



**Critical spirit manifestations in TAFE teachers  
and their work**

by

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## **Abstract**

This thesis reports on research conducted with Technical and Further Education (TAFE) teachers from Queensland and Western Australia. The research is located at the intersection where teachers' identities met the discourse of new vocationalism. Scholars have highlighted the tensions that this discourse has produced in the relationships between TAFE and its teachers, and noted that TAFE teachers are pressured to change their subjectivities to reflect themselves more effectively as workers in an educational market focused on economic imperatives. This is often in contrast to these teachers' personal notions of themselves as liberal educators, with a focus on lifelong learning, personal transformation, collaborative relationships and social responsibility. This research was driven by the possibility that the concept of 'critical spirit' might provide a means for TAFE teachers to stand their ground in relation to the continued reshaping of the TAFE teacher terrain produced by the adoption of the new vocational discourse.

This interpretative research was conceptualised by synthesising sociocultural perspectives of discourse as a reality building tool (Gee, 2005) with notions of critical thinker dispositions referred to as critical spirit (Siegel, 1988; Oxman-Michelli, 1992). The elements of critical spirit: openmindedness, independence of mind, wholeheartedness, intellectual responsibility and respect for others (Oxman-Michelli, 1992) were used as central components to the development of a coding framework for the explication of critical spirit from TAFE teacher artefacts and in positioning critical spirit as a discourse. An examination of 12 TAFE teacher case narrative artefacts revealed that elements of critical spirit were evident. Subsequent participant

credibility checks and semi-structured interviews provided diverse data related to teacher embodiment of a critical spirit in relation to the building of certain teacher identities. In some cases participants expressed that their identities were bolstered by engaging in a critical spirit discourse, others cautioned its public embodiment, suggesting that deploying critical spirit made them more visible to surveillance and control. The major finding of this research was that an explicit engagement with a critical spirit discourse was of value to these TAFE teachers. Furthermore, this critical spirit discourse was seen to perform the work of a borderland discourse (Gee, 2005; Alsup, 2006). It afforded a means to traverse the terrain “between disparate personal and professional subjectivities” (Alsup, 2006, p. 5).

The research also uncovered other discourses pertinent to participant artefacts. These were identified as a *test of fortitude* discourse and a *community of support* discourse. It was postulated that these would extend the critical spirit discourse by adding to Oxman-Michelli’s (1992) five elements of critical spirit. The findings suggested little evidence to support this position.

The significance of this research was in: (a) the production of a methodological construct for explicating particular notions of critical spirit; (b) its contribution to furthering understandings of the professional lives of TAFE teachers and their work world; and (c) the value that a critical spirit discourse had in strengthening these TAFE teachers’ notions of themselves and their effectiveness. Its contribution to substantial knowledge was in its expansion of our understanding of teacher identities within the Vocational Education and Training sector in Australia.

## **Dedication**

This dissertation is dedicated with love and affection to my loving mother Margaret Edith Tyler (*née* Murphy), whose undying love for me has always shone brightly, and without whose efforts I would never have attained such an educational opportunity.

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## **Declaration**

I declare that the main text of this thesis is entirely my own work and that such work has not been previously submitted as a requirement for the award of a degree at the University of Southern Queensland or any other institution of higher education.

Mark Anthony Tyler

21 July 2009

## **Endorsement**

Associate Professor Patrick Danaher

Principal Supervisor

21 July 2009

## Selected Publications Related to This Work

- Arden, C. H., Danaher, P. A., & Tyler, M. A. (2005, September). Struggling for purchase: What shape does a vocational education and training agenda take within a contemporary university education faculty? *International Journal of Pedagogies and Learning*, 1(1), 32-47.
- Danaher, P. A., Tyler, M. A., & Arden, C. H. (2007). Curriculum leadership, quality and technology in a suite of Australian further education and training teacher education programs: Making meaning, performing practice and constructing new learning futures. *International Journal of Pedagogies and Learning*, 3(2), pp. 74-83.
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- Queensland, Australia 13-16 June 2006: Hosted by Central Queensland University* (pp. 318-324). Rockhampton, Qld: Lifelong Learning Conference Committee, Central Queensland University Press.
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## **Chapter One – Introduction**

### **1.1 The problem**

The focus of this study is on the convergence of teacher identities and institutional change and, at a deeper lens, on the relationship between the personal and professional constructs of what it is to be a teacher and how this plays out in a context of educational reform. The study's primary concern is with teachers within the Vocational Education and Training (VET) sector in Australia. Specific attention is paid to Technical and Further Education (TAFE) teachers and the institutional environment in which they work. Critical spirit (Oxman-Michelli, 1992) is the main theoretical construct for the study. In particular, the study focuses on TAFE teachers' engagements with manifestations of critical spirit in relation to their work environments.

The work world of TAFE teachers is changing. The impact of economic rationalism and its collaborator new vocationalism in manipulating the topography of the VET sector has been significant (Butler, 1997; Chappell, 1998, 1999; Darwin, 2004; Harris, Simons, & Clayton, 2005; Hawke, 1998; Marginson, 1994, 1997; Seddon & Marginson, 2001). How TAFE teachers go about dealing with the educational reform of new directions, policies and curriculum at TAFE level, and how this impacts upon their identity formation, are particularly significant in the focus of this study. Critical spirit (Oxman-Michelli, 1992) is of keen interest as it is argued as being an important

tool in shaping TAFE teachers' identities and the multiple and complex ways in which they engage with their work world.

The scope, depth and impact of these changes to the world of TAFE teachers and the effects of these changes on their personal and professional lives have been weighty. Harris, Simons and Clayton (2005) in a major study of VET practitioners, of whom TAFE teachers as a group occupy a majority presence, stated that "Changes to the VET system have required shifts in practitioners' habits, beliefs, values, skills and knowledge" (p. 10). Of note in this study is the authors' reporting that the VET practitioners from public providers, as TAFE teachers are, "all reported negative feelings..." towards these sectoral changes (p. 10). Indeed, this is also borne out in research carried out by researchers such as Childs (2000), Chappell (1998, 1999), Grabau (1999) and Kronemann (2001a, 2001b), all of whom reported the positions of marginalisation experienced by TAFE teachers. Chappell arguably summed up the context of change that TAFE teachers have been experiencing when he stated that TAFE teachers are being asked "...to change their identity" (1999, p. 3).

As noted in the intentions of a series of forums conducted by McKenna and Mitchell (2006) as a part of the Reframing the Future (Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, 2008) strategy, aimed at professional development for educational change by capacity building within the VET workforce, the focus was on looking towards "strengthen[ing] a sense of professional identity" (p. 2), an aspiration that this thesis shares. For the thesis, it is about seeking to strengthen the subjective positions that TAFE teachers hold about themselves in relation to both personal and professional identities within the context of their world of work. The conceptual

framework guiding this study into TAFE teachers as they face and are buffeted by the winds of vocational education reform is the concept of critical spirit. Critical spirit emerges from the literature on critical thinking. It is not abilities or skills that are the focus, but rather the personal traits, character or ways of being that motivate individuals to avoid "...thoughtless intellectual compliance and passivity" (Oxman-Michelli, 1992, p. 1). As a researcher, I was particularly drawn to Oxman-Michelli's (1992) concept of critical spirit that revolves around five major elements: independence of mind; openmindedness; wholeheartedness; intellectual responsibility; and respect for others (p. 5). I wondered if critical spirit as a concept, way of being, tool, or discourse could be used by TAFE teachers to increase their understandings of themselves, and to increase their agency within the mentioned sea of change. It is towards answering this question that this project aims.

An important outcome of this project lies in identifying manifestations that could be interpreted as critical spirit, and how critical spirit might be deployed. To date there have been no empirical studies conducted into the existence of critical spirit *per se*. What the literature does reveal are rich descriptions of the ideal critical thinker (Facione, 1990); a critical thinking dispositions inventory (Facione & Facione, 1992); and several tools (Facione & Facione, 1994; Facione & Facione, 1996) that offer qualitative and quantitative data on a mix of skills and dispositions.

The gaps in the literature to which this study contributes relate to:

- the generation of qualitative data about critical spirit
- the building of knowledge about TAFE teacher identities



- the conceptualisation of a framework for the explication of nuances of critical spirit in discourse and
- the identification of a means to enhance how TAFE teachers engage in the critical aspects of their work.

## **1.2 The research questions**

The goal of this thesis is twofold: (a) to make legitimate claims around the phenomenon of critical spirit as it is enacted by TAFE teachers; and (b) to elucidate how this concept might be of utilitarian value to TAFE teachers in their world of work. The study's primary objective was to investigate whether and in what ways degrees and nuances of critical spirit were manifested within a group of TAFE teachers teaching in particular TAFE institutes within Queensland and Western Australia, by extracting data from TAFE teacher discourse which detail their interactions – both positive and problematic – at work. Included in this objective was the desire to articulate what function notions of critical spirit might perform, and to investigate meaningful ways in which this spirit might work to create new understandings of TAFE teachers and their work environments.

As a starting point, I have taken the position that the function of a critical spirit is of value to TAFE teachers and that its manifestation will aid in progressing the profession and the VET sector. The objective was to determine whether or not this is a defensible position. What is not evident are qualitative conceptions of critical spirit derived from empirical data. The literature suggests that, from a positivist perspective, dispositions of the critical thinker do exist (Facione & Facione, 1992; Facione, Facione & Giancarlo, 1997) and that these align partly with scholarly perspectives on

critical spirit (Oxman-Michelli, 1992; Paul, 1992). If qualitative data contributes to notions of critical spirit, it is also pertinent to seek what form it takes for TAFE teachers and how they might deploy it.

To this end, I used two research questions to guide this project:

1. What might be identified as the elements of critical spirit in particular TAFE teachers' discourse?
2. How might an explicit engagement with and reflection upon a critical spirit discourse be of value to particular TAFE teachers in relation to their identities and their relationships with TAFE as an organisation?

### **1.3 The scope and significance of the project**

This project has not ventured into the debate surrounding what critical thinking is or how it should be taught or applied; any reference to critical thinking is used to show from where the concept of critical spirit developed, and also how it relates to the critical being (Barnett, 1997).

I have framed my thinking about critical spirit by what Ronald Barnett (1997) called the critical being. This being displays critical spirit through his/her criticality. This is a holistic perspective that takes in a broader view of critical thinking to include the self and the world. Barnett argued that, whilst academics are arguing about the ins and outs of critical thinking, the person is neglected – in particular, the type of student he believes that academia should be producing. As noted above, this thesis has not ventured into debates around what constitutes critical thinking.

From the intimate places where the TAFE teacher constructs her/his subjectivities and knowledge of the world, I move to the places where the teacher and her/his work coalesce. Social theory (Du Gay, 1996) highlighted the view that meaning making occurs within the shared conceptions and the shared functions of day-to-day social practices by social actors. An individual identifies with other meanings and develops shared social meanings of events, actions, and situations. It is at this intersection, where social practice meets individual meaning making, that Chappell (1998, 1999) highlighted TAFE teacher identity reformulation.

As mentioned, new vocationalism is changing the very terrain of vocational education. Chappell (1998, 1999) took the position that new vocationalism is asking TAFE teachers “to do things differently ... asking them to become different teachers” (1998, p 1). Chappell noted the impact of policy discourses in shaping the new day-to-day realities of TAFE teachers. He gave examples of college director talk that reflects new vocationalism: for example, “‘Doing more with less’, ‘Running as a lean machine’” (1998, p. 6) and TAFE teachers’ sometimes critical responses, for example, “‘fewer resources’ ... ‘less time teaching’ ... ‘[a] culture of uncertainty and I guess frustration and ... varying degrees of cynicism’” (1998, p. 7). By the means of a discourse analysis perspective (Gee, 2005), this project responds to the research questions articulated above and by association to the contention that new vocationalism with its entrepreneurial and managerial discourses of competition and ‘the bottom line’ are putting pressure on, and possibly drowning out, the personal and often more traditional discourses around teaching practice and teacher identities as espoused by a group of TAFE teachers. Through the illumination of critical spirit and its deployment, the possibility of critical spirit being related to an emancipatory

strategy to further vocational teaching, by enhancing the clarity and effectiveness with which TAFE teachers shape and reshape their realities and identities, can be investigated.

Supporting the role that teacher voice plays in the shaping of teachers' work is also significant to this project. Teacher voice has been emphasised by Brady (2003) in her statement that teacher voices "provide a composite account from the teachers themselves of what they actually do .... [T]herefore it is a particularly valuable resource for ... understand[ing] teaching practice context" (p. vii). Teacher voice also appears as inculcated within the concepts of teacher empowerment and teacher efficacy in that its articulation and subsequent enactment may well produce "a subjective state of mind where an employee perceives that he or she is exercising efficacious control over meaningful work" (Potterfield, 1999, p. 51).

## **1.4 The overview of the thesis**

This thesis is arranged into seven chapters. This chapter has stated the problem, its significance and the research questions that guide its enactment in the pursuit of particular answers about the concept of critical spirit and its intersection with TAFE teachers and their world of work. Chapter Two reviews selected literature around two important considerations: firstly, teacher identities; and secondly, Australian TAFE teachers within the context of their work. Conceptions of teacher identities are dealt with by tracing various theoretical positions on its formation and the theoretical position that is pertinent to this project is elucidated. The topic of TAFE teachers is dealt with by an exploration of their history within the Australian VET sector and the

contemporary change factors that have impacted on the way in which they enact their identities as teachers.

In Chapter Three I articulate the conceptual framework for this study. I begin by examining notions around the dispositions of thinkers and emphasise the importance of John Dewey's (1933, 1991) position on openmindedness, wholeheartedness and intellectual responsibility and their central role in effective thinking. I then move to an exploration of both 'critical' and 'spirit' separately and show how they coalesced into 'critical spirit' within some of the critical thinking literature. The work of Harvey Siegel (1988, 1993, 1997, 2001) is used to emphasise the importance of "the 'critical attitude' or 'critical spirit'" (1988, p. 38). I conclude the chapter by positioning Oxman-Michelli's (1992) elements of critical spirit – independence of mind, openmindedness, wholeheartedness, intellectual responsibility and respect for others (p. 5) – as integral to how I have theorised about the possibilities of critical spirit in relation to TAFE teacher identities.

Chapter Four of the thesis discusses research design. Discourse analysis is positioned as both methodology and method for this project. Using the conceptual understanding articulated in Chapter Three, the chapter theorises critical spirit as a discourse by deploying Gee's (2005) perspective on how discourse builds reality. From this theorising a coding framework is constructed for the explication of a critical spirit discourse in selected TAFE teacher narratives. Ethical and political considerations are discussed along with specific data gathering and analysis techniques.

Chapters Five and Six are the data analysis chapters. Chapter Five examines the first research question through an analysis of the results of the application of a coding framework of a critical spirit discourse (Tyler, 2008a) to selected TAFE teacher narratives. Chapter Six is an analysis of the rich realities built by participant TAFE teachers within a series of semi-structured interviews. Particular to these realities were relationships with TAFE as an organisation, identities, and the value that emerged from an explicit engagement with a critical spirit discourse.

In Chapter Seven, the final chapter of the thesis, I conclude by synthesising the data analysis chapters' answers to the two research questions that guided the exploratory intentions of this project. The chapter concludes by returning to my personal note (outlined below) and highlighting some possible future research into critical spirit and teacher identities.

### **1.5 A personal note**

As Laurel Richardson (1994) stated: "Form and content are inseparable" (p. 516).

Hence this thesis and I are presented as qualitative research partners with postmodern possibilities of knowing something without knowing everything. I hold a poststructuralist perspective (Weedon, 1996) where language is integral to social reality in that our subjectivities are where various discourses compete in our meaning making. I agree with Richardson when she states: "Because the individual is subject to multiple and competing discourses in many realms, one's subjectivity is shifting and contradictory, not stable, fixed, rigid" (p. 518).

My position is also framed by a constructivist (Vygotsky, 1978; Wells, 1995) orientation towards TAFE teacher identities. Therefore I hold that TAFE teachers are independent but situated constructors of their knowledge and learn through reflection on their experience. Mezirow's (1991) theory of transformative learning is of interest to this interpretation of constructivism with his concept of critical reflection on experience. By identifying and analysing critical spirit I hope to have cast light onto what Mezirow nominated as a third level of reflection. At this level TAFE teachers would ideally confront and challenge their taken for granted norms: "What's wrong with how I am seeing what happened and how it happened?" (Fenwick, 2001, p. 13). The intention is to enable a fundamental and deeper understanding of the possible part that critical spirit plays in TAFE teacher subjectivities.

I also look to the construction and writing of the thesis as a method of enquiry itself, as acknowledged by Richardson (1994). I take heart from Richardson's (1994) encouragement to nurture my own voice within my writing and to be suspect of "desires to 'speak' for others" (p. 523). In the light of this I see this task as one in which I try out various positions in relation to my self-knowledge, that of critical spirit as articulated by the literature and my subsequent interpretations, and that gleaned from TAFE teachers in order to seek deconstruction and demystification.

Part of the forestructure of this study is my relevant personal position. In "Criticality: Its reflective utility within a Technical and Further Education workplace context" (Tyler, 2006), I have provided through phenomenography critical reflections on selected professional history as both a community and human service worker and a TAFE teacher. I have shown how I have developed my own criticality by drawing on

such influential writers as Habermas (1972, 1974) and Freire (1970) and how these perspectives have synthesised with previous ideas of social role valorisation (Wolfensberger, 1972) and self determination (Hughes & Agran, 1998). Essentially the article articulates how I have used my criticality as “the foundation to act with self determined purpose and confidence” (Tyler, 2006, p. 54) within my past world of work – TAFE.

This foundation underpins my personal reasons for exploring TAFE teacher identities and TAFE teacher relationships with TAFE. This exploration of critical spirit, its value and its utility to TAFE teachers also contributes to my personal journey in understanding the effect that critical spirit might have on my effectiveness.



## **Chapter Two – Literature review: Identity, identities, and TAFE teachers**

### **2.1 Introduction**

In this chapter, I explore relevant literature in relation to teacher identities and TAFE teachers, and underline this selective review with Parker J. Palmer's (1998) assertion that "We teach who we are" (p. 1). Palmer's claim is that the heart of teaching is the teachers' identity. The knowing of technique and the knowing of students are not enough, because "good teaching comes from the identity and integrity of the teacher" (Palmer, 1998, p. 10). I conceive that part of our challenge as teachers is to make conscious connections with who we are and therefore enable our journey through the tempestuous sea of teaching. Hence it is to the inner landscape of the teacher that I turn in an attempt to explore various understandings of how teacher identity develops.

I start my review with some seminal perspectives that viewed identity as a construct of individual agency, one where our subjectivity relates to autonomous choices about who we want to be. I then move to sociocultural perspectives where identity construction is considered to be influenced by social interaction. Next I engage with poststructuralist perspectives on identity, particular those understandings that arose from the perspective that our identity is a construct of discourse. As discourses are rich and varied over time, so too are the subjectivities that emerge from discourse. This perspective, where discourse enacts "specific social activities and social identities" (Gee, 2005, p.1), is explored more specifically in relation to teachers

through the provision of specific examples. I then move to the literature on TAFE teachers and their contexts; in particular I review the impact of a neo vocational discourse on their identities as teachers.

## **2.2 From identity to identities**

For a psychological perspective on identity formation, I turn to the seminal work of Erick Erickson and neo-Eriksonian identity theory and research. Erikson (1963, 1968) put forward the notion of identity as “a subjective sense of an invigorating sameness and continuity” (p. 19). This subjectivity (me/you) moves forward, making individual choices about the future in relation to “who you are, what you value, and the directions you choose to pursue in life” (Berk, 1996, p. 587). An examination of Erikson’s psychosocial stages of development suggests that, at the stage where identity is in conflict with identity diffusion, a stage that aligns with adolescence, successful identity resolution occurs when a sense of trust, which develops from successful relationships with primary caregivers, enables autonomous actions of initiative that produce a sense of industry and agency. This provides the perspective that identity is self-made but is also responsive to the environment. It also claims that identity can be classified (Haviland & Kahlbaugh, 1993). Cote and Levine (1988) critiqued Ericksonian ideas on the basis of too much emphasis on the role of the individual in maintaining an isolated construction of him/herself as a coherent whole, and suggested that more attention should be focused on the role of sociocultural influences within identity formation.

Even though Vygotsky (1978, 1986) did not offer a theory of identity formation, views within his sociocultural theory provide some useful concepts with which to

understand identity formation further. According to Vygotsky, our culture – the beliefs, values, customs, and skills of a social group – are transferred to the next generation through social interaction. This is achieved through the processes of language in terms of dialogue between children and other more knowledgeable and experienced members of the social group. This puts an understanding of identity formation in clear relationship with the social group that one inhabits, and also with the interplay between the group and the individual fostered through language and action. In a sense, “identity extends beyond the skin” (Bateson, 1972, p. 483) and “implies identity formation [as] an encounter between individual choices and cultural tools employed in a particular institutional context” (Zembylas, 2003, p. 220).

A poststructuralist view of identity (Bhabha, 1987; Butler, 1997; Foucault, 1984) moves away from the notion of identity formation as either an individual or a social process. It emphasises the political contexts in which identity formation occurs. A poststructuralist view holds the notion of multiple subjectivities as opposed to identity as an unchanging singularity learning new social roles (Nias, 1997). It occurs and continues to occur within a historical framework where meaning and experience continually interact. An individual’s experience is interacting with her or his meaning making and *vice versa* within a discourse (Foucault, 1984). Hence self-knowledge, an understanding of one’s identity, comes from individuals interrogating their experience in “a shifting [discursive] space where narratives of subjectivity meet the narratives of culture” (Zembylas, 2003, p. 221). The concept of multiple identities in relation to teachers is explained by using Nias’s (1997) concept of “preservation of self” (p. 7). Nias’s position is that teachers build various subjectivities around how they conceive their agency within their social world and that a sense of self develops on the basis of

the meaning that they derive from their perceived impact on their work and *vice versa*. As the dynamics of work change through being subjected to different discourses, so too do teachers' notions of themselves.

Britzman (1993) also asserted that, as discursive practices shift, identities also shift. She too challenges the notion of identity being conceptualised as a series of fixed positions and replaces it with the conception of identity formation as dynamic. This perspective, that identity is a work in progress, is articulated by Deleuze and Guattari (1987) as a process of becoming (p. 238). Becoming implies a continuous re-defining of self, in which notions of progression and regression are not useful because of their implied prescription and linearity. Instead, cultural and political experiences are contested within the individual to produce various subjectivities.

The two preceding paragraphs are specific examples of contemporary applications of poststructural positions on identity formation pertinent to teachers. By including these examples, I emphasise theoretical positions on how historical and contemporary historical discourses influence the development of various subjectivities that resonate, or not, with particular teachers' notions of themselves.

Johnson (2004) put a case against identity being portrayed as stable and uncomplicated. She did so through the case exploration of "Min", a Korean-adopted American male preservice teacher. Using the theoretical underpinnings of identity as being socially situated, contextualised, multiple and fluid (Gee, 1999) and a social reconstructionist (Zeichner, 1994) engagement that seeks to develop professionals who resist, rather than sustain or reproduce, social inequalities, Johnson showed how

“Min” drew on a “myriad of personal and educational experiences ... to enact his identity as a multicultural educator” (p. 27). For example, in one data transcript, “Min’s” engagement with students as a particular kind of multicultural teacher was demonstrated in his willingness to deal with differences in situations where there is a lack of multicultural texts. In another, “Min” constructed himself as a teacher who favoured dialogical inquiry with students. Both enactments drew attention to “Min’s” consideration of social inequalities. This research pointed to how “the relationality and multiplicity of an individual’s identities contribute to her or his enactment and perpetuation of certain race, class, and gender identities” (Johnson, 2004, p. 21).

Gibson (1995) demonstrated how teachers use their own historical recollections of teachers to make the transition from student to teacher identities. In a qualitative study of eight social studies beginning teachers, Gibson found that, even before these participants had started their preservice teacher education program, they had begun to develop ideas about social studies and pedagogies. What was also noted was their struggle with the moral issues that surfaced during their exploration of social studies as a teaching content area. In Gibson’s conclusion he claimed that the construction of teacher identity is highly personal, as these teachers did so by “confronting and rethinking ... initial conceptualisations of [their] moral responsibility [as] social studies teachers” (p. 194).

The two preceding paragraphs show examples of identity formation as a conscious process. Weeks (1990) also supported a conscious process in which identity involves overt acknowledgment of those elements that one has in common with a particular group – for example, the values that one wishes to share with others. By contrast,

Webb (2005) drew attention to the unconscious aspects of teacher identity formation. Webb suggested that identity construction, as a conscious process from the outset might not be an easy task for teachers. She acknowledged the unconscious aspects of identity formation, and in particular the histories of those teachers who participated in her study. These participants came from varying backgrounds that had an impact on their choice of secondary school teaching as an area of study. Two were trade people, one a mother, and one a young female straight from her senior phase of schooling, each with her or his distinct views of what it is like to be a teacher. Webb put forth her position in which the implicit historical discourses held by these teachers were in tension with the explicit discursive prescriptions of teachers put forth by accreditation bodies (see for example, Queensland College of Teachers, 2008), and that these prescriptions privileged managerialist views of teaching over “teacher ... views [that] emphasise[d] the interpersonal and personal aspects of their job” (Webb, 2005, p. 2). Ramsey (2000) concurred in noting that skill- or technique-based aspects of teaching are given priority by educational managers and that these are powerful reprofessionalising discourses. As a counter to the influence of discourses that are imposed, and that arguably counter self-efficacy and professionalism, Webb shows how reflection on and examination of issues and actions that influence teacher identity, within a self-critical learning community (Carr & Kemmis, 1986), stood as powerful resources in those teachers’ choices on how to responded to the dynamic factors within their work.

In the preceding discussion of the conscious and unconscious processes that contribute to teacher identity, the concept of discourse and how this shapes identity

has been introduced. It is now necessary to deepen this understanding by considering the role that discourse plays in the building and shaping of identities.

### **2.2.1 Discourse and identities**

Gee's (1999, 2005) well-known view of discourse analysis sheds light on theoretical positioning in relation to how discourses shape identities. Discourse for Gee is "[l]anguage as action and affiliation" (2005, p. 1). His theory and method explore "how language gets recruited 'on site' to enact specific social activities and social identities" (p. 1). In relation to social activities, Gee stated that language is always political in the sense that it is used to create a particular perspective on how "*social goods* are thought about, argued over and distributed in society" (p. 2; *emphasis in original*). On how discourse relates to social identities, Gee suggested that it is "through language [that we] enact a specific social identity" (p. 4). His theory emphasised an acknowledgment that language *per se* (speaking, writing, signing) is not the sole contributor to enactments of human activities and identities and that this "language-in-use" (p. 7) is augmented by other "non-language 'stuff'" (p. 7). Gee names this amalgamation of "language-in-use" and "non-language 'stuff'" as "'big D' Discourses" (p. 7). Discourses are "a patchwork of thoughts, words, objects, events, actions, and interactions" that "produce, reproduce, sustain and transform" (p. 7). For this study, when I use the term 'discourse' in relation to participants I include the conceptualisation that it is inclusive of Gee's 'stuff', and that this contributes to the building of certain situated identities.

Specifically, what I have taken from Gee's understandings of identities in relation to this thesis would be particular kinds of TAFE teachers participating and interacting in

varying ways within different social groups and teacher cultures within specific institutional situations. From the perspective of Gee's "seven areas of "reality"" (2005, pp. 11-13), TAFE teacher identities would be shaped and reshaped by the big D Discourses that frame and inform: what is significant for them; the activities that they enact; the identities that they construct; the relationships or non-relationships that they have; the politics that they engage in and are affected by; the connections and disconnections that they make in order to build conceptual relevance; and the sign systems and knowledge that they use to privilege one 'truth' claim over another. This implies a dynamic list of identities in relation to being a TAFE teacher.

The concept of the teacher being socially negotiated is not new (see Britzman, 1991; Casey 1993; Miller Marsh, 2002b) – likewise the role that discourse plays in socially shaping teacher identities. Miller Marsh (2002a), Barty (2004) and Gaudelli (1999, as cited in Barty, 2004) are useful examples of the teacher being socially negotiated and are dealt with separately now.

Miller Marsh (2002a) argued that teachers and preservice teachers should be explicitly exposed to the concept of discourse. "Learning to examine discourses through which we enact our teaching lives provides us with opportunities to select those discourses that allow for the creation of positive social and academic identities" (p. 453). Miller Marsh also highlights the fact that teacher thinking has been explored through individual perspectives and uses this research to emphasise teacher thought as socially negotiated – in particular, the thinking that is undertaken "as teachers struggle to make visible the connections among language, power and the fashioning of their identities" (p. 454). Miller Marsh's research informs us through an exploration of her



own and preservice teacher students' engagements in a university classroom where her students and she struggled to enact identities as a result of ideas and insights introduced into the classroom from feedback received by students. This feedback was anchored by one set of letters from a student about "discourse, power and identities" (p. 453). In an effort to show how "[d]iscourses work in and through us to position ourselves and others in the world" (p. 456), Miller Marsh firstly engaged with students to produce co-constructed definitions of discourse and power. She and her class defined discourse as "frameworks for thought and action that groups of individuals draw upon in order to speak and interact with one another in meaningful ways" (p. 456). They defined power as "a relational phenomenon that is continually being constituted and reconstituted as individuals move in and out of particular sets of relations" (p. 456).

Armed with these definitions, the students were asked to consider the varying degrees of power experienced as they moved throughout the school: between themselves and the supportive and unsupportive teacher, themselves and the university supervisor, themselves and the parents, themselves and the students. From their reflections and interactions emerged sociocultural discourses and child-centred discourses in which student identities shifted. Likewise Miller Marsh (2002a) commented on her identity formulation and reformulation as a result of the above interactions. She concluded by asserting that making explicit the powerful influence of the discourses that students are immersed in and use helps them to "make some choices about their own identities and the social identities of the children in their care as one way to work toward social transformation" (p. 467).

The previous paragraph offered an example of discourse as shaping identity. In this paragraph I use Barty (2004) to highlight the role that discourse plays in teacher identity and choice of pedagogy. Barty used Miller Marsh (2002a) to support the position that pedagogical discourses are informed by teacher identity and that these discourses define a particular teacher at a particular moment, within a sociocultural, historical and political context that shapes what teachers, students and the families of students can become. In exploring the apparent reluctance of social studies teachers to use primary sources (for example, archival documents, historical objects and digital materials) as teaching resources in their classroom, Barty claimed that these teachers deploy a pedagogical choice rather than a pragmatic choice, and that this pedagogical choice is “firmly grounded in notions of teacher identity” (p. 2). Barty suggested that these teachers’ identities were shaped by what Britzman named “technical rationality” (1991, p. 47). This discourse, a mechanistic, conservative and static notion of what teaching is, pressures teachers to “exhibit strong classroom management skills and have students do well on high stakes achievement tests” (Barty, 2004, p. 11), and this produces a reluctance to try any pedagogical strategy that opens the door to the controversy and contestation within the classroom that Barty claims is necessary for a rich and complex engagement with social studies education.

Gaudelli (1999, as cited in Barty, 2004) in his study of 14 educators also noted the relationship between personal identity and pedagogical choice with regard to how individual teachers dealt with controversy in the classroom. Gaudelli concluded that the teachers in the study struggled with controversy because they had no clear conception of the tensions between notions of universalism and relativism, and chose

a simplified ethical reasoning to cope during ambiguous classroom discussions in which relativism was apparent – for example, in instances of moral responsibility.

In the preceding discussion external institutional forces in relation to discourse and identity were noted, with Webb (2005) holding the position of teacher accreditation bodies privileging teacher discourse around prescriptive competencies, and Ramsey (2000) suggesting that this kind of discourse reprofessionalises teachers towards an identity that tends to privilege an educational managerialist discourse on teacher identity over a teacher's personal discourse on identity. The power that these external discourses have in promoting teacher access to social goods (Gee, 2005) – for example, access to social identities as 'good' teachers – has been examined in depth (Barty, 2004; Chappell, 1999; Grosvenor & Lawn, 2001; Moore, Edwards, Halpin & George, 2002). These enquiries cite instances of where government policy, aligned with nationalism and neo-liberalist management practices, has manipulated and in some cases enforced teacher identity (and influenced curriculum and pedagogy). For example, Chappell's (1999) contention was that TAFE teachers' understandings of themselves are very different from the view of dominant governmental discourses in Australia. His data showed how TAFE teachers are called upon to "change their identity" (p. 3).

Moore et al. (2002) saw teaching practitioners as being constrained by market education and values rather than informed by their own views of education. These authors suggested that rather than contest these discourses teachers give ground to a normalised discourse that sees them acquiesce to a preferred view of the individual

teacher. This perspective gives rise to calls for teachers to contest these external normalising factors:

[I]t is imperative that as teachers we need to reconsider the relationship between our notions of personal identity and how they shape, and are shaped by, the wider discourse of collective identity. This involves reflecting upon both the internal and external factors, which shape our identity as teachers.

