CHAPTER 5

Preface to the Accounts

In the chapters that follow I am seeking to explore my practice in two major areas of my work, which have run concurrently over the period of my inquiry. The two areas are:

- my role as an educator during a period of contradiction and compromise (Chapter 5), then engaged in a new educational initiative (Chapter 8)
- my role in starting and developing a new organisation (Chapters 6 and 7, and then revisited in Chapter 9)

In each case there are two main cycles of inquiry (See Chapter 2), revisiting the same practice and themes, and some smaller, mini-cycles contained within them. Marshall describes cycles of inquiry as "processes incorporating appropriate, and repeated, movements between action and reflection" (1999: 159).

In Chapter 2, I characterised these first-person accounts as "stories", and said that part of my purpose in offering them is to hear myself, and in some way 'validate' my own experience by articulating it and interrogating it. These stories are part of the sense-making process through which I am seeking to change my practice, by which I mean, bring it more in active relationship with my espoused purposes, and increase my awareness when inconsistencies arise.

As I have worked with this material, both in the process and as I try and make sense retrospectively, I am struck by the very enfolded nature of this work, which constantly seems to turn back on itself, commenting on its own doing. Everything I do and think seems to be connected to everything else, whilst personal, professional, and disciplinary boundaries are frequently blurred. As I have used this inquiry process to interrogate my ideas at a propositional level, I have immediately been carrying that work into my practice across these different areas. For instance, the Masters degree programme I have been helping develop and run over the later period of this inquiry (see Chapter 8) is

'about' the nature of global business in the future and the practice required to manage it: so is this inquiry. As a tutor on that programme, I assess students' work on the issues I am addressing here. My part in that programme has both grown from my engagement in this inquiry, and has fed into my personal/first-person work. One of my colleagues in the programme is my thesis supervisor. In that academic department I am simultaneously a student, a visiting teacher and a colleague. There are few clear, single-link relationships here, but multiple connections, enriching feedback loops, and at times confusion.

At times I have involved other people in these accounts – and have indicated below where that is the case. I have also made direct reference to other people and not asked them to comment or participate in my first-person process. It is important that I state here that what follows is *my representation*, not a claim to truth, in which I have permitted myself to articulate and own my experience (despite, at times, a strong wish to censor my writing). It is about me, located as I am , socially and organisationally, not about the others in my accounts, and is not intended as any kind of judgement of them.

(i)   Educational Practice: In the MBA Classroom

It is the first day of the new academic year. As Director of Studies for a full-time MBA programme in International Business, I have spent the previous week engaged in the induction of the new intake of 30 students, from 16 different countries. I have explained to them the course structure, the academic requirements, the choices they will have to make. I have arranged for them to meet and talk to the Computer Centre staff, the Librarian, the Information Technology staff. I have taken them on a three day trip to rural Wales, where we stayed in a farmhouse, carried out team-building exercises, got to know each other. I know all their names, and we have already eaten together, laughed together, walked to the pub together. They have begun to form relationships with each other, and they have started the process of working together and trying to discover what it is to know and understand someone whose race, language, cultural background, religion, and experience of the world is different from your own.

The students range in age from 23 to 45 years old, with the majority being between 25 and 30. Many have taken first degree in economics or business administration, and all have some work experience. A third of the class are women. I feel a particular responsibility towards them, because I know that they will face pressures and difficulties in their future

lives because of their gender. Several of these women are also Muslims, which give them an additional range of gender-related issues to handle.

The first module of the academic year is entitled "International Business Perspectives", and is intended to give the students a broad framework with which to understand some of the issues related to international business; topics to be covered include the trading relationship between the USA and Japan, the impact Japan has had on the way business is done world wide, the changing role of the South-East Asian countries, whether there is a convergence or divergence of management styles taking place around the world, and what might be the most effective approaches the prospective international business person might adopt. The module is run by an eminent British economist, and as part of the first day, he has invited a vivacious professor from one of the top European business schools, who specialises in European/American/Japanese relationships, to work with the class.

I am sitting in on this session, partly to inform myself of the extent to which the themes we have identified as important in our induction trip are picked up again in this initial teaching session, partly because the visiting teacher, Jacques, has a high reputation, and I want to learn from him and be able to talk about his approach to other teaching staff, and

partly to see how the members of the class fare in their first formal teaching session. (I am running several agendas at once: to pay attention to the process of the programme, as well as and in relation to the substantive content; to inform myself of the quality of the teaching inputs; to be able to act as some sort of bridge between the potentially disparate components of the programme; many people are responsible for parts of the programme, I have responsibility the whole thing)

As Jacques begins to teach, I experience a whole range of reactions. This is not unusual – I assume that everyone has a range of internal, personal responses to external events which they choose to act on or ignore in a variety of ways. I am trying, though, to pay attention to my reactions, and to allow them to inform me, in a more careful way than I would normally do. "Normal" is an interesting, and relevant word in this context, because part of what I find difficult is to work within the boundaries of what I have accepted as, and take to be, normal. In effect, I am "privately" busy – but what is the significance of this work?

