The discursive construction of literacy in a disadvantaged school

Volume 1

Barbara Comber

Chapter 1 The promise of literacy in poor communities: An autobiographical introduction to the research problem

> While we are immersed in our personal histories, our practices are not simply the products of our intent and will. We take part in the routines of daily life, we use language that is socially created to make camaraderie with others possible, and we develop affiliations with the roles and institutions that give form to our identities. (Popkewitz 1988, p.379)
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> As women in academia we are or have been trained certain kinds of discourse, certain kinds of disembodied ways of talking about the social and the individual. (Bannerji et al. 1991, p.10)

1.1 Introduction

Contemporary research is infused with dilemmas emerging from the poststructuralist contention that individual intention and agency do not exist outside of discourse. Even in resisting, we are a partial fabrication of our times and the discursive practices of the communities in which we live (Bannerji et al. 1991; Popkewitz 1988). As a university teacher my practices and identity are produced at least in part by the exclusive, disembodied discourses of the academy. An academic artefact, such as this thesis, is delimited by my history and contemporary institutional practices and discourses. As a woman educator researching the teaching practices of other women, I struggle in this document with the tensions produced my history as a student, researcher and teacher and the demands of the academic genre and institutional practice of doctoral thesis writing. I seek a position which combines critique and possibility, whilst recognising that there is no innocent, neutral position from which to comment. These introductory remarks foreground some dilemmas of 'writing up' research at a time of uncertainty and questioning of grand theories.

The focus of my work - the discursive construction of literacy in a disadvantaged school - is shaped by my histories and my present positions as student, researcher and teacher in the field of literacy education. In this chapter I explore how my histories relate to this problem and explain the standpoint I take in regard to the research. To begin I discuss my position on 'literacy', 'disadvantage' and 'pedagogy', the 'objects' of study and

'construction' here, whilst recognising the impossibility of encapsulating such contested terms in postmodern conditions.

1.1.1 Literacy and 'these kids'

The thesis explores why and how the constructs of literacy, pedagogy and disadvantage, are linked in current public discourses and institutional practices. My aim is to consider how literacy is taught, spoken and written about in one disadvantaged school. I explore how teachers construct literacy for 'these kids', where 'these kids' and their families live in what contemporary Australian society deems as relative poverty. I discuss how competing discourses come together in this local site in order to transform 'the disadvantaged child' into the 'literate student'.

Literacy is considered a basic human right in fast capitalist societies. Governments give it a high priority in economic, technological and educational policies. Yet literacy is not a given. History demonstrates that what counts as literacy is situation specific and that communities define who will be literate and in which ways. Literacy is socially constructed and therefore involves power relations, which ensure that different groups of people are given access to different forms of literacy. In the present study my interest is what comes to count as literacy in one disadvantaged school at this time. To what kinds of literacies are these children given access? These questions directed my observations over a two year period of regular visits to Banfield school in 1992 and 1993.

During the past decade there has been a proliferation of discourses linking the trilogy of literacy, pedagogy and disadvantage. The popular view, actively produced in the press and government policy, is that literacy empowers disadvantaged people and assists failing economies. The imperative then is to develop better pedagogies to raise 'levels of literacy' for the good of the individual and the society. Literacy is seen as a cure all, with some politicians even claiming that higher literacy levels will solve delinquency problems. The narrative constructed in these discourses is about the overwhelming good of literacy. It becomes the ticket to personal liberation, empowerment, employment and to a happy productive well behaved society. The faith placed in literacy is deep-rooted and itself produces substantial material effects. Anecdotal evidence suggests that a considerable proportion of funds (approximately one third) set aside for equity programs in disadvantaged schools across Australia is allocated to literacy related projects. These beliefs cumulatively produce what I describe as a 'literacy equals empowerment' hypothesis. Yet claims for the effects of literacy are largely unsubstantiated (Donald 1993; Luke forthcoming; Stuckey 1991) and until recently there has been little research

about contemporary literacy practices in Australian disadvantaged schools and communities (Freebody et al. 1995; Luke et al. 1994b; Malin 1990; Martin 1984).

1.1.2 The vocabulary of disadvantage: Classifying the population to be educated

In 1972 the Australian Labour Government came into power nationally and this heralded an ideological shift in regard to the distribution of funds for education on the basis of need. In 1975 the Disadvantaged Schools Program became the bureaucratic apparatus for organising the distribution of extra Commonwealth funds to schools where students were categorised as socio-economically disadvantaged. Through this program extra funds were allocated to schools serving communities where high percentages of students are assessed as living in poverty. These schools commonly experience problems with resources, as parents and care-givers are frequently unable to pay school fees or raise money for school projects and improvements (Connell 1994; Thomson 1992). The Disadvantaged Schools Program has ensured that financial resources for education are targeted to schools serving poor communities to enhance the learning opportunities for their students in ways that local schools design.

Schools where a high percentage of students lives in poverty are referred to as 'disadvantaged schools' in Australia. My use of the term, 'disadvantage', is not intended to imply that the schools themselves are disadvantaged, nor that there is a homogenous category of students who can be so described. I use the term 'disadvantage' following its use in official government discourse and educational policy. However I make problematic the deficit discourses which often accompany this term and result in children and their families being blamed for school failure. The word 'disadvantage' requires continued scrutiny in order to see who it works for and who it works against. My aim then is to explicate how 'disadvantage' is constructed by examining contemporary discursive and institutional practices for naming and dividing the population to be educated.

Compared to conditions in Third World countries, poverty in Australia may seem insignificant. However as Henry et al. 1988 point out:

> [P]overty in Australia claims some 2 million victims whose situation is, relatively speaking, grim and depressing, particularly because of the affluence which also exists around them. (Henry et al. 1988, pp. 143-144)

As Connell describes, it is a form of poverty experienced in 'high-wage economies' (Connell 1993, p.20). Definitions of 'the poverty line' are arbitrary insofar as such definitions can name but not describe in any comprehensive nor necessarily locally relevant way what might count as 'poverty', but such decisions do make a difference in

terms of who can access government benefits. In Australia decisions about welfare payments are made on the basis of the Henderson Poverty Lines (reported in Henry et al. 1988). These 'poverty lines' represent the calculation of the minimum income needed to survive on a weekly basis. Factors such as costs of housing, family size, unemployment, transport costs and average weekly earnings are taken into account. Estimates of the percentages of people living with incomes below this amount in Australia in the late eighties vary from twenty to twenty five percent, but it is usually agreed that the poverty line itself is determined at a very austere level (Henry et al. 1988, p. 144; Varghese 1994). People most likely to experience poverty in Australia include pensioners, the elderly, single parents, invalids, handicapped people, Aboriginals, recently arrived immigrants and refugees, and women: groups which obviously overlap in ways likely to increase the experience of disadvantage exponentially (Henry et al. 1988).

The Banfield school community, where the present study is located, included around seventy percent of families who were classified as living below the poverty line. Banfield was thus a 'disadvantaged school' (see Connell et al. 1991 and Connell 1994 for a history of the Disadvantaged Schools Program in Australia). To the extent that the classification and naming of schools as disadvantaged results in extra funding, such practices work in the interests of 'poor' communities. Statistical identification, classification and compensatory funding do not however change the structural conditions that produce these inequalities.

1.1.3 Literacy pedagogy and teachers' work: everyday discursive practices

Despite the proliferation of policy discourses linking literacy, pedagogy and disadvantage, in Australia there have been relatively few close examinations of the pedagogical practices of literacy teachers in disadvantaged schools. The studies that have been done tend to address the shortcomings of different pedagogical theories and practices (Martin 1984; Cope & Kalantzis 1993), rather than describe the actual practices and forms of life of teachers in classrooms. In this study I depart from the agenda of comparing, contrasting and defining best pedagogies. Rather I deal with pedagogical orientations as manifest discourses and consider them alongside other discourses which impact on teachers' and children's work in schools. In this way I want to examine everyday pedagogical theories in action. I take the view that there are no universal pedagogies which work for all teachers and students in all contexts but that pedagogies are locally assembled and produce contextually specific effects.

In recent times literacy researchers have rightly been concerned with the effects of literacy practices upon students. 'Kid-watching' has become a popular approach amongst whole

language literacy educators (Cambourne & Turbill 1987; Jaggar & Smith-Burke 1985). Literacy educators, taking a critical standpoint, have also stressed the need to see classroom situations from children's viewpoints and to ask questions about the kind of rationality children have to pursue to make correct answers (Baker & Freebody 1993). Whilst not ignoring students' perspectives, in the present study I shift the gaze to teachers. I watch and listen to teachers in order to understand literacy pedagogy as part of their everyday work. I consider the ways in which teacher rationalities, practices and discourses are seen to make sense. The thesis brings together areas of educational theory and practice which are often treated separately - namely, literacy curriculum and pedagogy, teachers' work and educational disadvantage.

While theories of literacy pedagogy are constitutive of the student (Baker & Freebody 1993; Green et al. 1994), at the same time such theories and their allied practices also construct the teacher (Baker 1995; Green forthcoming). How curriculum and pedagogical theory, along with overlapping and at times contradictory broader educational and political discourses, impact upon teachers' work and identities are rarely considered (King 1990). Without attention to the ways in which teachers are positioned by educational discourses in specific locations, educational reform and professional 'development' are built upon a fiction, an ideal teacher forever receptive and ready to enact the products of 'progress' in theory.

There is a pressing need for theories of literacy pedagogy to take into account teachers' practices in diverse local communities. Otherwise, academic research runs the risk, in Sue Middleton's words, of 'bracket[ing] out' the 'perspectives of people in the schools' (Middleton 1992, p.302). This investigation takes up the challenge of exploring how teachers in actual sites ignore, change and work with theory and policy agendas in their everyday discursive and institutional practices. The study begins with an analysis of public texts (where schools, teachers and children are the objects of knowledge) and then moves to the texts produced in the workplace by educators and students. My aim is to identify the discourses at work in both the public texts (policy, media and academic) and what often remain the semi-private texts of schools (classroom and staffroom talk, written assessments). Whilst I employ ethnographic methods of data collection and production, I treat data as text (Luke 1995). I analyse these everyday institutionally located texts along with the current public proliferation of discourses about literacy, pedagogy and disadvantage in asking how these discourses produce the 'truth' about the ideal student or the ideal teacher.

1.2 History of the research

Research requires 'thought about the intersection of biography, history, and social structure' (Popkewitz 1988, p.379). In this project my history, context and location are integral to the formation of the problem and my theorising about practice in this site. In this respect it is important for readers to know something of my educational and family history in order to understand why and how I came to do this project. Hence I move now to some brief autobiographical notes which relate to my standpoint as researcher in this study.

1.2.1 Growing up in a working class community

I grew up in a community of recent immigrants and inter-generational Australian poor and working class people. Cheap housing trust accommodation brought diverse groups of people to the suburb where I grew up. These families had a small disposable income and few assets. My father was a fitter and turner and my mother a shorthand-typist. Both worked long hours, with my father increasing his income through shift work, when it was available. My father also suffered several periods of unemployment. He did his elementary education in a small farming community in Eire, though how much schooling he completed remains a family mystery. He romanticised his schooldays with stories of time spent fishing and picking up what he needed to know 'from the other kids on the way home'. These jokes aside, he insisted on brother and myself doing well at school. He encouraged us to be highly competitive at school and often greeted our report cards with the question, 'Where did you come?' referring to place in the class. He lamented not having the opportunity to 'get an education'. He used the dinner table conversation as a way of finding out what we had done in school that day and quizzed us on what we had learnt by asking us to explain it.

My mother grew up in suburban Adelaide. Her father had been a government clerk, but was frequently out of work during The Great Depression. Her mother didn't work outside of the home. My mother did well in the many Catholic primary schools she attended (her family moved to avoid eviction). She reported that she 'skipped' several grades due to her academic performance. She won a scholarship to attend an all girls Catholic college for her high school education. However severe respiratory illnesses cut short her high school education after grade nine. When she recovered, she attended a business college and found employment as a shorthand typist – work she continued until she retired in her fifties. Throughout my childhood she emphasised reading, spelling, writing and working hard. Family spelling competitions were not uncommon and she regularly challenged us with newspaper crosswords. She was interested in all that we did at school and often told us of her regrets at not being able to finish high school. My

mother believed that books were the best gifts and enrolled us in a book club which sent one hard-back 'classic' (including *Tom Sawyer, White Fang, Little Women*) per month until she was unable to afford the subscription.