(Barty, 2004, p. 9)

This active engagement with, rather than passive acceptance of, the process of teacher identity construction is further emphasised by Danielewicz (2001), who in discussing teachers' selves suggested that student teachers need to experiment and find their own unique identities, not just emulate their supervising teacher or emulate teachers whom they liked from past experience. For this to occur, Danielewicz suggested that practising and preservice teachers must become more aware of and reflective on both the external and the internal discourses that shape their identity individually and collectively.

The work of Alsup (2006) in the area of identity discourses highlighted the tensions experienced by teachers in relation to dealing with external professional discourses and internal personal discourses as they relate to teacher identities. Alsup aligned herself with Gee (1999, 2005) in using the framing of "Big D" Discourses and the part that they play in teacher identity formation, as well as Gee's concept of borderland, where two or more discourses rub shoulders – for example, the borderland discourses generated as different ethnic groups of youth communicated when they came together in the schoolyard.

Alsup (2006) put forward her case that, where there is contact between disparate personal and professional identities, there needs to be something that enables or leads to an “ideological integration of multiple senses of self” (p. 36). This something lies in borderland discourse, “a type of happy medium” (p. 72). In relation to preservice teachers, Alsup stated: “[I]n its essence, it is discourse that allows preservice teachers to bring personal subjectivities or ideologies into the classroom and connect them to their developing professional selves” (p. 37).

Alsup (2006) gave an example of a preservice teacher whose demeanour included having a visible disability that appeared outside the accepted norm. This person’s inability to conceptualise her demeanour as a discourse, and the accepted norm as a disparate discourse, appeared to reduce her ability to engage with any other notion except that “it was my fault” for not fitting in. This apparent lack of insight appeared to prompt her to privilege the accepted norm over her identity discourse. In order to enable a resonance between this person’s professional identity and her personal identity, Alsup suggested enabling individuals to “develop bigger and better discourse maps” (Gee, 1999, p. 136, as cited in Alsup, 2006, p. 9). This according to Alsup allows individuals to “modify their discourse in ways that allow them to grow and participate successfully in various discourse communities or social milieus” (p. 39) – a transforming discourse. The space where the discourse of the individual is recognisable yet transformative is the borderlands. In the above example, this is space where the individual teacher and the education system flex around and within each other to bring about positive transformation. For Alsup, this doesn’t mean training teachers to go out and replicate the *status quo*. It means teachers changing within the

existing discursive system to the extent that they are not excluded by the community on the one hand or by their feelings of alienation on the other. So it is a *quid pro quo*, where “[t]he community affects their discourse, but their discourse also affects the community” (p. 40). Alternatively, it might also mean teachers contesting a system if it is not amenable to negotiation and potential transformation.

This discussion of teacher identity suggests that sense making in ‘doing’ teaching is connected with a co-construction of teacher identities. These identity constructions appear as a simultaneous process. Teachers internally construct notions of themselves, whilst at the same time teachers are being constructed by external forces. Hence teachers engage in, are buffeted by and buffet their sociocultural and political and historical contexts. This appears as a personal and internal process, joined by an impersonal, external process. The merger produces resonance or discord to varying degrees as the teacher attempts to become (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987).

Thus far, this literature review has scrutinised various positions on identity formation. This selected literature places identity formation on a continuum with identity as an isolated construction of a person making individual choices about who they are and what they value near one end of the continuum, and identity formation as multiple subjectivities that are interpellated into being (Pecheux, 1982) through the discourses individuals are immersed in somewhere near the other. The latter is important to this project – in particular, the work of Gee (2005) and Alsup (2006). Gee’s notion of big “D” Discourse in the building of realities and Alsup and Gee’s use of borderland discourse are used as conceptual tools in my theorising, firstly about the positioning

of critical spirit as a discourse and secondly about considerations about its possible role as a borderland discourse.

## **2.3 Who are TAFE teachers and what is their world of work?**

The remainder of this chapter is devoted to the TAFE teachers and the environment in which they work. In this section, I explore the literature in relation to TAFE teacher identity, who they are in terms of what they perceive themselves to be and what others perceive them to be, what they do and how they relate to their work within TAFE institutes.

### ***2.3.1 TAFE teachers and their changing landscape***

TAFE teachers are an identifiable group of teachers distinguished by their work within TAFE institutes and colleges throughout Australia. TAFE colleges and institutes numbered 86 in 2000, with some 1300 campuses (“Look how far we’ve come!”, 2001). In 2008, 66 TAFE institutes appeared in Internet search engines (for example, Web Wombat, 2008). Generally, TAFE teachers are knowledge workers within post-compulsory education, and are particularly under the influence of Australia’s VET system. They are distinctive within this system in the sense that they are public providers delivering teaching and training in each Australian state and territories. Others who deliver training within this VET system are those who work within private registered training organisations; these people are generally not employed as teachers but as workplace trainers (Smith & Keating, 2003). This section explores the current literature in order to paint a picture of TAFE teachers within the landscape of their day-to-day work, and show how “[TAFE teachers’] work is [considered] instrumental in government strategies to enhance national

competitiveness in global markets” (Rimmer, 2002, p. 45). It begins with a vignette of the transformative journey from traditional TAFE teacher to contemporary TAFE teacher, and looks at these teachers’ interactions within their world of TAFE in order to portray alternative versions of TAFE teacher identity as it is pushed and prodded by the forces of change.

TAFE teachers are people who have trade, industry or professional qualifications. Having practised the application of the knowledge, attitudes and skills of their profession for some time, these people have chosen to move into the teaching profession in either a full- or a part-time capacity. As teachers, they teach apprentices, (para)professionals and others in the ‘trade’ in which they themselves have been taught within the context of a specific industry.

A view of the traditional TAFE teacher is offered by Bruce (1909), who described vocational instruction by men at Goulburn Technical College, New South Wales. These men instructed in the college’s carpentry, sheep and wool, fitting and turning, plumbing and iron-works departments. This vocational focus is notable for two reasons: (a) the content of its curriculum, which aligned with the traditional industries of the day: primary industries and a fledgling manufacturing industry, and (b) the non-prominence of women as teachers of vocational skills.

This traditional focus of technical colleges (later relabelled as TAFE institutes and colleges) as a government provider of public education was on the transfer of specific industrial skills to a labour force that was to meet the expanding industrial base of the Australian economy. This industrial skill development discourse, beginning in the



1880s, continued up until the 1990s with very little change (Chappell, 1999). Voices on the position of women as teachers within technical colleges during this time were relatively quiet (Rimmer, 2002). Butler and Ferrier (2000) suggested that “much of the history of women and VET in this country is still in the form of undocumented oral histories” (p. 5). The notion that these are oral histories and not documented histories suggests a gender bias toward traditional male orientated skills being taught predominantly by males.

The 1975 Kangan Report “was a watershed for technical education in Australia” (Smith & Keating, 2003, p. 9). This report established TAFE as an educational sector and sought to broaden the concept of vocational education and training beyond its traditionally narrow focus on vocational skill transfer. Traditional space for apprenticeship training was shared with courses with an adult and community education focus. This liberal education construction set further education and training as a continuing and lifelong learning process that emphasised “individual learning, educational need, personal and social development ... [alongside] industrial skill development” (Chappell, 1999, p. 6). What TAFE teachers taught began to expand, as did the nature of TAFE teachers themselves. The Kangan report (Australian Committee on Technical and Further Education, 1974) also foreshadowed a time when the TAFE teacher role was in sharper focus – for example, in a number of reviews of TAFE teacher education needs (Hall & Are, 1991; TAFE National Centre for Research and Development, 1987). This focus appeared to culminate with the development of competency standards for those teaching in TAFE (Competency Standards Board, 1994); these were specific prescriptions of competency for the undertaking of the delivery and assessment of VET curriculum and allowed TAFE

teachers to be joined by a broader group of individuals taking on teaching roles. This broader group did not have to hold formal tertiary teaching qualifications. Their suitability was measured against the above competency standards. Most usually obtained competency through undertaking a VET level 4 qualification. This influenced the development of the teaching related work roles of workplace trainer and tutor, and the expansion of the notion of teaching to include nomenclature around training and facilitation.

The expansion of the TAFE curriculum also gathered considerable momentum over the 1980s and 1990s. Smith and Keating (2003) have documented the forces that contributed to changes in VET within Australia, including changes to the delivery of the TAFE curriculum. In their book, *From Training Reform to Training Packages*, Smith and Keating highlighted the imperatives for change within the Australian economy that were making themselves evident in the 1980s. They noted the end of the post war boom, a shift to global trade away from primary industries (such as farming and mining) to tertiary industries (such as hospitality and education), an increase in modern technologies, including information technologies, and changes in the way that people were expected to go about their work; for example, the ‘Scientific Management’ (Taylor, 1911) of the workplace became increasingly popular. The makeup of Australia’s labour force was also undergoing considerable change. More women were entering the workforce, there was high youth unemployment with the accompanying increase in school retention rates and jobs growth was mostly part-time or casual.

Smith and Keating (2003) detailed the various responses to this condition and prefaced it with the argument that “a common response to all the changes ... has been for a call for training to come to the rescue of the nation” (2003, p. 28). They detailed training as central to two major responses:

1. Industry restructuring – moving from older industries (for example, manufacturing) to newer industries (for example, information technology), including the taking on of flexible practices and total quality management principles.
2. Award restructuring[,] including the notion of multi-skilling workers to allow for a wider band of skills and a clear career path where an upgrading of skills or re-skilling meant an increase in wages. (pp. 28-29)

Smith and Keating included other elements, such as changing jobs, the need for a safe transition from school to work for the young, the fear of unemployment producing the need for higher qualifications for the same job and the taking on of new technology, as all increasing the demand for training.

On the face of it, the concept of who TAFE teachers are has changed considerably from the teacher who delivers skills training to the teacher who delivers further education and training which is explicitly aimed at increasing the economic potential of a nation. It is at this confluence of education and economics that notions of who TAFE teachers are and what they do are contested. The following subsection explores the literature surrounding the impact of the above changes on TAFE teachers and their various subjectivities.

### **2.3.2 An exploration of the impact of VET changes on teaching and TAFE teachers**

The narrative thus far depicts TAFE teachers as teachers *per se*. They have particular knowledges, attitudes and skills, which have been refined in practice, and they pass these onto prospective learners within TAFE institutes, but in recent years this notion of teacher has expanded to one of “sophisticated producers, recorders, organizers, applicers, disseminators and brokers of knowledge” (Seddon, 2000, p. 8). This resonates with Lepani’s (1995) forward view of VET in the year 2005. Lepani put forward the view that TAFE teachers would need to include such roles as specialist learning facilitator, market analyst and business manager. This change in conceptualising TAFE teachers is considered to be the result of changes to their work and workplace. TAFE workplaces have undergone a comprehensive, fundamental redesign in how they go about service delivery (Anderson, 1998). But two of the major impacts on TAFE teachers’ role and identity have been the changes which involved the corporatisation of government service providers such as TAFE, and the implementation of a Competency Based Training (CBT) curriculum. The former involved government providers of VET education competing within an educational market with private providers, and the latter involved a move from a focus on curriculum inputs controlled by teachers as expert holders of knowledge to a focus on education outputs with centrally prescribed curriculum and assessment (known as training packages). Arguably as a result of globalisation, TAFE institutes now operate within an educational market where they compete for funding to conduct the delivery of their services. TAFE teachers also operate within this context where emphasis is placed upon the serving customers and a tighter focus upon the outcomes of their educational delivery. In the following subsection I direct a sharper focus at these changes, especially in relation to TAFE teacher identities.

### **2.3.2.1 Globalisation, the state, TAFE teachers, and their teaching**

The dogma of globalisation has fundamentally changed the relationship between education and the state (Morrow & Torres, 2000). Both in Australia and overseas, federal and state or provincial governments have articulated links between education and training and a nation's economic reform (Dawkins, 1988; Ministry of Education, Skill and Training, 1995). The corporatising of the public sector has brought with it the ideology of neo-liberalism and the accompanying discourses of economic rationalism and new managerialism to bear (Butler, 1997; Chappell, 1998, 1999; Marginson, 1994, 1997; Seddon & Marginson, 2001). Practices and policies that had focused on the process of education as being of qualitative and intrinsic value have changed to those associated with outputs of quantitative measurement and instrumental value (Seddon, 1998). Those education policies that drive an economic imperative are called by some "new vocationalism" (for example, Ball, 1994; Grubb, 1996).

Nationally, the initial bureaucratic entity responsible for driving new vocationalism was the Australian National Training Authority (ANTA) (1994-2004). This authority, a conglomeration of policy and procedure, was central to the implementation of what is commonly known as the 'training reform agenda'. It articulated the prescriptive VET policies that enabled the operation of, and that guided engagement within, the Australian education market (Smith, 1998). A number of authors have elaborated on the uptake of market and economic rationalist principles by education providers (Anderson, 1998; Hewett, 2003; Kronemann, 2001a). But arguably the most specific perspective in relation to the impact of these principles on TAFE teacher identity is

that offered by Chappell (1999), whose contention was that TAFE teachers' "understanding of who they are in the educational project is significantly different from the identity now promoted by dominant policies and discourses of government" (p. 1).

Chappell argued that if, as a result of the changes in the nature of TAFE teachers' work policies and practices, they are asked to

... do things differently ... [they] are being called upon to become different teachers; that is, to have different understandings of their role in education, to have different relationships with students, to conceptualize their professional and vocational knowledge differently, to change their understanding of who they are in vocational education and training. In short, to change their identity. (1999, p. 3)

Chappell (1999) suggested that traditionally TAFE teacher identity was shaped around concepts of the professional teacher, in a community that shared common practices, ethical standards and specialised knowledge, and this placed them as a socially constructed definitive group. He pointed to problems with this conception given the influence of postmodern and poststructuralist debates, and cited authors such as Usher and Edwards (1994, as cited in Chappell, 1999) and research in cultural identities that emphasises the power of discourse in constructing social identities. This position suggests that discourse builds realities, based upon contingency and ambiguity. From this perspective, our subjectivities and sense of self are undergoing a continuing re-formation as we shape and are shaped by the discourses that circulate

within our life-worlds. Chappell claimed that it is this position that connects the construction of TAFE teacher identity with that of the discourses that shape and circulate within the policies of the TAFE world. Chappell acknowledged that these are not the only discourses that exercise influence, but highlighted the powerful impact that new vocationalism and economic rationalism have had on the educational realities of TAFE teachers.

These discourses suggest that, if education fails to produce quality outcomes, we fail to survive economically (locally and nationally). They are discourses that align public sector changes with private sector commercial practices and, as Chappell (1998) noted, have produced specific “talk” (p. 6). Chappell highlighted TAFE director talk that favoured discourses of economic rationalism such as “... *‘the market’* ... *‘quality’*, *‘efficiency’*, *‘entrepreneurialism’* ... *‘customer driven’* and *‘the bottom line’* ... *‘doing more with less’*, [and] *‘running as a lean machine’*” (1998, p. 6; *emphasis in original*). Further, these directors articulated new roles for their teachers by stating that “[t]eachers must be *‘educational resource developers’*, *‘market focused’* ... *‘consultants to industry’* ... *‘facilitators of learning’* ... *‘be more accountable’* ... and *‘look at ways of generating income’*” (1999, p. 6; *emphasis in original*). Also noted was director talk that was explicitly pointed at job security. TAFE teachers needed to “*‘lift their game’* .... [because] *it’s the quality of delivery often that decides who gets the jobs’*” (1999, p. 7; *emphasis in original*).

Chappell (1999) also noted TAFE teachers’ counternarrative, one that is devoid of the language of business and entrepreneurialism. The teachers articulated critiques of the changes to their work world – for example, “*‘fewer resources’*, *‘more administrative*

*work*, *'less teaching time*', ... and an emphasis *'on training rather than education*'” (1999, p. 7; *emphasis in original*). Also noted was teacher talk that expressed values associated with education that was missing from TAFE director talk: “*'access*', *'equity*', *'respect for difference*' ... [and in relation to teacher practice] *'honesty*', *'enthusiasm*' and *'integrity*'” (1999, p. 7; *emphasis in original*).

One other dominant aspect of new vocationalism, which had a significant impact on TAFE teachers, was the changes that they had to make in relation to how they delivered the curriculum. The traditional TAFE teacher delivered a teaching curriculum based upon areas of content. Generally, this model of curriculum was documented in a syllabus as planned learning experiences with accompanying resulting experiences that resulted from following the document (Print, 1993). In this model, content tended to come before assessment. During the process of implementing the training reform agenda, the CBT curriculum development model was introduced into TAFE. The model was distinguished by several features, which Smith and Keating (2003) identified as focusing on:

- The outcomes of training, not inputs;
- The measurements of outcomes as benchmarked against industry standards;
- Student progression that only occurs when they demonstrate competence by meeting the above benchmarks; hence, assessment is hinged upon performance;
- The modularization of competence into discrete industry aligned units of knowledge and skill (see Training Packages);



- The principle that an individual can seek to have recognized their prior experience in the demonstration of competence (see Recognition of Prior Learning); and
- The curriculum's flexible delivery. (pp. 122-129)

This model of curriculum development caused several changes in the way that TAFE teachers went about their job as teachers:

- Their pedagogy had to align with the linear progression of a prescribed curriculum that had its locus in demonstrable outcomes (Jones, 2000; McBeath, 1991; Misko, 1999).
- Industry representatives were considered to be the experts in content, and fed competency standards into training packages by means of advisory boards and councils (Misko, 2001; Smith & Keating, 2003).
- TAFE teacher content knowledge was to be up to date and aligned with industry standards; hence their regular return to industry was seen as mandatory (Rumsey, 2002).
- The delivery of units of competency was no longer conducted solely in classrooms or workshops within a particular college or institute. Delivery of training could constitute face-to-face, self-paced, distance and/or e-learning, or a combination of methods, delivered at the workplace or other suitable venues (Misko, 2001, 2002).
- Assessment could happen prior to content delivery through Recognition of Prior Learning processes (Australian National Training Authority, 2001; Wilson & Lilly, 1996).

CBT's impact on, and possible erosion of, the position of TAFE teachers as professionals are a common critique of CBT (Billett et al., 1998; Darwin, 2004; Mulcahy, 2003; Tyler, 2006). Robinson (1993) wrote on the specifics of CBT undermining teacher judgment, whilst Smith and Keating (2003) also acknowledged the loss of teachers' role as experts. Undoubtedly, Chappell's (1998) examples of TAFE teacher talk, such as “*everything is heading the way of CBT ...*”, “*the teacher will act as facilitator*” and “*greater industry involvement ...*” (p. 8; *emphasis in original*), and the accompanying TAFE director talk, which calls for TAFE teachers needing to “*keep up with new educational technologies*”, “*network work with industry*” [and] “*teach in the workplace*” (p. 8; *emphasis in original*), typify this impact. However, Chappell insisted that TAFE teachers' conceptualisation of themselves as liberal educators has remained despite contemporary economic discourses. This offers a glimpse of something resistant and possibly resilient within their make up that could offer alternative notions, or add to existing notions, of who TAFE teachers are. Chappell puts it down to the success of the Kangan (see Australian Committee on Technical and Further Education, 1974) discourse in shaping a particular TAFE identity. I cannot help but ask the question, “What role can critical spirit play?”

But before I begin to explore this question, it is pertinent to explore some additional specifics of TAFE teacher demographics in relation to the changes to their work environment. I do this by first highlighting the current TAFE teacher demographic picture and then focusing upon the specific literature that carries further the impact of VET changes on the TAFE teacher.

Nationally, full-time TAFE teachers number approximately 40,000 of a 350,000 strong work force involved in teaching and training within the VET sector (Smith & Keating, 2003). Cully (2004) on the other hand stated that accuracy in relation to the numbers of teachers within the TAFE workforce is hard to determine, noting that in the “2001 Census there were 17,400 TAFE teachers, while state training authorities reported 42,300 (for June 2002)” (p. 29). Cully puts this variance down to the flexible definitions around who are teachers in VET. The average age of a TAFE teacher is reported as 47. There are more women than men. Full-time TAFE teachers report working a average of 43.8 hours of paid work and an average of 7 hours unpaid overtime per week (Kronemann, 2001a). The number of part-time/casual TAFE teachers is less evident. In New South Wales, this number is 15,446 compared to 4,850 full-time teachers ( “NSW casual teachers”, 2004). Data in other Australian states are inconclusive. To suggest that the 1:3 ratio between full-time and part-time casual teaching staff exists in other states is a moot point.

As noted previously, variations on corporate managerialism have taken ground in TAFE colleges and institutions. The propensity to use casual staff as a means of controlling costs through an arguably more flexible workforce has been notable (Blackmore, 2000; Chappell, 2000). The marginalisation of casual TAFE teachers because of their lack of tenure (Childs, 2000) has produced perceptions of exploitation (Grabau, 1999) and teacher union action in response to this issue (Kronemann, 2001a, 2001b). One has to ask, “What level of enthusiasm do these teachers hold in order to perform the critical and creative requirements of their position when their professional life is removed and fractured because of this

marginalised position?” If we are to entertain the findings of union research, the picture appears glum for part-time and full-time TAFE teachers alike.

Kronemann (2001a) surveyed 2000 TAFE teachers who were members of the Australian Education Union. She stated that “budget cuts, and particularly growth through efficiencies, have created enormous pressure within TAFE” (p. 2).

Kronemann reported that the marketisation of TAFE has increased TAFE teacher workloads by forcing involvement in competitive tendering for the delivery of training initiatives, responding to user choice initiatives and new delivery modes. On the changes that have had the most impact on their work, TAFE teachers listed TAFE funding cuts, constant change through restructuring of the work environment, reporting and accountability requirements, cuts to teaching staff, changes to delivery modes and curriculum changes to be the six most influential changes. Eighty-six percent of TAFE teachers reported workload increase, with about the same number stating that stress had increased or significantly increased as a result of these changes. Sixty-eight percent reported an erosion of professional standards, 61% said that professional interaction between staff had been eroded and 50% said that teaching staff/student relations/interactions had been eroded. Fifty-six percent identified family life as having been eroded as a result of changes at work: juggling long hours at work, preparation at home, arriving home exhausted with little time for family responsibilities. “Teachers themselves ... are expressing concerns about the quality of teaching and learning that can be provided in the current environment” (Kronemann, 2001a, p. 5).

More recent research has produced further data on TAFE teacher reactions to the abovementioned changes in their work environments. Black (2005) in a study of head teachers in TAFE suggested that it is unlikely that the majority of TAFE teachers have accommodated the neo vocational discourse. Black, using the term “new managerial discourse” (p. 2), asserted that head teachers privately resisted the discourse whilst publicly accommodating it. He cited data that indicated that these teachers feared retribution and therefore chose not to contest the changes publicly. This position also resonated with the recent findings of Harris, Simons and Clayton (2005), who noted in their research the negative feelings that were expressed by VET practitioners employed by public institutions and the possibility that “[t]his could potentially lead to resistance” (p. 60).

Harris and Simons (2003) noted that:

... much rhetoric has been spoken about the range of factors that are shaping the emerging ‘new’ work of [VET] practitioners .... [H]owever, not as much research attention has been paid to the micro world of practitioners’ work and the ways in which change has impacted on their daily work practices. (p. 1)

This dissertation locates itself within TAFE teachers’ “micro worlds”. It contributes to the building onto the existing literature in three areas: (a) by expanding knowledge on TAFE teacher subjectivities; (b) by contributing to knowledge about the terrain where these subjectivities intersect with neo vocational discourse; and (c) through the positioning of critical spirit as a player at the aforementioned intersection and hence gleaning an understanding of its possible utilitarian value to the building of TAFE teacher identities and to these teachers’ engagement in their world of work.

## **2.4 Chapter summary**

In this chapter, I have reviewed selected literature on identity formation. I have highlighted what perspectives are important to this dissertation – that is, the concept of identity being transitory, multiple and shaped by discourse. Furthermore, this chapter has examined the literature on notions of TAFE teacher identities and the tension that exists among traditional, contemporary and personal positions on who and what TAFE teachers are and what they do. The chapter concluded with the stance that not enough is known about the identities that TAFE teachers build for themselves, nor how these teachers might deal with the public and workplace notions of them that are incongruent with their own notions of themselves. In the next chapter, the conceptual chapter, I explicate the concept of critical spirit, by discussing how it is theorised for this dissertation, and by constructing its importance to the research goal of articulating the possible value that this concept has for TAFE teachers.

## Chapter Three – Conceptualising the study

### 3.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I explore the concept of critical spirit as it helps to conceptualise the present study. Firstly, I begin by examining Dewey's (1933, 1991) conceptualisation around the dispositions of thinkers, as it pertains to a directional focus of critical spirit. Secondly, I delimit what meaning this dissertation assigns to the concepts "critical" and "spirit" by dealing with the terms separately. I then move discussion to critical thinking but only to frame my conceptualisation of the topic, for it is from this background that the concept of critical spirit first emerges. Discussion of what constitutes critical spirit and critical thinking dispositions will follow. The chapter concludes with a synthesis of the study's conceptual framework, including its perceived strengths for framing this study of TAFE teachers' identities and work.

### 3.2 The dispositions of thinkers

In Dewey's famous work *How We Think* (1910, renewed 1933, 1991), he explored thinking and in particular how to think well. Dewey concluded that reflective thought was the key to educational reform. Reflective thought is defined as: "Active, persistent, and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it, and the further conclusions to which it tends" (Dewey, 1991, p. 6).

Thinking is seen as something that is evoked by occasions. Usually this is an occasion that troubles or disturbs one's equilibrium. If a suggestion, as the result of little or no

deliberation, “is once accepted, we have uncritical thinking, the minimum of reflection” (Dewey, 1991, p. 13). To reflect is to turn the thing over in one’s mind looking for additional evidence that will either support the notion “or else make obvious its absurdity and irrelevance” (Dewey, 1991, p. 13).

Two notions that are important in this study begin to emerge here. Firstly, Dewey (1991) articulated what could be described as careless thinking, and secondly, this relates specifically to thinking that is unquestioning in nature. The following quotation hints at the labour required to engage in reflective thinking as opposed to careless thinking: “Reflective thinking is always more or less troublesome because it involves overcoming the inertia that inclines one to accept suggestions at their face value; it involves willingness to endure a condition of mental unrest and disturbance” (Dewey, 1991, p. 13).

Dewey (1991) introduced the idea of educating for good mental habits to overcome this tendency towards careless thinking, by enabling the development of attitudes within the thinker: “[T]he most important factor in the training of good mental habits consists in acquiring the attitude of suspending conclusion .... To maintain the state of doubt and to carry on systematic and protracted inquiry – these are the essentials of thinking” (Dewey, 1991, p. 13).

In answer to the question, “Why do we need good mental habits or attitudes?”, Dewey (1991) called upon the writings of John Locke (1632–1704) in explaining the thought tendencies of people that require constant vigilance and attention – that is, the



“conditions requisite for regulating the operations of inference” (p. 20). These conditions are exhibited in:

- [1] ... those who seldom reason at all, but do and think according to others ....
- [2] those who put passion in the place of reason ... neither use their own, nor hearken to other people’s reason .... [3] those who readily and sincerely follow reason .... [However,] they converse with one sort of men ... read one sort of books ... will not come in hearing but of one sort of notions ...
- (Locke, as cited in Dewey, 1991, p. 23)

Dewey (1991) believed that these are instances of dependence, self-interest and circumscribed experience, which produce dogmatic principles, closed minds, strong passion and a dependence on the authority of others. What follows is Dewey’s statement of what he saw as one of the main purposes of education:

Education has accordingly not only to safeguard an individual against the besetting of erroneous tendencies of his [*sic*] own mind – its rashness, presumption, and preference of what chimes with self interest to objective evidence – but also to undermine and destroy the accumulated and self-perpetuating prejudices of long ages. (Dewey, 1991, p. 25)

In the 1933 revised version of *How We Think*, Dewey added more weight to his perception of those thinking tendencies to avoid. By using the first person plural, Dewey brought the reader closer to share his personal perceptions. He proposed that we tend to:

... believe that which is in harmony with desire ... [;] we jump to conclusions; we fail to examine and test our ideas because of our personal attitudes ... [;]

we generalise ... [;] [we are swayed] by social influences that have actually nothing to do with the truth or falsity of what is asserted and denied. (p. 28)

Dewey (1933) emphasised the latter by suggesting that the regard that we have for those placed in authority (for example, parents and experts) is valuable but possibly misplaced: “they are among the chief forces that determine beliefs apart from and even contrary to the operations of intelligent thought” (p. 29). Being in harmony with others “is in itself a desirable trait” (p. 29), but it can weaken our independent thinking about the issue at hand.

It is at this point that Dewey (1933) returned to the worth of attitudes in relation to thought. He stated:

Because of the importance of attitudes, [the] ability to train thought is not achieved merely by knowledge of the best forms of thought ... [T]here are no set exercises in correct thinking whose repeated performance will cause one to be a good thinker. (p. 29)

Dewey (1933) suggested that information and the skills of thinking are of value but only when they align with the attitude of the thinker;

[N]o individual realizes [the] value [of information and exercises associated with thinking] except as he [*sic passim*] is personally animated by certain dominant attitudes in his own character ... Knowledge of the methods alone will not suffice; there must be the desire, the will, to employ them. The desire is an affair of personal disposition. (pp. 29-30)

The solution to developing the will to deploy reflective thinking, according to Dewey (1933), is the cultivation of relevant attitudes that are favourable to methods of investigation. He highlighted specific attitudes to be developed and “to secure their adoption and use” (p. 30): These are openmindedness, wholeheartedness, and responsibility.

Openmindedness is defined as “freedom from prejudice, partisanship, and such other habits as close the mind and make it unwilling to consider new problems and entertain new ideas” (Dewey, 1933, p. 30). Dewey (1933) emphasised that this does not mean an open mind that lets all manner of thoughts enter. His concept is more judicious in that it is a cultivation of alert curiosity, not one of mental sluggishness. He included the following in his description of what an openminded person might do:

- (a) show and believe in an active desire to listen to more than one side;
- (b) take note of facts from whatever their source; and
- (c) recognise possibilities, even the possibility that one’s dearest belief may be in error. (p. 28)

Dewey recognised that the last point is a battle with self-conceit.

Wholeheartedness is the habit of mind that articulates with the degree to which we immerse ourselves in our thinking about a particular matter. For a person to think wholeheartedly about a matter, “he [*sic passim*] throws himself into it ... ‘heartily’” (Dewey, 1933, p. 31). Dewey noted that in practice, both moral and ethical, it appeared to be a recognised disposition, and he asserted that it should be of equal importance in thinking. By this Dewey is suggesting that frequently it is not, and he uses the example of a student in class as his case in point. Often students give the

outward impression that they are attending wholeheartedly but their “inmost thoughts are concerned with matters more attractive” (p. 31). Dewey suggested that when a person is absorbed single-mindedly in a subject it transforms that person to a place of spontaneity, suggestion, and possibility: “the material holds and buoys his [*sic*] mind up and gives an onward impetus to thinking” (p. 32).

Dewey (1933) talked of intellectual responsibility as the third disposition of good thinking: “It is an attitude that is necessary to win the adequate support of desire for new points of view and new ideas and of enthusiasm for and capacity for absorption in subject matter” (p. 32). Dewey’s position was that intellectual responsibility is acting with integrity, by accepting beliefs that have been attained through exploring and accepting the consequences of holding them, in order “to be willing to adopt these consequences when they follow reasonably from any position already taken” (p. 32). Not doing so, Dewey warned, is to split the mind, blur insight and weaken the mind’s grasp because it attempts to carry two inconsistent mental standards. This produces a loss of the basic reasons for holding onto the belief in the first place: “[P]ower to carry a thing through to its end or conclusion is dependent upon the existence of the attitude of intellectual responsibility” (p. 33).

Dewey (1933) stated: “[These] are not the only attitudes that are important in order that the habits of thinking in a reflective way may be developed” (p. 33). There are other attitudes and traits that have a moral position. Dewey talked of these dispositional aspects of reflective thought as being a:

[R]eadiness to consider in a thoughtful way the subjects that do come within the range of experience – a readiness that contrasts strongly to the disposition

to pass judgment on the basis of mere custom, tradition, prejudice, etc., and thus shun the task of thinking. (p. 34)

In the following quotation, Dewey (1933) clearly put dispositions in a primary position with the technique or skill of reflective thought coming second: “If we were compelled to make a choice between these personal attitudes and knowledge about the principles of logical reasoning together with some degree of technical skill in manipulating special logical processes, we should decide the former” (p. 34).