Jacques is talking to the students about the need for a shift of paradigm, a suspension of their normal mental models, when attempting to understand each other across cultures. He is very charismatic and entertaining, he moves around the classroom, pouncing on students,

getting them to answer his questions, cracking jokes which get them laughing. They are very engaged in what he is saying, no one has lost attention. Some of them, those with less proficient English, are clearly anxious, perhaps because Jacques speaks English with a pronounced French accent, and they cannot easily understand him. When he asks one of the Japanese students to give his opinion of the case they are discussing, Hideyuki is silent and apparently embarrassed, not having understood what has been said to him. Jacques talks about his own experiences in Japan, where he spends several months every year. He also teaches a spring semester course at a prestigious American business school. He mentions the personal stresses placed on those whose business is international, and the need to find a balance in your life. He tells the class that he has five children, who are very important to him, and points to research that has been done on the effectiveness of expatriate managers showing that disrupted personal lives can have serious detrimental effects on people and their effectiveness.

The students are very impressed by him. They ask if he can come and teach again, they comment to me afterwards that this is exactly the sort of high quality, stimulating input they came on the course to get.

I am glad to hear him say some of the things he has said. He has made the point, very effectively, that in the emerging world, people will need to develop new ways of thinking, that this involves personal change and openness, rather than the assumption that the mental model you already hold will provide any sort of understanding. He is pointing to the contingent nature of what is known, and saying to these young people that they are poised at a very interesting historical time, when ideas, paradigms, are undergoing change. This is an exciting message, to which I, and I am sure others in the room, felt an emotional response, an almost palpable thrill. Questions of morality and judgement, he tells them, will become inextricable parts of your business life, because certainties are dissolving.

But I am also uneasy. This is a man who speaks with an ease and certainty which somehow denies the message he is trying to convey. One communication I hear from him (but is it only me?) is "be like me: I am witty, highly educated, cosmopolitan, successful, in demand around the world". He embodies something these students want to be, and they admire him for it. He uses his personal charisma to stimulate them, but he also shows little sensitivity to the extent to which his high-energy supremely confident classroom delivery intimidates some of them, particularly, on the basis of my observation, the Asian members of the

class. How is this to empower them? This is how they must learn to be if they are to be as successful as he is, and they know how far from it they are at the moment. This is a masculine and Western way of being, embodiment. What is the woman from Indonesia, for instance, to make of it? What does it tell her? How, in what way, could she be like him?

He communicates to me a whole set of gender relationships. He mentions his wife picking him up from the airport (an illustrative anecdote of the concept of paradigm – "if the car breaks down on the way to the airport what is she to do? she has no paradigm of how the engine functions, so how is she to fix it?"). He mentions in passing both his children and his international lifestyle. How can he have both a stable family and an international lifestyle? Because, I would guess, his wife, as well as collecting him from the airport, takes care of this aspect of his life. For me this is an implicit part of the message he is giving, and of course I hear it because it is relevant to me – my life involves a number of dilemmas on this. Perhaps they are dilemmas for him too, but they are not framed as being ones which are relevant for this discussion. Nevertheless they will be real, hard issues for the female students in the room, and should be for the male students as well, I believe. I am aware of myself minding that his implicit frame of reference is masculine, that he assumes all the students in their future lives will have wives to take

care of them. Its an emotional reaction on my part, a feeling of being denied, a recognition that what I perceive as the additional work done by women in management roles to overcome their "difference" and manage their role conflicts, is invisible and irrelevant, and that by implication my additional work is invisible and irrelevant. To me this is a denial of diversity, a communication about conformity, which is at the same time apparently, and ironically, about new-paradigm thinking and open-mindedness.

And sitting in this classroom, thinking these things, I realise my own collusion, my participation, my agency, in a process which denies me at some level, and thereby perpetuates the denial of other women. I wonder how to intervene in this process, here and now, to say something which flags up an alternative reality. I hold, in effect, an internal debate: this is a high status person, a guest, who we have invited; I am not obliged to agree with what he says, I would feel some space to question him on matters of substance. But to shift the terms of the debate onto something which is of great importance to me, and which the students would see (I imagine) as of marginal importance to them? I do not feel I have the right to do it, I fear for my own credibility, I fear not being understood, I know that I will say things which will alienate me from people with whom I am at the start of a lengthy relationship. I do not know what words I could

use which would not be seen as attacking Jacques personally, making comments on his personal, private life. He has just come to teach, he does not have to subject himself to judgement by me, who does not in fact know anything about his domestic arrangements. How could I be respecting him as a person to do so?

