot of time giving feedback and others were just putting in fairly short personal comments. I felt they were just not reciprocating ...the feedback from one individual was very thin and very scanty, so there was some inequality there, but nobody said anything. It did however create bad feeling and some mistrust. (Sam: DMS student)

On the positive side, this story demonstrates how the social processes taking place within participative assessment, provide opportunities for students to develop their understanding of social relationships. But the stories also show how differences of gender, ways of working or perceived ability can become translated into a hierarchy of the 'normal' (Tannen, 1992). The next story illustrates the ways in which students saw classroom politics having an effect on the outcome of assessment.

Fifth Story

Issue: *Jenny's story exemplifies issues associated with classroom politics. It highlights how participative assessment can create the grounds for prejudice, coalitions and exclusion.*

Jenny's Story (DMS student)

The period leading up to the assessment was full of speculation about what would happen. For me the whole process relies on us to be open both in giving and taking comments, including criticism, but often this was not the case. Instead what really happens is people sort things out informally, groups of individuals always working together with other groups, struggles for power, different people having their own agendas, this was all part of the sniffing out process. Many individuals in my group experienced dilemmas and conflicts, mistrust developed when certain individuals tried to lead the session and in my eyes, take control. A downside of the whole process is when cliques form within groups, or when an individual in a group takes a dislike to you, I can only describe this as playground tactics. However the experience gave me the best insight into process... it was funny how all the things I had read about people and groups began to make sense ... the

experience made me aware of the importance of teamworking and things like trust and openness, whereas I spent most of my time sitting on the fence trying to avoid the conflict because I didn't want to be the one that was left out.

Throughout the assessment periods there was always a great deal of tension, frustration, power differentials, indifference and conflict. The tendency in our group was to look to staff members to tell us the answers, to define a right or wrong response to a situation, to know more than us. Instead the redistribution of power created additional problems which meant we had to manage our own group dynamics **(Jenny, DMS student)**

This story demonstrates that norms in participative assessment groups are not necessarily negotiated between equals, but can be disproportionately influenced by more powerful individuals or coalitions, and these inequalities may in turn be reflections of the social context. Cunningham (1991), for instance, argues that sometimes women and black students have suggested that only other women or black people constitute peers, in that they do not accept that male or white students can be classified as peers, or that they should take part in their assessment. Implementing assessment methods which encourage learners to assist fellow learners, whilst in parallel developing their skills in critically evaluating the work of others, is a demanding, intricate process. The stories and extracts used illustrate the subtle processes involved in implementing participative assessment, and illuminate the uncertainties associated with such processes.

At best, participative assessment empowers students by making them as active learners, responsible for their own learning. Superficial applications in the interests of

'student involvement', within an unaltered disciplinary regime of the academic institution, engenders surveillance through self-regulation, especially if students are required to reveal or confess themselves. Applying Foucault's development of the concept of the panopticon as the embodiment of the principle of surveillance, unfacilitated participative assessment could be seen as a shift from the darkened cells of the traditional prison to the well-lit panopticon cell, a device which, though seemingly more humane, has the more subtle effect of creating self-disciplining subjects. In the same way, Ball (1990) argues that confessional techniques used in pedagogical practices, which encourage students to view the procedures of appraisal as part of the process of self-understanding, self-betterment and professional development, are simply more complex mechanisms of monitoring and control.

Dearden (1972), in his critique of non-directive facilitation, cites the example of a prisoner who, having his freedom restored after a long time 'exhibits only anxiety and withdrawal in the state of freedom, rather than the capacities of self direction and choice'. He argues that the granting of freedoms by a teacher can result in that source of control merely being replaced 'by that of some other agency' (p.451).

While participative assessment can be supported from the principles of a critical pedagogy, the research from this thesis highlights that the experiences of students involved underline the need for tutors to be prepared and able to work with the complex social processes which are generated. If not, retaining traditional practice may be preferable, in spite of its inherent contradictions with the principles of a critical pedagogy.

Summary

In this section I have demonstrated that participative forms of assessment are not automatically empowering and may even be disempowering in that they can potentially create a hidden curriculum of hierarchical authority. As Vince (1996) notes, learning environments are a powerful and contained arena for viewing negotiations on autonomy and dependence. Inside participative assessment therefore, it is important to recognise the inequalities of power which assessment can generate and which in any case can develop between students. Learning groups are permeated with relations of power, which contribute to the construction of individual and group identity. Participative learning groups develop norms and establish a dynamic of influence and hierarchy which can be in conflict with any endeavours towards equality.

The challenge of working with participative assessment involves incorporating an open and honest look at the power of the tutor. Rather than inflated or spurious claims for participative assessment, its worth is as a location where power relations can be examined and – ideally perhaps – negotiated.

What implications does this present for participative assessment? Within participative assessment, if we are to acknowledge that students have been granted a larger amount of control over their learning, but essentially the underlying power relationships stay extensively unaltered, how much control do they really have over the evaluation and assessment process?

Thus, within participative assessment, it is essential that an open review of what it entails is considered. Such questions are fundamental but are often not asked either during course design or during the course itself – but should be. The procedures and

processes of assessment extend further than the negotiations between tutors and students. Whose views are subsequently represented at examiners' meetings? How and where are disputes resolved? Which other sources of power are involved and which affect students' evaluation of their own and others' work? What is the tutor's role and responsibility in drawing attention to all this?

In chapter five the above questions are addressed and in reviewing the implications of this research I explore the contradictions and complexities associated with participative assessment and asks if it is too risky to contemplate in practice, despite its appeal in theory and the hopes and principles of critical management learning.