Dewey’s academic and intellectual clout helps to establish that this project can use conceptualisations around the dispositions of thinkers to gain. The fact that through his theorising Dewey has influenced contemporary educational thought with many perspectives around educational reform could be considered as a powerful single evidentiary reason, yet it is the application of some of his ideas as the beginning of the conceptualisation of what is central to this thesis that adds further meaning to this research endeavour.

The link between a focus on the dispositions of thinkers and this study of TAFE teachers’ identities and work is to highlight certain dispositions as contributors to the concept of critical spirit (Oxman-Michelli, 1992; Siegel, 1988). As introduced in the first chapter, and expanded upon later in this chapter, notions of critical spirit contain dispositional markers named as elements. *Openmindedness*, *intellectual responsibility* and *wholeheartedness* are three of these elements. *Independence of mind* and *respect for others* are the remaining two. In keeping with a poststructuralist view of discourse as being central to this study, these five elements are used to position critical spirit as

a discourse. Hence the use of these dispositions as fixed, internal markers of someone who has critical spirit as part of her or his identity gives way to conceptions around the possible value of engaging explicitly with a critical spirit discourse and the positioning of various subjectivities that results. This therefore makes an exploration of the nature/nurture and ‘born or made’ debates about internal characteristics redundant. What I wish to highlight as central to how I use the notion of critical spirit (in particular, the five elements) is to consider it in my conceptualising around the identity building tasks of discourses. In this project, this is about certain TAFE teachers being recognised as “meaning and meaningful in certain ways” (Gee, 2005, p. 7) through discourses, and the possible value that notions of critical spirit might contribute to this recognition.

In this section, I have emphasised the importance of conceptions about the dispositions of thinkers by positioning it with Dewey’s (1933, 1991) work on dispositional thinkers. In what follows, I deepen this exploration by expanding the articulation and justification of the conceptual framework to be deployed. First, I deal with the concepts of critical and spirit separately. Second, I draw on critical thinking to locate critical spirit within its scholarship. Third, I conclude with the notion of critical spirit scholarship contributing to a critical spirit discourse.

### **3.3 Conceptualising ‘critical’**

Interpretations of the term “critical” are many. Words used to define it include:

finding fault, careful examination, crucial decision-making, indispensable, essential and perilous. The term is important to this thesis in its corporeal connection to being a

particular type of critic (critic as a fair-minded and just identity), and the part that it plays in offering critique.

Central to discussion of the term “critical” is critical theory (Freire, 1970, 1973; Habermas, 1972, 1974; Mezirow, 1991). To examine all the themes of critical in the world of critical theory is beyond the capacity of this study’s conceptual framework. I therefore turn to the work of Stephen Brookfield, who provides a useful conceptual overview.

For Brookfield (2005), the critical tradition draws upon Marxist scholarship to seek to understand how we learn to perceive and challenge the *status quo*. A critical approach is learning “how to perceive and challenge dominant ideology, unmask power, contest hegemony, overcome alienation, pursue liberation, reclaim reason and practice democracy” (Brookfield, 2005, p. 2).

Brookfield (2005) helped in the understanding of notions of critical, which arose from critical theory, by identifying the four traditions of criticality. These are:

- (a) Ideological critique, attempting to recognise the unquestioning ways in which people readily accept the dominant and unjust ideologies of human practices. For example, Freire’s (1970) work around the concept of banking education and conscientisation presents well-known examples of hegemonic belief systems that maintain inequity.
- (b) The psychotherapeutic tradition, where criticality is achieved when the adult moves beyond the inhibitions of childhood to acquire critical awareness. For example, scholars like Gould (1990) and Rogers (1961) see

an awakening of understanding of self by adults as they begin to realise that their identity as authentic adults depends on emancipating themselves from childhood inhibitions. This view of the critical growth of self is connected to notions of social change based upon the principles of a just society as exemplified in the notions of promoting citizenship as articulated by Habermas (1974).

- (c) The notions of critical in relation to skilled argument and analysis. Acting critically under this tradition is, for example, to reason with warrant and make informed judgments, and to be critical of what might be put forward as the truth. This tradition is embedded in the critical thinking literature; see for example Ennis (as cited in Siegel, 1988) and McPeck (1981).
- (d) Pragmatist constructivism, as a critical tradition that emphasises the combining of the construction of reality by ourselves through our interpretations of our experiences with experimentation through democracy “to bring about better social forms”. (Brookfield, 2005, p. 15)

Brookfield pointed out that in this tradition the notion of critical lies in the preference for experiential learning with adults as being one choice of option in achieving critical understanding of their role as socially just actors.

The emancipatory nature of these traditions of criticality is important to my approach to this research – in particular, the centrality of the reclaiming of reason for socially equitable ends. If we turn to the Greek root of the word “critical”, *kritikós*, we acquire the meaning “one who discerns”. This suggests one who offers observation or comment in a particular manner. In this instance, the manner is deemed credible if it is constructive. Hence ‘critical’ will include the offering of constructive criticism:



“The process of offering valid and well-reasoned opinions about the work of others with the intention of helping the recipient rather than an oppositional attitude” (Farlex, 2005, p. 1). Embedded in this interpretation of ‘critical’ is a sense of “phronesis; that is, a prudent understanding of what should be done in practical situations” (Carr & Kemmis, 1986, p. 132). To this I add Habermas’s reiterations of the utility of criticality as “providing practical orientation about what is right and just in a given situation” (Habermas, 1974, p. 44).

The ‘critical’ that emerges from the above discussion on critical theory inhabits several places in relation to this study. Three important places are: (a) the critical components of identities as built by participant TAFE teachers; what they use to build claims about their sense of selves as actors in contributing to and promoting the citizenship of those whom they teach; (b) their critical examination of the relationships that they have with their respective TAFE institutes; and (c) the critical view of themselves as they put into practice an orientation, influenced by notions of a critical spirit, in deciding for themselves what is appropriate engagement as TAFE teachers. Poststructurally, this has less to do with helping to make clear the connections between the use of language and the exercise of power as with the focus of critical discourse analysis (Thompson, 2002), and more to do with the diversity of response that emerges from the participants of this study; particularly in relation to their interactions with discourses, and their important/critical constructions of their subjectivities and their relationships at work. This position is resonant with situatedness, difference, and plurality.

### 3.4 Conceptualising ‘spirit’

When the word “spirit” is used, it usually connotes something that is indistinct, intangible, a slippery notion or the essence of an experience or action. George Berkeley’s (1952) essay on *The Principles of Human Knowledge* told us that spirit is that which perceives; spirit is not part of ideas themselves but something quite distinct. He explained that “the essence of any idea consists of being perceived” (p. 413). “A spirit is one simple active being – as it perceives ideas it is called *understanding*, and as it produces or otherwise operates around them it is called *will*” (p. 418; *emphasis in original*).

Therefore spirit appears to have a place in understanding and action, yet spirit itself cannot be perceived. It is only by the effect that it produces that it can be identified. Berkeley (1952) wrote: “Such is the nature of spirit, on that which acts, that it cannot be of itself perceived but only by the effects which it produceth” (p. 418).

Thus, this non-quantifiable substance appears in various constructs that relate to its impact upon will and action. This is evident in spirit’s various manifestations – for example, human spirit’s triumph over adversity (Frankl, 1984); in reference to acknowledging degrees of vivacious engagement with the world – a spirited performer (Preston, 2005); and to denote some connection with concepts of deity (Turner & Dreger, 2004) and growth in soul (Scott, 2006).

Spirit’s importance in relation to describing what is uniquely human is further exemplified by popular writers and the media. In Harvey Mansfield’s (2006) controversial book *Manliness*, he talked of male emasculation at the hands of the

feminist movement, and used the Greek word “*thermos*” to equate manliness with the notion of animal spiritedness. What is arguably considered as quintessentially Australian is highlighted in the popular media by using spirit to help define unique acts of greatness. The term “Anzac Spirit” is connected with acts of mateship, bravery, questioning authority and the survival of a nation (Williams, 2006).

The word “spirit” in this thesis has a specific meaning. It implies intelligence, consciousness and sentience. Not unlike Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Spirit* (Hegel, 1977), in which spirit develops from consciousness, self-consciousness and reason, spirit in this instance is considered as an ever-evolving awareness, an act of mind. Furthermore, I add to the above conceptualisation of spirit, one that aligns with intelligence, consciousness, and sentience the dispositional concepts of resilience and hardiness. Human resilience, Bonanno (2004) stated, “reflects the ability to maintain a stable equilibrium .... [R]esilience is typically discussed in terms of protective factors that foster the development of positive outcomes and healthy personality characteristics” (p. 20).

Resonating with resilience is hardiness. Hardiness appears to manifest in cognitive, social and physiological ways to protect and enhance health and performance in people (Maddi, 1994; Wiebe & McCallum, 1986). Maddi (1999) highlighted hardiness as a personality disposition. His empirical studies have produced findings that claim that the higher the hardiness levels the greater the tendency to experience commitment, control and challenge, and the reduced likelihood of enacting avoidance. In this instance, therefore, spirit is put forward as an experience of mind and disposition.

Thus far, I have examined notions of thinking and thinker disposition, critical and spirit. I now wish to begin considering their convergence. Critical thinking is presented as the means to corral these concepts so that through their juxtaposition and interrelatedness they lose their insulation and begin to reveal what is useful for this journey into the inner terrain of the TAFE teacher.

### **3.5 Critical thinking**

‘Critical’ and ‘spirit’ reside as neighbours in critical thinking scholarship. This section provides a summary of the relevant areas of that scholarship and specifies where critical spirit is articulated. Simply, this scholarship speaks of critical spirit as that which relates to the internal disposition of one who thinks critically. The irony is that readers may find that their understanding of critical thinking is still slightly out of focus. This is because there appears to be no decisive definition of critical thinking.

The debate as to what is, and what constitutes, critical thinking waxes and wanes. Generally, it is seen as dealing with problems through careful thinking. Positions such as those articulated by McPeck (1981), Ennis (1987), Paul (1992), Brookfield (1987) and Siegel (1988), who occupy different spaces on the critical thinking continuum, have been chosen as examples of the many views on critical thinking.

McPeck (1981) carefully avoided a definition of critical thinking, citing its elusiveness as the reason. Suggesting that “the concept is overworked and under analysed” (p. 2), McPeck took the position that critical thinking is to “think more about something *specific*” (*emphasis in original*). The specific is emphasised, in that

critical thinking is present in relation to some activity or subject that gives rise to being thought about in critical ways only. What critical thinking involves is “a certain scepticism or suspension of assent, towards a given statement, established norm or mode of doing things” (p. 6). McPeck saw critical thinking’s scepticism as different from thinking in a contrary manner by suggesting that the scepticism is both judicious and reflective, in the sense that one demonstrates a level of deliberation that is capable of offering an alternative perspective. McPeck stated that critical thinking is:

... the disposition and skill to do X in such a way that E (the available evidence from a field) is suspended (or temporarily rejected) as sufficient to establish the truth or viability of P (some proposition) or action within X.  
(p. 13)

Emphasised in McPeck’s (1981) rendition of critical thinking is its application to the particular. In discussing the application of logic, McPeck argued that we need specialised knowledge of the field in question before we can appropriately apply logic successfully. He cited Toulmin (1958, as cited in McPeck, 1981, p. 33) in his assertion that there are as many logics as there are distinguishable fields. “Therefore for the purposes of critical thinking we should consider each field of inquiry to have its own peculiar epistemology ... [which suggests that there is] no clear single or monolithic route to effective critical thinking for all” (pp. 33-34). By contrast, Robert Ennis’s (1987) view of critical thinking does not directly connect with specialised knowledge. It does offer a prescription of dispositions, skills and abilities. It is to his definition that I now turn.

From Ennis's (1987) perspective of critical thinking as both practical and reflective comes his working definition: "Critical thinking is reasonable reflective thinking that is focused on deciding what to believe or do" (p. 10). Ennis believed that critical thinking is not necessarily embedded in subject matter areas, and that its teaching can be separated from content by emphasising its thinking component. In his taxonomy of critical thinking dispositions and abilities, Ennis showcased what he believed were the significant features of critical thinking – for example:

- (a) dispositions such as seeking reasons, being open-minded, and using one's critical thinking abilities, and
- (b) abilities such as formulating questions, analysing arguments, inference and deduction. (p. 25)

His belief is that his taxonomy "forms the basis for a thinking-across-the-curriculum program" (p. 25) as well as for a stand-alone critical thinking course.

Richard Paul (1992) offered contributions from the area of philosophy, and reminded us "that critical thinking is a process of thinking to a standard" (Huitt, 1998, p. 1).

Paul's (1992) definition is three tiered:

- Critical thinking: 1) Disciplined, self-directed thinking which exemplifies the perfections of thinking appropriate to a particular mode or domain of thinking. 2) Thinking that displays mastery of intellectual skills and abilities. 3) The art of thinking about your thinking while you are thinking in order to make your thinking better: more clear, more accurate, or more defensible. (p. 643)

What is evident in this definition is its attention to domains, skills and abilities. These elements within the definition align well with McPeck (1981) and Ennis (1987). The

meta perspective of thinking about thinking for greater quality is distinctive in that it takes reflection to greater depths.

Paul (1992) believed that the types of problems to which critical thinking applies are those with “conceptual messiness” (p. 269). These are problems that cannot be solved or settled within one frame of reference. These problems have links to our values. They are “multilogical[;] ... more than one incompatible logic can be advanced for their settlement” (p. 269) – for example, how to deal with adolescent pregnancy or what are acceptable parenting practices. The art of critical thinking from the ‘thinking about thinking’ perspective encourages individuals to move outside their own frame of reference. Paul put forward the position that we automatically identify and align ourselves with our own beliefs and experiences, so much so that any questioning by others to the contrary is viewed as a personal attack. Paul saw this as a default mode of thinking which is spontaneous, egocentric and prone to irrational beliefs. Critical thinking, in what Paul called the strong sense, enables individuals to “explicate, understand and critique their own deepest prejudices, biases and misconceptions, ... [and] to discover and contest their own egocentric and sociocentric tendencies” (p. 280). Critical thinking is both dialogical and dialectical thinking (pp. 644–645), in which the individual embarks upon seeking understanding through dialogue encompassing different frames of reference and the comparison of these different frames in fair-minded critique.

Brookfield (1987) sought to move critical thinking out of the hallowed halls of higher education and into the everyday lives of adults, so that they too could become critically reflective as citizens. Brookfield did not attempt to define critical thinking

but articulated it as “reflecting on the assumptions underlying our and others’ ideas and actions, and contemplating alternative ways of thinking and living” (p. x). He saw this as being an important way to become an adult (or become adult). He emphasised the importance of coming to conclusions and decisions ourselves by not relinquishing our responsibility to others: “We become actively engaged in creating our social worlds. In short [,] we take the reality of democracy seriously” (p. x).

Why is critical thinking important? To paraphrase Brookfield (1987), when we critically think we develop an awareness about:

- (a) the assumptions that we and others use to think;
- (b) the context in which thinking and action take place;
- (c) alternative ways of thinking and action;
- (d) the exercising of democratic control in terms of its relationship to taking initiative in the workplace to innovate;
- (e) potential bias in our world; and
- (f) the means to encourage tolerance of diversity. (pp. 7-9)

Our critical thinking therefore “involves calling into question the assumptions underlying our customary, habitual ways of thinking and acting, and then being ready to think and act differently on the basis of this critical questioning” (Brookfield, 1987, p. 1).

Brookfield (1987) positioned critical thinking as a developmental task necessary for the developing person, yet also necessary for maintaining a healthy democracy. He suggested that much of the critical thinking curriculum is associated with the contexts of schools, colleges and universities. He pointed out that there is little evidence to



suggest that this thinking is transferred to the outside environment. The problems that face adults are unlike those presented within the critical thinking teaching curriculum. For Brookfield, adults are critically thinking whenever they ask the question “Why?” (p. 4); for example, workers who seek to change outdated work practices, citizens who ask awkward questions of their politicians and spouses who look for new ways of constructing more satisfying relationships.

Brookfield (1987) asked the question, “What characteristics do we look for in critical thinkers?” (p. 5). The answer he provided explicitly informs this study’s application of critical spirit. Critical thinkers display an active engagement in:

... creating and re-creating aspects of their personal, workplace and political lives .... [T]hey exude the sense that life is full of possibilities ... see the future as open and malleable, not closed and fixed ... [are] self-confident about their potential for changing aspects of their world ... [and exhibit] an acceptance of a diversity of values, behaviours and social structures ... and a sense of humility [that others have a similar certainty about the world but that this sense comes] from ideas, values, and actions that are contrary to [their] own. (p. 5)

Critical thinkers:

- (a) Continually question; they are dubious of universal truths, of total certainty. Therefore critical thinking is a process, not an outcome.
- (b) Manifest critical thinking in various ways. For some it occurs almost internally; there are few external indicators that they are critically thinking. Brookfield (1987) suggested that the evidence of this will

occur only in their writing or talking. (The methodological implication of this important point is taken up in Chapter Four.) For others, critical thinking is manifested by making deliberate choices around departing from their normal/habitual ways of doing things.

- (c) Are moved to critical thinking by the positive as well as the negative events of their lives. The suggestion that traumatic events prompt thinking that changes paradigms does not stand alone. Unexpected positive events such as falling in love, experiencing new work role success and receiving positive feedback from colleagues can propel us to new vantage points where we reflect upon the usefulness of old paradigms.
- (d) Are emotive. Their critical thinking is not a sterile or purely cognitive activity. Critical thinkers feel fear, trepidation, anxiety, resentment and confusion, especially at the prospect of having some closely held value scrutinised and possibly also at the point where they realise that in order to move on they will have to search for another value, or overhaul the existing one. Conversely, critical thinkers experience joy, elation and sheer relief at the point where they break through into new ways of thinking and doing.

It is on the basis of these characteristics that Brookfield (1987) nominated what he believes are the components of critical thinking:

- (a) Identifying and challenging assumptions, especially those taken for granted.

- (b) Challenging the nature of the context from which these assumptions emerge.
- (c) Imagining and exploring possibilities.
- (d) Being reflectively sceptical. “[R]eflective scepticism” (p. 9) is not taking ideas or opinions at face value – even the ‘fixes’ sometimes advertised to cure the ills identified within a social, political or cultural systems. It is being “sceptical of claims to universal truth or ultimate explanations” (p. 9).

As I leave Brookfield (1987), I wish to emphasise one of his main premises: “On a very practical level, practically all adults function in some way as critical thinkers” (p. 9). This is central to the path of this research. I hold that TAFE teachers do in varying degrees critically think, and therefore, by way of association, that they have a relationship to critical spirit.

Harvey Siegel (1988) stated, “To be a critical thinker is to be appropriately moved by reasons. To be a rational person is to believe and act on the basis of reasons” (p. 32). Siegel claimed that therefore education should be aimed at fostering rationality and the development of rational people. When faced with choice, judgement or evaluation, the critical thinker seeks reasons upon which to base decisions. It is in the seeking of reasons where Siegel believes that we connect with and commit to principles. Principles are the general rules behind the reasons; they determine the relevance and strength of reasons (Scheffler, 1973). In order for a reason to count for action or judgement, the doer/thinker needs to account for that reason through commitment to some principle. Siegel likened this to a licensure (p. 33), the granting

of licenses to practice an important skill, task or profession. He warned that principles need to be applied consistently to cases, or otherwise reasons lose their genuineness and can thereby be called into question.

So Siegel (1988) joined reasons with principles and consistency, and therefore articulated critical thinking as “principled thinking” (p. 34). Because this thinking shows consistency with its application of principles, Siegel characterised the critical thinker as non-arbitrary, being fair and impartial in judgment and action. Siegel used principles to reduce the possibility of the critical thinker consistently acting partially and unfairly, by applying a principle that has a different moral voice. Scheffler (1973) offered an answer: “[I]f I could judge reasons differently when they bear on my interests, or disregard my principles when they conflict with my own advantage, I should have no principles at all” (p. 76).

Siegel (1988) made a distinction among the types of principles used to warrant reasons. He highlighted subject-specific principles as those used to assess reasons within a given context or knowledge domain (non generalisable), and subject-neutral principles that are “general principles which apply across a wide variety of contexts” (p. 34) (for example, the principle of logic). Siegel claimed that neither of the above principles can be ruled out with regard to their relevance to critical thinking.

Siegel (1988) believed that the assessment of reasons is only part of being a critical thinker. “Equally important is that the ... [person has] an appropriate attitude toward the activity of critical thinking ... the ‘critical attitude’ or ‘critical spirit’ component” (Siegel, 1988, p. 38).

As is evident in the above discussion, there are two main elements of critical thinking: the application of critical thinking and associated skills; and the willingness to apply critical thinking. It is this willingness that appears to be the attitude, character and/or disposition of the critical thinker. It is to the latter of these that I now turn.

McPeck (1981) and Ennis (1987) identify the willingness to apply critical thinking as a collection of dispositions which Paul (1992) calls the apparent paradox of “rational passion” (p. 282). Rational passion is seen as the means through which we prevent ourselves from being too wrapped up in our own view of the world. Paul says that it is: “A passionate drive for clarity, accuracy, and fair-mindedness, a fervour for getting to the bottom of things...[and] an intense aversion to contradiction, [and] sloppy thinking...” (p. 282).

Brookfield (1987) acknowledged the critical thinker first, and critical thinking a close second. He made explicit the *actor* in this dualism and her or his action in and on the world through critical thinking. The actor is involved in the recreation of his/her world through engaging in a particular way – an engagement that is: motivated by the seeking of reasons, purposively questioning givens, both implicit and explicit, and inclusive of significant affect. The critical thinker thinks and feels possibilities.

Dewey (1933) emphasised the attitudes of a ‘good’ thinker, whilst Siegel (1988) too emphasised the importance of these attitudes and began the use of the label “critical spirit” to refer to the collection of attitudes, habits of mind and dispositions of critical thinkers. The next section expands on this idea of dispositions within the critical thinker as critical spirit.

### 3.6 Critical spirit

In an earlier section on conceptualising ‘spirit’, I argued that attitudes, tendencies, and propensity align with this idea of spirit. Let me reiterate that it is neither abilities nor skills that are the focus of this research. This is why I have delimited the discussion on critical thinking to what is pertinent to critical spirit. Rather, it is the notions of attitude, personal trait and/or character, and the part that they play in a discourse that possibly motivates the person to avoid “... thoughtless intellectual compliance and passivity” (Oxman-Michelli, 1992, p. 1), that are central to my focus.

As mentioned above, Siegel (1988) placed the propensity to engage in reasoned assessment (critical thinking) as being related to a thinker’s attitudes: “In order to be a critical thinker, a person must have ... certain attitudes, dispositions, habits of mind, and character traits, which together may be labelled the ... ‘critical spirit’” (p. 39).

This is having the ability not only to engage in reasoned assessment but also to be disposed to it: “A critical thinker must have a *willingness* to conform judgment and action to principle, not simply an ability to conform” (Siegel, 1988, p. 39; *emphasis in original*). Siegel went on:

One who has a critical attitude has a certain *character* as well as certain skills: a character which is inclined to seek, and to base judgment and action upon, reason; which rejects partiality and arbitrariness; which is committed to the objective evaluation of relevant evidence; and which values such aspects of critical thinking as intellectual honesty, justice to evidence, sympathetic and impartial consideration of interests, objectivity, and impartiality. A critical attitude demands ... a commitment to seeking reasons ... [and] impartial

judgment [which possibly] runs counter to self-interest. (p. 39; *emphasis in original*)

Siegel (1988) emphasised that even critical thinkers themselves are not immune to their critical attitude. Those exhibiting critical spirit also put their own convictions on the line. Critical attitude is valuing good reasoning and “being disposed to believe and act on its basis” (Siegel 1988, p. 39). These “attitudes, dispositions, habits of mind, and character traits constitutive of critical spirit are general and subject-neutral” (Siegel, 1988, p. 152). Consequently, they stand as counter arguments to critical thinking being discipline specific. Yet, what is highlighted by acknowledging the role played by dispositions, attitudes and habits of mind is that the distinction between cognition and affect is not tenable, which is the possible paradox surrounding Paul’s (1992) notion of “rational passion”. Nevertheless, the life of a critical thinker is both emotion and cognitive skill (Siegel, 1988). Peters (1973) concluded that “[r]eason is a passionate business” (p. 101). Hence the critical thinker does not just act in certain ways; “a critical thinker *is*, in addition, a certain sort of person” (Siegel, 1988, p. 41; *emphasis in original*). The critical thinker still has critical spirit even whilst not engaged in reasoned assessment. Siegel suggested that, when we make claim to a critical attitude (or spirit) as part of our identity to foster critical thinking, we take on the development of a certain sort of person. Barnett (1997) calls this person the critical being. The importance of this position is not its implication of essentialism, that critical thinkers are somehow superior beings, but that it contributes to a focus on the building of identities that might result from an engagement with the perspectives on critical spirit that contribute to it as a discourse.

Missimer (1990) took issue with Seigel's (1988) view of critical thinking. Labelling this the "Character View" (p. 145), she suggested that its "[v]ersions ... have been advanced without much analysis" (p. 145). Missimer cited as her reasons:

1. The lists of attitudes, dispositions and character traits are hard to pin down. Some concepts interrelate and others lack deeper investigation. Some concepts appear to be characterised differently; for example, "can a critical thinker be consistent but not have aversion to contradiction, or [have] love of truth but not be disgusted?" (p. 146).
2. Traits are put forward as ideals to strive for, a future for which no evidence is presented.
3. When an examination is made using a Character View of the biographies of great thinkers ranging from John Stuart Mill to Sigmund Freud, evidence of venal characteristics is obtained. Dispositions, attitudes and traits such as moral and intellectual superiority, anti-Semitism, hot-headedness, single-mindedness and a willingness to distort facts to prove theoretical points were identified. These are not included in a Character View of critical thinking. To suggest that these great thinkers are not critical thinkers "lands one in some difficulties" (p. 148).
4. Ethical theorising appears missing from the Character View (p. 151), which suggests that the morals of critical thinking be accepted uncritically.

Missimer (1990) put her hand up for the "Skills View" (p. 147) of critical thinking, which emphasised a set of skills only. It is without the messiness of character perspectives, is theoretically simple, leaves ethics to the scrutiny of the applier of the critical thinking skills and resonates with the historical evidence derived from great



thinkers who in Missimer's view did not necessarily exhibit some elements of the Character View yet who were, as is evidenced by their greatness, critical thinkers.

Siegel (1993) responded to Missimer's (1990) "Perhaps by skill alone", by dealing with the above four reasons for dissent separately. On the first, Siegel agrees with Missimer (1990) by acknowledging that not enough is known about the character view of critical thinking – specifically, the difficulty involved in quantifying the attitudes, dispositions and habits of mind. Siegel suggested that having the dispositions is a matter of degree; "To what degree or how much is enough?" is a question for further research.

On the second point, again Siegel (1993) agreed with Missimer (1990), that the Character View's different theorists offer several versions of the ideal traits and dispositions. This makes the Character View hard to pin down. But this, according to Siegel, is no reason to abandon the Character View, as it is similar to the variations that theorists offer with regard to the skills of critical thinking. Multiple simultaneous possibilities are seen as the key.

With regard to the third proposition of Missimer's (1990) dissent, that great thinkers displayed venal characteristics and therefore cannot under the Character View be considered as critical thinkers, Siegel (1993) responds by asserting that there is nothing to suggest in the Character View that a critical thinker has to be moral. The character traits that are important are those that contribute to the process of critical thinking. If some traits or dispositions influence one to be blind, for example, to "a frank acknowledgment of fallibility" (Siegel, 1993, p. 166), their inclusion in a

Character View could be under question. What Missimer has done, argues Siegel, is to focus upon some great thinkers' venal traits that have little relevance to the holders' critical thinking ability. Siegel stated: "That persons of venal character have sometimes thought well, and produced exceptionally high quality thought, is a result that proponents of the Character View can happily accept" (1993, p. 168).

Missimer's final view is that the Character View of critical thinking "smuggle[s] in moral prescriptions" (1990, p. 145), therefore leaving ethics outside the surveillance of critical thought. Siegel (1993) claimed this as a false premise and stated that in the Character View "*everything* is open to critical thought and 'free theorizing', including the nature of critical thinking and the ethical dimensions thereof" (1993, p. 168; *emphasis in original*).

Garrison (1999) added a more recent voice of dissent in relation to Siegel's (1993) views. Garrison's main criticism pertains to his belief that the body/mind distinction between critical thinking and critical spirit offers a dualistic perspective that is confusing and untenable. Garrison suggested: "Critical spirit and skill are simply two aspects of the same integrated function" (p. 213). He believed that critical spirit is too ethereal and is not in itself a mover of anything. Critical thinking according to Garrison is embodied. He used Dewey (1933) to support this by suggesting that "habits involve thinking, feeling and acting ... [and] constitute a single, unified, organically functioning self" (Garrison, 1999, p. 214). Garrison sought from Siegel a clear account of how critical spirit can move us from what 'is' to what 'ought' to be done without embodiment.

In order to make sense of the need to distinguish between critical spirit and reasoned assessment, Siegel (2001) responded to this challenge by using a common situation where a person who critically thinks fails to do so for some reason.

Many factors may interfere with a person's exercise of her ability to think critically ... hunger, fatigue, self-interest etc. This is already reason enough to mark the distinction between someone's ability to critically think and her actually doing so .... But a further, educationally crucial reason for doing so is that a person might fail to think critically because she lacks the 'critical spirit' or 'critical attitude' – she might ... fail to value or care about conforming her belief and action to the epistemic force of relevant reasons. (p. 578)

Siegel (2001) suggested that this is reason enough for including such a distinction within any account of critical thinking, and that if we are to enhance our understanding and application of critical thinking we must strive to encourage not only the valuing of reasons but also the development of dispositions to engage in the activity. Regardless of the correctness of Garrison's (1999) position, "[It] does not erase the distinction between having the ability to do something, and actually doing it" (Siegel, 2001, p. 578). Siegel argued that it is not a case of disembodiment or dualism but rather a case of recognising the way in which critical spirit "causally contributes to the determination of belief/action" (p. 581).

In the discussion above I have reviewed the position of Siegel (2001) and traced his responses to those who have been critical of his support of critical spirit. What has emerged from his and his dissenters' writings is the expressed need to continue an exploration of critical spirit, that is – “ ... the need for further exploration of the

dispositions, attitudes, habits of mind and character traits constitutive of the critical spirit” (Siegel, 1993, p. 164). Further exploration within this field has been limited to some additional conceptual movement and the examination of dispositions from a quantitative perspective. It is to these that I now turn.

In relation to the above discussion, this study is located more closely to the notions of Siegel (1993) and his conceptualisations about critical spirit and the value that these have for their contributions toward a critical spirit discourse. The following discussion covers the ground where the previously mentioned conceptualisations of critical spirit are brought together and given substance as the elements of critical spirit.

Oxman-Michelli (1992), who drew her concept of critical spirit from several sources, such as Dewey (1933), Paul (1992) and Siegel (1988), identified five major elements:

Independence of mind, in the sense of intellectual autonomy, self-understanding, self-confidence, and courage;

Openmindedness, in the sense of alert curiosity, attentiveness, the spontaneous outreaching for alternative perspectives, intellectual flexibility and the willingness to suspend judgment;

Wholeheartedness, that is, enthusiasm and perseverance in pursuit of an intellectual goal;

Intellectual responsibility, in the sense of objectivity, integrity and humility, as well as confidence in and a commitment to the process and the consequences of reason, and

Respect for others, in terms of sensitivity, empathy, fairmindedness, readiness to listen, [and] willingness to consider the other's point of view. (Oxman-Michelli, 1992, p. 5)

These, according to Oxman-Michelli (1992), are the “tendencies that motivate, or ‘animate’ a person to think” (p. i) and, if we focus upon critical thinking as critical spirit, we focus attention on what motivates the critical thinker. Oxman-Michelli supported her position by aligning with Dewey (1933), who suggested that attitude towards questioning and reasoning should take precedence over the skill itself. This is “[the] willingness to approach ideas, events, and issues in a thoughtful, critical manner” (Dewey, 1933, p. 4).

A critical thinker could be said to have both intellectual skills that constitute critical thinking (according to whatever academic account) and a readiness and a willingness to use them. The latter is a disposition of the mind, attitudes and tendencies that motivate a person to think (Oxman-Michelli, 1992).

Oxman-Michelli (1992) made a distinction between the critical thinker and the intellectually compliant and passive thinker. She suggested that when a person, believing that a situation warrants more than just routine or emotional response, makes a critical judgement with a critical attitude to investigate further and asks penetrating questions, s/he is more than likely operating from a cognitive style that may attract the label of critical thinking. A critical thinker avoids “... thoughtless intellectual compliance and passivity” (p. 4).