I am aware of the irony of this situation. I feel powerless to speak; I know that not speaking is collusive, it contributes to my own powerlessness. Yet in this situation I have a lot of positional power, what I say has more significance than that of, say, members of the class – and this silences me. What I could say with less organisational power, I feel I cannot say now. So what has this role done to me? I fear to use the power I have to forward the causes I believe in.

I wonder, then, what status these thoughts and feelings of mine have: are they imaginings? Evidence of my own pathology? How can I, with validity, make connections between these internal events and the substantive issues of gender and management?

Bateson's (1972) ideas on communication and meta-communication have helped me to understand something of my own felt contradiction, and perhaps why these seem to have particular relevance in the field of management education. I have long felt that

management education was engaged in some sort of "trick", that the movement by recent writers on management to thrive on chaos, create learning organisations, value people, change paradigms, were somehow diverted to a use that had nothing to do with thriving, creating, valuing, changing, because the business, organisational and management purposes they are used for operate within the unchallenged conceptual frameworks of Western modernism. Some process seems to be taking place which labels the realm of engagement of the ideas under discussion, a limitation which is contradictory to the substantive nature of the ideas themselves.

Bateson suggests that all communication takes place on two levels, one of which is a tacit meta-communication labelling the status of the communication itself. As human beings we become very practised at receiving and interpreting meta-communications, even though every meta-communicative message is logically contradictory (Berman, 1981: 221). Despite this violation of the logical rules we normally operate by, Bateson suggests that these metacommunications constitute most of our 'deutero-learning', namely the pervasive habits, patterns, expectations, assumptions and world-view that we carry around with us. This is the process by which the area of engagement is framed, and maintained, and hence of crucial importance in understanding how learning takes place and ideas do or *do not* lead to changes in action.

That which we learn consciously and formally, so-called digital knowledge, is set against a backdrop of a vast accumulation of analogue knowledge. Digital knowledge is abstract, rational, formal. It is that which is in text books and newspapers, that which is spoken in lectures, and written in essays. Analogue knowledge is that which is iconic, the form of representation itself conveys the content in some way - it includes art, dreams, fantasy and body language.

In MBA education, there is often a conflict between the analogue and digital messages being conveyed, and in thinking about gender relationships and management, this distinction provides me with some clues in understanding what may be happening. Jacques's digital message was that open minds and a suspension of mental models was the key to cross-cultural understanding. His meta- communication was that someone like him was 'successful', could get on well, be the object of admiration, earn a lot of money, command authority, and so on. The content of the programme tells the students that sufficient mastery of economics, accounting, strategy, organisational behaviour, marketing, and so on, will lead to a successful business career. The digital knowledge is largely of this factual type. But there are multiple meta-communications taking place. One is the Western modernist message, that the world is ultimately conquerable; it is there to be acted upon, "developed", used (or used up). It offers a tacit way of being, as that which a developed economy, developed world and developed mind, aspires to. According to this unarticulated analogical model, everything which can be known can be known in this digital way, the world is fully understandable to the rational autonomous self. The way of being is founded on a form of masculinity, learning analogically from those who teach, write and act in the world of business. There is a communication taking place, I suggest, which is conveyed by the overwhelmingly masculine, white, Western embodiment of those engaged in management practice and management teaching, which denies difference, and which sits in stark contrast to much of the overt (liberal) message.

What is being learned analogically is not so much about knowledge or skills, but about *who* has power and *how* power is used. Much in the way that Bateson describes the

structure of the double-bind' which through its internal contradictions denies the individual who is subject to it the avenue for confronting and commenting on the contradiction, the meta-communication of this educational programme seems to deny the validity of the conceptual framework which could comment on its own meta-communications. The digital content is framed as 'factual' and hence value-neutral. The framing process is framed as outside the arena of play.

(ii)   Leaving: A Self-Explanation, 1995

I spent four years as Director of Studies to the MBA in International Business for the University, and during most of that time I did not feel valid in what I was doing. I felt that I was dissembling in some way, about what I did or did not know, about what my values are, about what my competence is, about what I thought about social issues, politics, lifestyles. What amazes me is that I seem to have done it pretty well. I have become a practised dissembler, managing the disparity I felt between the self I 'really am' and the self I appeared to be. It is worthy of attention, I believe, because this was a process of normalisation, of de-differentiation, in which, even though I may not have at first fitted into the expectations of those around me, I soon came to do so, to such an extent that they were sorry to see me go. I had done such a good job of carrying out my private work, of adjusting, and learning, and masking, that it was invisible to everyone except me, unless I chose to show it in some way.