The 'literacy equals empowerment' hypothesis was alive and well during my childhood. Extra money that my parents earned through shift work and overtime was directed towards our school education. They expected my brother and me to finance a university education through government scholarships. Along with many friends in similar circumstances, we did get to university and many of us returned to education and social welfare institutions convinced of the power of education to make a material difference in people's lives. In relation to my subjectivity as a researcher in this study I am conscious that the commonsense hypothesis I seek to explore - that literacy is empowering for disadvantaged people - connects for me with lifelong personal and professional histories.

1.2.2 Catholic school days

I spent my early schooling at a small Catholic neighbourhood school, where my friends and their families shared the belief that doing well in school was the way to better and wealthier futures. For working class and poor Australian Catholics (which included many 'new Australians', as recent immigrants from the United Kingdom and Europe were called at that time) in the 1950s education was the ticket to better jobs and lifestyles. It was also seen to be a way of achieving a rise in social status in a community where, as my father was at pains to point out, Catholics often felt themselves to be 'outsiders' and subject to discrimination when it came to employment, club memberships and public life.

My Catholic school days in the sixties and seventies were a contrasting mixture of rote learning, catechism, guilt and innovative radical teaching by young nuns who were completing their university education part-time. Whilst primary schooling instilled strict discipline, respect for elders and missionary zeal in caring for 'others', high school was a time of possibility constructed by feminist educators who believed that girls could and should pursue professional futures. It was a variant of feminism which simultaneously opened up new educational and professional lives for young women whilst maintaining patriarchal social values in matters of sex, religion and the family. The discourses of Catholic education of that period and location produced contradictory social goals and subjectivities for women: education, careers, social justice, motherhood, obedience and humility. In secondary school teachers encouraged critical questioning about other people's lives, whilst at the same time promoting the humble and selfless woman, urging a 'voice' whilst ensuring it wasn't too loud or visible. The voice of the Catholic woman should be 'other'-centred', used for the well-being of others. Not surprisingly, many of

my co-students went into careers of teaching, psychology and social work - the 'helping professions'.

Some twenty year later, as a researcher working at Banfield, a small Catholic parish school serving a poor community I brought a multi-layered history relating to the problem. I was positioned as both insider and outsider in this context. I brought a kind of membership or at least a remembered membership. Thus when the principal talked about the number of children requiring warm clothing, supplied by charitable organisations such as St Vincent de Paul, I remembered our own family visits there some thirty years earlier. When I witnessed liturgical events I automatically joined in on the amens and signs of the cross, though much of what else they did was new to me. I had in many ways left this community. My childhood meant that I knew from the inside about some aspects of the experiences of these children and their teachers. I was able to use my history to understand what was going on.

Yet in the course of the study I realised that while some things hadn't changed, other realities were quite alien to my experiences. Being a poor child at a Catholic school in the fifties was very different to being a poor child at a Catholic school in the nineties. Thus my life experiences on the one hand allowed me to understand this context quite intimately and sympathetically, yet on the other hand I needed to be to be vigilant about the intrusion of nostalgia into my work, in case it prevented me seeing and hearing the discursive and material practices of this contemporary site. Whilst I could not unmake the history nor the discursive practices which produce me as researcher and educator I was conscious that these are equally problematic as they are helpful in this interpretive work.

Researcher subjectivities represent ongoing challenges for the ethics and textual practices of educational researchers. Questions about the ways in which researcher biographies and subjectivities intersect with and affect research practices do not have neat answers. Here I aim for self-reflexivity - treating my position and interpretive frames as problematic and open to contestation. What a working class childhood might mean for researchers studying working class communities from their present locations as middle class university researchers is not always clear (Walkerdine 1994). A further unresolved issue is the ways in which historical and contemporary beliefs and practices might intersect with the conduct of research. While Catholicism was not central to this research I try to make clear instances where Catholicism as a discourse produced effects on the everyday institutional practices of these women in this site. My Catholic childhood made it easier to recognise certain practices and to perform the outward signs of membership in the community (such as the responses to prayers and singing hymns), yet my distancing from the church as an adult meant that I was uncomfortable doing so.

1.2.3 Middle class literacy teacher in a disadvantaged school

Along with many classmates I went from university to teacher's college, partly aided by scholarships which paid a living allowance in return for a bond which required graduates to teach anywhere they were posted in the state.

My training as an English teacher emphasised the importance of student talk, language across the curriculum, choice of texts, relevance of tasks, feedback, discussions, group work and drama. The teachers college lecturers drew on liberal humanist philosophies and were committed to transforming schools. Guided by the work of language educators in the United Kingdom they saw English and language pedagogy as key to improving schools (Barnes et al. 1969; Barnes 1976). Closer to home, in the late seventies projects concerned with 'language across the curriculum' and 'negotiating the curriculum' enjoyed active involvement from teachers, departmental advisers and university academics (reported in Boomer et al. 1992). As a graduate, I was a product of what for the times were quite radical approaches to education and to the central role of language in education.

Following my progressive training at teachers college and my own childhood experiences, I was a firm believer of the literacy equals empowerment hypothesis. At twenty, I began teaching as a secondary school English and Humanities teacher in a disadvantaged school in an industrial town some four hundred kilometres from the capital city where I had grown up. I was ready to construct a meaningful, relevant and fun curriculum with the students. However in the classroom I found that there were many other things I had to learn before I could negotiate this kind of program with my students. I found that they did not have the commitment to, nor the faith in school and school work, that I had taken for granted. They were surprised and suspicious that not only did I want them to do 'all this stuff' but that I expected them to enjoy it as well and see how good it was for them. They were embarrassed by my liberal pedagogy with its emphasis on the individual, feelings and opinions. I had assumed that was 'good' for me would be 'good' for my students. I had already forgotten my own unsuccessful pleas to my parents to leave school when I was fifteen. At that time I had seen schooling as irrelevant.

This is not the place to analyse in detail memories of my first year out teaching, however the shocks that I experienced that year as I confronted the inadequacy of my assumptions and expectations and the gaps in my knowledge have stayed with me. I had not realised how much as university graduate and teacher I had begun to practise middle class discourses and have middle class aspirations. Teacher education, indeed much of my

education, had been an enculturation into particular schemas for success, normalcy, childhood and literate practice. I had not anticipated the effects of my altered position – that I was no longer a child from a poor community but a middle class young adult invested with authority as a teacher. Nevertheless my theories about literacy teaching and learning and my commitment to the literacy equals empowerment hypothesis were not shaken by this precarious and confusing start to my teaching career. I simply assumed that I needed to know more about how to teach reading and writing and that this would enable me to do a better job of helping students to be literate. This led me back to university studies to find out how children learnt to read and write. I was sure there were answers.

1.2.4 Whole language to critical literacy: looking for the 'truth'

Whilst teaching secondary English, Humanities and Remedial Reading (as it was called at the time) I completed graduate studies in language and literacy education. These courses emphasised psycholinguistics, the reading process and language variation. At this point I believed I had found the answers I was looking for about how students learnt to read and I reformulated an approach to teaching literacy which built on children's knowledge and interests. A few years later while taking parenting leave from my school position, I began lecturing on a part-time basis in these same professional development courses. At that time I was zealous in my belief that approaches to teaching based on how children learnt language and how proficient readers and writers operated held the solutions to universal literacy in school. Over the next ten years my colleagues and I produced units of study informed by case study research into the writing process (Calkins 1986; Graves 1983; Cambourne & Turbill 1987), ethnographic research into language use in homes and schools (Tizard & Hughes 1984; Wells 1985) and psycholinguistic investigations into the reading process (Holdaway 1979; Clay 1979; Smith 1973). For my own part I maintained my interest in effective pedagogical practices (Edelsky et al. 1983). My object was to analyse how successful literacy teachers operated (Comber 1987; Hancock & Comber 1987). I was interested in patterns of interactions, what teachers said, what they had students do, the classroom rules and routines, and what made these classroom communities work for literacy learning. I was committed to producing pedagogical solutions. Wishing to avoid 'band wagons', I did not describe my work as 'whole language', but it was read that way by other educators and it was definitely imbued with the core belief that if the situation was 'right' all students would learn to read and write English willingly and easily.

In the eighties I worked as a tutor trainer for the national (and subsequently international) Early Literacy Inservice Course, known as ELIC, (Education Department of South

Australia 1984) and then co-developed the Literacy and Learning in the Middle Years Project (Campagna et al. 1989), a literacy inservice course for teachers in the middle years of schooling. These projects emphasised process pedagogies, though the Literacy and Learning in the Middle Years program incorporated a central role for the teacher, built around the Brunerian notion of 'scaffolding' (Bruner 1986). During this period I actively contributed to the production of local educational discourses which fostered the belief that literacy produces empowerment and a great deal of productive innovative pedagogy resulted from this work. Yet, in all this work my colleagues and I assumed that there were universal pedagogical solutions and, further, that the problems of students who were traditionally disadvantaged in terms of the outcomes of schooling would be solved by our new improved explicit pedagogies.

In Australia during the eighties a number of criticisms were made of whole language and process approaches to literacy instruction that deeply challenged my assumptions and practices. The most stinging of these, from my position, was that whole language and process approaches worked best for middle class Anglo children and not so well for disadvantaged groups, including bilingual, Aboriginal, non-Anglo and poor students. It was argued that process pedagogies made it harder for these children to learn the literacies which count in mainstream Australian society. I explain this challenge in detail in Chapter Four.

Unlike in the United States (see Edelsky 1991), much of the criticism of progressivist and whole language reforms came from radical and leftist educators. Researchers taking a socially critical position demonstrated that school literacies were gendered, raced and classed practices, and that what went on in schools, often under the auspices of progressive liberal pedagogies, maintained power relations and a selective tradition of literacy in the interests of the dominant and the privileged (Freebody & Welch 1993; Gilbert 1990; Luke 1988). Further, if literacy was not a given internal state to be achieved, but socially and culturally constructed practices which are situation specific, then whole language could not be seen as simply as the best means to an unproblematic end, but as an ensemble of culturally specific literate practices - one way of doing school literacy which produced different effects in different locations and with different groups of students. This questioning of the very possibility of universal pedagogical solutions shook any complacency and confidence I had about the 'truth' about the effects of literacy or the promise of 'best pedagogies'.

1.2.5 Coming to the problem: The discursive construction of literacy in a disadvantaged school

This study foregrounds questions about the effects of literacy education for disadvantaged groups. In short, I examine what literacy education looks and sounds like in one school community. I explore how teachers construct and enact their literacy curriculum, what kinds of practices go on and the effects of these practices for the literacies of disadvantaged school students. The problem – the discursive construction of literacy in a disadvantaged school – emerged from my history as a student in a poor community, my experience as a teacher in a disadvantaged school and increasingly from my work as a tertiary educator. In addition to the academic critiques of progressive approaches, complaints and questions from teachers contributed to my growing concerns about the inadequacies of the pedagogies I and others had promoted.

My colleagues and I were continually confronted with teachers' claims about the inadequacy and inappropriateness of suggested practices for disadvantaged school contexts. An example may make clearer the kinds of objections teachers raised to pedagogical techniques promoted as universally appropriate 'good practice'. In 1989 we had prepared a video of a teacher using a reciprocal reading approach with a text in a primary classroom (following Palincsar 1987). The video demonstrated the procedure in action. However when we used the footage in workshops with teachers from disadvantaged schools their response was problematic. The teachers did not find the video a convincing demonstration at all. They responded in ways we had not anticipated. What they attended to was not the procedure but the pedagogical relationship between the teacher and the students, and in particular to the institutional relations of power and authority. They responded with comments such as, 'She's turning her back' or 'I couldn't do that with my kids'. The teacher had turned away from the class during the lesson. These teacher viewers rejected the technique on the grounds that the children shown on the video were 'different' from the children they taught. As far as these teachers were concerned the video presented a willing group of eager students cooperating with the teacher.