I argue that at critical spirit's centre are character, personality, motives, values and attitudes that can contribute to the making of identities, more so than the skill of critical thinking. This is not meant to de-emphasise critical thinking but to suggest that one may have difficulty in developing critical thinking skills without identities that are somehow related to critical spirit. Oxman-Michelli (1992) asked what would be the point of learning critical thinking skills if one were not going to use them. Therefore she contended that critical thinking skills can develop in a meaningful way only if they are done so alongside the development of dispositions, and that "[d]ispositions will develop only as they are welcomed, encouraged, supported and rewarded" (p. 6).

Before we continue, I believe that I need to remind the reader of the important position that I take in regard to this study and the above discussion on critical spirit. Thus far, this talk of critical spirit as a disposition alludes to the conceptualisations of identity that side with the structuralist position of identity being internal, mostly fixed and imbued with agency, and that somehow an encouragement of the development of these dispositions will foster the development of critical thinkers. This may well be a possibility, but I do not claim to take this classical stance on identity formation. As mentioned in Chapter Two, this project takes a poststructuralist vantage on identity formation, which highlights the role that discourse plays in the formation of identity and acknowledges a multiple of subjectivities that can be built by individuals as a result of the discourses in which they are immersed. I therefore maintain that my interest is in conceptualising critical spirit as a discourse, a task to which I turn in Chapter Four. In this positioning I include the notions discussed in the body of this

chapter, such as dispositions, attitudes, character and value positions, and the identified elements of critical spirit.

The remainder of this chapter acknowledges the diminutive body of quantitative research that has contributed to the dispositions and habits of critical thinkers. This acknowledges the role that positivist positions play in contributing to a discourse of critical spirit.

Facione, Facione and Giancarlo (1997) stated: “To be effective learners and successful workers we must be willing and able to make informed, fair-minded judgements in contexts of relative uncertainty about what to believe and what to do in certain situations” (p. 67). These authors posit that to be willing and able to critique situations and adjust methods of doing according to the results of the critique is a must. They continue with the strong suggestion that this ‘must’, which they term “critical thinking”, is a necessary habit to form if we are to be successful in our dynamic world where “yesterday’s verities are yesterday’s misconceptions” (p. 67).

Facione, Facione and Giancarlo (1997) went on to emphasise this willingness as serving to motivate one towards engaging in critical thinking:

We must [have people] who have the *motivating habits of mind* to be willing, if not eager, to engage in thinking ... asking tough questions ... judicious in making decisions ... [and] mentally orientated toward following reasons and evidence ... [in] fair-minded engagement in problem-solving, decision-making and professional judgment. (p. 68; *emphasis added*)

Verplanken and Faes (1999) stated that “habits can be considered as automatic acts in the sense that they operate outside our awareness” (p. 594). This is clearly associated with behaviour. But habits can develop in line with attitudes and intentions (Ouellette & Wood, 1998). In this instance, habits of mind are set apart from habits that relate to skill. The essence of habits of mind aligns with dispositions (Facione, Facione & Giancarlo, 1997). In this case, it is those dispositions that influence the tendency to think in a particular way – to think critically. Thus, although similar to behavioural habits – for example, habits associated with keeping oneself healthy and with buying and eating fruit – there are certain habitual behaviours that would be expected to be enacted regularly by the critical thinker – for example, acknowledging personal bias and focusing on the specifics of arguments. Facione, Facione and Giancarlo believed that dispositions towards critical thinking are the habits of mind that motivate people to “use thinking as their main problem solving strategy ... a consistent internal motivation to employ critical thinking abilities in judging what to believe or do” (pp. 3-4).

As is evident in my above citations, notable empirical researchers into critical thinking dispositions include Facione (1990), Facione and Facione (1992, 1994, 1996), Facione, Giancarlo, Facione and Gainen (1995) and Facione, Facione and Giancarlo (1994, 1997, 2000). Whilst investigating critical thinking and the dispositions of critical thinkers, these authors did not refer to this collective of attitudes, habits of mind and character traits as critical spirit. Facione, Facione and Giancarlo (1997) offered an example of these authors keeping their conceptualisations to a specific collection of dispositions. These are: truth seeking, openmindedness, systematicity, inquisitiveness, analyticity, cognitive maturity and critical thinking



self-confidence (pp. 6-8). Their research was conceptualised in relation to the Delphi Expert Consensus, which describes the ideal critical thinker (Facione, 1990):

The ideal critical thinker is habitually inquisitive, well informed, trustful of reason, open-minded, flexible, fair-minded in evaluation, honest in facing personal biases, prudent in making judgements, willing to reconsider, clear about issues, orderly in complex matters, diligent in seeking relevant information, reasonable in the selection of criteria, focused in inquiry, and persistent in seeking results which are as precise as the subject and the circumstances of inquiry permit. (p. 3)

The California Critical Thinking Disposition Inventory (CCTDI) (Facione & Facione, 1992; Facione, Facione & Giancarlo, 1997) was developed using “established psychological testing strategies” (Facione, Facione & Giancarlo, 1997, p. 6). The seven scales, based on the dispositions mentioned above, were used to measure “the strength of a person’s disposition toward or away from critical thinking” (p. 6). This quantitative tool was applied to school contexts (for example, Ferguson & Vazquez-Abad, 1996) and in a mix of skill and dispositional measurements in workplaces (Facione & Facione, 1994, 1996). The former indicated a growth in the thinking dispositions of students studying junior science, and the latter offered scoring rubrics to evaluate candidates during job selections.

With regard to the above, it is this latter conceptualisation of dispositions, as a means of sorting the ‘good’ from the ‘bad’, which this project avoids. The intention is not to use conceptions of critical spirit as a dispositional identifier used for the purpose of privileging certain people over others. The intention is more to be open-minded about

what other conceptualisations of critical spirit might contribute to it as a discourse, and consequently how it might be used as an efficacious tool for the TAFE teachers within this study.

The importance of this project lies in identifying TAFE teacher manifestations of what could be interpreted as critical spirit, and how it is deployed in relation to themselves and their work. To date there have been no empirical studies conducted into the existence of critical spirit *per se*. Scholarly reasons as to why this is so are not evident. Possibly it is because the concept is too ethereal, possibly because the methodological tools available at the time of its conception were not sufficiently developed. What empirical research does reveal is: a rich description of the ideal critical thinker compiled through a Delphi investigation involving 46 international experts in critical thinking (Facione, 1990); a critical thinking dispositions inventory developed using a quantitative approach (Facione & Facione, 1992); and several tools (Facione & Facione, 1994, 1996) that “offer more qualitative and holistic” but nevertheless quantitative data on a mix of skills and dispositions (Facione, Facione & Giancarlo, 1997, p. 8).

These quantitative studies do not articulate an understanding of critical spirit that is consistent with this dissertation – in particular, the positioning of critical spirit as a discourse, nor the value that this discourse might have for TAFE teachers. I have found no evidence in any studies that elucidate what teachers in a TAFE environment use to engage in the critical aspects of their work. What the research does reveal is dispositional descriptors of critical thinkers that extend beyond Oxman-Michelli’s (1992) elements of critical spirit. Facione and Facione (1992) in their CCTDI use

seven scales of measurement: truth-seeking, openmindedness, systematicity, inquisitiveness, analyticity, cognitive maturity and critical thinking self-confidence. These scales extend Oxman-Michelli's elements of critical spirit, yet exclude her final element, respect for others, and do not address aspects of resilience and hardiness. As a starting point for this inductive investigation, this thesis is guided by Oxman-Michelli's elements of critical spirit to which the dispositional concepts resilience and hardiness have been added, thereby providing the foundation for a significant contribution to theoretical knowledge at the study's conclusion.

### **3.7 Chapter summary**

In this chapter, I have highlighted a central conceptual component to this project, critical spirit. I have emphasised its importance through tracing its relationship to Dewey's (1933, 1991) arguments on reflective thought, explored positions on critical and spirit separately and located it within the critical thinking literature. Dealing with the concept specifically, I have examined critical spirit from the standpoint of disposition, character trait and habit, and noted both qualitative and quantitative viewpoints. Primarily, I have placed emphasis upon scholarly ideas of critical spirit as important contributors to positioning it as a discourse, and use at the crux of this positioning Oxman-Michelli's (1992) elements of critical spirit: independence of mind, openmindedness, wholeheartedness, intellectual responsibility and respect for others. I now turn to my methodological chapter where I undertake the positioning of critical spirit as a discourse, develop a coding framework for the explication of critical spirit within selected TAFE teacher narratives and elucidate other data gathering strategies pertinent to the research questions introduced in Chapter One.

## **Chapter Four – Methodology and methods**

### **4.1 Introduction**

In this chapter, I draw a boundary around the ‘what, how and who’ of this research. I start this by discussing the paradigm that I deployed and its qualitative orientations toward the design of this study. In the light of Glesne’s (1999) interpretivist enquirer, outlined below, I expand upon my use of discourse as a social construction (Berger & Luckmann, 1967; Gergen, 1999) as the orientation that I used in generating and interpreting what counts as knowledge in relation to this thesis.

Within the successive sections of the chapter, I include the delimitations and limitations of the study by identifying the participants in this enquiry, note the methods used to gather relevant data – for example, the coding framework used to explore particular social constructions around notions of critical spirit – and elaborate my role as a primary research instrument in relation to particular issues of reflexivity and ethics. I conclude the chapter with a discussion of the matter of warrant.

### **4.2 The qualitative research orientation**

This project is qualitative in research orientation. It is not concerned with measuring or quantifying phenomena, nor is it intended to seek generalisation from its findings. This research activity is situated within TAFE teachers’ worlds or realities. I, the researcher, am part of these realities and it is my interpretations that endeavour to make these realities more visible. The empirical material I collected include artefacts, personal experiences and value positions, and interviews “that describe problematic moments and meanings” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 3) in specific TAFE teachers’

lives. These problematic moments and meanings relate to participant identities as TAFE teachers as they navigated the new vocational environment of the Australian VET system enacted daily within TAFE institutes.

Pring (2000) reminded me that in qualitative research the focus is upon “that which is distinctive of the personal and social ... the ‘meanings’ through which personal and social reality is understood” (p. 44) and that therefore, I the researcher cannot be assumed to be apart from what is researched; what is ‘true’ is negotiated by the participants and myself. This ‘truth’, therefore, is a version of reality and provisional, its relationship with certainty tenuous (Pring, 2000). Therefore, as Richardson (2000) would agree, I am “off the hook .... [I] don’t have to play God ... as an disembodied omniscient narrator .... [I will have] plenty to say [about] the subjectivities engaged in knowing/telling about the world as [I] perceive it” (p. 928). My perceptions are based upon my interpretations of TAFE teacher worlds, and are part of the material for the telling within this project. I turn to this interpretivist position.

#### **4.2.1 The interpretivist position**

This project’s enactment is within the interpretivist tradition of social research. In this tradition, emphasis is placed on “social phenomena as distinct from physical phenomena” (Clarke, 2001, p. 33). The concept of ‘truth’ is taken to be understood as a position that arises from individual and group constructions of their own realities and hence reality is multifaceted. This is opposed to notions of ‘truth’ being an objective reality and hence generalisable (Smith, 1998).

Glesne (1999) offered a useful conceptual frame for the interpretivist enquirer, and nominates the following stance. The interpretivist enquirer assumes:

- that reality is a social construction, and therefore acknowledges the complexities and variabilities of socially constructed phenomena that make them difficult to measure;
- that the purpose of the research is to seek understandings of participants' social constructs and constructions;
- that a research approach is needed that is in-depth and that engages with relevant people in context; and
- that researchers are the primary research instrument – they engage and interact with participants (pp. 5-6).

This orientation is helpful in addressing the project's two research questions – the first in relation to critical spirit being manifest in TAFE teacher discourse, and the second, related to the value of an explicit engagement with critical spirit. Interpretivists acknowledge that realities can only be apprehended approximately, not fully (Guba, 1990). I acknowledge that my interpretations will be approximations, but within these approximations will be images that capture individual TAFE teacher points of view and constructs on the constraints they experience in every day life (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000) at TAFE. Constructs that produce the TAFE teacher discourse in which critical spirit may manifest. Furthermore, “[s]ecuring rich descriptions” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, *emphasis in original*) is also an outcome I seek, for it is through these that I build a picture of the position of value that critical spirit has for the participant TAFE teachers.

### **4.3 The discourse analysis method**

As mentioned in Chapter Three, the definition of discourse for this thesis is a confluence of perspectives offered by Phillips and Hardy (2002) and Gee (2005).

Discourse, therefore, is defined as an interrelated set of texts and practices that

embrace a broader sense of language, and that include “action, interaction, values, beliefs, symbols, objects, tools and places” (Gee, 2005, p. 27).

Theories of discourse suggest that reality is a social construction and that primarily we construct this reality through “groupings of utterances or sentences, statements which are enacted within a social context, which are determined by that social context and which contribute to the way that social context continues its existence” (Mills, 1997, p. 11). Phillips and Hardy (2002) stated: “The things that make up the social world—including our very identities—appear out of discourse” (p. 2). To this poststructuralist alternative to positivism Foucault (1972, p. 49) added that discourses should be thought of as the “practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak”. In keeping with the work of Wetherell, Taylor and Yates (2001), discourse in this study is considered as constitutive, involves work and entails co-production in meaning – constitutive in the sense that language is not a neutral medium that conveys meaning, but is actively involved in making meaning. “Discourse builds objects, worlds, minds and social relations .... [It is] social action ... [which] brings social worlds into being” (p. 16). Discourse involves work by constructing (intentionally or unintentionally) a version of events or happenings that is functional and in some way useful to the deliverer within a particular context (Wood & Kroger, 2000). Consequently, in this study I used the above conceptualisations of discourse to explore various discourse artefacts produced by participant TAFE teachers. The design intention of this research was to explicate rich descriptions of these participant identities and the manner in which identities were built. Further emphasis was placed upon examining these teachers’ social constructions of their world of work, particularly these teachers’ relationships with

TAFE as an organisation. Also, as mentioned, an intention was to position critical spirit as a discourse in order to examine the results of its explicit introduction to participants and its influence in building “... objects, worlds, minds and social relations” (Wetherell, Taylor & Yates, 2001, p. 16) pertinent to the TAFE teachers within this study.

Foucault (1972, 1979, 1984) brought relationships of power to the concept of discourse. Rather than our having the complete agency to write or speak our own experience in the social world, our experiences are shaped in part by “[a] multitude of conflicting discourses” (Philips & Hardy, 2002, p. 2). For Foucault, power is a central element of discourse, not as a possession or something that can be bestowed or taken away, but as something that is dispersed through social relations and is productive. It is involved in producing certain kinds of social relations. It is a “... form of action or relation between people which is negotiated within each interaction and is never fixed and stable” (Mills, 1997, p. 39). Rather than suggesting that power is an imposition of will, Foucault posited it as a constitutive element of relationships where discourses provide the means not only of producing coercive relationships but also of contesting them. “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, pp. 100-101). Foucault’s concept of power in relation to discourse lurks pervasively in this research. In Chapter Two, I noted the imposition of the new vocational discourse on the VET arena and its role in the production of various notions of what TAFE teachers should be and do. The design constructs of this study ensured that an exploration of this discourse and its influence in shaping teacher identity and how participant teachers’ agency was affected was actioned. The study’s



design was also framed to reveal how the new vocational discourse is engaged with and also contested by participants. Adding the concept of *borderland discourse* aids in taking further issues of contestation, or in some cases accommodation, of imposed discourses.

As introduced in Chapter Two, Alsup (2006) traced teacher identity discourses and suggested that the success of teachers, immersed in competing identity discourses, is in relation to their ability to develop ‘borderland’ discourses that provide them with a means of agency. In the Foucauldian sense, certain teacher discourses are powerful shaping agents – for example, those produced by teacher accreditation bodies. Alsup’s perspective of ‘borderland’ discourses provides teachers with the means to contest, and to offer different constructions of, teacher identity. This is an important element within this study in that I have claimed that discourses are shaping TAFE teacher identity towards learning to be different teachers. What this study was also designed to explore was alternative discourses that might offer a different positioning, that of contestation, or at the very least difference. As mentioned, issues of power pervade the identity discourses (Alsup, 2006) of selected TAFE teachers; the exploration of a critical spirit discourse in relation to it contributing as a borderland discourse and thereby troubling pervasive external discourses, was also an important consideration in this study’s design.

Wood and Kroger (2000) stated that: “Talk creates the social world in a continuous ongoing way; it does not simply reflect what is assumed to be already there” (p. 4). They emphasised “talk as action ... [and] talk as an event of interest” (p. 4). In this sense the world is constructed discursively, an intimate process that stands apart from

what ‘really’ happened. We can therefore see that discourse understood from this perspective aligns with postmodernism in that it deals with uncertainty and ambiguity, and is comfortable with contingencies (Wetherell, Taylor & Yates, 2001). Any knowledge that is built is therefore subjective as opposed to the modernist perception of the truth as something that can be determined and settled once and for all.

The concept of reflexivity abounds in notions of discourse (Duranti & Goodwin, 1992) – so too within the confines of this study. In attempting to understand social phenomena through discourse, I acknowledge that discourse also creates reality and that reality creates discourse. There exists reciprocity between reality and the discourses used to create it; this reciprocity is reflexivity (Gee, 2005). For instance, if I speak of “agenda and minutes” I can begin to create a reality of a team meeting. This facilitates certain kinds of actions – for example, organising a room in a certain way with whiteboards, writing pads and pens. But if I bring a bottle of wine into the room the reality of a team meeting changes to include other concepts of doing that might be named “team building”. Gee (2005, p. 10) suggested that this reflexive process of building and rebuilding through language “... accounts for change and transformation” and names it “language-in-use” (p. 11). As I am engaging in a reality through language-in-use with the participants in this study, I am, and the results that emerge, are immersed in and are a product of reflexivity. The concept of reflexivity suggests that I cannot separate myself as researcher from the research (Wetherell, Taylor & Yates, 2001). I hold to this conception.

Specifically, discourse analysis as the method of inquiry in this project focuses upon TAFE teacher “talk” (Wood & Kroger, 2000, p. 4). This talk is constructed in the

realm of culture and located at interactive encounters where TAFE teachers engage with fellow social beings to create their relations and realities through “conventions, shared rules, story lines, and narratives” (Wood & Kroger, 2000, p. xii). In this project some of these encounters are the case narratives, credibility checks, and interviews where the participant TAFE teachers construct discursively their identities, their relationships with TAFE, and their notions of value in relation to critical spirit. This method of inquiry will highlight the variability embedded in the TAFE teachers talk to provide multiple versions of identity as a TAFE teacher, and multiple versions of their engagement with, and reactions to critical spirit and their work environment. As discourse is action (Wood & Kroger, 2000), the opportunities for comparison that result will provide glimpses of problematic and unproblematic practices, and help to identify alternative practices (Tracey, 1995) that may be generated as a result of an engagement with critical spirit.

Discourse analysis as a method of analysis is articulated in Section 4.5. In this preceding section I specifically articulate how I position critical spirit as a discourse, how this positioning is crucial in the development of a framework for the explication of critical spirit in TAFE teacher discourse, and introduce the actual TAFE teacher ‘talk’ that counts as my data.

#### **4.4 The data collection techniques**

The participants in this research were TAFE teachers who were students at the University of Southern Queensland (USQ), Australia. These TAFE teachers were undertaking study towards their completion of various awards in education and further education and training. TAFE teachers and prospective TAFE teachers

undertake these programs to be eligible for permanent employment and to progress through TAFE's promotional system.

#### **4.4.1 The artefacts**

The initial sources of data were assessment artefacts produced from a course in which participants were enrolled and that contributed to a degree in further education and training. The course was entitled "Instruction Theory and Practice". A module on case pedagogy within the course had an assessment requirement that requests the students to construct and submit a narrative that can be used as a case for the education and training of educators. This approach to instruction, case-based education, is said to bridge the gap between theory and practice in relation to the complexity of teaching (Shulman, 1992). The assessment item was open-ended and requested students to write 1000 words detailing an actual instance in their experience as educators that, in their opinion, would provide insight into the role of the teacher and the complexities of teaching. Several general themes are offered as examples of topics – for example:

What I know now...

What I thought I knew then...

Critical incidents

The reality of teaching for me, and

My teaching world of work. (Tyler, 2006, p. 39)

Students were asked to consider how critical the incident was to their understanding of themselves as educators and the utility of the instance in relation to their own learning. They were encouraged to be reflective and to talk about what they were thinking and feeling: what they did, what they didn't do and what they'd like to have

done. As these are instances of self-disclosure, students' submissions are treated confidentially.

40 artefacts were collected over Semesters One and Two of 2007. Data could have come from any source of TAFE teacher discourse. The following points articulate why the above were chosen as a data source:

1. The data were rich in that they were narratives about TAFE teachers' interactions within their world of work.
2. Beginning with the collection of data through this method, TAFE teachers' discourse was more likely to be produced without explicit or conscious engagement with critical spirit (see Research Question 2), with subsequent data gathered after that explicit engagement.
3. As the data detailed instances of TAFE teacher interactions with their world of work, they were seen as likely to involve an at least implicit deployment of critical spirit.
4. The narratives were disclosures of what was useful to TAFE teachers in dealing with the challenges of their teaching.
5. The subject of the narrative was chosen by the TAFE teacher as something that may be useful to other preservice and inservice teachers; hence the contribution was seen to have a utilitarian value to the TAFE teacher community.
6. TAFE teachers traditionally study via distance programs; the collection of data through these means created a broader geographical representation and reduced the cost associated with direct workplace data collection.

From these data 20 texts were selected. The texts were chosen on the basis of how well they fell within the evocative writing style articulated by Richardson (1994) as the “*narrative of the self*” (p. 521; *emphasis in original*). These were narratives that “meet literary criteria of coherence, verisimilitude and interest” (p. 521). This selection was also influenced by Gergen’s (2001) structural account of well-formed narratives from the constructionist perspective. This provided structural markers that indicated narratives that were “culturally and historically situated” (p. 249). It is important to emphasise that these were not elements of assessment identified in the marking rubric for pass/fail on the assessment item. My data set included artefacts from multi-sites (Sturman, 1994). My intention was to choose a data set of narratives that provide a varied, deep and rich description of TAFE teachers’ actions in context, along with the associated personal interpretations. To date the literature has not identified gender as a factor in relation to critical spirit; consequently the authors’ gender was not considered. This is possibly due to research into critical spirit being in its relatively formative stages. Nevertheless, this may become a point of focus for future questions into its deployment.

Once selection was made, the authors/TAFE teachers were contacted by myself inviting their participation in the research project (see Appendix A). Of the 20 contacted, 11 teachers agreed to participate. They gave permission to use their artefacts and the collection of subsequent data through credibility checks and interviews. It was with this data set of narratives that I began my interpretations and analysis guided by my first research question in relation to elements of critical spirit being present in TAFE teacher discourse. Upon my preliminary analysis of the data set, I sought respondents’ perspectives on my analysis. The method deployed was a

credibility check (Elliott, Fischer & Rennie, 1999; Packer & Addison, 1989). This member checking sought participants' comments on my interpretations of their narratives in relation to the elements of critical spirit. My analysis of narratives was emailed directly to individual teachers to which they responded with their comments and suggestions.

By deploying credibility checking I have reinforced my aim to seek variety and heterogeneity in participant perspectives on my analysis of their case narratives. To the literature's and my notions of critical spirit, these teachers begin to add their voice. What will be evident in the discussion that unfolds in Chapter Five is not an attempt to limit perspectives to Oxman-Michelli's (1992) elements, but quite the opposite. Reported are rich and varied contributions to the different interpretations of a critical spirit discourse.

A third set of data was collected from participants by way of semi-structured interviews (Weiss, 1994) conducted over Semesters One and Two of 2008. This choice was based on my belief that "qualitative interviewing is a way of uncovering and exploring the [multifarious] meanings that underpin people's lives" (Arksey & Knight, 1999, p. 32). In order to seek answers to my second research question, I returned to 7 participants to explore their perceptions of critical spirit in relation to their identities as teachers and its utility to them in their workplace. Prior to the interviews, I asked the participants to read Oxman-Michelli's (1992) article "Critical Thinking as 'Critical Spirit'" and to reengage with their case pedagogy artefacts, my subsequent interpretations and their credibility checks. The interviews were carried

out in a semi-structured manner (Weiss, 1994) that aimed at enabling the asking of direct and open-ended questions whilst allowing for the exploration, emergence and development of participant perceptions. These interviews also provided the opportunity for further credibility checking. I checked any hunches and tentative interpretations in order to seek consistency between what participants said and what I heard and interpreted. This process could be said to have heightened the plausibility of my results (Merriam, 1988).

The semi-structured interview questions were as follows:

1. What were your initial reactions to the concept of critical spirit?
2. What were your thoughts and emotions that arose in relation to your narrative, my interpretations and your reading of Oxman-Michelle's article?
3. How might the concept of critical spirit reflect upon you personally and professionally?
4. How might your engagement with critical spirit be of value to you?
5. How might this thinking influence how you go about your work at TAFE?
  - a. In what way could this concept be useful to you in your work as a TAFE teacher? In what way might it be cumbersome?
6. How might you add to this concept of critical spirit?

Please note that emphasis was placed upon the 'how' question. In keeping with my constructivist perspective, I was keen to know how the participants constructed meanings around the notion of critical spirit. Specifically, this related to constructions of identities, and the way that their social activity of work might be organised and constructed having been explicitly exposed to the concept of critical spirit. Elliott



(2005) suggested that this is a useful distinction for the qualitative narrative researcher in that constructivist viewpoints derived from ‘how’ questions offer a difference from naturalist viewpoints that tend to focus upon individual lives and intimate experiences. Also noted here is the place of reflexivity within the interviews and how the process could construct meanings that resulted from the interaction between participants and myself (Harris, 2003).

#### **4.5 The data analysis techniques**

As mentioned, data for this study were obtained from TAFE teacher discourse. The use of the term “discourse”, as described by Wood and Kroger (2000), is “for both activities of speaking (conversation or talk) and writing (text) and their material embodiment” (p. 20). This project was concerned with TAFE teacher text and TAFE teacher talk as sources of discourse data.

Phillips and Hardy (2002) described discourse analysis as methodology and method. In this section, I focus on discourse analysis as the method deployed in the analysis of data gathered within this research project, I position critical spirit as a discourse and detail how I conceptualised and applied the coding used to ascertain critical spirit in TAFE teachers’ discourse.

##### **4.5.1 Positioning critical spirit as a discourse**

In an earlier section I articulated the position that “...when we speak and write, we design what we have to say to fit the situation in which we are communicating .... [and] at the same time, how we speak and write creates that very situation” (Gee, 2005, p. 10). Furthermore, it is in this very act of speaking and writing that we build a

world of activities around us, and this connection between language and action is “language-in-action” (p. 10). I add to this in saying that we use language to become recognised in specific ways as certain types of people, in building “an identity here-and-now” (p. 11).

In order to deploy discourse analysis as a method of analysis for this project, I draw together Gee’s (2005) questions in relation to reality building within a piece of text, and Oxman-Michelli’s (1992) elements of critical spirit. The resultant answers from this synthesis enable me to claim critical spirit as a discourse. In the next subsection I action critical spirit discourse in the building of the coding framework that is used for the explication of critical spirit.

Pertinent to this section is an engagement with critical spirit, and a focus on exploring how it might look using Gee’s (2005) perspective on how discourse builds reality.

Gee posed seven questions that discourse analysts might ask themselves in relation to the analysis of a piece of text (written or verbal):

- How is this piece of language used to make certain things significant or not and in what ways?
- What activity or activities is this piece of language being used to enact?
- What identity or identities is this piece of language being used to enact?
- What sorts of relationships or non-relationships is this piece of language seeking to enact with others?
- What perspective on social goods is this piece of language communicating ...?
- How does this piece of language connect or disconnect to things ... ?

- How does this piece of language privilege or disprivilege specific sign systems ... or different ways of knowing ... ? (Gee, 2005, pp. 11-13)

In what follows, I start with what might be considered an essentialised position on critical spirit. One may ask, how does this fit with research conducted from a poststructuralist position? I emphasise that this is only the starting point. Even though I am beginning with a particular perspective of critical spirit, my aim is to explore the emergence of plural perspectives that evolve from the participant data. This will include reactions to an engagement with Oxman-Michelli's (1992) perspective of critical spirit and the other possible discourses that might emerge. This aim is evident in the proceeding Section 4.5.2, where the reader will find an openness to heterogenous notions of critical spirit, for example, the attention paid to the indigenous coding themes that were used to build upon the exogenous coding themes derived from Oxman-Michelli's elements of critical spirit<sup>1</sup>.

To begin positioning critical spirit as a discourse, I use Oxman-Michelli's (1992) description of critical spirit as the beginning lens. As noted in the previous chapter, she articulates the elements of critical spirit as:

independence of mind, in the sense of intellectual autonomy, self-understanding, self-confidence, and courage;

openmindedness, in the sense of alert curiosity, attentiveness, the spontaneous outreaching for alternative perspectives, intellectual flexibility, and the willingness to suspend judgment;

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<sup>1</sup> Exogenous codes are those developed prior to analysis; indigenous codes emerge from the data and can be used for deeper analysis (Pfaffenberger, 1988).

wholeheartedness, that is enthusiasm and perseverance in pursuit of an intellectual goal;

intellectual responsibility, in the sense of objectivity, integrity, and humility, as well as confidence in and a commitment to the process and the consequences of reason; and

respect for others, in terms of sensitivity, empathy, fairmindedness, readiness to listen, and willingness to consider the other's point of view. (1992, p. 3)

Further understanding is obtained by offering particular answers to Gee's (2005) above-mentioned questions. These questions have been reframed by putting critical spirit as the subject of the questions. This is because I am interested in how we use language to become recognised in certain ways as certain types of people in building "an identity here-and-now" (p. 11). More specifically, this relates to how the participants in this study might have used the concept of critical spirit (see my second research question). My responses to Gee's questions are drawn and my interpretations formed from an iterative engagement with the literature on critical spirit.

*How is critical spirit discourse being used to make certain things significant or not and in what ways? What critical spirit discourse highlights as significant are "complex dispositions, attitudes, habits of mind and character traits" (Siegel, 1997, p. 27) that occupy people who manifest a " 'critical attitude' or 'critical spirit' " (Siegel, 2001, p. 580). These attributes are considered embodied and "necessary [for] a full account of critical thinking" (p. 581). It is the embodiment of these attributes that moves people to pursue reason. Oxman-Michelli suggested that critical spirit makes people more inclined to think critically and less likely to engage in "thoughtless*

intellectual compliance and passivity” (1992, p. 1); hence passive acceptance is considered significant because it identifies what critical spirit is not.

*What activity or activities is critical spirit discourse used to enact?* The activities that critical spirit enacts are those associated with particular intellectual and visceral engagements with knowledge and what constitutes knowledge, and particular engagements with the repositories of this knowledge – others, their texts, their perceptions and conceptions and associated artefacts. In essence, critical spirit enacts particular engagements with the big “D” Discourse (Gee, 2005) – language and “other stuff” that are “ways of being in the world” (p. 7). Enactments in this case are the enactments of *independence of mind* – for example, having the courage to announce publicly a held view, one that may be at odds with common convention; *openmindedness* – for example, actively seeking alternative perspectives and actively suspending judgment so that the clearest available perspective can be heard; *intellectual responsibility* – for example, acting with trustworthiness, knowing that all ‘truth claims’ are not beyond question and that different possibilities can be just around the corner; *wholeheartedness* – for example, persisting with a challenge by actively looking to reinvigorate one’s forward progress; *and respect for others* – for example, taking time to privilege other voices over one’s own.

*What identity or identities is critical spirit discourse being used to enact?* The identities that critical spirit discourse enacts are those that “value *good* reasoning and are disposed to believe, judge and act on its basis” (Siegel, 1997, p. 36; *emphasis added*). These identities are those of a critical thinker as opposed to the act of critical thinking. This particular thinker is disposed to critical thinking because of the

attributes that he/she holds. Without these attributes there is less likelihood that he/she will engage in and act according to critical thinking. Therefore these identities are mostly disposed to and willing to “conform judgment and *action* to principle, not simply an ability to so conform [judgment]” (Siegel, 1988, p. 39; *emphasis added*). That is, they are identities that are willing to act on the basis of critical thinking as opposed to critical thinking that is not enacted. According to Oxman-Michelle (1992), the elements of these identities are independence of mind, openmindedness, wholeheartedness, intellectual responsibility and respectfulness. Barnett (1997) suggested that through the “integration of the critical spirit” (p. 8) the “critical being” (p. 63) reconstitutes him or herself by being critical but also by being creative (p. 8). Importantly, the person who enacts critical spirit is not immune from its application. “For the possessor of the critical attitude, nothing is immune from criticism, not even one’s most deeply held convictions” (Siegel, 1988, p. 39). Critical spirit discourse enacts affect. It is visceral in the sense that the critical thinker cares about reason and is respectful of the reasons of others.