When I was asked to take on the role of Director of Studies, and to help establish this new programme in the university, I hesitated at first, wary of becoming involved with a business degree and its 'private sector' orientation. But I also thought there were some arguments in favour. First there was the simple joy of being able to create something, to be able to work on a project within a large and sometimes amorphous institution which would work or not as a result of my efforts, which was not there before I acted and would be there afterwards. I did not doubt my practical ability to do this, and I welcomed the opportunity.

Second, I recognised the notion of "business" and "business values" as an area of valid inquiry and engagement for someone interested in issues of social justice and the working of organisations Through the late 1980s, there had been a gradual erosion of the institutional and practical boundaries between the public and private sectors in Britain and other European countries, a process which looked likely to continue through the next

decade, and there was an active debate (continuing) about what this meant for the management of the public sector. The very fact that the vice-chancellor of this traditional university was wishing to begin to offer business education was significant. At the very least there was a change of management discourse taking place.

Third, I am deeply suspicious of the conventional academic splitting of thinking and doing, and committed to the bringing together of activity and thought, for both political and practical reasons. The separation out of theory and practice has meant that those who "think" have become out of touch with all the sorts of knowledge that is to be gained from bodies, and from the connections between our bodies and our world (Corrigan, 1988). Forms of education which seek to bring into engagement practice, that which is done in the world, and ideas, seem to me to be of a particular and powerful significance, and personally I am keen to be involved in the generation of knowledge in this way.

The field on which business is played is expanding in unprecedented ways. Where twenty years ago managers worked in mainly domestic arenas, for many the entire world is now in their sights. It is not just senior executives in major transnational corporations who make decisions with world-wide consequences, it is increasingly also managers in medium-sized companies who take actions, 'enter new markets' or devise new products, which impact the lives of people who are in no way 'part' of the business concerned and may be geographically distant.   These are activities which affect the distribution of resources around the world, increasingly challenging and influencing the behaviour of governments. This, it seems to me, is a potentially powerful position to be in.

There is a way in which, however many curriculum changes may be made to encompass "global issues" into the MBA curriculum, I did not believe this would bring about any different, non-instrumental understanding of the relationships involved, unless the students were also participating in a process which enabled them to connect their

propositional, practical and experiential knowing, and thereby have some sense of where they, as doers in this whirling global scene, might be located. Unless this was an educational course which at least attempted to step outside the practice of dealing in received ideas, at least raised the questions of connection between modes of knowing and the content of what is known, it could only be denying through its meta-communication any overt message about change.

I drew, here, on my own experience as an adult learner (Coleman, 1991), where I know that I learned not only through exposure to new ideas, but also through an increased sensitivity to the congruence, or more often incongruence, I experienced between the propositional knowledge with which I was coming into contact, and the experiential knowledge I had of the group around me and the institution within which I was learning. In other words, I used my experiential knowledge to check and challenge my head - and the more I did so, the more I became aware that an "extended epistemology" (Reason, 1988) could lead me to "know" things which were never explicit in the learning contexts, but which seemed to me, and still seem to me, to be playing out anyway. This, for me, is an expression of the politics of knowing; it connects with the feminist assertion that I could learn about political processes through attention to my private experience, and through engaging this experience with others, in a way that connected it in with the content of the learning, rather than bracketing it off. I see strong connections between questions raised by globalisation - human rights, the exercise of might by the powerful, the increasing spread of the Western industrialised "world-view" as normality around the globe - the "McWorld" thesis (Barber 1992)[1] - and the very personal and intimate challenges of hearing each other speak, of being attuned to diversity rather than conformity.

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[1] Barber describes McWorld as "the onrush of economic and ecological forces that demand integration and uniformity and mesmerise the world with fast music, fast computers and fast food...pressing nations and people into one commercially homogenised global network".

So, I became Director of Studies for the MBA, with responsibility for putting together the curriculum in conjunction with our partner-course in Paris, co-ordinating the teaching so that the whole made sense, and overseeing the academic standards. I thought this would give me some room to influence how the course was taught.

I did not find it easy to express my concerns verbally, in the communicative currency of the university. At times I have felt that this is a failing on my part - that I have not learned very well to play a particular game of communication, which may have helped me to fight my corner and assert my position. There was an argument to be made to the teaching staff from the economics department, as to why it was inappropriate and damaging to judge the academic performance of a 30 year old banker from Brazil according to the same criteria as a 19 year-old British accountancy student - but the mode of the argument, the terms of engagement, meant accepting a framing I did not accept, fighting to gain and hold credibility within a model of valid and invalid knowledge I did not agree with. I could not find a credible starting point in such arguments. I seemed to be asking to make things academically easier for the Brazilian.