This group of teachers rejected the language arts strategy because it required student behaviour they believed they could not expect from their students. They could not imagine themselves physically orienting to the children as the teacher on the video had done, nor could they imagine their students as the students on the video. Their students did not look like, behave like, nor sound like the students on the video. The objections they raised were based on their judgements of what was possible in the literacy classroom based on their experiences of working with groups of children whom they saw as

different from the children we had represented in our demonstrations. This problem has haunted me. While I am unwilling to accept teachers' verdicts that the children they taught needed to be watched constantly in case they misbehaved, their arguments are nonetheless significant and point to the problems with totalising pedagogies for different communities. I remain actively opposed to the deficit discourses that produce a 'these kids cannot or won't' syndrome amongst teachers, both because of my own personal history and an ongoing political commitment to working for social justice through education. Still, the need to check enacted pedagogical practices in different sites is crucial. My problem as a teacher educator is to consider what kinds of theories and knowledge are useful for teachers who work in very different sites. This work assumes extra importance in a climate where increasingly the same outcomes are required for all students.

This instance and numerous repetitions of the argument, 'that won't work with my kids', produced, along with the critiques of progressive pedagogy, a number of urgent questions for me. On what grounds do I assume that I, or anyone else, could find pedagogical solutions which will 'work' with all students? What do enacted pedagogies look like in particular sites? What is it that works or doesn't work in specific educational sites? How do we judge whether a set of practices works? What do these pedagogies do when they do work? What different work do pedagogies do in different sites? What is the vision of the ideal student that teachers have when they decide if their practices are working?

Questions about how pedagogical theories are recontextualised in local sites required a study that focused on specific local practices and discourses grounded in the material life of a school over a period of time. From the outset my intention was to explore these problems with the help of the teachers and administrators, not to take up a position an expert or judgemental position in regard to any prior assumption about 'good practice'.

1.3 Standpoint

Research practices are never neutral or natural, but shaped by particular views of the world. Feminist and poststructuralist theorists have argued that researchers should make their own locations and standpoints visible through our textual practices and examine the social effects of our own discourse (Bannerji et al. 1991; Gore 1993; Lather 1994; Luke 1992; Smith 1987). My brief autobiographical sketch above reflects my commitment to foregrounding how my history and contemporary institutional location intersect with this project. Feminist work on standpoint confirms that there is nothing which can simply be taken for granted in research designs, practices and reports. These are constructed

manoeuvres and decisions which involve power relations. These challenges made me aware of the gendered nature of the research task I have undertaken, both in working at the school site and on the construction of the thesis. In this section I explain my standpoint in relation to:

- gender divisions in the production and use of pedagogical theories;
- thesis writing as a dividing practice;
- the role of the intellectual; and
- critical literacies and the missing teacher allies

1.3.1 Gender divisions in the production and use of pedagogical theories

Feminist educators contend that historically the producers of grand theories have usually been men (Luke 1992; Smith 1987). The production of educational and social theory has been a patriarchal domain. 'Public man', liberated from private domestic chores and child rearing, is free to work on universal public interests (Luke 1992, p.32). One result of the gendered division of educational work is that academic research and writing is frequently 'gender-blind' (Lee 1992). What does this division of intellectual work, even amongst those who speak in terms of empowerment, mean for education? Even reform with an explicit social justice agenda based on critical pedagogy has been the domain of male academics, yet the people who attempt to make it work in schools are usually women. Weiler argues that 'this material basis for the public conceptual world of men rests on the labour of women' (Weiler 1988, p.61). A key question becomes: Who is theorising about whose labour (Luke 1992, p.32)?

In Australia, literacy debates at a theoretical level have largely been dominated by male protagonists (Lee 1992). Whole language or process approaches are often synonymous with Holdaway, Cambourne and Graves. For instance when introducing Holdaway at an Annual Australian Reading Association conference in 1987, Cambourne referred to him as the 'father of whole language' – the patriarchal discourse celebrated. In the recent 'genre-based pedagogy' movement, despite the contributions of many women educators, Martin is often quoted as the theoretical authority. In a world where texts are increasingly organise and rule society, women have not constructed the ideological models around which debates occur (Smith 1987). Whilst many women publish and write about literacy teaching in Australia, the theoretical terrain has remained largely a male domain. Women have tended, until recently, to produce synthesis texts - teacher guides, curriculum documents and practical program tools, which mediate theory. With the exception of the production of feminist pedagogies, women's theoretical work has been less visible. In literacy education which women have a say, what about and in which contexts, needs scrutiny.

This does not mean that women have no say in literacy education in Australia. In terms of numbers, women dominate literacy teaching. Indeed, school literacy teaching can be seen as a feminised profession (Luke 1993a). In this project, for example, I worked with an all female school staff, not an unusual phenomenon for primary schools. Women are largely doing the teaching work, either with children, or in teacher preparation or in professional development. Much of this intellectual work involves the translation of academic discourses into readily accessible language and practices. This is not unimportant work. It means however that women are less likely to produce the primary discourses or theoretical statements which guide this work. This sexual division of the literacy studies field has direct impact on women teachers' lives across educational sites, which I briefly illustrate using my own university career as data.

I worked in the university sector for almost eight years on various short-term and hourly paid contracts before being awarded tenure. My comparatively recent teaching experience meant that I was asked to produce 'hands-on, practical ideas' for teachers. My identity as an academic was constructed as a 'good ideas person'. I did not resist this and restricted my reading to sources which were likely to furnish me with useful ideas I could offer teachers. For some time my reading of theory was minimal. I restricted my theoretical reading to material about language learning, child development and teaching. My research was a search for successful practice (Comber 1987; Comber & Hancock 1987; Hancock & Comber 1987). I saw teachers as the audience for my writing, not other academics. My academic work was dedicated to 'the practical and useful', 'what teachers want' and during the time I was employed on contract, social theory was largely absent from my reading and practice, or done in a haphazard fashion when a conference sparked off a new interest.

In the late eighties my need to deal with broader social theories grew. Reading for my Masters dissertation led me to the work of feminist educational researchers and literacy education scholars working from socially critical perspectives. Teaching in curriculum and research methodology courses opened up new areas of debate beyond the confines of literacy education. These events in my academic life pointed to the need for more than practical solutions to pedagogical questions. I believe my experience is not unusual and that it illustrates the ways in which women educators are frequently positioned as practitioners. When the enacted theories did not work often we blamed ourselves (or were blamed by others) for not doing 'it' properly.

In this project I have been conscious of the ways in which theoretical solutions impact on the work of women teachers. My interest in the present study is to examine the effects of

such theorising, including my own, in producing teacher and student subjectivities and school literate practices.

1.3.2 Thesis writing as a dividing practice

Thesis writing is the active construction of an academic identity and position, creating the academic self, often through one's analysis and representation of other people's lives. Insofar as they involve a categorisation and disruption of the world and involve a redefinition and reclassification of the author, PhDs are dividing practices in themselves. Having a doctorate is considered an essential requirement for a number of research activities, committees and funding options. Writing the thesis can be considered the ultimate academic examination - writing oneself into existence as an academic who should be listened to, who has credentials to 'know'. Proving one's academic worthiness and accessing membership depends on the production of the thesis discourses (Bannerji et al. 1991; Lee 1992). Completion of the doctorate can allow women into new professional roles, yet it can also separate us from the women about whom we write. In coming to this problem and in writing the thesis I try not to privilege academic above everyday discourses. Nor do I make claims for the importance of the practical over the theoretical. Rather I try to use each to read the other. These tensions cannot be readily resolved or written off through methodological choice or finesse. They infuse this document.

Feminist academics must ask ourselves why we write and what we hope to achieve by our writing in order to avoid 'unwitting capitulation to the very forces we are resisting', namely, privileging grand theory over local action, disposing of research subjects' rationalities and the practice of exclusive discourses of the academy (Sawicki 1991, p.2). It is crucial therefore that I make my position clear in regard to the women teachers who are the subjects of this research. For example I experienced some anguish about how the Banfield teachers might read themselves in this text. How could I work from a socially critical position to scrutinise classroom practices in a way that did not lead inevitably to another case of blame the teacher?

This is no small matter. Reformers need to be aware of the ways in which our critique positions and at times alienates teachers. Where teachers believe that academics know nothing about their work, and where academics struggle to demonstrate some degree of sensitivity to teachers' working conditions, or worse operate at cross purposes, the risk is that teachers' and academics' conversations about pedagogy remain separate. In this report I hope to construct meanings in ways that do justice to the complexity of teachers' work and the competing and contradictory discourses and institutional requirements that

construct that work. To do so requires a great deal of self-consciousness about the 'discourse decisions' I make in this document (Sawicki 1991, p.3).

Universities train students in exclusive discourses which serve to marginalise those who do not produce them (McKenna 1991). Here, I have tried to avoid constructing a discourse that selects its readers narrowly. Rather I have tried to produce a text which is accessible to school-based teachers as well as my academic peers. To this end I invited Banfield teachers to give critical feedback to drafts of this thesis. I see the thesis then as an instance of discursive practice and one in which it is possible to work towards a kind of writing that invites the readership of the subjects of its analysis - teachers working in disadvantaged schools. I have not always managed to achieve this and am conscious of Foucault's warning that:

> [O]ur discourses can extend relations of domination at the same time that they are critical of them. (Foucault cited in Sawicki 1991, p.11)

An ongoing problem for me is how I write about the women who let me into their lives as teachers and how I involve them in the process of constructing this text. The challenge was to use the data critically but at the same time not to position the teachers as unknowing, unconscious subjects. In Chapter Three I discuss these dilemmas further. Texts are the products of intellectual labour, yet the effects of research reports are difficult to anticipate. My concern here was not to produce a text which elevated my role as intellectual or to inadvertently make teachers the objects of blame. I did not find an unequivocal or final solution to these dilemmas and the text of this study represents this tension as much as it might seek to resolve it.

1.3.3 The role of the intellectual

As I have suggested the positions one can take as an educational researcher are complex and often contradictory. However I might hope that my practices will work in the interests of particular groups, such as women teachers or disadvantaged students, such advocacy positions are not given, nor simple to construct. Here I make no claims for the positive effects of this research. Rather I try to construct a position from which I can interrogate my own practices as a researcher.

> One is always already in a particular historical situation, which means that one's account of the significance of one's cultural practices can never be value-free, but always involves an interpretation. (Dreyfus & Rabinow 1983, p.166)

Dreyfus and Rabinow point out that 'the knower' is never outside the context investigated and is in part produced by the practices intended for analysis. In analysing Banfield events and discourses I recognise that I am produced by similar history, circumstances

and discourses as the teachers about whose work I write. I have been guided by Foucault's stance on the role of the intellectual.

> The intellectual's role is no longer to place himself 'somewhat ahead or to the side' in order to express the stifled truth of the collectivity; rather it is to struggle against the forms of power that transform him into its object and instrument in the sphere of 'knowledge', 'truth', 'consciousness' and 'discourse'. In this sense theory does not express, translate or serve to apply practice: it is practice. (Foucault 1977, pp.207-208)

Thus as researchers it is imperative that we explore the effects of our institutional practices and that we do not absolve ourselves from the unanticipated outcomes of our professional discourses. Similarly, Gore argues that intellectuals must be more 'humble and reflexive in our claims' (Gore 1992, p.62). This suggests the need for continual examination of my role as researcher in this site and the ways in which I exercised power because of my position and assumed knowledge of literacy education.

One of the strongest and most common themes in the teachers' talk with me reflected their doubts about themselves as teachers. The very act and gaze of the research had the effect of making their teaching problematic in their eyes. Teachers frequently used the interview as a confessional, explaining that they were 'not doing enough' or that there were 'doing it wrong'. They deferred to my professional expertise in asking me to evaluate what they had done or what they planned to do. I took the role of listening to their analyses of the situations that confronted them, however I did not pretend that I had answers to the dilemmas they faced. On the other hand I did not withdraw or withhold resources which addressed the concerns they raised.

Producing the thesis was not simply a process of 'writing up'. The research has continued throughout the writing and re-writing as I explored possibilities for critical discourse analysis that avoids constructing students and teachers as in need of enlightenment or as in need of the gaze or knowledge of the researcher.