CHAPTER FIVE

PARTICIPATIVE ASSESSMENT:

CONTRADICTIONS AND COMPLEXITIES

Participative Assessment: Contradictions and Complexities

Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to consider the implications of the research material by exploring the contradictions and complexities associated with participative assessment and consider the question. Is participative assessment too risky to contemplate in practice, despite its appeal in theory and the hopes and principles of Critical Management Learning?

In chapter four the research material stresses the importance of assessment as the procedure which most clearly expresses institutionalised power while questioning the assumption that practices of participative assessment are necessarily empowering. The findings from this thesis also emphasise the need to take account of power dynamics other than those which comprise the tutor-student relationship. Asymmetries of power which originate from differences including gender, competitiveness, a sense of intellectual superiority, or a lack of trust in the validity of other students' opinions, race, age can all affect the evaluations made of students' work, even where the tutor is ostensibly absent.

The findings presented in chapter four also drew attention to the underlying social processes that can emerge within student groups, whilst challenging the implicit assumption that participative assessment necessarily creates equality in the learning

relationship. The differences that emerge within student groups influence power relations, which then impact on the process of assessment and its outcomes.

This chapter addresses three key issues which have emerged from the research findings; firstly power, authority and the rhetoric of empowerment, secondly classroom politics, within participative assessment; thirdly emotions, power and participative assessment.

Power Authority and the Rhetoric of Empowerment

The language of transformation, enlightenment and empowerment lie at the heart of critical management learning. Consequently, power is a particularly significant concept within the two postgraduate programmes. Empowerment, openness and trust have been core tenets of participative assessment. Similarly, much value has been placed on group work and learning communities within participative assessment. One of the hopes of a learning community is that it is egalitarian, democratic and empowering of the learners, as illustrated by McGill and Beaty (1995) and Pedlar (1988). The proposal that students should play a significant part in evaluating their own and others' learning is clearly a departure from the traditional interpretation of the tutor's role possibly is the crux of the formal learning process – that somebody is going to evaluate learning. Traditionally it has been someone other than the learner and in participative assessment there is an attempt to either share this with or hand it over to the learner. There are difficulties with this, as explained in chapter two. However, such transition of judgement and what might be interpreted as power and authority, is the central focus of participative assessment.

One of the difficulties in moving to a learning community approach where participative assessment operates is the establishing of the principle of authentic use of tutors. This concept, according to Megginson and Pedler (1976) is difficult,

...and can lead to situations where it looks as though the tutor is playing a game, "ask me in the right way and I'll tell you". This is similar to, and just as unhelpful as, the "guess what I want you to say" game played by some teachers in the competitive classrooms of our school system. (Megginson and Pedler 1976, p.266)

This excerpt highlights a critical question for tutors involved in participative assessment. The research findings (Chapter Four: Power Authority and Classroom Politics) question the role tutors play in participative assessment. Rachel and Bill's story highlight how difficult it is not be constrained or influenced by the presence of tutors in participative assessment. As this student's reflection on their experience of participative assessment further illustrates,

The atmosphere within my group varied and was considerably influenced by the role of the facilitator, because we were unsure as to what their role was. It felt initially that his presence was disruptive.

The research from this thesis leads me to argue that within participative assessment tutors need to be reflexive about their practices, because of the power they can have to influence the outcome of assessment . As Shrewsbury (1987) argues:

Empowering pedagogy does not dissolve the authority or power of the instructor. It does move from power as domination to power as creative energy...a view of power as creative community energy would suggest that strategies be developed to counteract unequal power arrangements. Such strategies recognise the potentiality for changing traditional unequal relationships. Our classrooms need not always reflect an equality of power, but they must reflect movement in that direction. (p.9)

Within my theoretical frame I highlight that Gore (1993) points out that the institutional context may militate against changes such as these, begging the question as to how much freedom academic institutions really have to question and challenge existing structures. Brookfield (1986) has highlighted how a number of institutional variables seem repeatedly to skew, distort, or prevent the neat application of empowerment and self-directed learning principles. This is because the realities of curricular imperatives, grading policies and institutionally devised evaluative criteria preclude student involvement. This is further reinforced by the research material which has highlighted the paradoxes of trying to work more democratically, whilst being acutely aware that the tutors are responsible for maintaining the academic standards of the university. The following extract reinforces this,

He made it clear that his judgement would be the final one; he was the academic and if he did not feel able to justify a mark he would insist on changing it.

This example could be seen as a rationalisation which acted to maintain the power of the tutor.

Within critical pedagogy, whilst there is recognition of the socially constructed and legitimated authority that tutors have over students, little attention has been accorded to analyse in any depth the institutionalised power imbalances between themselves and their students, giving the illusion of equality while leaving the authoritarian nature of the tutor/student relationship intact. As Ellsworth (1992) argues ' empowerment is a key concept...which treats the symptoms but leaves the disease unnamed and untouched.' (p.98)

Jacques (1981) argues that there are several compelling reasons why academic performance should be assessed by the individual and their peers. He argues that self assessment is important because students must internalise criteria and standards for themselves if they are to achieve a useful degree of professional autonomy and assess their own competence in future careers. However, to share the power for making formal judgements for themselves and their peers is not a procedure that students take to readily. In many ways it exposes the problem of power in a raw way. As Jacques (1981) points out 'assessment is a sacred cow and I am asking them not just to eat it, but to join me in fattening it for consumption' (p.7).

So what does all this mean at the level of power, authority and empowerment within participative assessment? From the research findings it could be argued that whilst the underlying structural relationships remain unaltered, new methods of assessment simply reflect and produce a more sophisticated exercising of control, whether intentionally or by default. For example, within participative assessment students are asked to believe they have a greater measure of control over their own learning, and whilst they may seemingly have greater control over operational processes, the nature of the underlying power relationships remain significantly unaffected.