Rather than fight these sorts of self-defeating battles, I believed I could work with the MBA programme, to put my values into practice, I could try and find a way to "walk my (silent)talk", do my meaning rather than speak it. I perhaps thought the meaning of what I was doing would communicate itself in this way.

For me this meant a particular practical agenda. I have broad ways to describe it: an attention to the messages contained in organisational processes, and their possible impact on the learning environment; a willingness to try and listen to the quiet voices around me, rather than the noisy ones; a desire to make spaces in a formal teaching process within which learning can happen under the control of the learners rather than the teachers; a belief in the intrinsic validity of other people's experiences, and a desire to encourage the

re-view and re-validation of those experiences as part of the process of learning. A belief that these sorts of processes would be an integral part of any sort of education in preparation for a changing future, and that these were aspects of behaviour which are very much part of the activity we call "management"

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I would, therefore, have liked to have seen this course really challenge what the term "MBA" is, questioning the whole concept of value neutral and mechanistic business administration. I believe that there was plenty of scope to look for innovative ways to build on the incredible breadth of the experience brought by the participants, coming from so many different countries from around the world. I believe that they entered the programme in good faith and with open minds, only too willing to learn from each other and to try and envisage a better future for themselves and their fellow humans. I believe members of University staff had a good deal to learn from the course participants, in how to think more broadly. I believe that there is something intensely hopeful in the coming together of such a group, who if they can only learn to be with each other, whilst respecting themselves and each other's diversity, would have managed one of the most difficult challenges humans face.

But, painfully, I came to realise that this is not what I helped create. The coming together of the value-systems of the University, and the value-systems of MBA education seemed to me formidable. I experienced my actions being interpreted as contributions to the frame I wanted to shift, rather than challenges to it.

The Management Board for the degree opposed any reduction in 30-hour per week classroom contact hours, on the grounds that this would disadvantage the programme vis-à-vis other MBA programmes with which it was competing. There was a view that the students were 'buying' a fixed amount of classroom time, and to reduce it might short-change them. The new Director, taking up her post during the second year of the course,

declared that she wanted to improve the quality of the programme, and took various steps to standardise the behaviour and output of the students. She increased the number of compulsory modules, and sent notes to the participants reprimanding them for bad timekeeping, reducing further any responsibility they could take for their own learning-process. She had lengthy discussions with me about introducing a dress code and holding workshops on personal presentation, which I said I thought wholly inappropriate in a programme that states valuing diversity as one of its aims. She suggested to me that I might be denying the students, particularly the non-British ones, access to information that would help them promote themselves at job interviews. Alternatively, I put to her various suggestions for increasing the extent to which the participants could increase their personal autonomy within the course. Her response was to say that the participants, when they left the programme, were going to have to live in the "real world", and the sooner they learned the rules the better. She said that she did not think I was helping them by being too nice to them.

I tried to use the discretion I had. I made a point of listening to the participants, whether singly or collectively, and trying to feed their perspectives into a formal system that did not easily listen. I set up regular facilitated learning groups for the students, and weekly meetings with class representatives to discuss issues of course management. I saw every student individually for tutorials each term. I tried to move between the different perceptions I heard from them, and from the teaching staff, the support staff and the Director. Wherever I encountered mis-communication - which was often - I tried to bridge the gaps. I saw this as a way of broadening out the categorisations we were collectively working with.

Although the students were, for the most part, very appreciative of my work, I paid a high personal price. I did not feel much sense of achievement or pride in what I was doing. I felt both very exhausted and disempowered, and began to question what, if any, were my skills, my contribution. I felt as if every day, all day, I held a contradiction: I acted the

part of someone directing an educational process which I did not believe to be truly educational, and which seemed to me to be working within an intellectual paradigm that I personally had rejected on political and personal grounds. I wondered, really wondered, if the course participants, with whom I had a great deal of contact, had any idea of my values, whether they in any sense knew 'me'. I found it very difficult when my colleagues, and in particular the Director, made statements with which I profoundly disagreed - particularly, as they often were, statements which did not respect the humanity, individuality or personhood of the participants. I particularly struggled with the fact that these statements, in effect, represented me, and my professional position, to those who heard them. It was as if I had handed away my power to define myself and represent myself, and was instead having to work within assumptions that I did not share. On several occasions I went to the Director and explained what had distressed me about what she had just said or done - in no great expectation that she would share my concern, but rather that I could not let lie that representation of myself, and wanted to separate my self from it, even if I could only do so between the two of us.

Ironically, she - and members of the teaching team - valued my activities, because they contributed to the smooth running of the programme. In effect I kept the students contained, and sorted out potential difficulties, particularly interpersonal ones, before they became too explosive. My relational work, rather than changing the values of the programme, sustained them.