*What sorts of relationships or non-relationships is critical spirit seeking to enact with others?* Respectful relationships are specifically positioned as important within the discourse. Its considered enactment will ensure a particular moral interaction, which focuses upon instances of the privileging of the other’s voice during empathic engagement whilst in communication. Venal and other possibly non-respectful characteristics such as rudeness and hedonism, because they do not necessarily detract from the ability to think critically (Siegel, 1997), are therefore not beyond inclusion, but if they move a person towards closed-mindedness and insulation from a sense of connection with others and their ideas they are considered less suitable to this

discourse's relationship enactments.

*What perspective on social goods is critical spirit communicating?* What appears implicit in critical spirit discourse is the communication of an egalitarian perspective. It appears that all views and their holders have merit in the first instance, and that the degrees of merit mesh with the knowledge, understanding and skill requirement at any given time within our interactions as we *be* and *become* within our world (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). Some are not pertinent at a given time, but may be at another. The status of knowledges, understandings and skills appears to vary according to their need and utility. What critical spirit's perspective suggests is that we should always have an 'ear out' for where and when this might be.

*How does critical spirit discourse connect or disconnect to things?* It appears to be attempting to connect people through the sharing of various conceptions, perspectives and ways of being. Critical spirit's leaning is towards the 'connect' as opposed to the 'disconnect'. The 'other' has significance. Critical spirit appears social, as opposed to isolated, and emphasises interdependence over independence and cooperation over competition.

*How does critical spirit discourse privilege or disprivilege specific sign systems or different ways of knowing?* What is explicit in critical spirit discourse is the non-privileging of any one way of knowing over another, as long as that way of knowing has been actively engaged with through reasoned assessment and not taken on as a claim unless it has been engaged with critically. If anything, critical spirit discourse devalues those ways of knowing that are passively accepted. On the position of

morals, critical spirit is said to connect with the obligations of education. Siegel (1997) stated: “[T]he fostering of critical thinking [and hence critical spirit] is morally obligatory” (p. 63). Even though and also because this argument appears not to have been reasoned otherwise, it remains open to critical scrutiny.

#### **4.5.2 The critical spirit coding framework**

From the above, and other unconscious perspectives that I might have about critical spirit – what Gee (2005) would call my discourse model – I elaborated a coding framework for making sense of particular TAFE teacher discourse (Tyler, 2008a).

Coding in this sense, as it deals with qualitative elements, is more associated with analysis as opposed to translation (Fielding, 2001). As this is the case, I was mindful of not forcing data (Glaser, 1992) to fit some theory around critical spirit and TAFE teachers. I used the concept of critical spirit as an analytic tool “designed to clarify [my] thinking, provide alternative ways of thinking about [the] data and facilitate the teasing out of relevant concepts” (Corbin & Holt, 2005, pp. 49-50), pertinent to an understanding of the inner landscapes of TAFE teachers.

The coding set out in Table 4.1 is indeed *a priori*, the elements being those developed by Oxman-Michelli (1992), and the indicators being derived through my engagement with the published material on critical spirit. These are, as Pfaffenberger (1988) put it, “... exogenous [coding] categories developed before field research” (p. 28). Part of the intended use of these categories was to examine how well they fitted the data. In examining this fit I was mindful of any indigenous categories that emerged through the analysis. Pfaffenberger suggested that the exogenous categories be replaced by the emergent indigenous categories. This issue is discussed in the succeeding discussion



of the data that emerged.

Table 4.1: *A coding framework for critical spirit*

<b>Elements of critical spirit</b> (Oxman-Michelli, 1992)	<b>Indicators:</b> <b>Narrative states/implies</b>
Independence of mind	Various arguments and the author’s degree of support, the firmness with which views are held, public displays of position, likes and dislikes, self-disclosures of thoughts, ideas, beliefs, values and attitudes, degrees of self-knowledge.
Openmindedness	Willingness to consider different points of view, openness towards trying alternatives, non-contrariness, affirmation of possibilities, acceptance of change, a negotiable position as opposed to a non-negotiable position, a non-use of power to push an intellectual position.
Wholeheartedness	A zest for investigation, high degree of effort, an embracing of the narrator’s chosen topic, focused inquiry, energy, not dull, not bored or lethargic, “just enough is not good enough”, the concept of personal best, consistency in seeking reasons, perseverance, comfortable with the uncertainty of not knowing and continues to seek to know, following through.
Intellectual responsibility	The seeking of reasons, awareness of bias (personal and other), an assessment of the trustworthiness of information, the seeking of detail, active engagement, working within discursive processes, a comfortableness with dialectical engagement, the seeking of balance between the objective and the subjective.
Respect for others	Expressions of empathy, human over technical, avoids sympathy, looks on self as a tool to emancipate others, fair consideration of others’ perspectives, displays humility, cooperation, interdependence, community, acceptance of diversity, tolerance, engagement with the voices of others, socially conscious, non-conceitedness, acceptance of mistakes.

#### 4.5.2.1 The coding framework in action

Gee (2005) stressed the importance of analysing “chunks” or “spurts” (p. 125) of narratives in order to glean the salient information. He asserted that in the analysis the researcher is “saying” the sentences of text in her/his mind and breaking it down into chunks or spurts to impose some kind of meaning (p. 126). The analysis in this instance was focused upon identifying the aforementioned elements of critical spirit and other chunks that might add to furthering this exogenous notion of critical spirit. A preliminary application of the indicators from Table 4.1 to the thematic content of the narrative artefact is exemplified in Table 4.2.

Table 4.2: *A preliminary analysis of Linda's narrative*

Elements of critical spirit (Oxman-Michelli, 1992)	Chunks and preliminary interpretations
Independence of mind	<p><i>A firm decision</i> 1 I decided to impart my knowledge onto a group of unsuspecting students.</p> <p><i>Self-disclosure acknowledging value</i> 2 To see them on the day of their event, seeing all their hard work come to fruition, was priceless.</p>
Openmindedness	<p><i>Acceptance of student diversity</i> 3 Keeping them all engaged can be a challenge. I had them for two semesters allowing me to really focus and vary my instructional methods accordingly.</p> <p><i>Openness towards trying alternatives – moving outside prescriptive curriculum</i> 4 Stray from planned sessions or lesson plans ... to accommodate learning styles but also [for] relevance ...</p> <p><i>Openness towards trying alternatives – openness to learning</i> 5 I have learnt invaluable lessons. (IR)</p>
Wholeheartedness	<p><i>Perseverance</i> 6 I kept looking for the light at the end of the tunnel 7 can just see it.</p> <p><i>Follow through</i> 8 rectify the situation.</p> <p><i>Not lethargic</i> 9 I felt very inadequate, disorganised and challenged. 10 I felt disadvantaged that I had not been given more preparation time.</p>
Intellectual responsibility	<p><i>Continuous improvement</i> 11 I utilised the inherited resources as a base and adjusted and altered them to suit. 12 I know that this journey for me is going to be a continual learning curve. 13 I know I can learn from students and that I can continue to grow as an educator.</p> <p><i>Active engagement</i> 14 but I kept a level head and maintained my professionalism. (W)</p>
Respect for others	<p><i>Socially conscious</i> 15 carefully consider students' fears and inhibitions. 16 I needed to cover all aspects of the unit in broad, differing ways 17 to ensure all learning styles were covered.</p> <p><i>Human over technical</i> 18 they were a great group of people to work with.</p> <p><i>Interdependence</i> 19 I really appreciated the planning and assistance [from colleagues] as I was not really in a position to make a lot of changes.</p>

Table 4.2: (Con't)

<b>Other discourse</b>	
Test of fortitude (ToF)	<i>2 I was literally “thrown in the deep end” and allocated a full timetable of fifteen units to teach.</i> <i>4 I was literally one lesson ahead of my students.</i>
Community of support (CofS)	<i>Past teacher leaving some resources</i> <i>3 My predecessor has left student workbooks.</i> <i>5 A colleague kept reminding me that “you know more than the students do; just keep referring to real life instances”.</i>

The artefacts were read several times and emerging signs were noted.

The artefacts were read once more and coded according to the framework. Noted were instances of the text aligning with the particular indicators of critical spirit discourse in each artefact and in the material as a whole. Also recorded were particular (indigenous) chunks that were considered to be noteworthy for extending present conceptions of critical spirit. These were grouped as “other discourses” and the themes that were pronounced were labelled as “test of fortitude” and “community of support”.

Table 4.2 gives one example of the preliminary analysis of one of these TAFE teachers’ artefacts. In this case it is the results of an analysis of Linda’s (pseudonym) narrative. In this table are those chunks of Linda’s narrative that align with the critical spirit coding framework. Please note that the italics are indicative of my preliminary interpretations. Also note that in some instances the chunks have bracketed initials – for example, “(IR)” – preceding them. These are my acknowledgment of their seeming connection with other elements of critical spirit; for example, “I have learnt

invaluable lessons” (Linda, cn<sup>2</sup>) could be considered to be part of the element Intellectual Responsibility. For analysis, tables (exemplified above) were produced for all of the participant artefacts, with similar chunks of critical spirit discourse emerging.

#### **4.5.3 Summary of method**

In this thesis I have employed a discourse analysis method of data analysis (Wood & Kroger, 2000). This method was deployed recursively. It was used in analysing the initial data set of narrative artefacts and redeployed in relation to subsequent data collected from participant interviews. It was an iterative process that moved analysis to different levels of understanding by “re-analysis of data which is informed by the data analysis already undertaken” (Froggatt, 2001, p. 483). I began the analysis of the data set of narratives using the components of critical spirit as articulated by the literature and formulated them into a coding framework derived from positioning critical spirit as a discourse (Tyler, 2008a). Elements of independence of mind, openmindedness and the like (Oxman-Michelli, 1992) were central to that which evolved as the means of coding pieces of data. Furthermore, to sharpen my focus whilst engaging with the results of the credibility checks and interview transcripts, I was mindful of Wood and Kroger’s (2000) strategies for the interpretation of discourse:

What comparisons can be made between literal meaning and irony?

What is not there?

How would it read if a particular item or phrase was omitted?

What is the structure of the text saying about the function of its content?

What are the multiple functions of the discourse?

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<sup>2</sup> cn: case narrative.

What categories can be or are constructed and for what purpose?

What assumptions have to be made in order to understand a text in a particular way?

How is agency held? (pp. 96-99)

Table 4.3 further summarises the above discussion by setting out the alignment among the research questions, methods and data sources associated with this thesis. The use of a research diary is discussed in the next section.

Table 4.3: *Alignment of research questions with methods and data sources*

Research question	Method	Data source
What might be identified as the elements of critical spirit in TAFE teacher discourse?	Evocative writing style	Initial selection of TAFE teacher narratives.
	Discourse analysis – a coding frame for critical spirit	“Chunks” or “spurts” of narratives (Gee, 2005).
	Research diary	Researcher reflexive and reflective interpretations of participant feedback.
	Credibility check	Participant perceptions of researcher interpretation/analysis.
How might explicit reflection on the concept of critical spirit be of value to TAFE teachers in relation to their identity and their world of work?	Discourse analysis/research diary	Interview transcripts. Researcher reflexive and reflective interpretations of participant feedback.

## 4.6 The ethics and politics of the study

What is highlighted in the beginning of this chapter and in the section entitled “The qualitative research orientation” is the nature of the close relationship between the researcher and what he/she is researching. This almost umbilical connection means that this research is laden with values (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). I am “complicit ...

[in the] research project, rather than ... a detached, objective observer” (Danaher, 2001, p. 69).

As mentioned above, I acknowledge that reflexivity (Taylor, 2001) is endemic within the analysis, interpretation and claims that emerge from this project. My past position as a male TAFE teacher involved in the struggle within the aforementioned discourses influenced my relationship with the artifacts collected, my choice of conceptual framework and the manner in which I cast my eye over the TAFE teacher narratives. Furthermore, I acknowledge that the artifacts themselves feed back on, and are reactive with, my interpretations. The extent to which this influenced the research “is inevitably difficult to assess” (Taylor, 2001, p. 19). Nevertheless, I acknowledge that, as I engaged with the troubling terrains of other published and unpublished TAFE teacher experiences of new vocationalism, I could not help but compare my own private experiences and note a shared sense of diminished agency (see Tyler, 2006). As I reflect on my resonance with the discourse of critical spirit, I also acknowledge that, in a sense, it may be part of my reclamation of this lost sense of agency. Nevertheless, I am mindful of this background and therefore to my position of familiarity in relation to these kinds of personal experiences and subjectivities enhancing the substance of my interpretivist claims.

To augment my analysis in this project I used a research diary (Hughes, 1996) in which I recorded my thoughts about and my reactions to my immersion. As well as providing grist for reflexive elements and helping to formulate interpretations of the data, the diary paid particular attention to noting when I was alerted to “the features of the discourse that [made] particular readings or reactions possible, plausible and

understandable” (Wood & Kroger, 2000, p. 92). In the diary, I attempted to explain the reasons for my reactions, and to reflect on their impact on my analysis. This diary also provided a history of the project and my thinking as this history unfolded.

From my perspective, the TAFE teacher participants in this study who shared their discourse did so with shared understandings of community and culture in relation to the TAFE work environment, to which they related the utterances of their discourse. In this sense TAFE teachers’ work life was coordinated social action from which they all derived meaning (Garfinkel, 1967) and it is these utterances – data in the form of words – that were the object of my interpretations.

Denzin and Lincoln (2000) suggested that the ethics of research lie in the moral responsibilities of the researcher. In this section I discuss my sensibilities towards participants’ dignity and their rights in relation to this project. Bulmer (2001) suggested the following ethical considerations in relation to doing social research: using ethical guidance from a professional association; informed consent; respect for privacy; confidentiality of data; and the issues of harm and deceit. I now address these considerations in turn.

As a past member of the Australian Institute of Welfare and Community Workers (AIWCW), I have explicit knowledge of their code of practice for ethical humanistic engagement (Australian Institute of Welfare and Community Workers, n.d.). In the introduction to the code of ethics the AIWCW states that: “[The] professional practitioner ... is concerned to promote the worth and well being of all individuals .... [C]onduct opposed to the full recognition of human dignity and well being for all

persons within ... professional practice shall be considered improper and unacceptable” (p. 1). I deployed this overarching principle in my engagement with the participants in this study. This code of practice also articulates principles of informed consent (Principle 2.4, p. 3) and privacy and confidentiality (Principle 3.1, p. 4). I enacted these principles by way of adhering to the USQ ethical clearance processes and through my general engagement with the participants. Informed consent was obtained from the participants for the purposes of using the initial artefact, and subsequent involvement in credibility checks and interviews (see Appendix A for the letter inviting participation and Appendix B for a sample consent form). In this letter the study’s purposes, processes and benefits were articulated to participants. Their position of anonymity was assured and pseudonyms have been used throughout this thesis to achieve that end. The letter also acknowledged to participants that they could withdraw from the project at any time. A final statement of ethical clearance (Reference Number: H07REA646) was issued by the USQ ethics committee on 23 April 2007 (see Appendix C).

Scott and Usher (1999) said that research is inevitably connected with power. A Foucauldian perspective would acknowledge harm and deceit as also being elements of power. In this sense we now move to the political dimension of this discussion of ethics. Pring (2000) suggested that one of the harms that participants in research might suffer is a loss of dignity. As I carried out the interviews I was mindful of the degree of dignity lost after the disclosure of personal information that might not normally be disclosed during general conversation. Furthermore, I was aware of the emotional labour (Hochschild, 1983) that participants might have experienced when having to ‘behave as a research participant’. I addressed this participant vulnerability



through the development of a sense of mutual professional trust. Pring (2000) attested to the importance of mutual trust within the research journey. For myself this development began when the participants, students studying a course that I was teaching, began to see me as a professional who acted with ethics. Yet this trust could go only as far as the limited interaction that these distance education students had with me over the course for the aforementioned semesters of study. For the interviewing I made explicit attempts to put the participants at ease and adopted a flexible approach to interviewing whilst endeavouring to be non-judgmental and empathic (Geldard, 1993).

If an element of deceit was involved in this research, it could possibly be described as an act of omission. For the purposes of seeking answers to my first research question — “What might be identified as the elements of critical spirit in TAFE teacher discourse?” — I chose not to provide the participants with a detailed explanation of critical spirit. I wished to explore TAFE teacher narratives in the first instance without them having explicit knowledge of the concept. After the credibility check, participants were given a copy of Oxman-Michelli’s article “Critical Thinking as Critical Spirit” (1992). The interviews were then contextualised by reflecting upon their artefacts, my interpretations using the critical spirit coding frame and their understanding of Oxman-Michelli’s article.

A further political dynamic within this research was that the original narrative artefact was also an assessment item. This might imply potential influence by myself as the assessor. This arguable claim is reduced significantly when one considers that the artefact would still have been of value to this research even if the author/student had failed the assessment item. As mentioned above, the item was chosen for its evocative

writing (Richardson, 1994). The uses of assessment artefacts as data are not uncommon. Harreveld (2002) articulated that her data were based on student assessment artefacts and that selection was “not chosen on the basis ... of relevance to the course ‘learning outcome’ or ‘performance criteria’, but rather on the basis of [their] relevance to the research” (p. 175). This was also the case for this research project.

A concluding ethical consideration relates to the question ‘who benefits from this research?’ Coombes and Danaher (2001) stated that this question is “one of the most enduringly significant questions to be directed at an educational research project” (p. 111). The obvious primary benefactor of this research is myself. I stand to obtain a doctoral degree on the basis of this text being viewed as a successful thesis.

Given this consideration, I have to acknowledge the possibility of my voice as a researcher overwhelming the input of the participant TAFE teachers. Denzin (1993) suggested that “the other voice becomes an extension of the author’s voice” (p. 17). Usher and Edwards (1994) believed that this is an inevitable consequence of the pursuit of knowledge. I have endeavoured to balance this inevitability through the use of credibility checking. Both after the initial narrative analysis and during interviews, participants were asked to add their voices to my interpretations.

This process served four purposes:

1. It provided a degree of trustworthiness necessary for the warranting of the claims that evolved from this research;

2. In the tradition of naturalistic research it provided readers of this thesis with the means to “act as ‘auditors’ themselves” (Elliott, Fisher & Rennie, 1999, p. 222);
3. The credibility checks themselves were data. They contributed to the process of revision, enrichment, and an extension of understandings and perceptions of critical spirit; and
4. The checks provided the means through which TAFE teachers consciously gave their voice to the concept of critical spirit. This feedback added further data to the nuances of a conscious engagement with the concept.

TAFE teachers were also the intended beneficiaries of this research. As claimed above, new vocationalism is changing the very terrain of vocational education and influencing TAFE teachers to change their identities as teachers (Chappell, 1998, 1999). I believe that illuminating critical spirit has advocated an emancipatory strategy to further vocational teaching by enhancing the clarity and effectiveness with which TAFE teachers shape and reshape their realities and identities. It is also one means to contest unwanted imposed identities.

For TAFE teachers this research will shed light onto the areas of their teaching that are important to them. It also highlights areas of concern that may produce stress and burnout. It will help to identify areas for individual capacity building and can offer a means for these teachers to understand their tendency to act in or react to a variety of circumstances within their world of work.

#### **4.7 Strategies for warranting the study**

As mentioned previously, I did not see myself as standing apart from the phenomenon that I investigated. My own values and beliefs were part of this enquiry. I was aware of the need to suggest a different form of knowing as I was attempting to understand human beings, not the physical environment. A traditional positivist paradigm in which researchers place themselves apart from the phenomena that they are observing (Edge & Richards, 1998) did not apply as I was fundamentally, through my immersion in the project, a participant in what I investigated so my values influenced the manner in which I represented the findings. Therefore I have taken the position that this form of knowing was contextualised, engaged and situated rather than decontextualised, detached and objective.

Edge and Richards (1998) offered three questions that have enabled me to sharpen my conceptual development in relation to the warranting of this study. These are questions of position, voice, and representation (p. 340).

The first question “How am I to position my work within the schools and traditions of research?” has been partially addressed by my claim to be constructivist in perspective with a discourse analysis methodology and method. This is an ethnographic stance in that I have written about people and researched their meaning makings and interpretations in relation to the construction of their worlds (Goldbart & Hustler, 2005). One main goal was to undertake thick description of the phenomenon under question (Geertz, 1988). In this sense, I have provided a thick description of the notion of critical spirit and how it might be conceptualised and utilised by TAFE teachers. Hence the credibility of the findings from this study relates to its attempt at

“persuasive illumination” (Goldbart & Hustler, 2005, p. 17). In order to highlight its plausibility, I have attempted to draw readers into the world of critical spirit for TAFE teachers, by providing the means through which they begin “sensing the believability of that world” (Goldbart & Hustler, 2005, p. 17).

The second question, the extent to which the people with whom this research took place were able to “speak their own thoughts in terms meaningful to themselves” (Edge & Richards, 1998, p. 340), relates to my interpretations of TAFE teacher discourse and to those teachers’ situatedness within TAFE institutes in Queensland, Australia. This study sought to identify whether and how these teachers in their discourse deployed critical spirit. The character and nuances of TAFE teacher talk were considered data. Focusing on these teachers’ worlds in this way enabled them to speak their thoughts in terms of what was meaningful to them. Through the use of credibility checks and in-depth interviews as data collection techniques, I was able to affirm and confirm with the participants my developing interpretation of their words, thereby highlighting the meaningfulness of teachers’ thoughts to themselves, as well as to me.

The third question relates to how I have expressed what I interpreted through my chosen lens, and what warrant I can assert about my claims. Given that I am in “the role of the researcher as individual rather than as methodological cipher” (Edge & Richards, 1998, p. 342), how do I provide justification for my claims? In answer to this question, I was guided by Wood and Kroger (2000), who provided alternatives to the traditional *res naturam* methods of warranting – reliability and validity. My investigations of critical spirit were in *res artem*. Here there are multiple meanings

and versions of the truth, “none of which are ‘true’ in the sense of a single material reality” (p. 163). As my methodological perspective was discourse analysis, I acknowledge that the relationships between what we do and the meanings that we ascribe to action “are multiple, contentious and socially constructed” (p. 164); consequently, repetition in the sense of reliability is problematic.

By my taking the above stance, it would be erroneous to suggest that what I have reported matched, as closely as possible, the real state of critical spirit in relation to TAFE teachers and their world of work. Because TAFE teacher discourse is about our world and is part of our world, any meaning that is derived is shared, shifting and rightly susceptible to multiple interpretations. (I use “our” because I the researcher am not removed from this world, but very much part of it.) An analyst using discourse analysis therefore provides one version of meaning that is neither true nor false. Because truth and reality are themselves discursive constructions, there is “no basis for selecting one account over another on the grounds that one is a truer [and] more valid version of the world” (Wood & Kroger, 2000, p. 166).

The alternative warrant in this situation is provided by trustworthiness and soundness. Wood and Kroger (2000) suggested that research is trustworthy if it offers a useful way of understanding the discourses, and offers a possible foundation for understanding other discourse. Sound claims are considered as “solid, credible and convincing (because they are logical [and] based on evidence ... )” (p. 167). The authors articulated several criteria for trustworthiness and soundness. I address these separately in relation to this study.

Orderliness, documentation and audits are criteria for trustworthiness. I have applied these criteria by ensuring that my manner of reporting is both clear and ordered to elucidate relevant facets of my research. Data extracts have been provided for readers to conduct their own evaluations of my interpretations (Potter & Wetherell, 1994). By doing so I have provided an auditable account of the process.

The recursive nature of my enquiry has made orderliness central to the soundness of my research. I wished to avoid what Watson-Gegeo (1988) called “dive-bombing” (p. 575) research investigations, where impressions are made only over short periods of engagement with participants and their settings. In this analysis, repeatability for me was the repeated reading and analysing of the discourse produced by the TAFE teachers to question and requestion my own interpretations. This demonstration of soundness is at the core of my warrantability, along with the orientation that I have used for the analysis. As mentioned previously, this research was inductive; therefore the orientations and constructs – for example, coding for the explication of critical spirit – have been used to make coherent analytical claims about critical spirit and TAFE teachers.

The final two criteria for soundness are plausibility and fruitfulness (Wood & Kroger, 2000). These criteria provide an evaluative stance through which myself and others can gauge whether and how the findings provide a degree of clarity about what is claimed, as well as the success of those claims in directing attention to what would be usually unnoticed (Tracey, 1995).

As thick descriptions (Geertz, 1988) add to the plausibility of claims, so too does triangulation. Whilst triangulation enables a means to open up a complex phenomenon for the viewing of its different facets (Flick, 1998), it could also be claimed to increase plausibility by virtue of the fact that it offers several methods for “reveal[ing] slightly different facets of the same symbolic reality. Every method is a different line of sight directed toward the same point, observing social and symbolic reality” (Berg, 1995, p. 4). In this research the metaphor of triangulation as a practice for certainty in the positioning of phenomena is not applied; instead triangulation refers to the “process of using multiple perceptions to clarify meaning” (Stake, 1998, p. 97). In its simplest form, triangulation for this study has used the vantage points provided by a literature review, researcher application of a coding frame to narratives, credibility checks, in-depth interviews and a research diary to inform notions of critical spirit.

The fruitfulness of this project is related to whether and how it goes beyond old perspectives on critical thinking by shining a new light onto the possibilities that grow from reconsidering critical spirit’s role. Fruitfulness is also evident in how this research generates “new kinds of discourse” (Potter & Wetherell, 1987, p. 171). By positioning critical spirit as a discourse, new possibilities arise – for example, how critical spirit discourse is used as a borderland discourse, and how it contributed to the building of TAFE teacher identities. Fruitfulness is also an indication of the strength of the implications that this research project has for future research. This is addressed in the concluding chapter.



## **4.8 Chapter summary**

In this chapter, I have articulated the interpretivist paradigm as a central epistemological assumption that underpins this thesis. The other is that of discourse, its importance in being a social construct and a builder of reality including the activities, identities and politics of living. The use of these perspectives in data collection techniques and in analysing TAFE teacher narratives, credibility checks and interviews has been elucidated. Importantly, the chapter has shown how these perspectives have been deployed to articulate a method of inquiry in relation to positioning critical spirit as a discourse and explicating its value in relation to the participating TAFE teachers. Covered also within the chapter were discussions around ethical and political considerations. I also dealt with the strategies that I used to support the trustworthiness of this research project's enactment. In the next chapter I put the above methodology and methods to work as I report on the data used to build answers in relation to the first research question.

## Chapter Five – Explicating critical spirit from TAFE teacher narrative artefacts

### 5.1 Introduction

In Chapter Three, I deployed the reasoning of Dewey (1933, 1991), Siegel (1988, 1993, 1997, 2001), Oxman-Michelli (1992) and others to theorise a conceptual viewpoint on critical spirit. In Chapter Four, I synthesised this viewpoint with predominantly Gee's (2005) sociocultural notions of discourse to position critical spirit as a discourse. I argued that by means of this positioning critical spirit's elements could be distilled from TAFE teacher narratives. To this end, I developed a critical spirit coding framework. Chapter Four also described the data collection methods deployed by this study. Thus far, these have produced TAFE teacher narrative artefacts and their associated credibility checks. Pertinent to this chapter is the overlaying of the selected narrative artefacts with the critical spirit coding framework and the data and discussion that resulted.

In this chapter I respond to the first research question posed in this project:

*What might be identified as the elements of critical spirit in particular TAFE teachers' discourse?*

Generally, this response is an analysis of narrative artefacts written by particular TAFE teachers and my conclusions in relation to critical spirit and these TAFE teachers' discourse. More specifically, this chapter undertakes a discursive journey, one that moves consecutively to deeper levels of analysis. I start my analysis by providing examples of the narrative artefacts as examples of evocative writing and highlight why these are important to this study. Next I introduce the TAFE teachers

and report their individual involvement in the project. I then move to highlighting the teacher voice that resonated with my conceptualising within this study. In a similar way to how I had dealt with conceptualising critical spirit in Chapter Three, I call attention to what I believe are examples of Dewey's (1991) reflective thought within these TAFE teacher narrative artefacts, and then move onto illuminating data on conceptions of 'critical', 'spirit' and critical thinking. Section 5.6 reports the data that emerged from the overlaying of the critical spirit framework, while Section 5.7 articulates each participant's view of my analysis using the framework. The remainder of the chapter is devoted to the conclusions that I draw. Essentially, using the aforementioned conceptual and methodological positions that I have elaborated to frame the enactment of this research, I conclude that elements of critical spirit are indeed manifest in selected TAFE teachers' discourse.

The organisation and representation of data in this and subsequent chapters require the use of discourse from individual teachers. In order to keep these teachers' identities confidential, I have given them pseudonyms and these are used to identify specific TAFE teacher voices within this project<sup>3</sup>.

## **5.2 The teachers' narrative artefacts**

These narrative artefacts, individual narratives about experiences at work written from the perspective of case pedagogy, were the first data source. The narratives that I selected for analysis were those that were considered by me to fall into what

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<sup>3</sup> Participant teacher voice is acknowledged in several ways within this thesis. Specific voice that comes from artefacts is identified with the teacher's pseudonym and its source. For example, Linda's voice can be acknowledged as "Linda, case narrative (cn)", "Linda, credibility check (cc)" and/or "Linda, interview (int)". The instances within the text where I give examples of chunks of teacher discourse that arose from discourse analysis, specifically in tables where chunks are preceded by line numbers, teacher voice is acknowledged by the teacher's pseudonym only.

Richardson (2000) called an evocative writing style. These were examples of a “narrative of the self” (p. 931). In these forms of writing one can see an experience of self-reflection and transformation. Evocative writings are instances of “... highly personalized, revealing texts in which authors tell stories about their own lived experiences, relating the personal to the cultural” (Richardson, 2000, p. 931).

Of the 40 TAFE teacher narratives engaged with, 20 were chosen as examples of evocative writing. Below are two extracts from two case narratives that exemplified evocative writing as articulated by Richardson (2000):

I began my teaching career in January 2006. After working in five major five-star hotels, across three states, and focusing on hospitality and events, I decided to impart my knowledge onto a group of unsuspecting students. My original career path was to become a high school teacher[;] however, I was sidetracked for about twenty-three years by event management.

Unfortunately or fortunately, I was literally ‘thrown in the deep end’ and allocated a full timetable of fifteen units to teach. I had fourteen days to prepare myself for a student orientation for my faculty, and my first lesson, should I finally navigate myself around the campus and library. One cluster of units contained nine topics and my predecessor had left student workbooks, power point presentations, lesson plans, assessments and notes for me to utilise as required. If this had not been the case, I do not think I would have survived the semester. (Linda, case narrative (cn))

I have been continually experiencing the feeling of discomfort, stress and the lack of enthusiasm to attend classes. I found that behavioural challenges within my theory and practical classes were escalating and were impacting on curriculum, classroom dynamics and my responsibilities of being a teacher. Therefore, I became conscious that behavioural management was a major concern within my sector of education. I realised that I assumed all semester enrolments would be identical and no alteration to curriculum was required. For instance, I am now encountering a greater percentage of much younger learners who are involved in education and training under the social security system's provisions of mutual obligation. (June, cn)

Each of these appears as an example of a “narrative of the self” (Richardson, 2000, p. 931). They offer critically reflexive instances that appear to evoke new questions about self within context.

These 20 TAFE teachers were approached regarding their possible participation in the project. Their permission to use their case narratives was sought via a letter of invitation to be involved in the project (see Appendix A). Twelve TAFE teachers agreed to be participants in the study. They gave permission for the analysis of their case narratives, my subsequent data collection and analysis through credibility checks, and semi-structured interviews.

Initially, seven narrative artefacts were chosen to pilot the aforementioned critical spirit coding framework (see Chapter Four). The results of this pilot provided data to support a tentative position that elements of critical spirit were present in these TAFE

teachers' artefacts (Tyler, 2008a). This *prima facie* position provided the motivation for continuing the application of the critical spirit framework to all participant narrative artefacts, and to carry through with the associated credibility checks and semi-structured interviews.

The remainder of this chapter introduces the 12 TAFE teachers and reports what emerged from my engagement with their narrative artefacts and an associated eight credibility checks. Four TAFE teachers withdrew from the study after initial artefact analysis and before completion of the credibility check stage. These four teachers gave permission for their case narratives to be used for the overlaying of the critical spirit framework but were not available for the follow up credibility checks or interviews. Furthermore, one teacher who had originally acknowledged her or his availability to be involved in the project was unable to be contacted for her or his semi-structured interview; hence seven teachers were subsequently interviewed.

### **5.3 The participating TAFE teachers**

The authors of the narratives were: Linda, Mitchell, Jean, June, Kat, Tina, Gus, Ryan, Karen, Matt, Roberta and Hannah. Table 5.1 shows their respective involvement in the above-mentioned pilot study and the various data collection activities of this project.

These teachers came from varying geographical locations within Australia – metropolitan and regional areas of southern Queensland and the Pilbara region of Western Australia. Respective state TAFE authorities employed them. These teachers

taught in various knowledge and skill areas associated with the VET curriculum – for example, tourism, business, hospitality, nursing and metal trades.