1.3.4 Critical literacies and the missing teacher allies

Studies from a critical standpoint point out teachers' dominance in classroom talk during literacy events literacy events, even in pedagogies which purport to include students' cultural knowledge (Baker & Freebody 1989; Gee 1990; Luke 1993c). I do not question the significance of socially critical work on the nature of school literacy practices. On the contrary this burgeoning work is emerging as a major contending orientation on literacy pedagogy, which continues to have profound effects on my teaching and writing. Nevertheless, I am conscious that critical research into literacy education can produce new versions of the teacher as problem.

Whereas whole language created the potential for teachers to change their position in the production of knowledge through writing and publishing about their research into classroom practice (Willinsky 1990), in critical constructions of literacy pedagogy there has been an absence of teachers' voices. In Australia, debates about what critical literacy might be and what it can and cannot achieve have largely been dominated by academics. Many texts about critical literacy and critical pedagogy are considered by teachers as impenetrable mazes of highly theoretical, dense prose. Some versions of critical literacy have constructed teachers and their work as the sites for critique, using the generic problem teacher to re-establish just who knows best about teaching. In so doing critical educators run the risk of dividing themselves from teachers and alienating teachers from literacy pedagogy as a political project. Thus the very power relations involved in the production of 'critical literacies' need scrutiny.

Current moves towards critical literacy have tended to be theorised about and around teachers and ignoring teachers as situated beings, working in particular local sites. Critical research concerned with literacy teaching has most often taken an advocacy role in relation to the child or the student. In other words researchers have considered the social effects of particular kinds of literacy instruction from children's standpoints. Calls for change for different kinds of practices are then seen as the teacher's problem, without recognising teachers' own standpoints, histories and institutional locations. In the present study I attempt to move to a position where pedagogy can be critiqued but the teacher is not placed in the position of unaware technocrat. During the fieldwork, analysis and writing I have consulted teachers in order to better understand how pedagogical discourses are produced in a complex local site. I am interested in what limits who teachers can be, what they can do and say, and how these limits are produced.

1.3.5 Literacy pedagogy as teachers' work

Schools organise the time, placement, physical care and education of the young population for a considerable proportion of their lives. As post-industrial societies increasingly depend on textual constructions of reality, the emphasis on universal literacy remains significant. In schools sites, especially disadvantaged schools where literacy levels are often assumed to be problematic, literacy has been constructed as an urgent priority, a problem for teachers to solve.

Pedagogical theories of literacy privilege certain kinds of student subjectivities and construct teachers according to the knowledge/disciplines which are valued. In this thesis I argue that contemporary theories of literacy pedagogy do not sufficiently take into account the complexity of teachers' institutional positions and competing discourses.

They 'bracket out' the other kinds of work that teachers do in schools and classrooms, which may include legal, punitive, nurturing and nursing, to name only some of an ever-extending repertoire of responsibilities (Acker 1995; Connell 1985; Middleton 1992). In addition, theoretical positions about literacy pedagogy frequently ignore teachers' gender, class, ethnicity, language, cultural, historical and current lifeworlds. These absences mean that constructions of literacy pedagogy produce bodiless, non-emotional, non-cultural teachers - the professional subject. Each has an in-built imperative towards teacher change based on the assumption that if teachers had the right kind of knowledge their consciousness would be raised and they would do the 'right thing', namely, teach the right literacy. In academic texts teachers are represented as problematic beings who need to be changed - transformed by new knowledge, new skills, new attitudes, new beliefs, new ideologies and so on.

In contemporary research the teacher is seen as powerful in classroom literacy events (Freebody et al, 1995; Luke 1993b). The Australian primary school teacher appears to have considerable control over what and how is taught in their own classroom. To some extent I share this view and in this study I do discuss how students are positioned by particular kinds of discursive practices and how teachers might teach differently. However I am more concerned with how and why teachers construct literacy curriculum in the ways that they do. I am interested with the ways in which teachers are positioned by the discursive practices of academic, media and policy documents and how these shape the institutional and discursive practices of people who work in schools. Few studies of literacy curriculum account for the competing discursive practices which contribute to specific realities in actual contexts and impact on enacted curriculum. We know relatively little, for example, about how genre pedagogy or whole language are combined with social welfare, social justice, legal and psychological discourses in specific sites or to take another example the effects of behaviour management policies simultaneously deployed along side so-called liberating literacy pedagogies. In other words, how do curriculum projects, together with other truths about teaching and schooling, combine to construct material and discursive practices of the classroom and the staff room?

Teachers are not without agency in the face of these discursive assaults, but recently their political influence as a profession has been undermined. Foucault's theories linking discourse, power and subjectivity led me to analyse the knowledges and institutional practices that govern teachers' work and moreover to respect teachers' resistance to the colonisation of their work by different academic camps. My position is that as an academic working in education I must form new alliances with my school-based colleagues in order to take action in educational policy and to change normative practices

which disadvantage certain groups of children. To move forward in pedagogical theorising and practice I believe we must do this intellectual work together with teachers.

1.4 Thesis overview

In Chapter One I have introduced the focus of this research and outlined how my own history relates to the problem and the standpoint I take in this project. Chapter Two explains my use Foucault's interpretive analytics in exploring the constitutive nature of discourse. Chapter Three describes the research orientations informing the methodological decisions I made in this project and how and why I went about the study in the ways that I did. Here I outline how I have taken up insights and practices from feminist, post-structuralist and critical research in order to carry out this project. In Chapter Four I move to an analysis of selected recent policy, media and academic texts which focus upon literacy, pedagogy and disadvantage. These texts are produced by 'experts' and inform policy and program budget allocations at a national, state level and local level. In this sense such texts produce the macro contexts in which teachers and students work.

Having established a broad sense of sociohistorical context, I then turn to look at the immediate institutional context. In Chapter Five I begin the first of four chapters considering the local texts produced about literacy, pedagogy and disadvantage at Banfield. I provide a description of the school and its community, its ethos and recent history and introduce the competing discourses in use during the present study. In Chapter Six I discuss teachers' and administrative staff's statements about their work, about teaching literacy and about their students. Chapters Seven and Eight deal directly with school literacy practices through an analysis of transcripts of classroom talk. In Chapter Seven I explore the discursive construction of the ideal literate student and in Chapter Eight I describe the main literacies on offer to Banfield students at this time. In Chapter Nine I consider what counts as literacy in the public documents which assess students' literacy. In Chapter Ten I take up some key issues the study raises and consider the implications of the project for my own work as a teacher educator.

My hope is that this study offers a useful account of the 'traverse of discourses' (Luke & Luke 1995) from policy documents, to media headlines, to academic theories, to the texts of everyday schooling, the teachers' instructions, the classroom discussions, the texts children read and write, the school report cards - the discursive practices through which literacy lessons in a disadvantaged school are assembled and the literate student produced.

Chapter 2 Literacy, pedagogy and disadvantage: A Foucauldian analysis

> My objective... has been to create a history of the different modes by which, in our culture, human beings are made subjects. (Foucault 1983, p.208)

> Take for example an educational institution: the disposal of its space, the meticulous regulations which govern its internal life, the different activities which are organised there, the diverse persons who live there or meet one another, each with his own function, his well-defined character - all these things constitute a block of capacity-communication-power. The activity which ensures apprenticeship and the acquisition of aptitudes or types of behaviour is developed there by means of a whole ensemble of regulated communications (lessons, questions and answers, orders, exhortations, coded signs of obedience, differentiation marks of the 'value' of each person and of the levels of knowledge) and by means of a whole series of power processes (enclosure, surveillance, reward and punishment, the pyramidal hierarchy). (Foucault 1983, pp.218-219)

2.1 Introduction

In contemporary Australia there is a proliferation of texts which link literacy, pedagogy and disadvantage. Increasingly, this trilogy of key words is used, in current educational and political discourses, along with promises of excellence and equity. However, despite the work of contemporary educators on formations of literacy practices and policies which are equity driven, there have been few studies which examine the discursive practices which together constitute the issues of literacy, pedagogy and disadvantage. This is the task of this thesis.

This investigation examines the ways in which literacy is talked about, and taught, in one school serving an economically disadvantaged community. It explains how current discursive and institutional practices form teacher and student subjectivities and constitute the literacy curriculum in one site. The present study entails reading a range of educational texts concerned with literacy, pedagogy and disadvantage: academic publications, policy and media documents, school documents, interview transcripts and transcripts of teachers' talk in the staffroom and in classroom literacy lessons. Looking at these texts, which occur in and around the institutional site of the school, I trace the various discourses of and about literacy, pedagogy and disadvantage, as these interweave to construct and position teachers and students.

As the foregoing quotations suggest, the work of Michel Foucault has tremendous potential for examining the present proliferation and intersections of discourses about literacy, pedagogy and disadvantage. Foucault has been variously described as a historical philosopher, a social scientist, a sociologist, with many commentators noting that Foucault's work, by its very nature, resists labelling. Foucault described himself as a 'crypto-Marxist, an irrationalist, a nihilist' (Foucault 1988, p.13). Foucault's approaches seem to defy simple application, yet his general perspective is useful in a study such as this. In particular Foucault's irreverence towards truth claims is a helpful starting point for me as a literacy educator who has actively contributed to producing the 'truth' about teaching literacy. Rereading contemporary educational discourses and examining specific local discursive and institutional practices in the light of Foucault's work disrupts accepted rationalities, taken for granted claims and plausibility structures about literacy. Claims made for literacy and pedagogy may enmesh the teacher and the disadvantaged child in particular 'games of truth'. Foucault's work offers ways of analysing the institutional and discursive practices of educational institutions such as schools.

In this chapter I explain my use of Foucault in this thesis. I begin by summarising the significance of Foucault for social science and for education in particular. I then turn to describe the ways in which Foucault's work has been employed in recent literacy research, noting the innovations and limitations of such applications. I summarise changes in perspective and analytic tools, relevant to the present study, which have emerged from across Foucault's textual corpus, taking into account critiques of Foucault's work. To conclude, I explain how Foucault's work has contributed to my re-framing and the analyses of the problem of this thesis: The construction of a literate culture in a disadvantaged school.

2.2 Significance of Foucault for social science

> There can be no 'Foucault system. One cannot be a 'Foucauldian' in the way one can be a Marxist or a Freudian..... If Foucault is to have an 'influence' it will no doubt be as a slayer of dragons, a breaker of systems. Such a task should not be seen as negative; indeed it is the system-building that is the real negation. (Sheridan 1980, p.225)

Sheridan's comments are somewhat ironic in the light of the emergence of 'a veritable Foucault industry' (Sawicki 1991) of conferences, readers, university courses, collections and guides, many of which purport to tell the uninitiated how to read and use Foucault and to detail the pros and cons of his earlier and later works. While Foucault died in 1984, his work continues to have profound effects, generating considerable

debate and publication across many disciplines and domains. The impact of the work of Foucault on social science has been considerable over the last three decades and has escalated with English translations of his books, addresses and essays. Foucault's impact on social sciences is significant and ongoing. Dreyfus and Rabinow (1983, p.xvii) claim that 'his works represent the most important contemporary effort both to develop a method for the study of human beings and to diagnose the current situation of our society'. Foucault's contribution is seen as methodologically significant and as producing insights about contemporary life (Smart 1985). Foucault's work has had such an impact on the social sciences that Rabinow predicts paradoxically that Foucault may well himself be 'a founder of discursivity' (Rabinow 1984, p.26). The importance of Foucault's work extends beyond the topics of his historical enquiries ' to what he called a history of the present - an excavation of and perspective on the bedrock of our modern conceptions' (Foucault 1988, p.10).

> My role - and that is too emphatic a word - is to show people that they are much freer than they feel, that people accept as truth, as evidence, some themes which have been built up at a certain moment during history, and that this so-called evidence can be criticized and destroyed. To change something in the minds of people - that's the role of the intellectual. (Foucault 1988, p.10)

Foucault saw the significance of intellectual work as changing something in the minds of people and in this regard his questions are especially significant. For instance Foucault starts with taken for granted hegemonic hypotheses, such as the supposed repression of sexuality in modern life since Victorian times, and asks different sets of questions about the supposed phenomena.