My way of doing things is pretty characteristic of women managers: I am concerned with the quality of relationships in the workplace, and I prioritise these, because I see them as the way I get things done. In a sense, I broker these relationships in order to achieve things, and so maintaining relational links is important to me - they are a major resource. In the university where I have been working, and in the academic organisations I have been working with, managerial authority is usually demonstrated in "masculine" ways - by making firm declamatory decisions, by informing other people of those decisions and

insisting they are implemented, by confronting people who step out of line, by claiming personal credit for positive developments.

As I achieved more organisational power, I felt more pressure on me to demonstrate my authority in these sorts of ways. This was paradoxical, since my effectiveness at "getting things done" was recognised in my organisational advancement. The ways in which I felt the pressure were subtle - partly a process of not recognising myself in any of the figures of power I saw around me, and hence needing strength to hold my difference. Partly being put into a number of situations that were challenging in their own right, and hence pulling on some conventional and well-recognised badges of authority to contain my personal stress. I learned the rule of the game.

For instance, in February 1995 I went to Pakistan on behalf of the university to visit a college in Lahore that wanted to establish an academic link with our MBA programme. Whilst I was there I was asked to make a presentation on our programme to a group of potential students and their parents as part of the college's open day - and I was aware of dressing, and behaving, so as to deliberately maximise the extent to which I conformed to my expectations of their expectations of what I should be like. Had they been open to accepting some different presentation of me, I did not offer it to them. It felt to me, at that point, that doing my job demanded I compose myself in a certain way: it demanded that I acted as if I thought the programme we ran was really the best way these Pakistani parents could prepare their children for a career in international business – even though I very much doubted that was the case. It demanded that I identified myself closely with the principal of the Lahore college - a man who I neither liked nor trusted at all, and whose educational principles I disagreed with. It demanded that I present myself as a carrier of the values of the "international business community", when I felt no identification with men-in-suits who travel the world in pursuit of profit maximisation.

To continue to participate in this arena meant I had to work to contain all the feelings of inadequacy and invalidity that these sorts of situations brought up for me - and in saying this, I recognise it as a process, which is not just about me as an individual, but about the disciplining power of normalisation. Perhaps if I were to persist, I could stop noticing what hard work it was for me to fit the mould - I would get used the persona I was inventing, I would grow into it, as other people do. But I also believe that in doing so I would be letting go of some important part of my identity, as a person, and as a woman.

Eventually I decided to resign, and to return to my previous role as a lecturer within another department. I felt hugely responsible towards the students, and at the same time realised that this trapped me, kept me in a situation which I found damaging. The day that an advertisement for my replacement appeared in the Economist (universally read by students on the course) I came into my office in the morning to find a note under the door. It read: "We saw a horrible advert this morning…please say it isn't true! Don't leave us! Signed, the MBA class".

One of my colleagues at the University had lunch with me before I left, and said that he was very sorry I was going. "You are uniquely suited to carry out this job", he said - "I cannot imagine anyone else being able to do it like you can, managing to get so many difficult people working together on this programme". I appreciated the positive feedback he gave me, but I also felt it spoke of the lack of understanding of what I had been doing, which was not to just to 'be myself', but to be committed to a set of priorities which were not otherwise enacted in the educational process we had collectively created. This was not about me as an individual, and was not accidental: it was, and is, I believe, part of management.

I notice that, even though I am aware of these issues, even though I can identify these processes in the midst of experiencing them, I still do experience them, and feel the pressure to be other than as I am.

`(iii) Leaving: Commentary

As will be clear from previous chapters, I am carrying a set of beliefs which amount to a tacit educational theory, and which I am trying to act on. Like many people engaged in teaching within the university sector, I am a relatively uneducated educationist: I have received no formal teaching in educational theory or the practicalities of how to teach. I have developed views on what constitutes good education both from my own experiences as a mature student (I have taken a postgraduate social work degree, and a part-time taught MSc degree since reaching adulthood), and through experimentation, first as a trainer, then as a teacher of postgraduate students.

I see education in two ways: as the transmitter and reproducer of culture, and also as a place of personal growth and transformation. I am carrying with me a model of all knowledge as political, contextualised, sitting within a discourse which is held together by power relations, and from the critique in Chapters 3 and 4, I am linking this politicisation of knowledge with gendering processes, and suggesting that there is no such thing as "neutral" knowledge. What Paulo Friere (1972) called the "banking model of education", where pieces of knowledge are taken in and stored by the recipient until needed, is increasingly the dominant one in formal education: knowledge is de-politicised and commodified through this approach. The model of MBA degree that I was asked to implement made this explicit, by dividing the curriculum into 25 or so "modules" or units, each representing 30 hours classroom time, and each deemed equivalent to each other (one half module of accounting plus one half module of strategy equalled on whole module of organisational dynamics). The student was required to successfully complete 18 individually assessed modules, of which 6 were compulsory, together with a project-based dissertation, in order to qualify for the degree. The banking model of education seeks to deposit in the student digital knowledge (Bateson, 1972), which is verbal-rational and abstract.