Table 5.1: *Participants and their participation in the project*

Participant/ pseudonym	Pilot study (Tyler, 2008)	Narrative artefact analysis	Credibility check	Semi- structured interview
Linda	√	√	√	√
Mitchell	√	√	√	√
Jean	x	√	√	x
June	x	√	x	x
Kat	√	√	√	√
Tina	x	√	√	√
Gus	√	√	√	√
Ryan	√	√	√	√
Karen	√	√	x	x
Matt	√	√	√	√
Roberta	x	√	x	x
Hannah	x	√	x	x

These TAFE teachers were also distance education students at USQ and were enrolled in the course “Instructional Theory and Practice”. They produced the narrative artefacts in response to a case pedagogy assessment, and it is with these artefacts that I began my analysis of their discourse. It should be noted that participants produced these artefacts prior to my explicit engagement with them about the concept of critical spirit.

#### **5.4 What emerged from the TAFE teachers’ narrative artefacts**

In reading and rereading these teacher narrative artefacts, I was struck by the clarity with which these teachers told their stories about themselves as they reflected on themselves as teachers and the various aspects of their teaching. These are instances of experience that held great importance for them, and into which they appeared to invest a great deal of emotional and conceptual energy. The depth and richness with which they coloured their experiences allowed me to ‘get into their shoes’ and seek to

obtain an empathic understanding of their perspectives. I endeavoured to capture this in the following two examples where I provide for the reader a taste of what participants had written as told through my voice.

#### **5.4.1 Linda's narrative**

Linda's narrative told of how she chose a change in career direction that took her away from the hospitality and event management industry to TAFE teaching. Linda explained that her secondary choice of work was a 23 year "sidetrack" (Linda, cn), as her primary career intention was to become a teacher. She quickly moved to her story about being "thrown in the deep end" of teaching, and acknowledged several hurdles – for example, 15 TAFE modules to prepare, five of which she had to prepare from "scratch", and navigating the unfamiliar TAFE terrain. Linda gave voice to the collegial support from other TAFE teachers in terms of the provision of advice and some resources, yet stated "I found it really difficult to teach from the developed resources of another teacher." Linda talked about "tailor making" lessons to cater for the "unique participants" in her classes. But this realisation didn't appear to come to Linda without difficulty, as "[d]uring the first semester of my teaching career I felt very inadequate, disorganised and challenged". She described herself as an "organised control freak" and that it was this that helped her maintain professionalism and continue to look "for the light at the end of the tunnel". This appeared to imply that she is more organised now, now that she is out of the "tunnel".

Linda cited other lessons during her journey – for example, learning the necessity of catering to the diversity exhibited by her students and how this changes from one group to another. Catering to these differences – for example, in "group dynamics,



age differences, life experiences [and] learning styles” – by varying “instructional methods” appears as another key to Linda’s success. She talked of careful consideration of students’ “fears and inhibitions” and acknowledged her occasional inconsideration. Lisa described her moves towards rectifying these instances and acknowledged them as times when she has “learnt invaluable lessons”.

To close, Linda looked towards the future of her teaching and described it as a “continual learning curve” (Linda, cn). Lisa stated, “I know now that I can learn from the students and that I can continue to grow as an educator”.

#### **5.4.2 Mitchell’s narrative**

Mitchell’s narrative began with a description of a request by his manager to undertake a training project. His TAFE institute had won a tender to offer retail training to clients from a human service organisation (HSO). Mitchell described the casual nature of the request, as it was put to him over the lunch table “in between bites of her apple” (Mitchell, cn). He accepted the project but quickly found out that the project would not be as routine and casual as his manager first put it. Mitchell’s engagement with the HSO revealed that the students were all recent refugees with English as their second language and that they held varying capabilities “in relation to language, literacy and numeracy”. Mitchell stated, “I started to realise what an enormous challenge laid before me”. He noted that his usual *modus operandi* in relation to planning, preparation and instruction would need to be reviewed.

Mitchell’s concern was realised on the first day of class. Many students displayed a limited understanding of English. Mitchell was faced with the question of “[How] do

I balance the twin concerns of meeting the students' needs and also maintaining the integrity of the qualification?" (Mitchell, cn). Mitchell chose to adjust the curriculum and his teaching strategies and noted several examples: keeping content to crucial points only; allowing extra time for students to decode information, especially for those having difficulty with English; coping with students' differing perceptions of time; and building in "catch-up" sessions for those students who appeared to display a priority for family life over being in class. Mitchell did not say what degree of difficulty this provided him, but he did mention the joy and laughter that he experienced in attempting to unravel the complexities of the English language. He believed that he balanced his initial concerns and stated that 12 out of the 14 students obtained the qualification. Mitchell closed by emphasising the importance of what he learnt from these students, particularly the insights that he gained into "their societies and cultures".

Both Linda and Mitchell tell of instances where they experienced internal tension between their preconceptions about what was an appropriate workload and appropriate pedagogy with particular student cohorts on the one hand, and their actual experience of the necessities of these engagements on the other. Both these teachers articulated positions of stress that resulted from the coming together of preconceptions with actual experience. What these narratives also articulated was these teachers realigning their preconceptions and expectations in order to 'get the job done'. They reported this as involving quite an internal struggle. Nevertheless, both teachers took to changing their particular internal paradigms and noted the benefits of doing so. It was at this nexus, where these internal changes occur, that I theorised

about the possibility of critical spirit being party to these changes in relation to the identities that participant teachers built.

Having provided a sample of these teachers' perspectives on both themselves and their contexts as viewed through my interpretation obtained from reading their narratives, I move to examine them for resonance with the conceptual positions put forward in Chapter Three. The next section relates to notions of reflective thought, critical spirit and critical thinking and how they apply to these TAFE teacher narratives. I interlace this inquiry with chunks of discourse (Gee, 2005) that appear to have resonance with the various mentioned concepts.

## **5.5 Towards a critical spirit in TAFE teacher narratives: Some cogitations**

In this section, I take a similar path to the conceptualisation of critical spirit undertaken in Chapter Three. In my conceptual chapter, I moved from Dewey's (1991) concept of reflective thought through scholarly positions on critical and spirit. I then explored notions on critical thinking and concluded with a position on critical spirit. I also follow this path within this section, but with a different focus. This section focuses on the empirical examples of these concepts within participant TAFE teacher discourse.

### ***5.5.1 Dewey's reflective thought***

From a Deweyian perspective these TAFE teacher narratives are imbued with instances of reflective thought. The teachers' "[a]ctive, persistent and careful consideration ... " (Dewey, 1991, p. 6) of their individual engagements in their

personal teaching interactions produced what appeared to be attempts to articulate a personal sense of meaning. This personal meaning historically situated their choice of professional and personal identities that went with teaching. Their narratives described instances where their equilibrium was disturbed by particular experiences and where those occasions evoked the labour of reflective thought. Would Dewey (1991) nominate these instances as a tendency towards “careless thinking” (p. 13)? I would say not; they appeared more as examples of “careful consideration” (p. 6). These teachers had not articulated an acceptance of the face value of their deliberations. Each appeared to have ruminated on the grist of their reported experiences and subsequent interactions, and all appeared to display the promise of different possibilities in relation to the individual meanings that they derived from their thinking about themselves as the central actors within their case narratives.

In Chapter Three, I drew upon the theorising of Dewey (1933, 1991) to begin the exploration of the dispositions of thinkers. Dewey’s mention of good mental habits to overcome the tendency towards careless thinking highlighted the importance of “open-mindedness, whole-heartedness and responsibility” in deploying reflective thought and avoiding mental sluggishness (1933, p. 30). The data provided by the TAFE teacher discourse were indicative of Dewey’s reflective thought. Below are selected examples.

In Mitchell’s narrative, he talked about his concern in relation to dealing with a class cohort of students who were refugees and had English as their second language. Mitchell was concerned with how he would balance curriculum imperatives with the students’ need to be successful (and possibly his own need to be positioned as a

successful teacher). This state of dissonance, itself producing reflective thought, drew him towards a disclosure of openmindedness: “I would need to review my decision-making process in relation to planning and preparing for instruction” (Mitchell, cn). Here Mitchell sought to adjust his usual mode of preparation to cater for a new cohort of students. In Jean’s narrative, she wholeheartedly embraced active engagement with her students, where she explained that it was: “... vital for adolescent learners to gain experience” (Jean, cn). June gave an example of responsibility. This manifested as her seeking reasons to expand her understanding of a particular student’s attitude in relation to what this student wanted to be and the required personal growth needed to get there. June wondered whether or not this perspective should be made explicit to the student: “I struggled with the evidence before me” (June, cn). This student exemplified poor interpersonal skills, yet was extremely keen to reach her goal of becoming an administrator. June struggled with the necessity to give this student feedback on what she observed, and in the end chose to do it through the process of group work.

The above are three examples of discourse evident within the participants’ narratives that align with what Dewey (1933) highlighted as the personal attitudes of reflective thought. Dewey put these attitudes in a primary position. This positioning is privileged over that of the “technical skill in manipulating special logical processes” (p. 34). My interpretation of contemporary literature influences me to take the position that these very attitudes formed the basis of future conceptualisations of the dispositions of thinkers (Seigel, 1988) and in particular that of critical spirit (Oxman-Michelli, 1992). This I believe paves the way for a deeper investigation of the data.

### **5.5.2 A conceptualisation of ‘critical’**

The data derived from this analysis also resonated with my ongoing undertaking to conceptualise ‘critical’ for this study (see Chapter Three). Chunks of these TAFE teachers’ discourse provided indications of critical being conceptualised as emancipatory (Freire, 1970; Habermas, 1974), as being of developmental importance in the sense of personal growth (Gould, 1990; Rogers, 1961), as a form of reasoning (Ennis, 1987; McPeck, 1981; Siegel, 1988), as constructive (Brookfield, 2005) and as seeking “phronesis” – prudent enlightenment on how to act in particular situations (Carr & Kemmis, 1986, p. 132). Table 5.2 provides an example of the resonant discourse that emerged out of these TAFE teachers’ narratives and appeared to align with the above-mentioned conceptualisation of critical. This table illustrates specific examples of discourse from Ryan, Roberta, Matt and Linda. Ryan’s example of emancipatory thinking came from him placing students in a position where they offered expertise and knowledge. Even though Roberta was an experienced teacher, her acknowledgment of her connection with lifelong learning was critical within her case narrative. In Matt’s case narrative, he was particularly reflective on his engagement with students. His reflections often had within them the essence of “why” questions. Linda’s case narrative had a leaning towards pragmatics; she collected and utilised advice that worked for her and discarded that which didn’t.

Table 5.2: *Conceptualisations of ‘critical’ paired with examples of participant discourse*

<b>Conceptualisation of ‘critical’</b>	<b>Participant discourse</b>
Emancipatory	“... opportunities for two-way learning experiences.” (Ryan)
Developmental importance	“I am still learning as an educator.” (Roberta)
Reasoning	“Is this how teaching should be?” (Matt)
Phronesis	“A colleague kept reminding me: ‘... just keep referring to real life instances’.” (Linda)

### **5.5.3 A conceptualisation of ‘spirit’**

Similar resonance occurred with my conceptualisations of spirit. In Chapter Three, ‘spirit’ was firstly considered slippery and ethereal – not a part of ideas but the will behind ideas: the essence that makes ideas happen (Berkeley, 1952). This led to the consideration of spirit’s impact upon action and how this occurred in a variety of ways – for example, the human spirit’s triumph over adversity (Frankl, 1984) and acts of mateship and bravery as implied in the term the “Anzac Spirit” (Williams, 2006). I also highlighted as important Hegel’s (1977) assertion that spirit develops from consciousness and reason, to which I added the concepts of resilience (Bonanno, 2004) and hardiness (Maddi, 1994), suggesting that the combination of resilience and hardiness influenced a tendency to commitment, control and challenge. As a prelude to what is to come, I acknowledge here that the data from some of these case narratives contradicted this developing conceptualisation, in that some participant perspectives on critical spirit suggested to differing degrees resonances with hardiness and resilience. This begins to become evident in the analysis using the critical spirit coding framework reported later in this chapter, and comes into sharper focus in my analysis of some interviews reported in Chapter Six.

Table 5.3: *Scholarly conceptualisations of ‘spirit’ paired with examples of participant discourse*

<b>Scholarly conceptualisations of ‘spirit’ as:</b>	<b>Examples of participant discourse</b>
the will behind ideas	“Hindsight will always produce a better teacher.” (Tina)
triumph over adversity	“I pressed on .... I saw myself as a competent professional.” (Kat)
conscious reasoning	“In what better way could I have encouraged [name deleted] to accept greater responsibility ... ?” (June)
resilience/hardiness	“I set myself a goal: persist until the end of the year.” (Matt)

Table 5.3 gives examples of participant discourse that aligned with conceptualisations of spirit put forth in this thesis. By doing this, I show that ‘spirit’ is a little more substantial – that is, by way of its being interpreted as being evident in participant discourse. This is not intended to undervalue the ethereal properties of spirit but seeks to give substance to the concept through attempting to capture it within these TAFE teacher narratives. Tina’s use of hindsight to develop new understandings, Kat’s persistence, June’s reasoning and Matt’s articulation of remaining resilient in order to be openminded to the new possibilities that might unfold in the future, are possible examples of ‘spirit’ within these teachers’ discourse. What is noted is the difficulty involved in deconstructing ‘spirit’ in order to give examples in discourse; for example, June’s ‘conscious reasoning’ may well be instances of ‘the will behind ideas’, and Matt’s ‘resilience’ may well be his articulation of the way that he ‘triumphs over adversity’. This suggested that there is a ‘gravity’ that compels the conceptualising of spirit not only as ethereal but also as holistic (Watts, 2003). During my attempts at deconstructing, ‘spirit’ appeared to lose the conceptual power that it had held when I considered it whole. In my continued thinking about ‘spirit’ I was drawn to the connections between the identified individual constructs; they appeared not to want to stand alone. The challenge that this phenomenon posed also applied to my analysis of TAFE teacher discourse through the use of the elements of critical



spirit. In Section 5.6 I take this conundrum further. I report that the interpretation of specific chunks of discourse is an indicator of several elements of critical spirit. In the conclusion of this chapter, I discuss the implications that this has for the use of critical spirit as nomenclature associated with teacher dispositions and, by association, with teacher identities.

#### **5.5.4 TAFE teachers' critical thinking**

The conceptual framework chapter established that the scholarship on critical spirit is nested within that on critical thinking and that the positioning of critical thinking as both the skills and the attitudes of a critical thinker also emerged from this scholarship. This binary was reflected in the work of McPeck's (1981) "disposition and skill to" (p. 13) apply logic in a certain knowledge domain, Ennis's (1987) taxonomy of dispositions, skills and abilities for generic critical thinking, Paul's (1992) thinking about thinking for deeper reflection as a paradox named "rational passion" (p. 282), Siegel's (1988) conception of the critical thinker as a person who is "appropriately moved by reasons" (p. 32) and who has "an appropriate attitude toward the activity of critical thinking" (p. 38) and Brookfield's (1987) positioning of the actor (the critical thinker) as explicit in her/his actions in and on the world through critical thinking.

If, as this scholarship claims, critical thinking and critical spirit are a binary, it stands to reason that as a prelude to explicating critical spirit – an intention of this thesis – I would be well advised to seek instances of critical thinking within its data, for where critical thinking exists so too one may suggest is critical spirit. But, as acknowledged previously, the concept of critical thinking is still elusive. Nevertheless, it seems that

in order to claim a degree of warrant an attempt should be made. As a consequence of this position and as a means of rendering it within a particular perspective, I turn to Brookfield (1987), who states that critical thinking is “reflecting on the assumptions underlying our and others’ ideas and actions, and contemplating alternative ways of thinking and living” (p. x), and that evidence of this is found in the critical thinker’s writing or talking (p. 6).

In the following text, I show what I have identified as critical thinking within three TAFE teachers’ narratives. The lens used for this recognition was Brookfield’s (1987) components of critical thinking: instances of identifying and challenging assumptions and the exploration and imagining of alternatives (p. 15). These instances emerged from the occasions focused upon by these particular participants. The three examples below present chunks of these TAFE teachers’ voices that were indicative of critical thinking as envisaged by Brookfield. Also in these subsections I comment on the potential for these instances to provide evidence of the elements of critical spirit.

#### **5.5.4.1 Jean**

Jean talked about the changing cohort of students in her hospitality classes – in particular, the “greater prevalence of younger students ... [and] major increases of behaviours” that heightened her concerns for the students’ learning. Jean’s past assumptions about student cohorts were under question: “I was experiencing continual concerns and blockages to effective teaching and learning” (Jean, cn).

Jean highlighted the most disturbing as being episodes of “physical and verbal abuse” (Jean, cn). Jean reported that these incidents left her concerned that she lacked the

appropriate skills to deal with classroom management and made her less than enthusiastic about teaching. Jean addressed her concerns by challenging her previous assumptions about her new students. She chose firstly to obtain more knowledge about her new cohort in order “... to understand my adolescent learners” and secondly to reconceptualise her students’ educational experiences by coming to the position that “... within my classes is often the first chance for my learners to succeed”. Jean put this down to the success of CBT’s “constant reinforcement of competence” and a “cooperative learning environment” as opposed to what she identified as the secondary educational sector’s assumption about the supposed lack of “intrinsic self motivation in these students”.

Jean saw the VET experience as an opportunity to foster any lost motivation to learn. Jean went on to talk about her recognition of the need to adjust her teaching techniques and also gave an example of how she fostered collaborative learning through demonstrating how collaboration was necessary in training whilst on-the-job with “experienced employees” at local hospitality businesses. When students saw the utility of what they were being taught, Jean reported that behavioural challenges reduced. She concluded by emphasising the matching of teaching strategies with particular class needs: “I recognized that I needed to adopt appropriate adjustment techniques to understand my adolescent learners so that I could enhance rapport and collaborative learning within my training sessions” (Jean, cn).

In this instance, Jean’s critical thinking was actioned by the experience of being challenged by a cohort of students and that this did not agree with her value position on education or the teaching and learning experience. Jean’s experience had potential

for producing evidence of critical spirit, in that her action was one of taking responsibility to find out more about her students. She also displayed an *openmindedness* towards their potential for developing a value for the training they were receiving.

#### **5.5.4.2 Kat**

Kat emphasised that the topic of her narrative was very much “alive” (Kat, cn) for her. It related to her starting as a TAFE teacher undertaking the delivery of competencies in the area of nursing. Kat considered herself a knowledgeable practitioner and saw the opportunity of teaching as a way to enhance her own professional development. Kat told how the assumptions that she held about herself as a “knowledgeable practitioner” were challenged. Shortly after starting, she was given the responsibility for setting up a mental health training program for a remote area: “I personally found the experience to be totally overwhelming. I felt as though I had entered a different reality.”

Kat put her position down to not understanding the jargon and processes of TAFE and the inability to find a senior person who could answer her questions and provide her with guidance and support: “Every time I asked for assistance they delegated responsibility to someone else.” Kat’s alternative was to persevere: “I pressed on; I reflected on the entire experience, realised that I would have to take control, figured it out for myself.” She reported that her self-confidence was draining away. She concluded that she needed to take control. She did. Three months later the course was up and running, with positive feedback being received from the stakeholders. Kat did not rest on her success and moved to further action: “Having gone through this experience I decided to take some positive action.” Kat lobbied for, produced and

implemented a series of 10-minute induction sessions for new staff. She wrote about what it was that drove her. It was not only her personal experience of inadequacy, but also what she called “an unrealistic perception by management to dangerously assume ...” that those employed to teach at TAFE can undertake the role with no support. She made a vigorous claim that holding the minimum qualification (Certificate 4 Workplace Assessor or Certificate 4 in Training and Assessment [TAA]<sup>4</sup>) to teach at TAFE is inadequate preparation for “bridging the theory and practice gap ... for a teacher to be employed in the VET sector”.

In Kat’s example, the challenge that prompted critical thinking was an affront to her identity as a “knowledgeable practitioner”. This experience prompted Kat to deploy her thinking toward filling the knowledge gap that created her angst. This culminated in the production of a series of staff induction sessions. This instance shows the potential for evidence of the elements of critical spirit that align with *intellectual responsibility* and *respect for others*.

#### **5.5.4.3 Tina**

Tina began her account with her wondering why she was still teaching and why she did not return to “the comfort of the corporate world” (Tina, cn). Her assumption was that teaching would be less demanding. “How wrong I was...!”, Tina stated. Having completed a Certificate 4 TAA, Tina had “never set foot in the classroom”. The following chunk emphasises the impact of her challenge: “Walking into that first class

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<sup>4</sup> In order to teach any VET curriculum, individuals are required by the Australian Quality Training Framework (AQTF) (Department of Education, Science and Technology, 2007) to have completed a level four VET certification in training. Specifically these are the Certificate IV in Assessment and Workplace Training (BSZ) or its predecessor, the Certificate IV in Training and Assessment (TAA). This is a requirement for TAFE teachers. Dissatisfaction with the BSZ certificate (see for example National Assessors and Workplace Trainers, 2001; Smith & Keating, 2003) led to the development and introduction of the TAA certificate. Criticism of the TAA certificate is also evident – for example, its inability to prepare VET practioners for increasingly complex educational judgements (McKenna & Mitchell, 2006; Palmieri, 2003).

was one of the hardest things I have done.” Tina talked about preparation and setting ground rules as the key to her survival. Yet on reflection she acknowledged that this focus was more on content, rather than on “... listening to them [the students] to learn more about their needs and motivations”. Tina noted that now her classes became a “... very different ball game”. Tina highlighted her emphasis on personal connections first and on acknowledging individual differences such as students’ differing social circumstances, motivation levels and expectations by TAFE. She acknowledged that this position was arrived at in relation to a series of experiences that affected her in a variety of ways. Tina reported on two of these. The first was an “in the face” confrontation with students over possible changes to assessment because of teacher replacement, and a second was Tina’s lack of knowledge about a student with Asperger’s syndrome. Becoming cognisant of her own lack of knowledge influenced her to rethink her engagement practices when seeking students’ resubmission of work. Both situations caused Tina to review her usual practice strategies and to base them on seeking to know the students first. Tina closed by asserting that in instructional practice “continual learning effort” is required.

In Tina’s experience, it was moving from the corporate world to the classroom that produced her challenge. It was not as easy as she had thought. Her critical thinking was deployed in relation to her pedagogy. She conceded that for her, a focus on the learning relationships that develop between teacher and student was important.

Privileging relationships over content was a prime consideration for her. In this instance there is possible evidence of the critical spirit elements of *openmindedness* and *respect for others*. Tina was being open to the importance of relationships within the learning exchange.

Contextualised instances of critical thinking were consistent across all of the participant narratives. The three instances above are examples of these teachers probing their and others' habitual ways of thinking and doing. Using Brookfield's (1987) lens, these happenings appear as instances of critical thinking. On these occasions these teachers have begun to reflect on their habitual ways of going about things or on the habitual happenings within their workplaces. They appear to have developed a contextual awareness that their thinking and doing are influenced strongly by the social constructions in which they have been immersed, and that these culturally induced value and belief systems, around what it is to teach as a TAFE teacher, are reinterpreted by them to produce attitudinal shifts. These attitudinal shifts appear to invite these participants to imagine, explore and do things differently.

Thus far in this chapter, I have provided insights into the thoughts, ideas, perceptions and experiences of the participants in this study. I have partly analysed the first data set and aligned it with a particular conceptual scaffold articulated as a means of moving towards explicating critical spirit in TAFE teacher discourse. I have made claims that within these data there are instances of reflective thought that resonate with scholarly conceptualisations of 'critical' and 'spirit'. Furthermore, I have explored the data using a lens of critical thinking and made claim that these data provide instances of critical thinking. I now move to overlay these narratives with the critical spirit framework articulated in Chapter Three. As mentioned previously, this framework was developed by positioning critical spirit, as articulated by Oxman-Michelli (1992), as a discourse using Gee's (2005) theory of discourse analysis.

## **5.6 Critical spirit in TAFE teacher discourse**

In this section, I report on data that resulted from my analysis of the discourse in the participant TAFE teachers' narrative artefacts using my conceptual position on critical spirit. The first subsection in this section relates to overlaying the critical spirit framework onto each case narrative. What is noted is the framework's usefulness in explicating what manifests as critical spirit within these case narratives. The second subsection speaks to the results of the credibility checks, and reports on the teachers' engagements with my interpretations of their narratives using the above mentioned coding framework.

Having read the teachers' artefacts several times, and having noted what might possibly be emerging indicators of critical spirit within their narratives, I read the artefacts once more and coded them according to the critical spirit framework (Tyler, 2008a; see Table 4.1). Noted were the chunks of narratives (Gee, 2005) salient to the indicators of critical spirit.

Twelve teacher artefacts were analysed, the results of which emulated those obtained from my previous piloting of the coding framework (Tyler, 2008a). When the framework was used, chunks of discourse (Gee, 2005) emerged that had similar contours to the indicators of critical spirit. Tables 5.4 and 5.5 are examples of the results obtained from the analysis of the participants' narrative artefacts. These respective examples highlight what the coding framework counts as critical spirit discourse within Linda and Gus's narratives. Within the tables there are numbers preceding the chunks; these are indicative of their sequential appearance within the artefact. Please note that some chunks are headed with italics. These are indicative of



some organising interpretative thoughts. In some instances the ends of chunks have bracketed initials – for example, “(IR)” or “(O)”. These are my way of acknowledging that particular chunks appear to have a connection with other elements of critical spirit; for example, “23 I have learnt invaluable lessons”, which has been interpreted as a statement pertaining to openmindedness (O), could also be considered to be part of the element intellectual responsibility (IR), in that an intellectually responsible act would most likely be to ‘seek reasons’ from an experience with an acknowledgment of this insight being useful new knowledge. As mentioned previously, this could well be an indicator of the phenomenon that I experienced when analysing these teachers’ narratives in relation to the concept of ‘spirit’. I noted a holistic ‘pressure’ that seemed to resist my conceptualising of ‘spirit’ by way of reduction. This was also consistent with my attempts at identifying elements of critical spirit.

In Linda’s narrative, she highlighted the valuable lessons that she had learnt from teaching; these lessons appeared as the pragmatic rules of thumb grown from personal experience and partly on advice from other teachers. The discourse chunks associated with *independence of mind* are examples of these. The first, a statement about unleashing herself on an unsuspecting group of students, appeared within her discussion of flexibility and seemingly said to deflect any portrayal of herself as being self-important. This, a probable attempt at humour, announced to me that Linda did not want to take herself too seriously, meaning that as a teacher she needed to deploy degrees of accommodation; hence this was a chunk that arose from self-knowledge.

Table 5.4: An analysis of Linda’s narrative

Elements of critical spirit (and indicators)	Chunks and interpretations
<p><b>Independence of mind (IM)</b>                      Various arguments and the author’s degree of support, the firmness with which views are held, public displays of position, likes and dislikes, self-disclosures of thoughts, ideas, beliefs, values and attitudes, degrees of self-knowledge.</p>	<p>1 I decided to impart my knowledge onto a group of unsuspecting students. (O)</p> <p>21 It’s all right to stray from planned sessions... (O)</p> <p><i>I’m here for student growth.</i></p> <p>25 To see them on the day of their event, seeing all their hard work come to fruition, was priceless. (R)</p>
<p><b>Openmindedness (O)</b>                      Willingness to consider different points of view, openness towards trying alternatives, non-contrariness, affirmation of possibilities, acceptance of change, a negotiable position as opposed to a non-negotiable position, a non-use of power to push an intellectual position.</p>	<p><i>Acceptance of student diversity</i></p> <p>13 Keeping them all engaged can be a challenge.</p> <p>14 I had them for two semesters, allowing me to really focus and vary my instructional methods accordingly.</p> <p>19 I was very wrong.</p> <p><i>Challenge to prescriptive curriculum</i></p> <p>22 ...strayed from planned sessions or lesson plans... to accommodate learning styles but also [for] relevance...</p> <p>23 I have learnt invaluable lessons.</p> <p>24 Topics can be a little dry and uninteresting for young people.</p>
<p><b>Wholeheartedness (W)</b>                      A zest for investigation, high degree of effort, an embracing of the narrator’s chosen topic, focused inquiry, energy, not dull, not bored or lethargic, “just enough is not good enough”, the concept of personal best, consistency in seeking reasons, perseverance, comfortable with the uncertainty of not knowing and continues to seek to know, following through.</p>	<p><i>Perseverance</i></p> <p>11 I kept looking for the light at the end of the tunnel.</p> <p>12 I can just see it. (see 10 in IR)</p>
<p><b>Intellectual responsibility (IR)</b>                      The seeking of reasons, awareness of bias (personal and other), an assessment of the trustworthiness of information, the seeking of detail, active engagement, working within discursive processes, being comfortable with dialectical engagement, the seeking of balance between the objective and the subjective.</p>	<p><i>Continuous improvement</i></p> <p>7 I utilised the inherited resources as a base and adjusted and altered them to suit.</p> <p><i>Teaching is hard work but I am prepared to fulfill the responsibilities.</i></p> <p>8 I felt very inadequate, disorganized and challenged. (O)</p> <p>9 I felt disadvantaged that I had not been given more preparation time. (O)</p> <p>10 But I kept a level head, maintained my professionalism. (see 11 and 12 in W)</p> <p><i>Go the extra mile to...</i></p> <p>20 Rectify the situation. (W)</p> <p>26 I now know that this journey for me is going to be a continual learning curve. I know I can learn from students and that I can continue to grow as an educator. (It feels right to consider this for all 5 elements)</p>

Table 5.4: (Con't)

Elements of critical spirit (and indicators)	Chunks and interpretations
<p><b>Respect for others (R)</b>                      Expressions of empathy, human over technical, avoids sympathy, looks on self as a tool to emancipate others, fair consideration of others' perspective, displays humility, cooperation, interdependence, community, acceptance of diversity, tolerance, engagement with the voices of others, socially conscious, non-conceitedness, acceptance of mistakes.</p>	<p><i>Appreciation</i>                      6 I really appreciated the planning and assistance [from colleagues] as I was not really in a position to make a lot of changes. (CofS)                       15 I needed to cover all aspects of the unit in broad, differing ways (O)                       16 to ensure all learning styles were covered.                       17 They were a great group of people to work with.                       18 carefully consider students' fears and inhibitions.</p>
<p><b>Other discourse</b></p>	
<p><i>Test of fortitude (ToF)</i></p>	<p>2 I was literally “thrown in the deep end” and allocated a full timetable of fifteen units to teach.                      4 I was literally one lesson ahead of my students.</p>
<p><i>Community of support (CofS)</i></p>	<p><i>Past teacher leaving some resources</i>                      3 My predecessor has left student workbooks.                      5 A colleague kept reminding me that “you know more than the students do; just keep referring to real life instances”.</p>

As is evident in the table, I have also related *independence of mind* to the element of *openmindedness*. From my interpretation of Linda's articulated need for flexibility arose the resonating cord with the element of *openmindedness*. This occurred with Linda affirming a position that she was open to changing perspectives. This too is evident in the next chunk, Line 21, “It's all right to stray from planned sessions ... ”. This is an articulation of belief (*independence of mind*) yet also one that indicates an *openmindedness* to notions of what constitutes curriculum, and for me it is also an example of Linda's propensity to contesting prescriptive curriculum or at least taking a critical perspective of curriculum.

Under *wholeheartedness* I placed chunks that related to Linda's major act of perseverance. In her case narrative Linda tells of being "thrown in the deep end" (Linda, cn). This relates to her experience of having to begin to teach with only a minute portion of teaching resources. She told of how she had to develop complete teaching resources for five modules, and that she was "literally one lesson ahead of [her] students". I interpreted Linda persevering with teaching because of "the light at the end of the tunnel" as an act of wholeheartedness. In this instance Linda's *wholeheartedness* too had connections with *intellectual responsibility*. The chunks of discourse that aligned with *intellectual responsibility* were those that talked of Linda's apparent comfort with notions of continuous improvement. She talked of continually refining teaching resources to suit student needs, but also to meet the gaps in available teaching resources. This was interpreted by me as part of her professionalism, which was noted in the above table as also connecting with Linda's enactment of *wholeheartedness*. Linda's *respect for others* plainly comes through in the discourse chunks that exemplify her flexibility around various student teaching needs and her willingness and attempts to accommodate these. Again for me this resonates with *openmindedness*.

Linda also articulated a respect for those other TAFE teachers who offered her pragmatic assistance (Line 5). This particular chunk was drawn from another discourse I found evident in some of these teacher's case narratives. This "Other discourse" I named *community of support*, where chunks of discourse announced instances involving the provision of support for the individual teacher by his/her teaching community. The fact that this was significant enough to be put into respective case narratives indicated to me the possibility of a *community of support*

discourse being involved in developing an increased understanding of critical spirit. This too was the case for the “Other discourse” that I called a *test of fortitude*. I began to consider this discourse as possibly being indicative of resilience and hardiness, concepts that I had added to my conceptualisations of ‘spirit’ and again involved as having a possible connection with critical spirit.