My research findings highlight that within participative assessment tutors are the custodian of academic standards and, as one of the students (Rachel) states;

'the tutors always argue that they need to justify the marks to an external examiner, so I didn't feel I could argue'.

Thus within the student group there remains an underlying belief that some form of unspoken but expected authority is still present. Therefore tutors who seek to practice participative assessment methods may not be supported institutionally either ideologically or in practical terms, because the quality system may be constructed on traditional didactic methods. Golding (1980) argues that any use of the term empowerment involves the depoliticization of control. Control is the underlying outcome but the meaning of the relationship is 'managed' in such a way as to make the exercising of that control a less contentious issue. The idea of being empowered is a more comfortable prospect than being controlled but the outcome may be the same. Gore (1993) argues that critical discourses on empowerment are presented as liberating because they challenge dominant discourses, not because they have proved liberatory for particular people or groups, and that the self critical nature claimed for critical discourses seem more rhetorical than actual. This is further highlighted when she argues:

> ... we must ask how much freedom can there be within the institutional
> and pedagogical exigencies of teaching...More attention to contexts would
> help shift the problem of empowerment from dualisms of
> power/powerlessness, and dominate/subordinate. (p.61)

Within critical and feminist pedagogy, the notion that classrooms are neutral sites for the production of knowledge is disputed. Feminist pedagogy is aimed at 'interrupting relations of dominance' (Lather, 1991, p.122). Feminist teachers who are committed to creating education that would be empowering for students, especially women, have attempted to promote more egalitarian classrooms responsive to difference(s) of identity, location, history and experience. Transforming relations of power in the classroom has been manifested in new pedagogies that are generally described as participatory, experiential and non-hierarchical, focusing on concepts such as 'student voice', 'critical thinking' and 'dialogue'. These forms of pedagogy entail a new understanding of the nature of knowledge in teaching as well as in assessment.

The word empowerment carries with it a promise of autonomy and the capacity to shape participative assessment in ways which not only reflect but develop the skills and aspirations of the student who is empowered. However, Fielding (1995) argues that in reality the arena of empowerment is relatively small and the boundaries firmly fixed.

Similarly, Lather (1991) attacks what she sees as the current fashion for exalting empowerment as 'individual self-assertion, upward mobility and the psychological experience of feeling powerful. (p.3). Within participative assessment, the research material highlights that for many students, participative methods are not necessarily inherently liberating or transformatory. As is demonstrated by Claudette, Ann and Kim's story in chapter four, participative assessment can potentially create a hidden curriculum of hierarchy and authoritarianism. In participative assessment, nurturing both equality and community is difficult if students are caught in the trap of competing for domination and control alongside the struggle to survive psychologically, an example of this has been highlighted in Jo's story. The ability to do so relies on members being

ready and able to tolerate ambiguity and the loss of control, and to work with difference, not suppress it (Pedler, 1988). Anti-racist and feminist pedagogies also present many insight into ways in which critical pedagogy approaches are not necessarily inherently liberating or transformatory. Even when empowerment, self-awareness, raising consciousness and reflexivity are introduced, issues of power authority, consensus, peers, equality, race and gender remain problematic (Jarvis, 1987: Ian McGill and Beaty, 1995; Vince, 1996), particularly in the context of participative assessment, as my research has demonstrated.

One of the implications of participative assessment is that instead of being empowering, some voices are silenced when it is used by 'powerful individuals and groups to assimilate difference among people and to hemogenise alternative perceptions, ideas and feelings in a manner that protects their power and interests.' (Beyer and Liston, 1992, p.380). This is illustrated by David's story, which exemplifies how individuals ensure their vested interests are protected.

Empowerment, from an emancipatory perspective, is about enabling those who are oppressed to speak and to be heard. However Giroux, McLaren (1986) and Simon argue that, whilst it is true that part of what is meant by empowerment is to 'counter the power of some people or groups to make others "mute" to enable those who have been silenced to speak' (Simon 1987, p.374), this is not enough. There needs to be a recognition of the structural context in which those voices speak to each other.

Giroux insists that 'individual powers must be linked to democracy in the sense that social betterment must be the necessary consequence of individual flourishing' (1993, p.11). The point is explored by McLaren who argues that 'Empowerment of the self without regard to the transformation of those social structures which shape the very

lineaments of the self is not empowerment at all, but a sojourn into a version of humanistic therapy where catharsis is co-extensive with liberation.' (1988, p.76).

Within this thesis, the research findings unveil some of the underlying assumptions of power, authority, consensus, equality, self-government, and the notion of non-hierarchy that underpin the practice of participative assessment and then question whether adopting such approaches are realistic or desirable within management learning. These issues are examined in the next section.

Classroom Politics within Participative Assessment

This section critically appraises the part played by classroom politics in participative assessment. My contention is that trust, openness, equality and democratic egalitarian dialogue are all advanced in helping to create less hierarchical structures and less hierarchical relationships between tutors and students within participative assessment. However, such change also needs to take account of the social, political and cultural bases of power which influence and are reflected in relationships amongst students themselves.

In the next part I will explore the problems that ensue from a denial of the social context in which participative assessment operates, and argues classroom politics within participative assessment has the potential to provide rich and diverse insights into individual and group behaviour.

Drawing on documented student experiences as presented in chapter four, I seek to demonstrate how social, cultural and political issues intrinsic to participative

assessment are being reproduced in the micro-politics of the classroom, by the student group.

Classroom Politics and the Issue of Trust

Within participative assessment trust is a vital ingredient; what do we mean by trust? Giddens (1990) takes trust to be an integral aspect of the social construction of contemporary selves. Trust, he argues is based

> …on a mutuality of response and involvement; faith in the integrity of another is a prime source of feeling of integrity and authenticity of self. Trust in abstract systems provides for the security of day-to-day reliability, but by its very nature cannot supply either the mutuality or intimacy which personal trust relations offer (1990, p.114)

Likewise Fukuyama offers a general definition of trust as

> The expectation that arises within a community of regular, honest and cooperative behavior, based on commonly shared norms, on the part of other members of that community (1995, p.26).