But, as Friere also pointed out, education is the means by which consciousness is transformed and people are able to change the world around them. Education is growth, hope, the future. I work in an educational field because I think it is important - it is a way that I can see to engage in praxis - action and reflection leading to change. My own experience of being educated is one of being able to access new ideas, and make sense of these as of relevance to, and offering new perspectives on, my life and experiences. This is a process which I do most readily through talking and sharing thoughts with trusted others (Coleman, 1991). I am reminded of Goldberger et. al.'s reference to "really talking", which "reaches deep into the experience of each; it also draws on the analytical abilities of each...domination is absent; reciprocity and co-operation predominate." (1987: 218)

Belenky et. al's. (1986) work on women's experiences of education concluded that educational processes underestimated gender differences in processes of learning, and that women demonstrated a distinctive pattern whereby individuals moved from silence, through received knowledge, to begin to make and use knowledge of their own, recognising their part in its construction. Creating places within educational settings where this sort of learning can take place is, from my perspective, engaging in feminist action.

(I remember vividly my own moment of grasping some of this. It happened when I was 17 years old, and went, as a member of my school sixth form, to a symposium in Germany for school students from my city and the German city with which we were twinned. The subject of the event was "East-West Détente". I was studying German A-level, and was ostensibly there to practice my language. There I met, among the student group, several committed Marxist, and spent every night in intense political discussion. With a shock I discovered ideas about 'ideology', 'false consciousness', 'hegemony', the political dimension of knowledge. I experienced a deep sense of betrayal, feeling that I had been manipulated and processed by my society. I left there with my 'mental models'

and emotions in turmoil, and as a result of that 10-day trip changed the choices I was making about the future direction of my life: what universities I would apply to, and what subjects I would study, what was important to me. I also lost friends and put huge strains on my relationship with my family.)

Significant learning, that which involves questioning some of the discursive power relations which hold frames in place, also involves some opportunity to interrogate the patterns, the personal experience, the processes of learning-to-learn, in which the individual is involved. For Friere (1972), this sort of process is one he called "conscientization", the point at which the individual becomes engaged in a radical owning and re-naming of personal experience. (also the feminist strategy of consciousness-raising).

Sinclair's (1997) research of women's experiences of MBA education identified four sources of tension which were highlighted by her respondents: centralization versus decentralization of authority in the classroom, where the teacher was seen as 'star performer', holding authority closely to him/herself; defences against admissions of uncertainty and ignorance – it was felt definitely not to be alright to not know something (echoing the findings of Fletcher's (1998) study of relational work inside workplaces, where she found the same dynamic, being handled differently by men and women); learning by looking outwards versus looking inwards, making connections to their own experiences; and knowing by analytical replication versus imaginative and emotional engagement with the learning process.

Her work suggests:

> "A particular pedagogical style has often been privileged in management education. It helps explain why women professors have sometimes struggled to establish their authority, and alerts us to the dangers of management education reproducing and

perpetuating the oppressions and exclusions that exist elsewhere in management"
(1997: 377)

I recognise Sinclair's findings in my experience of this MBA programme, which offered very little space (for the tentative exploration of ideas and experience which characterise connected knowing. The course (which was pretty standard among models of MBA) involved students spending 30 hours most weeks in the classroom being taught at, as well as substantial reading and preparation, regular closed-book assessments, and projects to be delivered, sometimes as group assignments, in very short deadlines. The result was at best an individualist scramble to stay on top of the workload and 'deliver the goods'. Time constraints and the simultaneous tracking of multiple modules meant students had little opportunity to read widely, or to experiment with ideas or any form of practice. In effect, the course reproduced the time-pressured instrumentalism of the business environment.

Even whilst I was running the MBA programme, I 'knew' all this. I knew that this distanced, packaged presentation of knowledge was highly political, and that we were in no way dealing with the impartial transfer of information. But in what way could I be said to know this if my behaviour, my action in the world, showed nothing of my propositional process? I held my thoughts inside myself, and took as private work the management of my internal/external contradiction. In Foucault's terms, I disciplined myself.

Although there were colleagues with whom I discussed these sorts of issues within my previous academic department, when I moved to set up the MBA programme, I lost that kind of support. Several of my closest contacts expressed the view that someone who purports to hold the values I did should not be working on a business education programme, because it was so compromising. In some ways I agreed: I felt guilty.