Gus’s case narrative was chosen for the second example because of its resonance with all the other narratives, as was Linda’s, but also because of it offering difference. Table 5.5 is an analysis of Gus’s case narrative. Gus’s example provides much personal opinion; hence the element of *independence of mind* is strongly represented. Gus, a teacher in refrigeration and air conditioning, moved into teaching from the particularly high-pressure position of service manager within a large private company.

Gus highlighted the need for high degrees of preparation for his previous job in both trade knowledge and organisational skill. His chunks of discourse, indicating resonance with *independence of mind*, exemplified his bemusement about the expectations that the employing TAFE institute had about his undertaking what he thought was a responsible task, the teaching of apprentices, with little knowledge of his teaching ability and with “no teaching resources” (Gus, cn). The presence of this degree of *independence of mind* might be seen to ‘shoulder out’ instances of *openmindedness* and other elements of critical spirit. This may be apparent when a comparison is made between the number of chunks in *independence of mind* and other elements. Nevertheless, Gus’s *independence of mind* did not extinguish other elements. In Gus’s case one element of critical spirit had more presence than other

elements, yet all elements, including the other discourses of a *test of fortitude* and *community of support*, were evident.

Table 5.5: *An analysis of Gus’s narrative*

Elements of critical spirit (and indicators)	Chunks and interpretations
<p><b>Independence of mind (IM)</b>                      Various arguments and the author’s degree of support, the firmness with which views are held, public displays of position, likes and dislikes, self-disclosures of thoughts, ideas, beliefs, values and attitudes, degrees of self-knowledge.</p>	<p><i>Bemused</i>                      2 I did however find it extraordinary that I was not questioned in regard to my previous teaching experience.</p> <p>3 The recruitment of new trade teachers is becoming increasingly difficult .... Persons are often recruited based on being the sole applicant for the position.</p> <p>8 I look back with bemusement and disbelief at the coaching and mentoring availability prior to my teaching engagement.</p> <p><i>Position on curriculum</i>                      10 ... was too advanced at that level to allow for easy conceptualisation by the students who were undertaking a trade certificate ...</p> <p>11 My belief that as a trades teacher the needs of the students are better met by lesson deliveries supported by industry experience, and that we should not aspire to the higher levels of engineering before ensuring that all students are fully conversant with the fundamentals of the trade. (R &amp; IR)</p> <p>12 This is the premise (11) that I use ... for delivery methodology.</p>
<p><b>Openmindedness (O)</b>                      Willingness to consider different points of view, openness towards trying alternatives, non-contrariness, affirmation of possibilities, acceptance of change, a negotiable position as opposed to a non-negotiable position, a non-use of power to push an intellectual position.</p>	<p>13 I thought I would receive a great deal more training and direction. (IR &amp; IM)</p>
<p><b>Wholeheartedness (W)</b>                      A zest for investigation, high degree of effort, an embracing of the narrator’s chosen topic, focused inquiry, energy, not dull, not bored or lethargic, “just enough is not good enough”, the concept of personal best, consistency in seeking reasons, perseverance, comfortable with the uncertainty of not knowing and continues to seek to know, following through.</p>	<p><i>Perseverance - following through</i>                      6 I did however view this as a new challenge, and enthusiasm took the place of any apprehensions I may have had.</p>

Table 5.5: (Con't)

Elements of critical spirit (and indicators)	Chunks and interpretations
<p><b>Intellectual responsibility (IR)</b>                      The seeking of reasons, awareness of bias (personal and other), an assessment of the trustworthiness of information, the seeking of detail, active engagement, working within discursive processes, being comfortable with dialectical engagement, the seeking of balance between the objective and the subjective.</p>	<p><i>The seeking of reasons</i>                      1 ... gave me cause to conduct some soul searching.</p> <p><i>The seeking of detail</i>                      5 I requested permission to sit in on some lessons that my soon to be predecessor was delivering to a group.</p>
<p><b>Respect for others (R)</b>                      Expressions of empathy, human over technical, avoids sympathy, looks on self as a tool to emancipate others, fair consideration of others' perspectives, displays humility, cooperation, interdependence, community, acceptance of diversity, tolerance, engagement with the voices of others, socially conscious, non-conceitedness, acceptance of mistakes.</p>	<p>14 I source every possible resource to assist them in achieving their goals. (W)</p>
<p><b>Other discourse</b></p>	
<p><i>Test of fortitude (ToF)</i></p>	<p>4 No teaching resources, paper or electronic, were created or maintained .... I need to compile my own ...</p> <p>9 I do however see this as a test of character in resourcefulness and resilience, and maybe somehow it serves the Darwinian theory of natural selection, that being the survival of the fittest.</p>
<p><i>Community of support (CofS)</i></p>	<p>7 The other trade teachers in my faculty were very supportive, offering their time whenever possible.</p>

Gus's chunk in *openmindedness* is indicative of his expectation and willingness to be open to his personal knowledge of pedagogy being extended. His chunk in *respect for others* is indicative of his acknowledgment of the importance of his students' goals and his want to help his students obtain them. Gus's chunks of discourse that coincided with a *test of fortitude* are those that possibly connote with a position on resilience and hardiness within critical spirit. This marks terrain that is contested by

other TAFE teachers within this project. As is evident in subsequent discussion of the analysis of other case narrative artefacts, particularly that which emerged from the credibility checks, Gus's notion of "the survival of the fittest" as a marker of resilience and hardiness was not shared by all of the participants. This influenced me to be more critical about resilience's and hardiness's possible contribution to extending notions of critical spirit – a point that I take further later in this and succeeding chapters.

For the analysis of all of the selected narrative artefacts, a table and written analysis (exemplified above) were produced for all of the participant narrative artefacts, with chunks of critical spirit discourse emerging from each artefact. The chunks pertaining to the critical spirit elements of *openmindedness* and *respect for others* appeared evident in all narratives. Chunks indicative of *intellectual responsibility* were absent from only one of the 12 artefacts, whilst chunks pertaining to *independence of mind* and *wholeheartedness* appeared absent from one further narrative and *wholeheartedness* was not evident in two.

The frequency of the emergent critical spirit discourse demonstrates how the elements of the discourse look in relation to the group as a whole (Silverman, 1993); this is represented in Table 5.6 and includes examples of chunks from narratives other than Linda and Gus's.

Tables 5.4, 5.5, and 5.6 tell of the data that resulted from my chosen exogenous coding categories. There are also data indicative of possible indigenous elements. These are exemplified in particular tables under the heading of "Other discourse". The



most prevalent are chunks that speak about the experiences of these TAFE teachers that relate to a *test of fortitude* discourse. Table 5.7 lists the TAFE teachers and examples of chunks of their narrative that evoke this discourse, which appeared to be existent in 11 of the 12 artifacts.

Table 5.6: *Element frequency and critical spirit discourse examples*

Elements of critical spirit (Oxman-Michelli, 1992)	Number of times elements appeared as chunks in narratives	Example of chunks of critical spirit discourse
Independence of mind	33	3 The assumption that having a Cert[ificate] IV in workplace assessor [ <i>sic</i> ] will be an adequate qualification to get through is a sad indictment, as I believe that it does not prepare the teacher thoroughly enough. (Kat)
Openmindedness	37	6 ... effort to convert early negative experiences into a positive. (Matt)
Wholeheartedness	12	4 I was enthusiastic and passionate about passing on my knowledge and expertise. (Karen)
Intellectual responsibility	27	14 ... ongoing education rather than a destination for the teacher to reach. (Hannah)
Respect for others	29	19 At all times I was aware of the need to meet my students' needs. (Mitchell)

Table 5.7: *Examples of chunks pertaining to a test of fortitude discourse*

Teacher	Test of fortitude discourse
Linda	20 When [I] begun TAFE teaching [I was] 'thrown in the deep end' with what was considered a large workload.
Mitchell	20 I started to realise what an enormous challenge laid before me.
Jean	3 I have been continually experiencing the feeling of discomfort, stress and the lack of enthusiasm to attend class.
June	[No chunk evident]
Kat	15 Having been reduced to a bumbling, inarticulate almost regressed adult, by a system and an institution that appeared to have no structure that functioned by "making it up as it went along".
Tina	5 I was not prepared for the new challenges I would face.
Gus	14 No teaching resources, paper or electronic, were created or maintained .... I needed to compile my own.
Ryan	6 I frequently experience unwillingness from them [students] to acquire the content knowledge.
Karen	8 ... armed with preconceived assumptions formulated from misinformation.
Matt	12 ... 'thrown in the deep end' and having to 'sink or swim'.
Roberta	14 My worst nightmare is now running out of prepared material.
Hannah	27 I found it really hard to cope in the same way that I had previously after 18 months working with involuntary clients with drug addictions [ <i>sic</i> ] issues.

The other indigenous element that emerged was a *community of support* discourse.

The following chunks are examples:

23 A colleague kept reminding me that “You know more than the students do; just keep referring to real life experiences”. (Linda)

1 I was assisted by my predecessor in the first session where I was made familiar with the class set up and the delivery mode. (Tina)

This discourse emerged from seven of the artefacts and appeared four times.

Both *test of fortitude* and *community of support* discourses appear as part of the “other stuff” that Gee (2005, p. 7) suggested adds to the construction activities of reality making through discourse. All case narrative artefacts, except Ryan’s, clearly articulated realities in which degrees of tension existed between the teachers and their respective TAFE institutes. Some tensions were expressed as differences in expected work output, others around how curriculum should be delivered and still others about appropriate levels of support that teachers should receive from administrators, with the latter being expressed as too little or, when things didn’t go to administrators’ plans, too much. What these two explicit discourses told me was that most of these participants were, rightly or wrongly ‘under pressure’ and that they had experienced situations where they had to work beyond what they thought was their appropriate capacity, and in some cases capability. Most appeared to traverse this troubled terrain unscathed or only partly scathed, and they used the journey as the grist for their case narratives.

The articulation of a *test of fortitude*, and in some cases its transcendence, is a way of building a reality that says, “I was tested and I passed the test – I’m worthy.” This

successful dealing with adversity appears as the “stuff” of spirit when, for example, spirit is thought about in terms of resilience and hardiness. This is how my original hunch regarding resilience and hardiness being connected to critical spirit was expressed. It would seem that from these data a connection was there. Whether it is a pre-requisite, antidote or ally to critical spirit is unclear. As mentioned, more light is shed on a *test of fortitude* discourse in the credibility checks and interviews.

What is evident is that the *community of support* discourse appeared with less intensity than a *test of fortitude* discourse within these narrative artefacts. This seemed out of character with notion of teachers working in collegial environments or indeed with the reactions of people experiencing degrees of hardship; for example, Brookfield (1994) noted the use of collegial support when discussing the “dark side” (p. 214) of adult educators’ work and was evident too in the research conducted by Wegner, McDermott and Snyder (2002) into communities of practice. The ‘silence’ attracted my attention because when I’m under pressure I also seek support from my friends and colleagues, but this was less evident within these case narratives. These teachers voiced only a few connections with colleagues. Their use of a collegial support, which could have been used to leverage their respective responses to the pressures of their workplaces, was either slight – for example, accessing advice and some incomplete resources – or not evident at all. In the subsequent interviews, some teachers acknowledged that other teachers were around but they were reluctant to ask them for support. Most mentioned that the other teachers had full workloads and were also ‘under pressure’. This possibly influenced some participants not to ask for support or help because of the imposition causing an increase in other teachers’ workloads.

Another possibility is that these teachers were building identities that were associated with dominant discourses (Gee, 1999; Gergen, 1999). These dominant discourses or metanarratives (Mishler, 1995) are said to constrain personal narratives as they put pressure on the author to hold to taken-for-granted notions of what is ‘good’ or ‘bad’. Within these teachers’ case narratives is the possibility that they are building identities that imbue self-reliance and independence because this is part of a dominant discourse related in this instance to discourses of a market economy (in which neo vocationalism is positioned) and prescriptions of teachers by accrediting bodies. The possibility of exploring a counternarrative emerges for me. If these teachers were to rub shoulders with a discourse of, for example, social interdependence (Johnson & Johnson, 2000), what might emerge as a *community of support* discourse, and would it hold more substance within their construction of identities? This is something outside the limits of this research project, but which is suggested as a future research endeavour.

## **5.7 Credibility checks**

The second data set consisted of feedback from participants on the results of my analysis of their narratives using the aforementioned critical spirit framework.

The results were presented to each participant by giving her or him a copy of the analysis of the respective narrative, as detailed in the examples of Linda and Gus’s narrative analysis, Tables 5.4 and 5.5. Appendix D details the letter sent to participants regarding the credibility check phase. Attached to the letter were the critical spirit framework table, each participant’s specific narrative analysis table and a feedback form (Appendix E). The participants were asked to:

1. Reread their narrative
2. Read and make themselves familiar with the critical spirit coding framework table (Table 4.1)
3. Read my analysis of their narrative
4. Comment on and/or add to my analysis using the provided comments sheet
5. Return their comments to me using the prepaid envelope or via email.

As a precursor to the collection of the third data set through an in-depth interview, I also added four open-ended questions to the credibility check comments sheet. These were:

1. What did you find out about yourself through the analysis of your narrative using this method?
2. How might this understanding of critical spirit have value to you in understanding your identity as a TAFE teacher?
3. How might you use this concept?
4. What questions came to mind when you engaged with this analysis?

My intention with these questions was to explore the participants' preliminary thoughts on critical spirit as it applied to their identities, in order to be attentive and open to possible critiques of critical spirit or possible different explanatory frameworks for critical spirit. A further intention was to provide participants with a foretaste as to the types of questions that I would be asking in the semi-structured interviews.

Eight credibility checks were returned. These came from Linda, Mitchell, Jean, Kat, Tina, Gus, Ryan and Matt. Four participants withdrew from the project before the

collection of this second data set. Of these, three participants cited family and work pressures as reasons for their withdrawal. The fourth person's withdrawal was indicated by not replying to my requests for credibility check responses and interview availability.

What emerged from the credibility checks is dealt with in two subsections. The first relates to participants' views of my analysis, and the second subsection reports on the responses provided to the open-ended questions on the feedback form. In these credibility checks two things stand out: (a) the embracing of the concept of critical spirit by these teachers; and (b) further evidence of the 'gravity' between the elements of critical spirit that appeared to resist insular thinking about individual elements, and that there is a propensity shown by the participants to keep in mind a holistic perspective of the concept.

### ***5.7.1 The participants' views of the researcher's analysis***

First I offer some general comments in relation to participant responses to my analysis. I then turn to each participant individually for more specific comment.

Participant comment came in two forms. Linda, Mitchell, Gus, Tina and Matt provided explicit comments agreeing with my analysis of the elements of critical spirit discourse emerging from their narratives. Gus was the only participant in the group to offer comment about the inclusion of some of his chunks in elements different from my analysis. In Linda, Mitchell and Gus's narratives I had identified the five elements of critical spirit discourse – *independence of mind*, *openmindedness*, *wholeheartedness*, *intellectual responsibility* and *respect for others* – as being present

in their narratives. In my analysis of Tina and Matt’s narratives I had made no identification of any discourse that aligned with *wholeheartedness*. Both Tina and Matt noted this, and provided possible explanations for its omission.

Jean and Ryan gave another form of comment. They offered feedback that did not make explicit their agreement or disagreement; rather they contextualised the elements by giving examples of how the critical spirit elements apply to themselves in the contexts of their teaching. As I engaged with their feedback I developed the sense that it was an affirmation of my identification of the elements of critical spirit in their respective narratives, and that they chose to add to my analysis by providing contextualised examples of how they thought that they embodied notions of critical spirit. I turn now to the specific responses.

#### **5.7.1.1 Linda**

Linda agreed with all my interpretations in relation to specific chunks of her narrative aligning with the critical spirit framework. She offered supportive statements as to why she agreed; for example, under *independence of mind* she stated: “I **am** here for student growth” (Linda, cc; **emphasis in original**); under *wholeheartedness*: “I think my narrative shows perseverance and following through”; and under *respect for others*: “The narrative indicates acceptance of diversity and mistakes and also reflects empathy”. Linda’s statement under “Other discourse” *personal test of fortitude* is of interest. She stated: “Teaching is a test of fortitude – every day. There is always a continual challenge.” She asked a question in this section: “Do all teachers have the same experience?” The data suggest that this appeared to be the case. As mentioned

previously, a *test of fortitude* discourse was evident in all analysed case narrative artefacts except one.

#### **5.7.1.2 Mitchell**

Mitchell's comments amounted to a firm agreement with the majority of my interpretations. He states: "Yes, I most definitely agree with the researcher's analysis" (Mitchell, cc). His only noted contention was around my omission of any chunks pertaining to the element *wholeheartedness*. He states: "I am not totally sure how to interpret this element but I believe that I did address some of the aspects of this element e.g. concept of personal best in delivering quality training to my students" (Mitchell, cc).

This prompted a re-examination of Mitchell's narrative. I concluded that, whilst the concept of personal best was implied in the narrative, no actual chunks (as identified by the coding framework) were evident. This apparent anomaly is indicative of the resistant nature that the concept of critical spirit has towards being reduced to a set of categories. By using the suggested framework I had missed Mitchell's positioning of himself as wholehearted. This may be an inadequacy associated with the framework or indeed in its conceptualisation, yet the framework has been successful in identifying *wholeheartedness* in other artefacts. My interpretation tends to lean more towards the substance of critical spirit being holistic.

#### **5.7.1.3 Jean**

Jean's response to my analysis of her narrative using the critical spirit framework contained what appeared to be examples of how she embodied or enacted critical



spirit in her work as a teacher. Yet in her comments she did attest to an *independence of mind* that may be interpreted as closed-minded. She reports in her comments under this section of the feedback: “I took for granted that all learners were the same ... with identical perceptions towards learning” (Jean, cc). When I related this back to the identified chunks of discourse on *independence of mind* in the initial analysis, I concluded that these comments were disclosures of a personal position that Jean herself later challenged. Jean’s other chunks of discourse showed her challenging this position. Chunks of discourse that aligned with the element of *opendmindedness* attest to this possibility; for example:

4 I realised that I assumed all semester enrolments would be identical.

8 I realised I needed to adopt appropriate adjustment techniques to understand my adolescent learners. (Jean)

Jean’s response also provides an example of her apparent embodiment of the “Other discourse” identified in the initial analysis. Her comment on the element of personal *test of fortitude* tells of this element being a continuous component of teaching that has a personal dimension: “training, preparation, acknowledging learners ... and administration duties impact on teachers’ personal feelings” (Jean, cn).

#### **5.7.1.4 Kat**

Kat responded with agreement about all the elements of critical spirit. She offered no comments in “Other discourse”. In some of her affirmative responses she added specific comments about herself; for example, in the comments on *wholeheartedness*, Kat stated that she is “passionate about her subject” (Kat, cc), and in relation to *intellectual responsibility* that she “believes in keeping current”. Kat’s comment

under *respect for others* is of note. Kat believed that respect for others is a part of “a principle of adult learning”. She disclosed that she upheld this principle and applied it to her teaching practice.

Kat’s connection of critical spirit with adult learning principles evoked in me Brookfield’s (1987) position on the critical thinker. His suggestion that critical thinking is a developmental task necessary for developing into, and throughout, adulthood, and that it exhibits “... an acceptance of a diversity of values, behaviours and social structures” (p. 5), again leads me to think of critical spirit as being a visceral embodiment of critical thinking. The other connection that I make is between *respect for others* and *openmindedness*. With this perspective Kat is enacting *respect for others* by deploying adult learning principles, which include an acceptance of, and accommodation for, diversity.

#### **5.7.1.5 Tina**

Tina’s response was similar to Mitchell’s in that she indicated her assent by stating, “Agree with your view” (Tina, cc) alongside all of the elements identified in the feedback sheet except *wholeheartedness*. Her articulated view about that element was firstly an acknowledgment that “... this is not demonstrated within” her narrative. She qualified this with her view that wholeheartedness grows as the teacher builds confidence with her or his teaching, but also that confidence comes when the teacher is accepting of “one’s limitations”. This strikes a chord with Palmer’s (1998) position of teaching from a position of authenticity, in which the teacher has developed degrees of self-knowledge and is true to this knowledge in enacting the identities of a teacher. Tina could therefore be articulating how she is ‘becoming’, and that

wholeheartedness for her is something to grow towards. The implication for the concept of critical spirit is that it might be useful to consider it from a developmental perspective. This certainly resonates with Brookfield's (1987) developmental position on the critical thinker, yet also with Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) notion of identity development being a process of "*becoming*" (p. 238).

#### **5.7.1.6 Gus**

Gus reported that he agreed with my analysis in relation to *openmindedness*, *wholeheartedness*, *intellectual responsibility* and *respect for others* chunks being evident in his narrative. He believed that the chunk:

13 I thought I would receive a great deal more training and direction (Gus) would be better suited to the element of *independence of mind*. My assumption was that Gus thought that his chunk was articulating a position of attitude (*independence of mind*) in relation to his expectations about the TAFE organisation engaging with him in his development as a teacher. I interpreted the statement as his willingness to be open to further training and the new perspectives on teaching that this may give; hence my identification of this chunk as an element of *openmindedness*. Again this is possibly indicative of the resistance experienced when reducing critical spirit into its constituent elements and using these in isolation from one another. In my interpretation, I considered the chunk as discourse associated with *openmindedness*, whilst Gus took a different perspective and suggested *independence of mind*, yet both appear as equally valid interpretations.

Gus's second recommendation was in relation to a chunk to be added to the element of *respect for others*. His recommendation was for me to consider his chunk

associated with the “Other discourse”, a *community of support* as another example of the element *respect for others*. In this chunk Gus focuses upon:

7 The other trade teachers (Gus)

supporting him wherever possible. My interpretation was that this was an acknowledgment of the other teachers’ enactments possibly being indicators of *respect for others*, not Gus’s. Hence I did not include it in the analysis of Gus’s narrative. Alternatively, Gus may have interpreted his ‘acceptance’ of support from other TAFE teachers as an indicator of respect for others, to which I could attach the interpretation of and expression of the element *openmindedness*. Again the concept of critical spirit appears to offer degrees of resistance to the isolation of its specific elements and their individual use in providing tightly focused versions of the phenomenon. The implication of this methodologically is that my notions of a discourse of critical spirit also provide rich and varied positionings on reality.

### **5.7.1.7 Ryan**

Ryan, like Jean, provided comments that were statements of how the elements of critical spirit related to his enactments as a teacher. What was different in Ryan’s credibility check was that his comments related to how the elements appeared to have been used to increase his teaching efficacy, especially in relation to his work with Indigenous people. Ryan did not explicitly agree or disagree with how I had analysed his narrative; instead he made statements that align with critical spirit elements. For example:

*Independence of mind* – “It is my contention that the ability to successfully deliver training to Indigenous students requires an appreciation of context.”

*Openmindedness* – “...must consider different points of view.”

*Wholeheartedness* – “To be involved in the field of indigenous training requires a high degree of effort [and] perseverance.”

*Intellectual responsibility* – “ ... need to ‘translate’ expectations into something more tangible and recognizable for indigenous learners.”

*Respect for others* – “consideration of others[’] perspectives ... translates into the open involvement of both parties to the training.” (Ryan, cc)

Ryan’s response extended my analysis by providing a possible example of an embodiment of critical spirit. His responses told how he enacts the various elements. Ryan’s credibility check did not offer glimpses of the apparent resistance the critical spirit has to being deconstructed into its constituent elements. This response tells ‘this is what I do’ in relation to the elements of critical spirit. Ryan’s response supported the contention of critical spirit as having visceral properties, and possibly exemplified Barnett’s (1997) “critical being” (p. 7).

#### **5.7.1.8 Matt**

Matt completed the “Participants’ views on researcher’s analysis” column for all of the elements of critical spirit and “Other discourse” with: “Marks’ [*sic*] interpretation of this element has identified the intention of the author” (Matt, cc). No contention was articulated. Matt commented more in relation to the open-ended questions asked on the comments sheet. I expand on these in the next subsection.

### 5.7.2 What TAFE teachers said – their answers to open-ended questions in the credibility checks

In this subsection the answers that Linda, Mitchell, Jean, Kat, Tina, Gus, Ryan and Matt gave to the above mentioned prompting questions, which were aimed at eliciting their preliminary thoughts on critical spirit as it applies to their identities, are reported. The four questions are dealt with in the sequence of their appearance on the feedback sheet. Answers are reported in Tables 5.8 to 5.11.

#### 5.7.2.1 Themes that emerged from the answers to Question 1

As reported in Table 5.8, generally these teachers attested to the analysis providing them with more of a self-understanding, through the casting of what Mitchell called “a critical eye” (Mitchell, int) over their own narratives. Most of these answers relayed to me the notion that this was a positive experience.

Table 5.8: *Participant answers to Question 1: “What did you find out about yourself through the analysis of your narrative using this method?”*

Participant	Answer
Linda	It makes you think and analyse yourself and teaching even more. Looking back, it makes me realise that I am doing a good job and struggling through the first semester was worth it.
Mitchell	By using this method it enabled me to cast a more critical eye over what I had written.
Jean	That I possessed knowledge of continual difficulties that I have been experiencing within my teaching area and at the time did not realise that this is a major concern for all team members. Furthermore that it would be more productive for these barriers and issues to be discussed between teams to justify approaches for early resolution, leading to a collaborative learning environment.
Kat	I should not voice my opinions so openly.
Tina	How little I knew when I first started about teaching styles but I did know about people and had a respect for them. This has seen me through[;] even as I continue to learn about adult education I see that my role as a facilitator is still constantly changing as my participants change.
Gus	[No answer.]
Ryan	This process allowed a self-analysis to occur, a reflective look at the underpinning requirement for lecturers dealing with indigenous learners to consider all of the elements of critical spirit identified.
Matt	The analysis highlighted the many elements of critical spirit necessary to cope with the many and varied pressures impacting on a ‘new’ TAFE teacher.

The comment from Kat that she “... should not voice [her] opinions so openly” (Kat, cc) stands as an outlier. This suggested to me that Kat has concerns with the *independence of mind* element within critical spirit. It suggested that there was a personal price to pay for articulating one’s position openly. (This is a point that I took up with Kat in her interview.) Both Linda and Matt mentioned the pressures of teaching. Both appeared to allude to their use of the concept as a means of coping by giving some kind of personal recognition to what they do in difficult times.

### 5.7.2.2 Themes that emerged from the answers to Question 2

The answers presented in Table 5.9 are indicative of the value of an understanding of critical spirit to these teachers. This appeared to lie again in how it has added to their understanding of self.

Table 5.9: *Participant answers to Question 2: “How might this understanding of critical spirit have value to you in understanding your identity as a TAFE teacher?”*

Participant	Answer
Linda	It made me realise how important the role is and that most students look to the teacher as a role model and someone to guide them.
Mitchell	I think it allows an individual the ability to create a greater self-understanding of their own self and how their thoughts and actions impact on others.
Jean	That I am not the only teacher to experience difficulties with curriculum, working conditions and the classroom environment. These issues I feel have been ignored by our senior level of management. So as a department coordinator/teacher I must ensure that myself and my team are adequately prepared and have regular discussions concerning any issues that can be detrimental to us as teachers.
Kat	The critical ‘spirit’ of the TAFE teacher was not valued in this instance.
Tina	When looking at the role as a TAFE teacher in comparison to the perception of a university lecturer, it can now be seen that the two are very different. My intentions were to use TAFE as a stepping-stone to university teaching but while[,] starting to understand the concept of critical spirit, I understand the roles are very different and have very different outcomes.
Gus	[No answer.]
Ryan	This is of value as it becomes a tool for self-reflection and could be used in a community of practice to value add to the process of engagement of policymakers, learners and lecturers.
Matt	Why am I doing this [teaching] The desire to ‘keep at it’ [stay teaching, not

	return to the trade] has been due to the elements of critical spirit highlighted by this analysis. This [teaching] is not ‘just a job’.
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Linda highlighted critical spirit’s importance in helping her come to the realisation that teachers are important role models. Ryan noted its value as a “tool for self-reflection” and Matt enacted this reflection by asking the question: “Why am I doing this [teaching]” and answers this question by positioning himself as a teacher who embodies critical spirit. Kat’s answer was evident by its tone of disappointment. She suggested that she too embodies elements of critical spirit but her current work environment didn’t value it. The apparently difficult experience of ‘doing’ TAFE teaching for these teachers also emerged from these answers.

### **5.7.2.3 Themes that emerged from the answers to Question 3**

In Table 5.10, reflection again emerged as a central theme. This, a looking back, is augmented with looking forward towards possibilities, towards: “What I would do differently” (Linda, cc); “overcom[ing] and identif[ying] further incidents ... that need addressing” (Jean, cc); and “where I am heading” (Matt, cc). Even the statement from Kat attested to the enactment of critical spirit in a new work environment being a possibility.

Tina raised an interesting idea in her answer. It appeared that she reflected long and hard on the fact that my analysis did not identify wholeheartedness within her narrative. She suggested that, whilst trying to survive the pressures of the job, she had no space to develop wholeheartedness. She reported that she does now. Tina’s comment highlighted her view that using the concept of critical spirit is a personal



affair. She took the position that she would resist its use as a benchmarking tool. If it were used in this way in her case, she may well be identified as not displaying wholeheartedness, a claim that could possibly leave her emotionally bereft and labelled as inadequate. This could be a possibility, especially in situations where her workload was such that it thwarted her ability to develop wholeheartedness. This raised for me a concern around the political ramifications of using these critical spirit elements as a means to identify acceptable and unacceptable dispositions in teachers. If this was the case, Tina’s subjectivity could be judged as being lacking. This also adds a perspective of vigilance towards the misuse of reductionist views of critical spirit. A holistic, developmental view would be less likely to entertain perceptions of variability and possible elitism brought about by selective attention to specific elements of critical spirit.

Table 5.10: *Participant answers to Question 3: “How might you use this concept?”*

<b>Participant</b>	<b>Answer</b>
Linda	I would consider using this concept at the end of a semester when reflecting and analysing how everything went. What would I do differently? Why?
Mitchell	To be honest I am still coming to grips with the whole concept of critical spirit. I would need to do more research to fully understand the concept in order to use it to its fullest.
Jean	To overcome and identify further incidents, analyse workplace situations that need addressing.
Kat	I must continue with the spirit in a new environment.
Tina	I would personally use this to improve my own teaching methods and evaluation. It would be used as a self-reflection tool to improve educational outcomes rather than as a benchmarking tool. At first I did have a comment in wholeheartedness – why are not all the boxes filled? I then realised that at that time I was trying to survive and keep my job. Wholeheartedness is what I am developing now.
Gus	[No answer.]
Ryan	See above Q2.
Matt	To remind me of where I’ve been and where I am heading.

#### **5.7.2.4 Themes that emerged from the answers to Question 4**

Table 5.11 is indicative of Mitchell, Tina and Matt's acknowledgment of a lack of certainty in their respective understandings of critical spirit. This reflected a number of possibilities, the first being that the concept is not well-known. The level of academic interest and consequent research appears to exemplify this position. Another possibility is that the methods deployed in data collection kept to a minimum a previous engagement with the concept of critical spirit. By using case narrative artefacts that were constructed prior to these teachers' involvement in the project I reduced any preconceptions of critical spirit to a minimum within the initial data set. This strengthens any claims about a critical spirit discourse being tacitly manifest in these teachers' discourse. A further possibility associated with the expressed uncertainty was that some participants might have also got caught up in its apparent holistic nature, so that they saw connections among elements that I either did or did not necessarily make explicit in my analysis. This would have influenced them to continue to have questions about critical spirit; for example, is it the individual elements or is its ethereal construct that should be treated as a whole?

In Jean and Ryan's case, they applied the elements to themselves holistically in context and gave personal examples of individual enactments of the elements. My interpretation is that Jean and Ryan had similar ideas in that they both applied it to their identities as a reflective tool. They asked questions about themselves in practice, and appeared content with what they found. This appeared to validate, at least partly, their self-concept and hence their acceptance of the concept. Jean took this further in her musings about its use with her fellow team members.

Linda appeared to use critical spirit as some kind of benchmark upon which she could measure her performance, and so too did Kat and Tina. However, Kat appeared to see it as a benchmarking device for TAFE to use in acknowledging the value of TAFE teachers to the TAFE organisation, and as contributors to industry, not just as end users of industry perspectives through implementing industry training packages.