In relating the above definitions back into a participative assessment context, let us consider a specific instance from the research of how the problem of trust manifests itself in the learning experience of students. Sam and Jenny's story exemplify issues associated with mistrust and classroom politics, which for them generated the grounds for prejudice, coalitions and exclusion as a result of the assessment process. In terms of

trust, it is important to point out what we see happening within this student group is a microcosmic manifestation of what happens in the real world of organisations.

The mistrust that characterises classroom interactions obtains at two levels. Firstly there is mistrust between the students. Differences in age, gender, occupation background and race can easily result in mutual incomprehension and also frustrate the facilitation of dialogue that seeks, reflexively, to address and surmount difficulties caused by such differences. It is clear that students in this situation radically misread each others' social cues, and with each misreading erode any foundation on which trust could be established. For example in the story 'Men with attitude', mistrust arises from gender differences, experienced through interaction during participative assessment.

> *...after the presentation was completed the male colleagues congratulated her on a good piece of work. Sally interpreted the congratulations as a sign that they (the men) had not expected her to do a good presentation and was duly offended. The males interpreted this as Sally being irrational and illogical.* (extract from chapter four)

A second level of classroom mistrust occurs exclusively between students and the tutors, as is illustrated by Rachel and Bill's story, whereby the intricacies and ambiguities in tutor-student relationships can create uncertainties which lead to mistrust. Within participative assessment tutors can easily mystify their power as 'facilitators' by advocating the fiction that there is equality between themselves and the students. As Brah and Hoy (1989) observe, analysis in experiential learning seldom involves attention to power relations in the classroom, even though participants' willingness to voice their experiences will be mediated by them. However, my point is that if this mistrust or

misreading of meaning and intent between students and tutors goes undetected, then more subtle disciplining techniques for introducing power relations can come into play.

Classroom Politics: a Foucauldian Perspective

The concept of disciplinary power is developed by Foucault (1979). Foucault offers a way of analysing the control of practices within participative assessment by introducing the idea of governmentality. The power relations presented in participative assessment continue to condition people into accepting discipline by others and to develop a type of self-discipline that can be understood through the concept of 'governmentality' (Foucault 1979). If something is to be controlled, governed, or managed, it must first be known. Governmentality is the necessary process that precedes administration and control, the process by which a domain becomes knowable and thereby 'governable'. This process involves formulating (breaking up into categories) that which is to be known in some particular conceptual way, developing measures by which it can be quantified, values assigned and coded, and the provision of a method of representation that facilitates decision making and the application of value judgements. Once this system of knowledge is in place, a complex and qualitative group of variables can be reduced to a single measure of performity. Examples of the techniques of governmentality in participative assessment include marking criteria and procedures.

Governmentality in participative assessment is exercised unconsciously and consciously by the governed student through the action of 'being one's own policeman', managing one's own practices. This understanding of 'self control' is an important aspect of the concept of governmentality.

His (Foucault's) approach is to deconstruct practices and examine in detail how they work focused on the processes of normalisation whereby practices are sanctioned not by an external authority or an appeal to collective sentiments, but by mundane acts of self-authorisation which sustain in the practitioner as a compliant identity, a self-policing individual (Usher et al 1997, p.56)

Within participative assessment, applying Foucault's concept of governmentality means students can be seen as internalising systems of surveillance to the point where they become the overseer of the evaluation process. This is similar to Foucault's description of the panopticon, where,

People learned how to establish dossiers, systems of marking and classifying. Then there was the permanent surveillance of a group of pupils or patients, and at a certain moment in time these methods began to be generalised (1997, p.83)

This is highlighted in Rod and Jenny's stories, which provide examples of self-policing and self-authorisation in participative assessment.

Thus the paradox is that the apparent democracy of participative assessment may at the same time be a constituent of a disciplinary technique. The dual interpretation is similar to Foucault's description of the shift from darkened cells of the traditional prison to the well-lit Panopticon cells which could be seen as a more humane development, although Foucault showed it was also a device which had the more subtle effect of creating self-disciplining subjects. Perhaps the apparently more democratic system of

participative assessment also represents a more subtle disciplining technique for bringing power relations into play.

From the discussion presented above, my findings highlight that within participative assessment it is critical to take account of the social and political bases of power which can influence relationships amongst students themselves and are significant to their experience of participative assessment.

Ellsworth (1989) challenges those liberal educators who assume that to break away from the traditional structures of the classroom by replacing them with discussion groups, circles and community meetings will result in equality of dialogue through mutual respect and tolerance. Arrangements of this kind are certainly a significant feature within participative assessment. Ellsworth's observation is that in spite of the hopes of radical and critical educators, such proposals are unrealistic. They fail to 'confront dynamics of subordination present among classroom participants' (1989, p.315)

Within this thesis, students' experiences illustrate how the social processes generated through classroom politics within participative assessment can impact on the learning process. Within participative assessment classroom politics yield insights which rarely emerge from didactic methods, and provide powerful insights into the social processes inherent in participative assessment. They also offer useful ways of engaging with the need to decipher the layers of power relations that weave their influence in participative assessment, and provide students with an opportunity to explore the micro-political dimensions of participative assessment.