> The question I would like to pose is not, Why are we repressed? but rather, Why do we say with so much passion and so much resentment against our most recent past, against our present, and against ourselves, that we are repressed? By what spiral did we come to affirm that sex is negated? (Foucault 1978, pp.8-9)

> Why has sexuality been so widely discussed? What are the effects of power generated by what was said about it? What are the links between these discourses, these effects of power, and the pleasures that were invested by them? What knowledge (*savoir)* formed as a result of this linkage? The object, in short, is to define the regime of power-knowledge-pleasure that sustains the discourse on human sexuality in our part of the world. (Foucault 1978, p.11)

Such radically different questions make for different kinds of problematisation and analyses. Foucault thought of an intellectual 'as someone who works with such questions, rather than with organic ties or ready-made theories or ideologies' (Rajchman 1995, p.15). Experimenting with questions rather than consensus characterised Foucault's way of working on problems, to the point where his questions deny the assumptions from which many researchers begin. For example, across his career

Foucault made a number of challenges to the 'commonsense' driving historical and sociological research, including undermining key assumptions such as the following:

- that power is held by particular social groups;
- that universal truths can be pursued and recovered;
- that rules about human behaviour can be discovered;
- that hidden meanings can be revealed;
- that there is an essential subjective meaning;
- that history is progress;
- that there are singular determinants of history (Cherryholmes 1988; Smart 1985).

Foucault's reading of history and contemporary social and political conditions profoundly shakes these tenets which have been so pivotal in theory building, research designs and interpretation in social science as I discuss in more detail later in this chapter (See 2.5). Foucault's work confronts the ways in which social scientists look at the world and describe it. He changes the questions which are asked about history and about the present, so that any sense of inevitability or natural progression is removed. What is at stake here is the credibility of the disciplinary domains of the human sciences.

> Foucault's work... begins from scepticism towards the very ideas of 'sociology' and 'psychology' or 'education' as human sciences and, further, sets out to reveal the complicity of science and knowledge in disciplinary techniques of moral regulation and social control. (Luke & Luke 1995, p.359)

From the point of view of the present study Foucault's work is useful in that it pushes me to consider my own role as a university academic in the production of theory and practices about literacy education and it precipitates the formation of new questions about literacy and its supposed benefits for disadvantaged groups. Starting from the kinds of questions Foucault poses, produces different possibilities for the study of literacy education at a particular time and place. It becomes possible to ask less reverent questions about the effects of literacy:

- How and why did literacy become a problem in late capitalist societies such as Australia in the 1980s?
- Why is literacy so widely discussed at this time? How is literacy discussed?
- Why is literacy constituted as part of a social justice solution for socio-economically disadvantaged groups and ailing economies?
- What are the local effects of the proliferation of professional knowledges around literacy and social justice?

Questions such as these, related to a literacy equals empowerment hypothesis, underlie this project. It is not that my commitment to literacy education or social justice is destroyed, but it becomes possible for me to ask what and how I have taken for granted

in my own institutional and discursive practices and what the local effects might be. It also becomes possible to question how and why literacy is unproblematically seen as liberating. Foucault's work is part of a larger poststructuralist rejection of binary oppositions in social theory.

> His questions and hypotheses are part of a radical re-evaluation in poststructuralist thought of the classical humanist conceptual split between ideology and economics, sexuality and politics, the individual and the social, the subversive and the repressive. (Bernauer & Rasmussen 1988, pp.6-7)

Yet Foucault did not seek to produce a new grand theory, but to construct counter hypotheses of the present - to reject the limits of how we understand and talk about the ways things are. By questioning first principles of Western science, Foucault worked against totalising theories, emphasising instead the need for analysis of local and specific events. How discursive practices are produced in specific historical settings, in particular material conditions was a major focus of his work. He demonstrated how theories produce effects in our lives and delimit who we can be, what we can do and say. His curiosity with the formation of human subjects was a theme across many of his studies. In terms of the current project I can begin to consider what kinds of literate students are produced in this disadvantaged school at this time.

> Foucault's theories do not tell us what to do, but rather how some particular ways of thinking and doing are historically linked to particular forms of power and social control; his theories serve less to explain than to criticise and raise questions. His histories of theories are designed to reveal their contingency and thereby free us from them. (Sawicki 1988, p.189)

In the field of literacy education where there remains a dominant story of the empowering effects of literacy and the possibility of a grand pedagogical solution which will work for all children, Foucault's scepticism can be harnessed as a positive force. In this project it enables different readings of teachers' practices in the literacy classroom. It makes it possible to question the pedagogies that are said to be good for disadvantaged children, who makes such claims and why. I found Foucault's problematisation of dominant theories and methods in sociological research generative and energising, yet daunting. Thus in considering how to proceed I sought examples of other educators and researchers who used Foucault's work in their analyses. I turn briefly now to a selective review of related studies which I have found helpful in this project.

2.3 Use of Foucault in educational studies

Despite the significance of Foucault's work for the social sciences it has been argued that its reception and application have been somewhat slower in educational theory and research (Marshall 1990, p.12). After noting the work of Walkerdine and Henriques as

exceptions to this trend (Henriques et al.1984), Marshall explains that this may be due to the way Foucault 'radically undercut' the ways in which both traditional and liberal educationists talk.

> Foucault does not just speak about such things as power, domination, and the construction of subjects in ways that can be tacked on, so to say, to resistance theory, reproduction theory, or whatever. (Marshall 1990, p.14)

However the publication of *Foucault and education* (Ball 1990), in which Marshall's chapter is included and the many lively reviews which followed it, is in itself an indication of the growing use of Foucault's work in education. Since the late eighties evidence of the take up of Foucault's work is more common in educational publications (Ball 1990; Cherryholmes 1988; Close 1992; Luke 1989; Polakow 1993; Popkewitz 1991; Ryan 1989; Tyler 1993; Wallace 1995). What follows is a brief discussion of research employing Foucauldian approaches to educational questions which has informed this study.

A number of educational researchers taking a Foucauldian perspective have made major challenges to some of the sacred assumptions of progressive Western educational discourses. These include the claims made for child-centred pedagogies and developmental theory (Walkerdine 1984; Polakow 1989); the autonomy of the professional educator (Cherryholmes 1988); the predictable effects of policies (Ball 1990); the need for reform and the benefits of progress (Popkewitz 1991) and the belief in liberating pedagogies (Gore 1993). These are not small targets, but represent some of the most influential 'truths' of contemporary educational discourse. Walkerdine explains how a Foucauldian approach is useful for re-thinking educational 'truths'.

> For me, the importance of this work lies in the way in which actual social practices may be discursively regulated by the production of 'truths', 'knowledges' about children, for example, which claim to tell the truth about child development. These produce the possibility of certain behaviours and then read them back as 'true', creating a normalizing vision of the 'natural child'. (Walkerdine 1988, p.5)

Walkerdine (1984) shows that discourses construct teachers and children as subjects and also what will be counted as learning. Through an exploration of key historical and contemporary documents Walkerdine demonstrates the ways in which developmental psychology has been taken up in child-centred pedagogies and in one study she focusses on mathematics curriculum and pedagogy in early childhood classrooms as the site for analysis of current institutional practices. Using Foucault's insights about the ways in which truth claims produce the child as an object of study, she argues that child-centred techniques, such as the observation of the child at play, become techniques for social regulation.

Similarly, Polakow (1989) has argued that developmental discourses are problematic because the taxonomies of normality which they evoke construct some children as 'other', as 'deviant'. Possibilities of classifying children on a developmental continuum meant that 'the body of the child became a behavioural site for both surveillance and control' (Polakow 1989, p.78). This normalising gaze allowed diagnoses of childhood problems in psychological, medical and educational terms rather than explanations related to material realities associated with poverty. Thus professional expertise associated with knowledge production around 'the normal child' could deflect attention and action from actual physical and environmental problems. Polakow observed that teachers, drawing on mediated versions of such professional discourses, are then likely to blame poor children and label them as Learning Disabled or as afflicted with a psychological or moral problem, when in fact the child may be hungry, ill and tired. The combined expertise of the child development experts ensures that the child is classified, monitored and recorded. Often the family of the problem child becomes the site of increased surveillance yet structural inequalities and economic realities remain unchanged.

Cherryholmes (1988) takes up Foucault's claim that there is no identifiable intentional author, but rather an 'author-function' and that rules of discourse govern what is said and what is not said, who has authority to speak and who must listen (Foucault 1984, p.117). According to Cherryholmes it follows that teachers are not the creators of their own discourses.

> Professional educators would like to believe they are in control of what they say and do and that their discourses-practices are based on true statements. But if truth is discursive and discourses are historically situated, then truth cannot be spoken in the absence of power and each historical arrangement of power has its own truths. (Cherryholmes 1988, p.34)

The argument is that teachers learn the discourses of educational institutions and they take up the discourse-practices of 'good teachers' as defined by those institutions. As teachers learn the discourse-practices of teaching, Cherryholmes argues they also learn to recreate asymmetries between teachers and students.

Popkewitz (1991) also draws on Foucault's argument that different knowledges produce 'regimes of truth'. In problematising the common sense view that educational reform equals progress or that change is for the better, Popkewitz contends that a discourse of progress is fundamental to pedagogic thought and that reform is related to patterns of social regulation found in schooling.

> The significance of modern pedagogy is its tie to problems of social regulation; pedagogy links the administrative concerns of the state with the self-governance of the subject. The forms of knowledge in schooling frame and classify the world and the nature of work, which in turn, have the potential to organize and shape individual identity. (Popkewitz 1991, p.14)

Thus Popkewitz's use of Foucault enables him to consider educational reform as a discourse with particular kinds of effects on teachers' work and as deploying new techniques of monitoring and evaluating both students and teachers. Thus reform becomes a site 'in which the modernisation of institutions occurs' where 'modernisation' has to do with the government of the population.

Also informed by Foucault is Ball's analysis of policy texts (Ball 1990). Policies 'are power/knowledge configurations par excellence' because they make authoritative statements about how things are and should be (Ball 1990, p.22). Ball's analyses of these 'textual interventions into practice' indicate how policies 'create circumstances in which the range of options available in deciding what to do are narrowed or changed' (Ball 1993, p.12). Seeing policies as textual production of truth and knowledge Ball examines the effects educational policies have in different contexts, noting as Foucault's work suggests that programs never work out as planned. This does not mean that programs do not have effects -indeed they do - but, that those effects may be unanticipated and contradictory to the policy makers' intentions.

Gore (1993) has considered the ways in which feminist and radical pedagogies are themselves regimes of truth. Using a Foucauldian analysis of these discourses, she argues that questions of specific pedagogical practices are overlooked in preference for grand theory. She also points out that radical discourses can in themselves produce the effects of domination and that with their focus on others - the 'oppressed' - these discourses have neglected theorists', educators' and researchers' relationships to themselves. She attempts to embody Foucault's more 'humble and reflexive intellectual' constantly questioning her own practices. She argues for the need to study specific practices in local contexts and to look at the ways in which neglected practices function to regulate relations of power. Inspired by Foucault's notion of 'spaces of freedom' she works to identify what these might be within institutionalised pedagogy.

The above studies represent only a small selection of recent educational research employing Foucauldian interpretive analytics. However they indicate the kinds of educational problems where Foucault's work has been useful to educators dealing with contemporary issues and debates. He offers educational researchers 'a new framework - not for studying the past, but for assessing the present' (Marshall 1990, p.22). From the point of view of the present study this work is highly illuminating in regard to the effects of educational theories, especially those which make claims to improve the educational enterprise and those which make statements about how it should be. These studies indicate the ways in which students, parents and teachers are subjected to the 'truths' of

contemporary educational discourses. Of particular concern for me is the ways in which progressive ideologies have been shown to be more subtle ways of dividing, monitoring and controlling the population, simultaneously closing down the spaces of freedom for teachers and students in classrooms. Given the claims made for literacy in contemporary political and educational discourses it becomes urgent for literacy educators to investigate the effects of such practices in sites where the majority of students begin schooling already classified as 'disadvantaged'. How forms of modern power, exercised through schooling, constitute the literate subject is the focus of a number of studies in literacy education research.

2.4 The use of Foucault in studies of literacy education

The use of Foucault in studies of literacy education is not yet extensive. It can be seen as a part of a broader project to move from psychological discourses to sociological discourses informing literacy studies (Baker & Luke 1991). Foucault's work has been used in two main ways. First there are studies which take an historical perspective -including both archaeological and genealogical approaches- on the role of literacy and schooling in the formation of modern citizens (Donald 1992; Hunter 1988; Luke 1989; Patterson 1993). Second there are studies and theoretical discussions using Foucauldian analytical tools in examining contemporary discursive and institutional literacy education practices (Collins 1991; Lee 1992; Luke 1992; McHoul 1991). Together this work re-reads grand theories of literacy pedagogy and re-examines 'sacred' curriculum practices.