The account I have given shows that I was trying to work with the ambiguity of the organisational setting at an individual level: I allowed my self to 'pass', as it were, for whatever those around me wanted to take me as (Marshall, 1995), and sought to work in the spaces I could find. Clearly, I was undertaking "indirect actions" (Gherardi, 1995): rather than fighting an ongoing turf-war in which I made my agenda explicit, I borrowed the rhetoric of the given discourse - "internationalism", since this was a course in International Business - to try to introduce places in the programme where frames might be questioned, and where "really talking" could happen. I used the organisational hypocrisy, the fact that there was an "ambiguous relation between values and behaviour" (Gherardi 1995) in this set up, to create some space for experimentation.

Outcomes/feedback

And, after four years, I decided to leave, feeling defeated, exhausted and disempowered. This was a year after I had begun this inquiry process, and starting a journal, paying attention to my living contradiction, allowing myself to express what I was feeling, led me to a point of choice. I felt that my personal resources had been exhausted and that I could hold the ambiguity no longer. Marshall's (1995) study of women who decided to leave their managerial jobs contains stories with many echoes of my own experience. An incongruity between their external images of who they were and their own pictures of who they wanted to be was one. She notes "much of their energy was used to create and maintain viable identities and sufficient power in cultures which did not accord them these as of right" (1995: 253), and many of them cited tiredness as one of the factors that led to them leaving. Unlike most of the women in her sample, I did have access to feminist conceptual frameworks that offered me non-personal explanations for some of what I experienced. But being aware that there are multiple levels of judgement taking place does not necessarily take away the discomfort of trying to live with them every day, nor compensate for the work that maintaining myself demanded. I was disappointed with myself. I remember one Saturday being in the city centre buying some formal clothes for

an imminent trip abroad, and seeing a TUC/NUT protest march coming along the main road, waving banners and chanting. I stood watching them, recognising with a feeling of something akin to physical pain that I was on the wrong side, somehow. My political values, and sympathies, were with those marchers and their protest. I knew, at that moment, that I must do something about this, that I should, and could, act to change this situation.

Marshall says of the women in her study:

> "Even when 'adapting' might be an appropriate label for their behaviour, this was not a passive acceptance, but an active managing of self to be effective, realise the potential power in a given role, and survive......it caused stress and tiredness, and some people felt they had become less than themselves in the process. One choice is to leave." (1995: 311)

She notes that these women "showed extreme persistence in the face of unpropitious circumstances"; and one of their characteristics was "not paying attention to important data on their own perceptions and needs, which was simultaneously encouraging them to desist" which "limited their abilities to act inquiringly" (1999: 166). As I inquired more, I paid more attention to such data. I began to recognise that as well as feeling constantly tired and sometimes tearful, I felt scared, as if I might be unmasked by anyone at any time. I began to realise I could do something about this, that I did not have to continue.

As I have reflected on this material, I notice how very un-inquiring my behaviour was during this period. As I began to tell my story to myself I became reflective, but I did not carry this through to engagement in the outside world: I was silenced. When my colleague, over lunch, attributed me with characteristics which, even at the time I felt to be inappropriate, I did not respond in a way which could engage him with my position: I did not use that opportunity to shift his perception in any way. (As the chapters that

follow will show, this is a key dimension of my practice which shifts during this inquiry.)
I tried working at the level of micro-process, creating small spaces of 'alternative' inside
the MBA programme, but I could not sustain the effort it took me. I decided to let go, to
leave.

In the Men's Rooms

When I was young I believed in intellectual conversation:

I thought the patterns we wove on stale smoke

floated off to the heaven of ideas.

To be certified worthy of high masculine discourse

like a potato on a grater I would rub on contempt,

suck snubs, wade proudly through the brown stuff on the floor.

They were talking of integrity and existential ennui

while the women ran out for six-packs and had abortions

in the kitchen and fed the children and were auctioned off.

Eventually of course I learned how their eyes perceived me

when I bore to them cupped in my hands a new poem to nibble,

when I brought my aerial maps of Sartre or Marx,

they said, she is trying to attract our attention,

she is offering up her breasts and thighs.

I walked on eggs, their tremulous a equal:

they saw a fish peddlar hawking in the street.

Now I get coarse when the abstract nouns start flashing.

I go out to the kitchen to talk cabbages and habits.

I try hard to remember to watch what people do.

Yes keep your eyes on the hands, let the voices go buzzing.

Economy is the bone, politics is the flesh,

watch who they beat and who they eat,

watch who they relieve themselves on, watch who they own.

The rest is decoration.

Marge Piercy, from *The Raving Beauties*, 1983