Emotion, Power and Participative Assessment

Growing awareness of the influence of power relations in shaping pedagogical agendas has provided considerable impetus for the issue of participative assessment. Little attention has been accorded to the issue of emotion and power in actually operationalising a critical participative assessment approach with students. I would argue that much of assessment pedagogy, even that which is intended to facilitate a more critical approach, does not provide a structure or educational processes adequate to the task of working with, and developing an understanding of emotions and power within participative assessment. Extant mainstream assessment practice ignores emotions and power or contributes to its suppression. Alternative assessment perspectives, while less hierarchical and place more emphasis on personal and professional experience, strengthen the notion of consensus, which tends to superficially deny power dynamics or attempts to integrate them. Drawing on the stories of students from chapter four, this section presents an examination of the concrete experiences of advancing such an approach and how emotions intersect with power relations. The following question will be addressed - What importance is attached to emotions and power in participative assessment?

On the basis of this critique, and based on the research data, the section will draw attention to ways in practice that participative assessment and its underpinning values, support the examination of power dynamics and emotions, deny its existence or attempt its suppression or assimilation. The intended contribution of this section is to identify ways in which emotions and power might be more recognised and appreciated as a source of learning than I believe to be the case in participative assessment currently. Moreover

rather than emotions and power being overlooked or obscured, the learning milieu of participative assessment should encourage understanding of emotions and power, recognising it as the basis for confrontation and change, both within the programme and, as a consequence, in the students' organisations.

Emotionality and Learning

Participant assessment is an activity of judgement, evaluation, self-knowledge, emotional resilience, confidence to act in the face of uncertainty and partial knowledge. The study of emotions in participative assessment is that it provides one way of thinking about the inseparability of emotion and power, and acknowledges that this relationship is at the heart of what it means to learn. Vince (1996) suggests that,

> Approaches to learning that break free of dependency on the teacher and place emphasis on the responsibility of the learner, always create anxiety (p.121).

Vince (1996) criticises the action learning approach of Revans and Kolb for "an overemphasis on individual experience and this has led to an insufficient analysis of the social and political context of that experience" (p.111). He suggests there is not enough attention paid to emotions or power issues and provides the following model of the cycle of emotions that promote learning.

1. Anxiety

5. Insight
or Authority

2. Uncertainty

4. Struggle

3. Risk
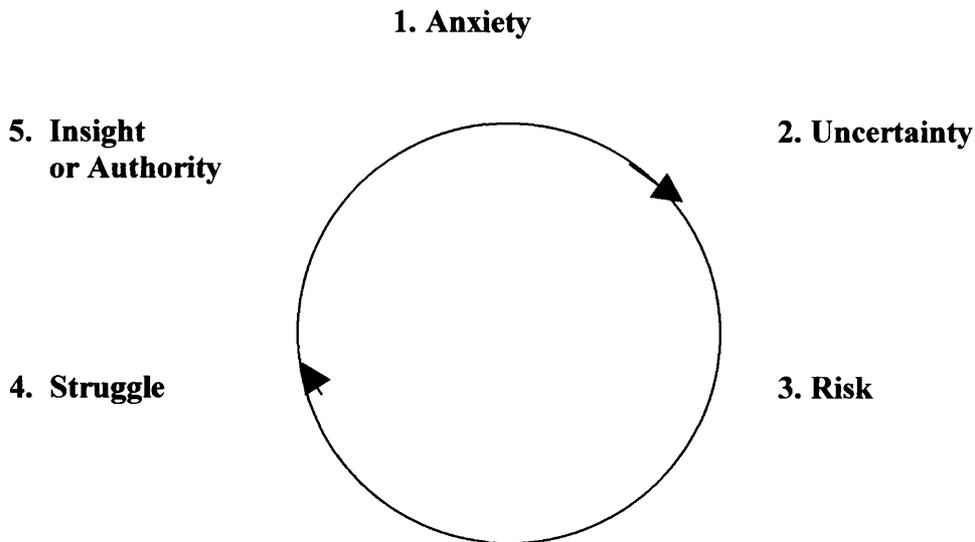
Figure 1: Cycle of Emotions promoting learning (Vince 1996, p.121)

His argument is that individuals can respond to their anxiety, either by entering a cycle that promotes learning, or a cycle that discourages learning. The first cycle moves from anxiety, through uncertainty, to taking risks, struggle, and reaching insight or authority, and a sense of empowerment. However, if the fear of uncertainty is too great, an individual will resist, responding with fight or flight, denial, avoidance, defensiveness, and ultimately maintaining 'willing ignorance' (Vince, 1996, pp.122/3).

My research highlights that it is not uncommon for students to experience real anxiety as a result of undertaking participative assessment. The stories presented in chapter four described a range of emotional behaviour, such as withdrawal, silence, aggression and scape-goating. Emotions promoting or discouraging learning are affected by the dynamics and politics of the group. Participative assessment involves feedback

mechanisms from other members of the group, prompting individual self review and disclosure. Such approaches will have an emotional content or risk factor. Dialogue between individuals in learning groups can serve to re-stimulate power struggles, an example of this is evident in Jenny's story. The intensity of these emotions, and anxiety about how to deal appropriately with power relations in groups and with teachers, means that learning groups can have a high investment in defending against, or avoiding those issues. This 'management by avoidance' (Vince, 1991) is shaped both by internal responses to learning and by socially constructed processes of interaction, particularly around power and powerlessness as is highlighted in Tracy and David's story. Their stories demonstrate that norms in participative assessment groups are influenced by the imbalances of power, status and social capital which exists in groups that are diverse in race, gender and class terms.

In participative assessment students bring differing emotional realities, different systems of meaning, different types of bias. The encounter between students in assessment is effected by social power relations. Students are positioned unequally in and by the group as a consequence of social construction of their identity. Thus, the impact of the relationship between power and emotions constantly shapes the agencies and practice of participative assessment. Consequently it is important to consider how emotions and power are acknowledged and worked with.