Donald (1983) was perhaps one of the first educators to use Foucault's work in studying literacy education. In an historical study of popular schooling in the nineteenth century, Donald (1983) pursues a Foucauldian-style question - 'how *illiteracy* was constituted as a problem'. He tracks the production of early connections between illiteracy and criminality and the school's function in maintaining surveillance of the children of the labouring poor. Donald indicates the ways in which the reading of literature involved a particular form of class-based training. His use of Foucault emphasises how power is exercised within state institutions through language use in a 'positive fashion' to create and transform reality. Donald acknowledges the utility of Foucault's theorising in understanding how problems such as illiteracy are produced at particular historical junctures.

> What a Foucauldian approach can reveal with great clarity is what is sometimes referred to as 'the hidden curriculum': the principles governing the organization of schooling and its forms of discipline and pedagogy. (Donald 1992, p.44)

As Donald points out it may be not so much that things are hidden but that they are so commonplace that we fail to see them. This is where Foucault's analysis of institutional and discursive practices in specific locations is so helpful. What exists and how it works is not overlooked. Donald distinguishes his work from other 'post-Foucauldians' (including Hunter) in that he does not see individuals as automatons acting out scripted roles; he maintains that there is a gap between normalising discourses and actuality (Donald 1992, pp.91-96). His argument is that 'the dynamics of subjectification are more complicated and more painful than simply identifying with, or re-enacting, the attributes and behaviours prescribed by social and cultural technologies' (Donald 1992, p.96). This argument is central to the question of agency in relation to teachers' work - what spaces of freedom exist and how teachers use them. School literate practices do not necessarily create such spaces of freedom, but can be employed as a part of the disciplinary practices of the institution in order to manage both its teachers and its students as becomes clear in Carmen Luke's (1989) analysis.

Carmen Luke explores the emergence of discourses on childhood and pedagogy in the sixteen century in relation to the early printing industry, the 1525 Peasant Rebellion and Lutheran reform. She demonstrates the beginnings of the use of institutional literacy to make students and teachers 'identifiable 'visible' objects of knowledge 'through the written trace left by their own writings, and by the notations made of them by their supervisors and the surveillance experts of visitations' (Luke 1989, p.126). Through literate work of students and teachers the school acts as an apparatus for continual surveillance, examination and record-keeping of the population. At the same time the school became the site where the criteria for appropriate literacy was defined, delivered and measured. This less than empowering view of the potential power of literacy to constrain, domesticate and control represents a radical shift from what progressive educators have said about literacy. Also taking a sceptical position upon literacy, including recent progressive pedagogies employed to teach it, is Ian Hunter.

Using a genealogical approach to popular schooling and the teaching of the subject English, Hunter (1988) argues that child-centred pedagogies and normative social training operate together in forms of modern literacy pedagogy. He suggests that both contribute to the management of increasingly diverse school populations. Focussing on literary education he presents the pedagogical relationship between English teacher and students as a key site for disciplinary practices and training in technologies of the self. He sees power as positive and productive and thus his analysis proceeds in terms of what modern schooling does in the formation of the modern citizen. Hunter (1994a) argues that intellectuals have misguidedly reduced English teaching to a series of binary choices:

freedom vs sophisticated social control, culture vs morality and personal growth vs useful skill.

Given these oppositional choices, the English teacher therefore is seen as either transformative intellectual or as a professional with a limited set of duties and obligations. Thus Hunter's work considers the social effects of academic theorising of schooling, equality, pedagogy and the subject English in terms of the production of the English teacher and the student of English. His project is to have us 'think otherwise' - to free ourselves of the discursive boundaries which prevent different practices. Hunter's (1993) challenge is that pedagogy might be normative without being repressive. Moreover he contends that liberal and Marxist critiques of schooling on the basis of the failure of schools to produce equality and self-determining subjects are theoretically unsound principles from which to examine schooling as an institution.

> There is therefore nothing intrinsically problematic in the fact that state schooling trains the population in socially normative conducts, abilities and styles of life; that it does so as a complex expert system permanently outside the reach and the concept of popular control; and that this training is oriented to mundane objectives (social training, occupational selection) determined by bureaucratic selection and political calculation. (Hunter 1993, p.278)

In pointing out the limited nature of the binary options for the construction of the English teacher and the wider function of schooling in governing an increasingly diverse population Hunter makes a useful contribution. However his critique of the possibility of ethical principles to guide action for school reform is problematic for educators. If the possibility of constructing guiding ethical principles for schooling is theoretically denied and schooling is seen simply as a bureaucratically driven training apparatus then working for social justice through educational reform becomes an impossibility also. Formulating principled action is not allowed for in Hunter's theorisation of popular schooling.

Taking a similar approach to Hunter (1988), Patterson (1993) focusses on a specific approach to literature teaching - personal response pedagogy - a common practice in the subject English. This practice brings the 'real life of the child' into the 'corrective space of the school' (Patterson 1993, p.66). The rationale for this practice is that it allows the student the freedom to express their own meanings. Theoretically all authentic responses are acceptable. Patterson argues that personal response 'may be better understood as a result of the need to find alternative ways for engaging the attention and supervising the moral and ethical development of increasingly diversified secondary school populations' (Patterson 1993, p.66). Students' personal responses to literature become the site of observation and correction. Patterson explains that the student-reader is expected to

perform a representation of the 'self' in their written response. In Patterson's analysis reader-response pedagogy is a site for surveillance and control.

Because schools combine detailed information on each student with monitoring of their moral conduct they can be seen as the 'paradigm of modern technologies of government' (Donald 1992, p.12). The contention from these genealogical studies is that literacy education (including the teaching of literature and the subject English) is part of a broad socio-political move to govern diverse school populations (Donald 1985; Hunter 1988, 1993; Patterson 1993). The historical counterparts of progressive and child-centred education can clearly be seen in the discourses of nineteenth century reformers. This work employing Foucauldian notions of governmentality and technologies of the self is important because it has the potential to radically shift critiques of modern education, literacy education in particular. If pedagogical approaches which make claims to liberating the individual can also be seen as practices in which the individual learns to govern the self - to work on the self so they produce themselves as a normal citizen - then analyses of contemporary literacy pedagogy can move to different questions. The multiplicities of roles which schools play in managing, training, caring for and educating society's young people requires different analytic tools than the binaries of liberation and emancipation. This research employing Foucauldian analytical tools makes a space for different criteria for examining literacy education. Recent investigations using Foucault's work in studies of contemporary classrooms indicate the complexity of everyday literate practices at school and highlight the unanticipated effects for different groups of students.

McHoul (1991) provides a Foucauldian perspective of 'beginning reading-in-a-classroom'. He offers a scenario where the beginning reader is watched, judged, evaluated, monitored and classified as a particular kind of subject: the classroom reader, who is 'not ready yet' for society. He argues that beginning reading curriculum, through its texts and practices, normalises individuals. The institutionalised practices and texts of the reading curriculum are read as productive of particular kinds of literate subjects.

Drawing on the work of Foucault and upon feminist poststructuralist theorists, Lee (1992) investigates the discursive practices of the curriculum area of secondary school geography: a subject specific school literacy. She demonstrates how the discourses of geography constitute gendered subjectivities. She also shows the ways in which one set of pedagogical solutions to teaching subject specific texts - genre pedagogy - fails to make a difference to the discursive positionings of girls as geographers, but rather works to maintain the dominant discourses of the discipline. Lee analyses geographical discourses at work in different sites, including textbooks, classroom talk and students' writing. In this complex multilayered study Lee demonstrates how claims about literacy

pedagogy and patriarchal discourses of geography work together to construct different positions for male and female students.

Collins (1991) maintains the need for class related analysis in studies of schooling and considers literacy as hegemonic practice. He uses Foucault's work on the institutionalisation of discursive practices, in particular the use of the examination in exercising power over individuals and populations. Collins discuss how school literacies (in the designated standard language) are stratified and measured and then come to count as the norm for all literacy. He argues that the definition of which literacy is required is always a class-related exercise. In other words the kinds of literacy practices which are evaluated as being 'good' in schools are already classed. What are judged as appropriate narrative or expository texts are the kinds of texts produced by white middle class people. In addition Collins deals with the literacy and mobility argument, concluding that whether it is empirically true or not the connection between literacy and social mobility is what is heard. Thus school literacy, however it might be defined locally, comes to be dominant literate practice as far as official assessments are concerned.

In a number of studies of literacy and schooling Allan Luke (Luke 1992; Luke et al. 1994a; Luke & Kapitzke 1994) employs Foucauldian analytic tools in dealing with current educational problems. Examining how discursive and institutional practices construct the school literate subject is a theme of much of this work. In particular, Luke addresses the ways in which these practices exclude and include, advantage and disadvantage different groups of school students. He sees Foucault's work as providing 'a model for rethinking pedagogy as discourse and inscription' (Luke 1992, p.112). In one study, drawing on Foucault's later work, he examines shared book experience, a common classroom literacy event. He illustrates how early literacy practices govern children's conduct and submit children to the teacher's evaluative gaze. In progressive pedagogy shared book has been promoted as an inclusive literacy event, where children can act like real readers from the start of school. However Luke's analysis indicates that there are rules for such events which actually exclude children who do not already display the required behaviours.

Luke et al. (1994a) explain how statements made by teachers during talk about books come to officially define the human subject to her/himself, in this case as the child reader/writer. Working from Foucault's assertion that discourses are constitutive, Luke et al. argue that Aboriginal identity is almost entirely removed from teachers' talk during literacy instruction. They conclude that teachers lack the 'discursive resources for talking about race and gender'. According to this analysis the discourses of the literacy curriculum construct a world of reading and writing which is mono-cultural and middle-

class. In a similar analysis of classroom talk Luke (1993c) demonstrates the ways in which the privileging of the individual author (in this case, the teacher-as-writer) works to maintain white western middle class versions of school narrative. Working with transcripts of classroom talk, Luke shows the ways in which educational discourses employed in everyday pedagogical practices construct particular kinds of human subjects. The literacy lesson constitutes a site for social regulation. In a different study of the literacy practices of a Seventh-day Adventist community Luke and Kapitzke (1994) use Foucault's notion of technologies of the self to analyse a collection of devotions published for children. They show the ways in which texts construct ideal versions of the Adventist child, the intended reader. Technologies of the self are written into the text for study.

As emerges from this brief review, Foucault has reconceptualised constructs which are central in research about literacy, pedagogy and disadvantage, including 'power/knowledge', 'governmentality' and 'discourse' and his development of new analytic tools, such as 'the disciplinary society' and 'technologies of the self' for studying and producing a history of the present. When the discursive and institutional practices of literacy education are taken, not as truths, but as historically contingent social and political practices which involve power relations and produce multiple and unintended effects, it becomes possible to consider other ways of constructing literacy practices which may make more space for difference within educational institutions. Rather than asking about whether our current practices work we can begin to analyse what they work to do. Foucault's destabilising of grand theories and truth claims is particularly pertinent to the work of literacy educators working with a social justice intent. Literacy researchers, taking a Foucauldian approach, have begun to shatter the myth related to the supposed empowering properties of literacy. Such veneration of literacy might actually have worked against any opening up of the literacy curriculum to difference. In the section which follows I present a summary of Foucault's reformulated constructs about the ways in which human subjects are formed in modern societies.

2.5 Foucauldian constructs: Tools for analysis

Writing to commemorate the tenth anniversary of Foucault's death, Rajchman reminds readers that Foucault 'spoke of theory as a tool-box of concepts' (Rajchman 1995, p.14). The editor of this commemorative issue celebrates ' a dissonant and experimental *use* ' of Foucault (Squires 1995, p.v). Foucault, himself tried to 'escape general interpretive categories' (Gutting 1994, p.1). Some theorists have made much of the two periods and approaches in Foucault's work referring to differences between his archaeological and

genealogical studies. However others, including Foucault himself, emphasise his lifelong interest in the processes by which human beings are constituted as subjects, both through discourses associated with the human sciences (psychology, demography) and through the institutional practices of modern societies (examination, surveillance, confession). The present study is neither an archaeology nor a genealogy, but rather draws on a synthesis of Foucault's interpretive analytics in dealing with a contemporary problem in a local site. His re-formulation of a number of constructs including power/knowledge, discourse/subjectivity, discipline/ surveillance, terms which overlap and shift in the course of his work, has been particularly useful in the present study. In this section and those which follow I outline the ways in which I have brought a pragmatic reading of Foucault to the thesis problem. I begin with a brief explanation of key terms in Foucault's 'toolbox of concepts'.