Participative assessment can generate powerful feelings for participants, such experiences undoubtedly precipitate important understandings about learning and emotions. However, it is also critical to look beyond the individual experience in order to appreciate both the social influences and implications. Without such an evaluation, the participative assessment experience is more likely to be transitory. Participative

assessment undoubtedly offers some fertile territory for exploring emotionality, power and micro-politics as they develop in the learning community.

Integrating Emotions into Participative Assessment

Generally considered fundamental to participative assessment, learning communities occupy some interesting and educational territory. They do not accord with conventional canons of academic learning, but nonetheless their potential for meshing effective insights and understanding of individual and group behaviour within participative assessment has enabled this form of educational practice to develop in rich and diverse ways. However, such developments have also highlighted the limitations and constraints that ensue from such an approach.

'Learning communities' refers to a spectrum of meanings, practices and ideologies which emerge out of the work of educators, trainers and management developers. Definitions of the learning community vary, ranging from the relatively simplistic; 'Basically a situation where (people) work together learn from one another and can explore' (Prideaux 1992), to the comprehensive; 'A learning event in which participants and tutors take responsibility together for agreeing the objectives, content, pace and method for learning within a given time frame' (Barry T, 1989, p.2).

Heron (1981) argues that within management education the learning community is an approach to learning which combines the value of individual responsibility inherited from the student-centred movement in adult education, with experiential learning theory and method, and attaches equal value to the idea that each individual should take responsibility for helping others with their learning.

The learning community is something of an umbrella term to describe learning

situations where a group of people come together to meet specific and unique

learning needs and to share resources and skills (Burgoyne et al 1978, p.29).

Pedlar (1984) develops this further by arguing that as a design for management

development the term 'learning community' has been used to describe a learning event

with fixed time limits and existing for a more or less specific purpose. The design

involves bringing together a group of people as peers to meet personal learning needs,

primarily through a sharing of resources and skills offered by those present. He argues

that the key principle that underlines this definition is that the term 'peers' implies not

equality of knowledge or skills, but demands that people meet each other on the same

level irrespective of outside rank, status or privilege and they all share the norms of the

learning community. Similarly, Reynolds (1997) states that learning communities are

generally more participative than most educational methods in that as well as sharing

ideas, tutors and students take responsibility for planning implementing and evaluating its

detailed design, content and direction.

The definitions presented suggest participative assessment methods assume a set

of common core values and objectives. The purposes of people participating in

assessment include personal growth and development, especially in terms of

interpersonal relationships, self-direction and evaluation. A major attraction for the

students is the experience of intimacy and intensity with others and the sense of freedom

which participative assessment can create. Participative assessment can also act as a

vehicle for shared decision-making, self-government and problem solving, and generate a

set of norms which emphasise comradeship and open confrontation of problems, together

with helping, i.e. encouraging people 'to own and be responsible for their actions'. The culture of participative assessment enables participants to find new personal solutions to managing and assessing in complex environments. However, it is important to note that my research findings question the whole notion of symmetry in relationship and suggests that participative assessment which operates within a learning community structure, does not always result in the creation of intimacy and community between students, as Gay and Joy's story illustrate in chapter four.

> *...I felt the pressure to conform, the stress and anxiety was very uncomfortable. I often felt I had no real voice, which affected my ability to contribute. (Extract from Gay's story, chapter four).*

In recent literature the concept of the learning community has been increasingly examined from both a critical pedagogy and postmodernist perspective. For the purpose of this section I do not intend to elaborate on the latter perspective, although it undoubtedly adds additional insights into notions of the learning community. From a critical pedagogy perspective Fox (2001), for example, claims that learning community based pedagogy aims to maximise student and/or pupil participation in the framing of the topic of learning and the skill of critique. He points out that without participation, and its consequence, the problematisation and customisation of content, the individual teacher and student confronts bureaucratically standardised intellectual curricula and are alienated from the process of learning, just as the worker is alienated from the means of production.

He further claims that the learning community seeks to reverse the alienating effect of traditional authoritarian education and quotes hooks (1994, p.8) who tells us

> To begin, the professor must genuinely value everyone's presence. There must be an ongoing recognition that everyone influences the classroom dynamic, that everyone contributes. These contributions are resources. Used constructively they enhance the capacity of any class to create an open learning community (p.8).

The tension between the personal and the community in assessment is always a source of conflict, because shared membership of one particular marginal sub-culture does not necessarily mean that assessment practice will support and result in the same ends. Engaging with conflict is, for many students, an anxiety-provoking and difficult task. When the milieu for such interaction does not just licence but supports a review of the emotional basis of experience within assessment, then the risks can appear greater. Crucially therefore this evidence requires some deciphering in the process of participative assessment in the context of learning. Tutors need to be able to facilitate emotions and emotive issues so that traditional assumptions about emotions and experience are brought to the surface and explored. Freire (1970) has captured the essence of developing awareness through 'conscientisation', as he calls it,

> Liberation is praxis and the reflection of men upon their world in order to transform it (p.177)

I would argue that a key rationale for encouraging students to be critical and explore power and emotions in participative assessment lies in the realisation of how powerful managers now are in the world of work, yet how poorly traditional management education and its assessment procedures has prepared them for considering questions of power, authority and responsibility. The research findings certainly illuminate dissonance, in the sense that some students (Kim and Gay) felt unsettled, had their perspectives disturbed and experienced uncertainty and pain. However, a number of them (Andrew, Sue and David) combine in the same story a co-incidence of pain and pleasure. Alongside the uncertainty and fear was elation, learning and a sense of empowerment.

This resonates with ideas of Taylor (1986) and Mezirow (1981) that feelings of alienation, disorientation and struggle are to be expected, and even necessary for transition.

Brookfield (1994) describes the dissonance produced by critical reflection, as the 'darker side' of such an approach and Reynolds (1998) warns of the production of cultural misfits, facing 're-entry' problems on their return to work, feeling frustrated or powerless with their new awareness. Perhaps most pessimistically are Alvesson and Willmott (1992) in their concern that,

> Enhanced ecological consciousness and greater freedom and creativity at work - likely priorities emerging from emancipatory change - may result in bankruptcy and unemployment (1992b, p.448).

Is Participative Assessment too Risky in Practice?

Implications

Do these contradictions and complexities mean that participative assessment, however appealing in theory and however consistent with the principles of a critical pedagogy, is too fraught with difficulties and problematical consequences to contemplate in practice? The proposal that students should play a significant part in evaluating their own and others' learning is clearly a departure from the traditional interpretation of the tutor's role. The possible consequences I have briefly outlined suggest that additional areas of understanding are required of tutors as well for the substantive evaluation of students' work. Rather than to discourage, the propositions are intended to highlight the implications for the tutor's role and the kinds of understanding that are required, both in redefining authority and in making sense of the processes which are generated or released by applying less hierarchical methods.

The issues and dilemmas that have been highlighted are those that tutors might identify for discussion even if they cannot be neatly or easily resolved. Equally there is a role for the tutor in supporting discussions of these issues when they are initiated by students. Where participative assessment in some form is practised, there is value in an open examination of what it entails. The procedures and processes of assessment extend further than the negotiations between tutors and students. How and where are disputes resolved? Which other sources of difference or of power might affect students' evaluation of their own and others' work? What happens beyond the participative

classroom, in examination boards and discussions with external examiners? What is the tutor's responsibility in drawing attention to these aspects and the tensions associated with them?

Responding to these questions calls for an understanding of the processes involved – including the tutor's own part in them – and the skill to support students in working through implications for their assessment of each other's work. The dilemmas and contradictions involved in participative assessment can be acknowledged at the start of the programme, and worked with as they arise before, during and after assessment as well as later in course reviews.

Given the nature of the issues, dialogue is arguably more constructive than legislation in identifying both the givens and the negotiables, and where the line between them is to be drawn. Ideally, throughout the process of participative assessment, tutors can identify and work with the social dynamics of each learning group. As Bright (1987) says, 'discussion of the student/teacher relationship must include a frank look at the power of the teacher' (p.98). While guarding against spurious or exaggerated claims for participative assessment, it can be appreciated as a location where power relations can be at least understood if not negotiated – which seems more consistent with the principles of a critical approach.

Empowering pedagogy does not dissolve the authority or power of the teacher. However, Ellsworth (1989) highlights that it is important to distinguish between imbalances of power which are appropriate and those that are inappropriate. Appropriate, as when tutors give information or introduce methods of analysis which enable students to make sense of their experience, recognising their role as theorists. Inappropriate, as

when the tutor imposes meaning on students' experiences, when in this regard at least, theirs is the authority that should count

Equally, Lather (1994) comments, to deconstruct authority is not 'to do away with it but to learn to trace its effects, to see how it is constituted and constituting' (p.124). - This would entail examining how an emancipatory approach can result in teachers emphasising their superiority by 'requiring' students to become more self-conscious.

These complexities cannot be reduced to a simplified set of guidelines but it does seem as if there is an argument for tutors being willing and capable of recognising and openly working with them. From a critical perspective this would entail a reflexive understanding of the processes involved – including the tutor's own part in them, and the skill to support students in working through the implications for the evaluations which are being made.

When implementing participative assessment, it is important to recognise the power that tutors can have to influence students' grades, which clearly indicates responsibilities we have for questioning our own intents, motives and practices to be reflexive. Tutors have to be prepared for emotionality and conflict, and be aware of their own needs and biases, and above all to develop an informed understanding of the power situated in their roles and the procedures traditionally associated with them. As Giroux (1988) states, 'Teachers' work has to be analysed in terms of its social and political function' (p.212)

In practice this would necessitate a need for tutors to be reflexive about their own awareness and practices in relation to their power to influence and their limitations, in a

sense mirroring the risk taking that they ask students to engage in, as well as being aware of the broader organisational context in which participative assessment operates.

Within this context the importance of being a critically reflective practitioner becomes clear. As Burgoyne and Reynolds argue, the critically reflective practitioners play an important role as:

> ...they are aware that with every practical action they take they are fixing (temporally) their belief' and acting their current best working theory, but they realize that this may also be open to challenge and improvement. (Burgoyne and Reynolds, 1997, p.2)

Concluding Thoughts

In assessing the more general implications of this research, it is clear that the study has helped illuminate four issues. Firstly, potential areas for further research, secondly, the importance of an appropriate methodology to studying social dynamics within participative assessment. Thirdly it has drawn attention to the fact that participative forms of assessment are not a utomatically empowering and may even be disempowering in that they can potentially create a hidden curriculum of hierarchical authority. Inside participative assessment therefore, it is important to recognise the inequalities of power which assessment can generate and which in any case can develop between students. Learning groups are permeated with relations of power, which contribute to the construction of individual and group identity. Participative learning groups develop norms and establish a dynamic of influence and hierarchy which can be in conflict with any endeavours towards equality.

Finally, the challenge of working with participative assessment involves incorporating an open and honest look at the power of the tutor. Rather than inflated or spurious claims for participative assessment, its worth is as a location where power relations can be examined and – ideally perhaps – negotiated.

Future Research

In terms of future research, three areas offer considerable potential and would be interesting to pursue. The first would be a proposition for researching the emotional dynamics of participative assessment and exploring the ways in which the process of learning may be affected by emotions.

On the basis of this critique, the research would draw attention to ways in practice that course design and its underpinning values support the examinations of emotions in participative assessment and how emotions intersect with power relations.