2.5.1 Power/Knowledge

In Foucault's analysis power and knowledge are dynamic, not stable conditions. Traditional ways of understanding power made it a possession. Foucault argued that power is not owned like property but is exercised in particular sites and circumstances: a set of actions upon other actions (Foucault 1983).

> When I think of power, I think of its capillary form of existence, of the extent to which power seeps into the very grain of individuals, reaches right into their bodies, permeates their gestures, their posture, what they say, how they learn to live and work with other people. (Foucault, cited in Sheridan 1980, p.217)

Modern forms of power work through 'caring' institutions such as prisons, hospitals and schools. Here individuals are objects of knowledge, their bodies, behaviours and attitudes observed, classified, judged and recorded. Thus power is associated with the production and use of particular formations of knowledge. Foucault was interested in how power was exercised and the effects of the ways in which power was exercised on the human subject. Rather than seeing power as something imposed from above Foucault showed how it works from below in local sites.

> One must rather conduct an *ascending* analysis of power, starting, that is, from its infinitesimal mechanisms, which each have their own history, their own trajectory, their own techniques and tactics, and then see how these mechanisms of power have been - and continue to be - invested, colonised, utilised, involuted, transformed, displaced, extended etc., by ever more general mechanisms and by forms of global domination. (Foucault 1980, p.99)

Power is often seen as negative, prohibitive and repressive by social scientists, but Foucault argued that a more useful analysis is to see relations of power as productive and positive, to analyse the effects and how they are achieved. Power and knowledge work together.

> We should admit rather that power produces knowledge (and not simply by encouraging it because it serves power or by applying it because it is useful); that power and knowledge directly imply one another; that there is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, not any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations. (Foucault 1979, p.27)

The social sciences produce ways of knowing the individual and the population. What is seen as authoritative and important knowledge changes in different locations and points in history. Modern institutions organise for individuals to be known in detail, to be recorded in terms of the norms of the population and to be trained to know and regulate the self. Rather than by force the population is managed through subtle coercion in local sites. Foucault described the institutions which exercise such power, though the management of individuals in time and space, surveillance and examination, as 'disciplinary institutions'. In Foucault's analysis, power and knowledge work together detailing each individual across the specified norms. New forms of surveillance and examination produce new forms of knowledge and with this knowledge come new forms of constraints.

However Foucault maintained that power is not absolute but continually contested in local sites. Wherever there is power Foucault argued that there is always resistance (Foucault 1978, p.95). Yet resistance is rarely constructed as a coordinated revolt. Rather resistance, like power, is produced locally through a multiplicity of actions, sometimes through individuals, sometimes through groups, sometimes planned and sometimes spontaneous. While Foucault admits there are occasionally 'great ruptures', he sees resistance as more likely to be characterised by its mobility and transience, through disruptions to the everyday mechanisms of power in local sites (Foucault 1978, p.96). According to Foucault nobody 'has power' as such, but there are 'local centres' of power/knowledge wherein individuals are subjected to the gaze and the disciplinary routines of those whose institutional position and discursive repertoire accords them authority at that time and place.

2.5.2 Discourse/Subjectivity

For Foucault discourses are bodies of social knowledge. Discourses are produced by those who are in a position to make authoritative statements about an object of knowledge and thus are 'historically contingent and subject to change' (McHoul & Grace 1993, p.31). These statements define the objects of their analysis, which in turn limit the ways in which they can be talked about and by whom. Foucault's approach to discourse is not linguistic nor a system of grammar, but related to disciplinary knowledges, such as medicine, criminology, psychology, education, and to the modern institutions where

such disciplines are brought to bear in knowing and managing both the individual and the population. For example, doctors both produce and are produced by medical discourses which are employed in determining and recording the care of the patient. According to Foucault, modern societies are governed through the exercise of power in local sites, the family, the school, the hospital, the asylum, the prison and so on and in these institutions professional knowledges are used to classify and record the individual against specified norms. Foucault's analysis of discourse was inextricably linked with his understanding of power and knowledge.

> Indeed, it is in discourse that power and knowledge are joined together. (Foucault 1978, p.100)

Yet, just as power is not a static property to be owned, so also discourses are not fixed or immutable. Foucault explained that there are always multiple discourses at play and competing in particular sites. In a school site for example, educational, medical, economic and religious discourses may be involved in decisions about curriculum and practice for a group of students. And within what I have termed educational discourse different ideological positions may be contested. These continual shifts are regarded by Foucault as creating spaces for resistance.

> We must make allowance for the complex and unstable process whereby discourse can be both an instrument and an effect of power, but also a hindrance, a stumbling block, a point of resistance and a starting point for an opposing strategy. Discourse transmits and produces power; it reinforces it, but also undermines it and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart it. (Foucault 1978, p.101)

In a field such as education professional practice might be informed by a plurality of competing discourses. For example the seven year old child reader, as a social object, may be variously 'known' and described as 'at risk', 'dyslexic', 'emergent', 'reluctant', or 'slow', depending on which professional discourses are employed in classifying the literate subject. It is likely that a number of discourses may simultaneously be available to the teacher assessor. However certain discourses may be officially sanctioned in policy or preferred by an administrator. These specific conditions affect what can be said about the child reader in a particular locality.

Foucault's use of discourse varied throughout his work, from his early preoccupation with particular kinds of knowledge claims and the rules for their formation, for example the human sciences, such as medicine or psychiatry, to the deployment of discourse in disciplinary practices such as the examination of the confession (Fairclough 1992b). Foucault argued that discourses were constitutive of the objects of which they spoke. Taking examples from discourses about the child, recent times have seen the production of the 'at risk' child, the 'emergent reader', the 'disadvantaged child', the 'abused' child,

the 'learning disabled child'. The subject is simultaneously constructed in multiple, fragmented and contradictory ways, through different discourses. For example, 'the disadvantaged child' may be a product of economic, educational and sociological discourses. Struggles over naming practices such as these are highly political. Thus the 'emergent reader' and the 'at risk child' may be tied to different discursive formations and different program effects, which in turn call forth different ensembles of discursive practices and techniques on the part of the child-teacher pair. New naming practices produce new kinds of subjects, new kinds of knowledge are produced about them and new discursive practices are produced in order to manage them (Rouse 1994, p.97).

In the human sciences 'man' became the object of knowledge both statistically at the level of populations and individually as the subject within networks of disciplinary institutions. Foucault's continuing interest was in the discursive constitution of the human subject and in the concomitant 'games of truth' that such knowledges produced.

> My problem has always been ... the problem of the relationship between the subject and truth. How does the subject enter into a certain game of truth?... So it was that I was led to pose the problem of knowledge/power, which is not for me the fundamental problem but an instrument allowing the analysis - in a way that seems to me to be the most exact - of the problem of the relationships between the subject and games of truth. (Foucault, quoted in Bernauer and Rasmussen 1988 p.9)

2.5.3 Discipline/Surveillance

In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault (1979) showed historically how punishment came to depend on imprisonment of bodies who could then be taught to change their ways through meticulous supervision and training. In the 'ideal prison'- the panopticon- prisoners could be watched without seeing their guard. Invisible surveillance meant that they never knew when they were being watched, thus they would need to regulate their behaviour constantly just in case.

> Their visibility assures the hold of the power that is exercised over them. (Foucault 1979, p.187).

Foucault argues that in modern societies, institutions such as the prison, army, hospital, the factory and the school are employed as apparatuses of surveillance. He described such institutions as disciplinary institutions, places where people's bodies are watched, ruled and regulated during periods of mandatory attendance. The architecture of these institutions enables easy supervision of each prisoner, soldier, patient, worker or student by a professional overseer; yet the supervisor is also 'perpetually supervised' (Foucault 1979, p.177). For example, just as the teacher watches the students, so also is the teacher subjected to the continued surveillance of the students.

In addition to surveillance and correct training, disciplinary institutions employ other discursive practices in knowing and managing each individual: the examination and the confession. Through the examination, the techniques of an observing hierarchy and those of normalising judgement are combined (Foucault 1979). Here the school, for example, became an 'apparatus of uninterrupted examination' where knowledge about the individual was collected, classified and recorded.

> The examination enabled the teacher, while transmitting his knowledge, to transform his pupils into a whole field of knowledge. (Foucault 1979, p.186)

The examination simultaneously tests for and produces knowledge. The disciplinary society produces the modern individual: 'calculable' or 'knowable' (Smart 1983). At the same time as the disciplinary institution constructs the individual as an object of knowledge it also functions to produce 'docile bodies'.

> A body that is docile that may be subjected, used, transformed and improved. (Foucault 1979, p.136)

This network of disciplinary institutions and practices produces what Foucault describes as modern 'bio-power', a process through which the state manages its population through the individualised application of surveillance and examination across grids of specification. As the same time judgements of individuals against specified norms are recorded and those who deviate are classified along a continuum and divided for further training.

Another major discursive technique of the disciplinary society is the confession. As Foucault puts it we have become ' a singularly confessing society' (Foucault 1978, p.59). The confession is the occasion where an individual must produce the truth about the self. Across legal, medical, religious, psychological, sexual, family and pedagogical sites the confession is variously employed in Western societies. Foucault notes that confessions may become occasions for particular kinds of literate activity - dossiers, letters, autobiography and so on. In this way the life of the individual is increasingly elicited and recorded publicly. People come to make themselves the object of their own judgements.

Foucault used the term 'government' to refer to 'the way in which the conduct of groups or individuals might be directed: the government of children, of souls, of communities, of families, of the sick' (Foucault 1983, p.221). Rather than seeing government as limited to the state or political structures he argues that to govern ' is to structure the possible field of action of others'. In governmentality Foucault brings together the ensemble of institutions, disciplinary and normalising practices by which whole

populations are managed. Increasingly his work became more focused on the ways in which people came to manage themselves.

> He was very interested in *how* things are done, and how people participate body and soul, in the ways things are done, and hence in how they might come to refuse to do so. (Rajchman 1995, p.14)

In his later work shortly before his death, Foucault coined the term 'technologies of the self' to analyse 'the history of how an individual acts on himself' (Foucault 1988, p.19). He argued that the human sciences have produced techniques of verbalisation which break from the Christian renunciation of self and allow for the self to be constituted positively. Foucault's concept of technologies of the self can be applied to a number of moves in educational discourses which emphasise self-regulation (self-assessment, behaviour management) and self-awareness (metacognition, metalinguistic awareness). In such pedagogical practices the pedagogical imperative is directed at producing particular kinds of self-knowledge and self-control in the student.

2.5.4 Using Foucault: Possibilities and cautions

I do not mean to suggest that Foucault provided a neat set of theoretical and methodological insights which I can simply take up and apply to the problem of this thesis. This is far from the case. What Foucault's work does is elaborate an intricate maze of challenges and constructs through which one can problematise a field of study. However, Foucault's work itself is not without the problems which he so adroitly identifies more broadly in social science. I turn now to some of the debates which exist about Foucault's work and explain the action I have taken in regard to this critique in this project.

The usefulness of Foucault's work is widely contested, with some repeated themes emerging as points of contention for researchers and theoreticians (see for example Fraser 1989; Sawicki 1991). Questions which are relevant to the present study particularly include those raised by feminist theorists, related to the patriarchal nature of Foucault's writing and those in regard to the agency of the human subject.