Secondly, the focus for this research has been to understand the lived experience of students involved in participative assessment. Another line of inquiry would be to explore tutors' experience of implementing participative assessment and the ways in which they engage reflexively with power relations in the classroom.

Finally there are many different ways in which the experience and learning of participative assessment could be conveyed. Telling stories is one vehicle. Exchanging anecdotes, gossip, dialogues and jokes is often central to the way in which we make sense of our experiences. As Fineman and Gabriel (1996) highlight, this process goes on incessantly in workplace corridors, offices, coffee rooms, and continues at home in accounts of 'what happened at work today'

Stories and storytelling has been used by qualitative researchers as mechanisms for collecting and interpreting data. Stories are an important ingredient of an organisation's culture; they express personal and organisational meanings and feelings, especially in terms of the metaphors people use. Stories can tell something of the myths that participative assessment preserves, as well as deeper-seated conflicts and anxieties. In short, stories can be regarded as an expression of how people naturally code their feelings, experiences and expectations. Stories are a rich mixture of the storytellers' needs and wishes, as well as their reconstructions of a particular event. The truth or truths, of each story lies not in its accuracy but in its meanings, since stories are reproduction of lived realities rather than objective descriptions of facts.

The third potential area for future research would be to explore the dynamics of the research encounter within participative assessment and critique the role of stories as a vehicle for researching and interpreting participative assessment.

Reflections on Methodology

Reflexivity in research is built on an acknowledgement of the ideological and historical power dominant forms of inquiry exert over the researcher and the researched. Self-reflection upon the constraining conditions is the key to the empowerment 'capacities' of research and the fulfilment of its agenda. ... As we see it, the process of reflexivity is an attempt to identify, do something about, and acknowledge the limitations of the research: its location, its subjects, its process, its theoretical context, its data, its analysis, and how accounts recognize that the construction of knowledge

takes place in the world and not apart from it.

(Ruby, 1980, p.154)

Within this thesis I have attempted to write 'myself' into the narrative of the research at all stages, by revealing the process through which the research is constructed. I have also tried to ensure that the 'I', the researcher, is not only identified in the methodology section, but that reflexivity is included as an integral part of the whole process. In research practice this is relatively rare (Coffey, 1999) and can lead to accusations of narcissism and self regard, in place of substantive thought and reflection on the real issues of research studies. However, the '...monastic conceit of disinterested objectivity in the ivory tower, where the dispassionate, panoptical gaze of a master subject surveys all' (Koondo, 1990, p.303) is of necessarily limited use. If the researcher is to enter these settings and to write of them, then the demand to integrate that narrative into the collection of 'other' narratives is difficult to resist, but equally difficult to achieve. As Ely (1991) highlights, 'doing qualitative research is by nature a reflective and recursive process' (p.179).

From the material presented above, I would argue that reflexivity has been an important part of this thesis. It is essential for researchers to reveal their own hand in their investigations. Reflexive styles of research writing; 'One which lets the audience see the puppets' strings as they watch the puppet show' (Watson, 1995, p.578) illuminate ethnographic research.

Within this study, when I write about events and people in my research on participative assessment, I am not simply describing or reporting what happened. I

cannot be objective in that way. But equally I am not making up what I am writing. As an ethnographic researcher I select, interpret, colour, emphasise and shape my findings. Thus, to judge whether or not the research accounts produced are worthwhile, readers need to know as much as possible about the nature of the researcher's role in creating them, as highlighted in chapter three.

As I now reflect back, my experience and observations highlight that there are several omissions which need to be addressed. Firstly, the whole process of analysing qualitative data is a difficult, time consuming and complex process. As I undertook the analysis I began to look more closely at the stories and found myself questioning the selection of stories, choice of extracts and the choice of words in my analysis of the data. Could there be other explanations and did my interpretation reveal which assumptions I was working from? Was I attempting to convince myself of a meaning which fitted more comfortably with my perception of participative assessment?

Although in chapter three I had set out and debated these complex issues, the reality of experiencing them left me feeling frustrated and angry. On reflection I became very preoccupied with the process of interpretation, to a point where the self-criticism generated escalated to a stage where I began to feel as if I was dangerously close to giving up. As Atkinson (1990) highlights,

> … any increase in critical self-consciousness is likely to make one's work more demanding. It is the sloppy and the glib that are easy; and a facile reliance on unexamined rhetorical forms is certainly not the way to achieve sociological insights.
>
> (Atkinson 1990, pp.180-181)

Thus, I would argue that I found myself subjected to my own disciplinary gaze in the name of reflexivity.

Secondly, the methodology deployed within this research enabled insights to be elicited which perhaps would not have been so easily accessible to others. As noted in the chapter on methodology (chapter three) being a tutor and ex-student I was uniquely placed to undertake this inquiry into the dynamics of participative assessment. The resources at my disposal allowed me to gain access to participative assessment and witness the reality of classroom politics. However, this study was not simply about social reporting, but hopefully the research constitutes a study of the dynamics of participative assessment informed by a consideration of its significance in the wider context.

Thirdly, the research from this thesis has served to remind me of the power of critical management learning within participative assessment. What are my responsibilities as a course tutor when initiating a process of participative assessment, particularly when the consequences of such an approach are potentially disturbing and unsettling for the students? I do not aim to offer a prescription, but I feel it is important to stress the importance of actively exploring and working with the complexities and contradictions of participative assessment.

Many of the issues that I have explored in this thesis are complex and pose as many questions as they provide answers. In my respects, therefore, the issues are likely to generate additional uncertainties into the design and process of participative assessment. However, it is important that our own hesitancies and anxieties about working with these differences (power, conflict authority, emotion) do not impede such a process because, as tutors and students, we encounter these ambiguities in the workplace every day.

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