Some feminists have argued that while Foucault's attention to the human body, the discursive construction of subjectivity and questions of power relations are useful for feminist analyses, his own writings remain patriarchal and gender exclusive (Bartky 1990). While Bartky acknowledges Foucault's achievement in demonstrating how modern disciplinary practices produce 'docile bodies', she argues that Foucault 'is blind' to the engendered forms of subjection of the body and that therefore 'his analysis as a whole reproduces sexism' (Bartky 1990, p.65). I am aware of the

gendered nature of the project which I have undertaken in the thesis. Drawing on feminist work on standpoint I foreground the ways in which this study is concerned with the labour of women. However, the concerns raised by feminists and other critics go beyond Foucault's rhetorical style to the question of whether his theoretical contribution is problematic or productive for a feminist or counter-hegemonic political action.

Foucault's work has also attracted criticism on the grounds that his insistence on the constitutive nature of discourse and the capillary workings of power through disciplinary institutions results in pessimism, relativism and nihilism. What is missing, it is argued, is an analysis of what constitutes a positive use of power (Fraser 1989; Hollway 1984; McNay 1992). If discourse constitutes subjectivity, then social actors can be seen simply mouthing the words of others. A Foucauldian approach to educational research, for example, could constitute teachers as puppets. Yet others have argued that Foucault's emphasis on the shifting and multiple nature of discourse and his reiteration that where there is power, there is resistance means that his theorising avoids reading people as automatons (Donald 1992; Smart 1985). Those who use Foucault need to theorise shift and change in discourse to ward off reading the effects as inevitable (Burman & Parker 1993; Fairclough 1992b). Thus how Foucault is read and used is crucial in terms of the analysis which results.

> A particular strength of the poststructuralist paradigm is that it recognises both the constitutive force of discursive practices and at the same time recognises the subject as capable of having agency in relation to those practices. (Davies 1992, p.51)

In the present study I have aimed to harness a positive reading of the constitutive nature of discourse, whilst remaining aware of Foucault's contention that in modern Western societies the construction of subjectivity involves the exercise of seemingly free, rational choices which in fact are internalised moral norms. Feminist theorists are concerned that Foucault's explanation of power/knowledge leaves little space for resistance to disciplinary techniques (Bartky 1990; McNay 1992).

> For the emphasis that Foucault places on the effects of power upon the body results in the reduction of social agents to passive bodies and does not explain how individuals may act in an autonomous fashion. This lack of a rounded theory of subjectivity or agency conflicts with a fundamental aim of the feminist project: to rediscover and re-evaluate the experiences of women. (McNay 1992, p.3)

In this study I have looked for indications of resistance from teachers and students within the everyday institutional and discursive practices of this school community. (See Chapters Six, Seven and Eight.) I have been particularly interested in occasions where teachers and students work against, and within, the relations of power which usually

prevail and where the related space is made for productive literate work of different kinds.

However, for some theorists Foucault's lack of 'normative guidelines for action' remains a problem (McNay 1992, p.197). While Foucault has insisted that power can and does have positive effects his own analyses emphasise disciplinary practices, social regulation and control. Foucault provides limited references to how a positive and constructive use of power might look. (Fraser 1989; McNay 1992). For researchers committed to research directed to social justice the lack of a theorisation of positive action remains a problem as Foucault 'does not explain how change might occur' (Waitzkin 1991, p.21). In Foucault's later work concerning technologies of the self the potential exists for a more positive analysis of subjectivity, but this work remained unfinished (Foucault 1988).

Foucault's analysis of power and subjectivity has also been critiqued on the grounds that it is too relativistic (Sawicki 1991, p.96) and lacks any ethical guides for normative action. There is a risk that without 'classificatory categories of power' each situation is relative and with no overarching principles for assessing the ethics of the use of power. The problem of relativism has been directed to poststructuralist theorising generally. Poststructuralist work, through its emphasis on the dominance of discourse and the removal of agency, can result in the destruction of the unitary subject, and precisely at a time when marginalised groups are working on their identity formation, (Lankshear & McLaren 1993). However, McNay (1992) concludes that Foucault's later work on subjectivity does avoid these flaws.

> The exploration of identity proposed by Foucault is not simply an endless dispersal of the subject, or a celebration of heterogeneity *qua* heterogeneity, but is linked to the overall political aim of increasing individual autonomy, understood as a humanizing quality of social existence. (McNay 1992, p.193)

At the outset of this discussion, I referred to Foucault's view that theory can be seen as a 'tool-box of concepts'. What is more important for the present study is the ways in which I am able to use Foucault to make a productive and positive critical reading of the problem for study, rather than what is or isn't missing in Foucault's work. Sawicki argues that Foucault's work does not provide a new comprehensive theory 'but instead a suggestion about how to look at our theories .... and the effects of power which theories produce' (Sawicki 1991, p.65). It is this approach which I try to take up in the present study. Thus Foucault's work can be a positive force when and if as educators we begin to closely scrutinise our own claims to knowledge. Thus whilst Foucauldian analyses do yield negative insights about education it may also be possible to create new ways of understanding old problems and hence to formulate new discourse for action.

> A virtue in the discourse approach is the way it directs attention to the origins of the discursive categories ... It also points to an interchange between the categories and experiences of life-worlds and the ways in which social science categories come to be. Social interests intersect with the production of knowledge. As Foucault argued, the greatest power lies in the capacity to shape the ways in which reality gets talked about. (Bessant 1995b, p.43)

If educators working for social change are able to affect the ways in which reality gets talked about that may be one useful form of action to emerge from the use of Foucault's interpretive analytics. The use of a Foucauldian approach in the study of literacy education raises different questions for study and different ways of pursuing those questions. Foucault's insights about the ways in which discourses produce regimes of truth has led to questions about the assumed 'goodness' of literacy and about the promised empowering properties of school literacy practices for disadvantaged groups. Foucault challenges the idea that there can be clear divisions between liberatory and oppressive discourses (Gore 1992; Martin 1988). Words and concepts have no essential meanings.

> The term 'empowerment' has no particular meaning prior to its construction within specific discourses; that is, it is important to acknowledge that the meanings of words are always 'up for grabs', that there are no essential meanings - only ascribed meanings. (Gore 1992, p.56)

Foucault highlights the potential dangers and normalising tendencies of all discourses, including those which aim to liberate (Gore 1992, p.63). Similarly there can be no essential meanings for literacy, or pedagogy, or disadvantage. When literacy education is considered as historically contingent discursive and institutional practices with multiple functions and unanticipated effects, space is made for educators to think differently, for something in their minds to be changed. Rather than debates about effective or best practices we can start by asking what our current practices do. What social effects do they produce? How do they delimit who teachers and students can be? Potentially the use of Foucault might illuminate the multiple and unanticipated social effects of school literacies. Foucault looks at the practices which transform human beings into subjects. He argues that there is a need to study specific rationalities in local sites in order to see how power is exercised in everyday discursive and institutional practices because a high degree of decision making and planning goes on at the local level. In this section I explain the ways in which reading Foucault contributed to the way I went about this project.

2.6 Using Foucault in this project

In this project I have used Foucault's 'tool-box' to reconsider literacy pedagogy in one disadvantaged school. I have considered questions which previously I would not have

asked. I have been interested in how discourses work to produce truths about literacy and about disadvantage at this time and the local effects in one community. Rather than an evaluation of literacy pedagogy I have considered how particular constellations of pedagogies came to be produced at this time.

2.6.1 The 'truth' about literacy and disadvantage?

Over the past twenty years but gaining pace in the last decade universally, there has been a proliferation of discourses about literacy - economic, political, educational, welfare - about the lack of it, the need for it, the claims made for it and about how to best teach it. Literacy, liberation of the individual, empowering pedagogies and the economic salvation of populations are frequently put together. The hypothetical equation is: good teaching (which is assumed to be definable) produces universal literacy, which produces empowerment of the individual, which produces economic health of the nation. Following Foucault, a number of questions can be posed about the discursive practices which foreground literacy at this time and make literacy a question of economy and power.

- Why is there a proliferation of discourses regarding literacy in the late twentieth century?
- Why is it that literacy is allied with empowerment of disadvantaged groups?
- What regimes of truth are produced in discourses that put literacy, pedagogy and disadvantage together?
- What kinds of student subjects are constructed in the competing discourses of and around literacy?
- What kinds of teacher subjects are produced in these discourses?
- Which educational discourses are employed by teachers in their work?
- What kinds of literate subjects are produced in a disadvantaged school site?

Such questions require an analysis of the social practices of a contemporary community whose institutional responsibility it is to provide literacy teaching in a disadvantaged community. In such a local site it is possible to examine the interplay and contestation of discursive and institutional practices and their effects. It is also important to consider why at this time and in this place did literacy become a matter for government policy.

2.6.2 Producing literate citizens: Managing diverse populations?

However, the supposed discovery by the state of a problem, such as high levels of illiteracy, to which it then responds should not be accepted as truth. Politics and policy formation is a discursive contest (Bessant 1993). What is interesting is why 'illiteracy' could be discovered as a problem at this time. How and why did it become a problem for investigation for government?

When techniques of government and access to information increasingly depend on textual practices literacy becomes central. What are the regimes of truth about literacy at work in our society at this time? In what ways does the 'truth' about literacy contribute to the practices of government and administration of the individual and the population? In other words why is it that improved levels of universal literacy have become a national political goal in many countries? Literacy is required for work, leisure and practices of self-management. The modern (and post-modern) citizen needs to be able to monitor and give a textual account of certain aspects of their lives.

How and why literacy has become a problem which is discursively tied to disadvantage is another question. Literacy assessments and programs can be used to regulate poor people. In the United States, literacy is provided through adult basic education, a federal program that developed as part of the 'War on Poverty' (Rockhill 1994, p.237). Welfare payments and access to further training may be made contingent on attendance at literacy programs. Similarly teachers in disadvantaged schools may see literacy teaching as part of anti-poverty campaigns. Yet how and why poverty and lack of literacy are linked discursively needs questioning.

Recently, researchers taking critical, poststructuralist and systemic linguistic standpoints have considered what different literacy pedagogies do and the kinds of literacies to which different groups of students have access. (See Chapter Four.) Educators have also raised questions about the impact of differential outcomes of schooling on children's life trajectories. In the wake of such investigations claims have been made about the kinds of pedagogies and literacies which disadvantaged children need. For example, increasingly educators have contended the need for 'explicit teaching' for disadvantaged children (Delpit 1988; Freebody et al. 1995; Martin et al. 1988; Walton 1993). But exactly what teachers might be explicit about and why disadvantaged children need this approach is rarely questioned. Given that literacy practices may be domesticating just as easily as they are liberating, literacy teachers may need to be sceptical of theoretical solutions which assert the need for particular pedagogical styles for disadvantaged students. Despite the good intentions of literacy researchers explicit teaching can become a euphemism for approaches which close down the spaces and options for difference for both teachers and students.

2.6.3 The pedagogical subjects: Literacy teacher and literate student

The study was conducted during a time when Australia was suffering major economic recessions. It was a period of cutbacks on educational spending, severe media attacks on

by women teachers. What does the ideal literate student look like in these classrooms? What effects do the intersection of discourses of empowerment, behaviour management, individualism, Catholicism, work and literacy produce? What are children learning to do with literacy ? What kinds of literate work are they doing? My aim is to develop an analytical approach and standpoint which draws on the work of Foucault, research concerned with teachers' work and teaching as a feminised profession.

Brodkey writes that the problems she studied were on her mind long before she read poststructural theory, but that poststructural theory has helped her to construct a position from which she can view her own and others' work on the history of literacy (Brodkey 1992, p.316). It has given her new ways of looking at curriculum and practice. This is true for me also. I did not begin this study with Foucault in mind. Rather I began the study with cumulative questions developed across my educational life and brought a Foucauldian analysis to this project in order to make the familiar strange and to consider the effects of my own discursive practices as a literacy educator and researcher. In closing this chapter I finish with a statement from Foucault about educational institutions which I find captures the complexity of his analysis and signals the difficulty with making judgements of an ethical and moral nature about pedagogical practices.

> Let us take something that has been the object of criticism, often justified: the pedagogical institution. I don't see where the evil is in the practice of someone who, in a given game of truth, knowing more than another, tells him what he must do, teaches him, transmits knowledge to him, communicates skills to him. The problem is rather to know how you are to avoid in these practices - where power cannot play and where it is not an evil in itself - the effects of domination which will make a child subject to the arbitrary and useless authority of a teacher, or put a student under the power of an abusively authoritarian professor.... (Foucault quoted in Bernauer & Rasmussen 1988, p.18).