Table 5.11: *Participant answers to Question 4: “What questions came to mind when you engaged with this analysis?”*

Participant	Answer
Linda	How can I continue to improve?
Mitchell	Refer to question 3.
Jean	Would this analysis assist in the understanding of my position as a teacher and my team members and the continuous hardships experienced in or out of the classroom?
Kat	Positive change for the way TAFE teachers are valued and their recognition by industry should be regarded more highly than it is.
Tina	How can this be implemented with the organisation that sometimes seems to forget that its core business is education? Where can I find more information on critical spirit?
Gus	The question that came to mind when undertaking this analysis was - is the predicament that I found myself in as a new teacher at TAFE endemic to other new TAFE teachers elsewhere? If so[,] has this been instrumental in necessitating this research report?
Ryan	I asked myself to critically analysis [ <i>sic</i> ] my approach to training indigenous people and to determine whether I was suitably knowledgeable about the issues that impact on training and delivering capacity building activities to remote indigenous learners. It has helped me identify why I do it the way I do and helped me with determining a course to influence policymakers.
Matt	What is critical spirit?

Tina also asked why the concept could not be utilised from an organisational perspective, and related critical spirit to the “core business of education” but, as mentioned, also suggested its personal use as opposed to ‘public’ benchmarking.

For Ryan, this engagement with critical spirit through the credibility check had helped him to understand the questions that he held about the ‘why’ behind his actions within an Indigenous learner’s context. This, along with other articulations in relation to his

responses to the credibility check, reflected his positioning of his engagement as a TAFE teacher as an apparent embodiment of critical spirit. He also appeared to see it as a means to guide his actions in relation to possible future attempts to influence policy development.

Gus wondered if his experience of being ‘under pressure’ as a beginning TAFE teacher was similar to the experiences of other new TAFE teachers. He questioned if this was a contributing factor to the enactment of this research project into critical spirit. My reflexive response to Gus’s question is “Yes”. I explicitly acknowledge my former experience as a beginning TAFE teacher as being ‘under pressure’ and recognise this experience as having impacted upon my choice of focus for this research. (I articulated this position in Tyler (2006), where I report on using criticality as a tool to leverage my teaching efficacy.) This question from Gus prompted me to point out the possible emancipatory work that critical spirit may be put to. Gus alluded to the position that there is work to be done in relation to his experience and possibly others’ experiences as beginning TAFE teachers. This also resonated with these teachers’ *test of fortitude* discourse that appeared in the analysis of their narratives. Gus’s position on “the survival of the fittest” appeared to have softened. His engagement with critical spirit appeared to have influenced him to ask further questions about “being under pressure”, a similar position to other TAFE teachers, and the necessity of the TAFE organisation having a hand in producing this testing terrain, particularly for beginning teachers. I interpreted Gus’s question about this idea necessitating a research project like this as Gus’s possible consideration of TAFE being complicit in obstructing enactments of critical spirit.

### 5.7.2.5 Other emergent themes

In most of the TAFE teachers' narrative artefacts, individual positioning as being *worthy teachers* or *professional* appeared through chunks articulating a willingness to learn from student engagement – for students and for themselves. For example:

8 sometimes it is my students who teach me

14 teaching has become as much about a process of continual growth and self-reflection

15 if I don't help myself in this field I will not be able to productively help students. (Hannah)

2 we need to take care to avoid assumptions

5 not allow personal bias to interfere

7 the day I stopped teaching hospitality and began helping individuals.

(Karen)

These two TAFE teachers were employed by separate state authorities and taught in different content areas: one community and human services and the other hospitality. They positioned themselves similarly in relation to elements of critical spirit discourse: *openmindedness* through an openness to learn; *intellectual responsibility* through enactments of continuous improvement; and *respect for others* through an articulation of their role in the emancipation of others.

It is this last point, the emancipation of others, which is significant in relation to TAFE teachers' navigations within the two discourses, education for economic imperatives and education for citizenship. It would appear that these TAFE teachers position themselves within a discourse that enables the “developing [of] greater vocational attributes, orientations and identity across *all* students [as opposed to]

‘new’ vocationalism [and] the talk of ‘enterprise’ ... ” (Yates, 2004, pp. 3-4; *emphasis in original*).

All teachers in this study also signaled individual possibilities around self-  
emancipation. Positions such as Gus’s “beginning teacher experiences of stress” (Gus,  
cn) and Kat’s “teacher versus bureaucracy” (Kat, cn) offered instances of how the  
concept of critical spirit might be put to work in order to challenge the perceived  
organisational *status quo* that appeared to reduce opportunities for the articulation of  
teacher voice (Brady, 2003) and to shape organisational perceptions of the worth of  
TAFE teachers. Both Jean and Ryan appeared to have put critical spirit to work in  
relation to how they captured their conceptualisations of themselves in context. Both  
reported on the ways that they embodied critical spirit and how this produced mostly  
positive outcomes for them.

## **5.8 Chapter summary**

These data tell me that the use of critical spirit as a concept is of use to these teachers:  
as a reflective tool, a lens for casting a critical eye, a means to understand the  
apparent importance of themselves as teachers and the importance of what they do,  
and in developing an understanding of themselves within stress producing contexts.  
These data show teachers’ attempts at positioning themselves as certain kinds of  
teachers enacting certain kinds of activities that relate to their relationships with  
TAFE. Their narratives connect their identities with a common good and provide  
examples of the enactment of this connection. TAFE as an organisation is positioned  
by some as having thwarting properties towards the carrying out of this imperative;  
others see the organisation as a partner in this imperative. From my perspective as an

interpretivist researcher, these ways of thinking and doing, as articulated by these teachers' discourses, resonate with this project's conceptualisation of critical spirit. I ask myself: are these teachers using critical spirit as a means of making explicit to themselves and others (myself and TAFE included) their qualities as a teacher? Are they, as Gee (2005) would suggest, "building things through language" (p. 10). On the basis of these data the answer to these questions is "yes". These teachers were building identities through their discourses. I initially aligned and analysed this identity building activity with critical spirit using a particular framework based upon my conceptualisation of critical spirit as a discourse. In their respective credibility checks these teachers continued with this building activity because the concept of critical spirit was appealing to them as a means of making explicit to themselves and to others specific characteristics or dispositions that they could or wanted to relate to.

Through their narratives these teachers have built particular views of themselves. I have identified specific chunks of discourse used in this building activity as critical spirit discourse. As far as I can determine, these teachers have built their respective views of themselves in context by unconsciously using what I have conceptualised as constituent elements of a critical spirit discourse. This contention is supported by three equally important points: the narrative artefacts produced by the participants were constructed prior to the commencement of this research project; the participants themselves articulated a need to know more about critical spirit at the credibility check phase; and critical spirit is not a commonly recognised concept within the public domain and is known only by a relatively small number of researchers.

The research question that I used to guide my data analysis and the reporting in this

chapter was: *What might be identified as the elements of critical spirit in TAFE teacher discourse?* On the face of the analysis using the selected coding framework and credibility checks, it would be fair to make tentative claim to the elements of critical spirit discourse being present in these TAFE teachers' discourse. The elements of *openmindedness*, *intellectual responsibility* and *respect for others* were the most prevalent, with *independence of mind* and *wholeheartedness* being less prevalent. What also appeared were connections amongst the elements; for example, in order to align with a position of intellectual responsibility, one also assumes a position of openmindedness and wholeheartedness or a combination of some or all of the elements. This showed that critical spirit conceptualised as constituent elements produced degrees of uncertainty in relation to their methodological use. What emerged was a resistance towards reduction and deconstruction. This suggested a need for a holistic approach to conceptualising critical spirit and argued strongly for the conceptual position of interdependence in relation to deploying critical spirit elements as dispositional markers. The other discourses, a *test of fortitude* and *community of support*, were involved as connections with resilience and hardiness, yet an anomaly was identified in relation to a *test of fortitude* possibly requiring a *community of support* in order to ameliorate the effects of such a test. This would possibly have been manifested in these data by a similar degree of emphasis being placed upon the two discourses by participants. As was evident, participants placed more emphasis upon a *test of fortitude*. This led me to leave any claims about the connections that these discourses might have with critical spirit until I gathered more data through the semi-structured interviews.



One important question worthy of particular note for my continued examination of critical spirit is this: If critical spirit discourse is evident in TAFE teacher discourse and if, as Gee (2005) suggests, language is action, what possibilities might arise from TAFE teachers' deeper engagements with a critical spirit discourse? This question signposts the direction of the next chapter, where I report my findings as I engaged with these teachers more explicitly about critical spirit using Oxman-Michelli's (1992) publication "Critical thinking as "Critical Spirit" " in semi-structured interviews.

The next chapter responds to the second research question: *How might an explicit engagement with and reflection upon a critical spirit discourse be of value to particular TAFE teachers in relation to their identities and their relationships with TAFE as an organisation?* By way of an aperitif, one possibility in enabling further conceptualisation of the utility of a critical spirit discourse may be as a navigational aid in traversing the borderlands (Gee, 1999) that exist between the two above-mentioned competing education discourses of new vocationalism and citizenship.

As mentioned, Chappell (1999) suggested that TAFE teachers are being asked to be different teachers. These data suggest that these TAFE teachers are resisting this pressure; their identities still appear to align with some of the traditional identities of the TAFE teacher. This supports the view of a personal conceptualisation of themselves as particular kinds of teachers. Alsop (2006) talked of teachers who reported being disenfranchised, who reacted by leaving the profession and/or who experienced burnout as a consequence of immersion in competing discourses that have produced discordant personal and professional identities. Alsop presented

evidence that borderland discourses offer “a type of happy medium” (p. 72) and that they provide a means to deal with the “ideological integration of multiple senses of self” (p. 36) that is required to traverse uncertain territory successfully. She suggested that it is in the borderlands that teachers can learn to respect personal beliefs and passions while learning to embody a particular teacher identity. Borderland discourses provide space where the individual is recognisable yet so too is an education system. These reflex around and within one another to bring about some kind of positive transformation, not just a replication of the *status quo*.

I take the position that the possibility of a critical spirit discourse doing borderland discourse work (Alsup, 2006) for these TAFE teachers cannot be properly considered until a fuller picture is obtained that illustrates the positions that these teachers construct for themselves within their contexts of work, the identities that they build and the notions that they assemble around their explicit engagements with this critical spirit discourse. The next chapter endeavours to explicate these nuances by way of reporting on what emerged from the semi-structured interviews conducted with these TAFE teachers.

## **Chapter Six - The TAFE teachers within**

### **6.1 Introduction**

In Chapter Five, I reported on the results of my analysis of the case narratives written by 12 TAFE teachers and an associated eight credibility checks used to explore the notion of elements of a critical spirit being evident in these teachers' discourse.

These teachers' case narratives produced evocative depictions of themselves teaching, immersed in their world of TAFE and the credibility checks elicited these teachers' reactions and corresponding thoughts in relation to my analysis.

Exploration begun with identifying: data that were evident of Dewey's (1933, 1991) reflective thought; data that indicated conceptions of 'critical' (Brookfield, 2005; Freire, 1970; Gould, 1990); data that resonated with conceptualisations of 'spirit' (Berkeley, 1952; Hegel, 1977; Williams, 2006); and data that provided evidence of critical thinking (Brookfield, 1987). I then overlaid the narratives with a framework for explicating a critical spirit discourse (Tyler, 2008a). This I conceptualised and constructed using the intersection between critical spirit as articulated by Oxman-Michelli (1992) and Gee's (2005) notions of discourse and discourse analysis. What emerged were examples of TAFE teacher discourse that aligned with the elements of critical spirit. It was from the credibility checks, where the participants began a more explicit engagement with critical spirit, that critical spirit began its work as a discourse.

Through the analysis I was able to uncover data that pointed to specific elements of critical spirit being present in these TAFE teachers' discourse and hence to provide

answers to the first research question. What also emerged was evidence of “Other discourse” that could possibly be additional elements of a critical spirit discourse – for example, discourse that spoke of *a test of fortitude*. These possibilities are further explored and reported in this chapter.

In this chapter I respond to the second research question:

*How might an explicit engagement with and reflection upon a critical spirit discourse be of value to particular TAFE teachers in relation to their identities and their relationships with TAFE as an organisation?*

The data drawn upon in the formation of responses to this question were primarily sourced from a series of semi-structured interviews conducted with seven project participants. These interviews were conducted during the period of May to August 2008. The interviews ranged in duration from 50 to 70 minutes. Three were conducted face-to-face, two were telephone interviews and one was conducted using ‘Skype’, a peer-to-peer voice over Internet protocol. This is a web-based synchronous communication tool utilising webcams for videoconferencing. It was planned that all interviews would be conducted face-to-face; unfortunately for two interviews technology issues thwarted this plan, and the telephone interviews were used as the back up. All interviews were audio recorded with the permission of the participants.

In these interviews I explored how seven TAFE teachers constructed their engagements with their world of work, how they built their identities as TAFE teachers and how these enactments responded to a critical spirit discourse. I used several open-ended questions to guide the interview; these revolved around the themes of:

- (a) preconceptions of TAFE teachers before they obtained employment as a TAFE teacher/conceptions of a TAFE teacher in the present;
- (b) the type of teacher you/TAFE want(s) you to be;
- (c) initial reactions to the concept of critical spirit;
- (d) thoughts and emotions during and after engagement with their credibility check and Oxman-Michelli's (1992) article;
- (e) the value of an engagement with critical spirit;
- (f) critical spirit's influence, how it is useful and how it is cumbersome; and
- (g) a 'test of fortitude' as an additional element of critical spirit.

This chapter redeploys this study's methodological stance in relation to my deployment of a discourse analysis for these interviews. It then reports the data that emerged from the application of this stance to interview audio clips and that illuminate seven TAFE teacher "kits" (Gee, 2005, p. 32). These were utilised by the participating teachers to highlight significance with regard to their relationships with TAFE, their building of identities and their positions of value in relation to a critical spirit discourse. In Section 6.3, I synthesise these kits and then move to a deeper discussion of the value that a critical spirit discourse has for these seven teachers. I conclude by reviewing the chapter and highlighting its claims.

## **6.2 The analysis of seven interviews**

As mentioned in the methodology chapter, the lens that I deployed in interpreting data is that of discourse analysis. Gee (2005) provided a particular focus on discourse analysis that is one of the conceptual foundations of this study. Its pertinence to the data produced by the interviews relates to those interviews as providing opportunities

to explore discourse as a “kit” (Gee, 2005, p. 32). In this instance this kit is inclusive of all the “stuff” that one could know about TAFE teachers that produces their big “D” discourse (Gee, 2005, p. 26). These interviews offered a means to explore these TAFE teachers’:

- (a) situated identities; (b) ways of performing and recognizing characteristics, identities and activities; (c) ways of coordinating and getting coordinated by other people, things, tools, technologies, symbol systems, places, and times; (d) characteristic ways of acting-interacting-feeling-emoting-valuing-gesturing-posturing-dressing-thinking-believing-knowing-speaking-listening.
- (Gee, 2005, p. 33)

The interviews also offered a means of exploring the intricacies of how a critical spirit discourse might infuse and widen the kits that these TAFE teachers deploy. I note that the possibility of achieving significant knowledge about the participants’ kits is limited to what can be extracted and interpreted by myself through interview and analysis. Hence I make claim only to a snapshot perspective gained during my immersion in the interview data.

In Gee’s (2005) account of the tasks of language, he noted that “... language-in-action is always and everywhere an active building process” (p. 10). Thus when we are communicating we are building the very situation that we are communicating about, and at the same time this situation is shaping the language that we use.

Language and context are bootstrapped to each other “in a reciprocal process through time” (p. 10). Languages and their association with the “other stuff [of life,] ... values,

beliefs, symbols, objects, tools, and places ... ” (p. 26) are the discourses that build and rebuild realities.

In these interviews, the participants and I were building a reality – that is, an interview around the concept of critical spirit and work and identities as a TAFE teacher. Gee (2005) saw discourses as building a reality through the seven building tasks of significance, activities, identities, relationships, politics, connections, and sign systems and knowledge. Previously I put this conceptual framing to work in building a critical spirit discourse as reported in my methodology chapter. As I studied the data produced by the interviews, I was mindful of how each interview enacted:

- (a) certain things as significant;
- (b) the recognition of certain activities;
- (c) the identities of the participants;
- (d) their relationships with others and institutions;
- (e) the participants’ access to social goods;
- (f) the connections with other discourses pertinent to the project; and
- (g) the privileging of certain ways of knowing and believing (Gee, 2005).

In acknowledging that “all the building tasks are integrally linked to each other and often mutually supported by the same words and phrases” (Gee, 2005, p. 18), I used three data organising questions to arrange the data obtained from the interviews.

These questions have a clear connection to this study’s second research question.

These questions were:

1. What did [participant] construct as significant in her or his relationship with TAFE?
2. What teaching identities did [participant] construct?
3. How was a critical spirit discourse positioned in relation to its value to [participant]?

Table 6.1 illustrates this study’s second research question (in the cell on the far left of the table), the three data organising questions and Gee’s (2005) building tasks of language.

Table 6.1: *The relationship among the project’s 2<sup>nd</sup> research question, the data organising questions and Gee’s (2005) language building tasks*

2 <sup>nd</sup> Research Question How might an explicit engagement with and reflection upon a critical spirit discourse be of value to particular TAFE teachers in relation to their identity and their relationships with TAFE as an organisation?	Data Organising Questions	Gee’s (2005) building tasks of language						
		Significance	Activities	Identities	Relationships	Politics	Connections	Sign systems and knowledge
	What did [participant] construct as significant in her or his relationship with TAFE?							
	What teaching identities did [participant] construct?							
	How was a critical spirit discourse positioned in relation to its value to [participant]?							



The table sets out how data from the interviews have been grouped using the data organising questions and aligned with Gee’s building tasks. These chunks and stanzas emerge directly from audio clips as opposed to interview transcripts (Crichton & Childs, 2005). This enabled me to include greater linguistic detail and serves to evoke a richer understanding of what the TAFE teachers said. In the chunks and stanzas, derived from the interviews, the following notational devices were used:

- Underlined words indicate stress on a word;
- Capitalised words are empathic and said with extra stress; and
- Two periods (“..”) indicate a pause (Gee, 2005, p. 107).

On occasions it was pertinent to include in the stanzas my voice as the interviewer. This is indicated with the letter “I”. Participants’ contributions are indicated by the use of the first initials of their pseudonyms.

### **6.3 Seven TAFE teacher ‘kits’**

The kits of these TAFE teachers have metaphorically rubbed shoulders with many discourses. Important to this project are the discourses of new vocational education (Hager & Hyland, 2003), liberal education (Yates, 2004) and critical spirit (Tyler, 2008a), as well as the personal discourses held by these TAFE teachers about themselves. Acknowledging that discourses have “no discrete boundaries” (Gee, 2005, p. 29), and that the creation of new discourses, the changing of old ones, the infection of one with another and the demise of others create opportunities and space for “recognition work” (p. 29) to be done, highlights these interviews’ potential for delivering increased understandings relative to these TAFE teachers’ contexts and the possibilities for creative transformations to take place.

### **6.3.1 Linda (Interviewed 26 June 2008)**

Linda disclosed that she has been teaching at a metropolitan TAFE institute for three years. Linda taught tourism and hospitality competencies. As well as her industry qualifications, Linda held a Certificate IV in Training and Assessment (TAA).

#### **6.3.1.1 What did Linda construct as significant in her relationship with TAFE?**

Significant in Linda's relationship to TAFE was her construction of a critical perspective of how TAFE functions as an organisation and its impact upon her as a teacher. In Stanzas 1 and 2 Linda voiced an emotionally charged position in relation to TAFE as a bureaucracy.

Stanza 1

L: My ASSUMPTION was that

L: it would be a lot more simplified

L: than what it is.

L: Um .. I had ABSOLUTELY no idea of .. the amount of paperwork.

Stanza 2

I: .. the bureaucracy and the paper work

L: Oh .. the BUREAUCRACY ..

L: I, I, just find the system

L: very .. very .. old-fashioned.

Linda's construct was not a positive one. She built a perspective of TAFE as an organisation that is an apparent distractor for her in getting on with the activities of teaching. Her experience was the opposite of her preconceptions about working in TAFE. She used the words "more simplified" to qualify this difference. In the process of considering her past assumptions, Linda built these reflections into the interview.

The chunk “a lot more simplified than what it is” indicates that she was being coordinated by the “BUREAUCRACY” in a certain way, an “old fashioned” way.

Three years after her initial engagement, Linda’s relationship had changed. She concluded that she now had a handle on the paperwork but, as she put it in Stanza 3, “the systems” still provided some unease.

Stanza 3

L: still you can ..

L: still some of the systems

L: are still quite archaic.

In answering the question “What type of teacher does TAFE want you to be?”, Linda added more to her construct of her relationship with TAFE and begun to touch on the new vocational discourse that imbues the organisation. This discourse coordinates certain enactments of particular kinds of teachers. Chunks of her response included phrases like: “putting bums on seats” and “online distance education”. These are common phrases used by TAFE teachers to describe a focus on education as a market: the first in relation to having a market focus that emphasises the volume of product moved; and the second an apparently efficient educational delivery method that is assumed to save on labour costs. Linda did not build into her construct the possibility of “online” educational delivery being beneficial to learners – for example, by enabling flexibility of when and where a student can access formal learning (Palmieri, 2003).

Linda positioned herself as contesting this discourse through her description of the tension that she experienced between “her curriculum” and an “online” delivery strategy. Linda described her need and her curriculum’s apparent need to engage in

the social component of group work, and that this was thwarted by a complete “online” teaching strategy. In Stanza 4 Linda built a tension between how she believes that the curriculum should be delivered and the organisationally preferred means of delivery.

Stanza 4

L: the big drive at the moment is online

L: .. EVERYTHING online

L: which is INTERESTING

L: because it really doesn't fit the curriculum document

I: OK

L: particularly in my area

I: I suppose .. the question comes to mind is ..

I: How does that fit with competency based training?

L: .. that's right .. that's right ..

L: I don't think it fits at all.

Linda went on to acknowledge that a blended delivery approach<sup>5</sup> would be acceptable to her but argued that a completely online approach “misses the richness” required in learning about “Event Management”. What stands out in the above stanza is how Linda posits CBT as being an outsider to the frame of her curriculum. It is as if her content area cannot be adequately taught by the outcome-focused methods of CBT.

This tense relationship with new vocationalism (see Chapter Two) continues into the arena of teacher education. New vocational discourse coordinates the training of educators within the VET sector. As noted above, the Certificate IV TAA (or its

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<sup>5</sup> A contested method of delivery, tending to encapsulate both learning modes and curriculum delivery modes. The term generally refers to “using a variety of techniques, tools, resources, media and environments ... to enhance training and learning outcomes” (Department of Employment and Training, 2005, p. 7). It is not necessarily online delivery, but online delivery can be a component of blended delivery.

predecessor Certificate IV BSZ) (see Footnote Three) is required to teach any VET training packages. Scholars (Smith & Keating, 2003) noted the contentions surrounding the adequacy of this training in order to be a competent teacher. In Stanza 5 Linda constructed a dissonant relationship with the qualification.

Stanza 5

L: I just don't think .. that

L: the Cert IV gives you the right skills ..

L: to be a teacher .. or trainer

L: .. and that's why I'm doing uni.

### **6.3.1.2 What teaching identities did Linda construct?**

In the above I have shown Linda to be in tension with the organisation of TAFE and the new vocational discourse that is dispersed within it. This is not surprising when one considers the teaching identities that Linda situated herself within. Linda enacted the position of a teacher who goes beyond traditional educational engagement. In Stanza 6, Linda built her identity as a teacher who goes beyond simply enabling the student to connect with course content.

Stanza 6

L: Oh .. it goes further than the classroom

L: Um .. more so your continued duty of care with the students

L: making sure that .. they're .. um .. they're ok ..

L: making sure that if they are applying for jobs

L: that they are doing the right thing ..

I: Mm ..

L: just going the extra step

I: Yep.

Linda's assembled subjectivity included degrees of commitment that were fed by her desire for seeing others grow and develop. She was not concerned with publicly

voicing this position (possibly a display of *independence of mind*) and almost challenged me to offer an alternative perspective, which she claimed that she would take little notice of, as Stanza 7 attests.

Stanza 7

L: um very committed ..

I: Mm

L: you take that whichever WAY you like .. ha ha

L: um .. no, definitely, I really enjoy the teaching ..

I: okay

L: Um .. I love dealing with students

L: I love dealing with young people

L: I love seeing them progress and learn things ..

I: Yes.

In Stanza 8 Linda raised an identity associated with enactments outside work. This suggested that part of her remaining “committed and focused” is proportional to another desire, that of “continued learning”. This possibly alluded to Linda’s identity as a part-time university student.

Stanza 8

L: want to remain committed and focused

I: OKAY ..

L: you’ve gotta make sure ..

L: that you’ve got something happening for yourself outside work

L: that you do have your own continued learning.

With regard to Linda’s relationships with other TAFE teachers, she set herself apart from the older teachers (those who appear to have been there for a long time) by suggesting that they would not align with the concept of critical spirit. In Stanza 9, Linda not only positioned herself as different from these “older” teachers but also

creates a picture of them as having less agency than she had in dealing with the TAFE organisation.

Stanza 9

L: Unfortunately .. I don't think ..

L: a lot of the OLDER TAFE teachers .. will take it on board.

I: Not receptive.

L: No .. I don't think so

L: But .. I think a lot of the younger ones would .. certainly

I: Fair enough .. How?

I: What is it that stops them from taking it on board?

L: .. (sigh) .. I HONESTLY think it's the culture

L: I find that the culture is .. very down

L: very .. demoralising

L: very .. negative.

Linda did not assemble a picture of the older TAFE teacher as one in which they are active agents in their own choices. Rather, she positioned the TAFE organisation as having a hand in producing a closed-minded response in some of its teachers.

### **6.3.1.3 How is a critical spirit discourse positioned in relation to its value to Linda?**

In Stanza 10 Linda began to assemble a portrait of herself as someone who is 'onside' with critical spirit. Some aspects of critical spirit appear to reflect back to her.

Stanza 10

I: So what were your initial reactions to this concept of critical spirit?

L: Um .. I could see ..

L: .. I could see myself in some of those aspects ..

I: .. aha ..

L: Um .. I could align with some of those things.

Yet I also noted some hesitation. I explored more deeply Linda's grasp of the concept and, as exemplified in Stanza 11, she responded with less self-assuredness. I gently pressed Linda to articulate some of the elements of critical spirit. Linda did not, but as I articulated the various elements of critical spirit she responded with affirmative head nods.

Stanza 11

I: What happened when

I: you were exposed to a reasonable definition of critical spirit?

L: Um .. I guess that ..

L: after I read the original paperwork I got from you ..

L: I thought .. okay .. that makes a little bit more sense.

I: Mm .. which bit .. in particular made sense?

L: .. yeah ..

I: Yeah .. which bit particularly made sense to you?

L: .. .. um .. some of the definitions .. the terms they were using

I: okay ..

As indicated above, Linda appeared to have difficulty in recalling some of the elements of critical spirit. This was further exemplified by her sharing that she could not align with the element of *intellectual responsibility* (an opposite position to that indicated in her credibility check), yet when I gave her examples of *intellectual responsibility* being enacted – for example, as a lifelong learner – she immediately voiced concordance. Stanza 12 built on this concordance and also gave an indication as to how a critical spirit discourse might perform work for Linda.

Stanza 12

L: No .. .. I didn't .. sort of .. align myself with that ..

I: Okay .. Okay .. what some teachers did is that they

I: aligned themselves as being

I: intellectually responsible .. if



I: one .. they were um .. committed teachers

I: and secondly if they were committed lifelong learners.

L: Aha .. I definitely think

L: um .. if you are in education

L: or even any professional field

L: you DO have to take on lifelong learning.

This is an example of Linda's and my constructing meaning around *intellectual responsibility* and how we both build it into a relationship with critical spirit. The effort with which we both worked was somewhat uneven. This is likely to be due to my high investment in the concept and her slight lack of assuredness. Nevertheless in Stanza 13 Linda showed a continued motivation to extend her understanding of critical spirit – for example, in critical spirit adding value to what she does by its propensity to prompt professional reflection.

Stanza 13

L: just makes you think ..

L: more in-depth ..

L: about what you're doing.

I: Okay.

L: and what you're trying to achieve..

I: Yep.

L: .. and what you're trying to get your learners to .. to do.

Another value of this alignment came with how Linda explained the political components of her positioned identity. What is taken as right or normal for her is to “go the extra mile”. Linda reported that it is the students coming back and saying “Thank you’ that makes it all worth while”. Stanza 14 shows how Linda’s perspective on the social goods associated with the discourse of the ‘good’ or ‘proper’

teacher going the extra mile highlighted the added responsibility in relation to her continued effort to be ‘good’.

Stanza 14

I: What do you think about yourself as a teacher when that happens?

L: I .. I .. think I’ve got a mark on the board .. and that’s great.

I: Okay.

L: Then .. then the next step from there is

L: to strive to keep doing that.

In Linda’s response to my question regarding critical spirit being cumbersome, she suggested that it could get in the way of day-to-day activities by influencing one to overanalyse and therefore not get on with the job at hand.

Linda states: “ .. off with the pixies .. ha ha .. everything in moderation.”

This is telling in regard to Linda’s sense of her doing. She saw a place for reflection (possibly with critical spirit in mind) but not when it gets in the way of ‘doing’ on a day-to-day basis.

The following stanzas relate to the “Other discourse” of *a test of fortitude* that emerged from the coding of participant case narratives, as reported in Chapter 5. In the interviews I sought to explore if *a test of fortitude* might be an additional construct in a critical spirit discourse. In Stanzas 15 and 16 Linda reacquaints herself with her test of fortitude and forms the picture of a teacher under pressure without appropriate recompense.

Stanza 15

L: It was pretty much ..

L: being thrown in the deep end

L: LITERALLY .. one lesson ahead of the students.

Stanza 16

L: You begin to question yourself

L: .. you know .. took a huge pay cut to come and do this ..

L: what am I DOING?

In Stanza 17 Linda builds a position of favour towards *a test of fortitude* being part of critical spirit. The ‘test’ component appears attractive to Linda, especially the implied message that, if you pass the test, achieve the goal and get over the hurdle, you’re made of the ‘right mettle’. Linda appears to have got over her hurdle, which enabled her to claim a position of being made of the ‘right mettle’.

Stanza 17

I: It’s part of becoming .. if you like

L: it makes you want to achieve that goal

L: it’s about getting over the hurdle.

Table 6.2 is a synthesis of Linda’s position in relation to her interview. It depicts Linda’s relationship of tension with TAFE. The interview data highlight this as quite high around her initial years of employment and a reduction after about three years. Tension still appears to linger especially around the manner in which curriculum should be delivered. She considers herself different from other, “older TAFE teachers”. Her subjectivity aligns with the identities of teachers that resonate with a discourse that favours liberal notions of education – hence the selection of the “Teaching for citizenship” cell. The value that critical spirit has for Linda as either a holistic or a deconstructed concept is indicated by the cell that indicates value “as a holistic concept”. Initially, I was unsure as to which applied to Linda because in the beginning of our discussion on critical spirit Linda indicated comfortableness with a holistic concept, and appeared to hold off my attempts to talk about its individual

elements. On the other hand, once I aligned *intellectual responsibility* with lifelong learning, Linda appeared to be less apprehensive.

Table 6.2: A synthesis of Linda’s position as obtained from the analysis of her interview

	Degree of perceived tension		Produced by	The position of others	
<b>Significance to relationship with TAFE</b>	High		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The TAFE bureaucracy.</li> <li>• Pressure to produce only ‘online’ curriculum.</li> <li>• Perceived inadequacy of certificate level four training to prepare for teaching.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Others (older teachers with more experience in TAFE) would not be receptive to critical spirit. They are different from Linda in that they are considered not to be active agents in their own choices.</li> </ul>	
	Medium	√			
	Low				
<b>Built subjectivities</b>	Teaching for economic imperatives <sup>6</sup>		Teaching for citizenship <sup>7</sup>	Example(s)	
			√	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A commitment to the growth and development of students.</li> <li>• Teaching outside the prescribed curriculum.</li> <li>• The questioning of CBT.</li> </ul>	
<b>The value position of critical spirit</b>	As a holistic concept		As individual elements	How is it valuable?	How is it less valuable?
	√			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• As a reflective tool.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• If it gets in the way of ‘doing’.</li> </ul>
<b>The value position of “Other discourse”</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A <i>test of fortitude</i> seen as a useful measure of the ‘mettle’ of teacher.</li> </ul>				

Discussion of the elements was stilted to this point, and did not flow after she acknowledged the connection; Linda appeared to not want to expand on the other elements. Therefore her favour towards it as a holistic conceptualisation would be a reasonable claim. The value of critical spirit to Linda is clearly indicated as being a useful tool for reflection on practice. It is of less value to Linda if it gets in the way of,

<sup>6</sup> In tables 6.2 to 6.8, this cell is indicative of a participant’s preference towards the new vocational discourse.

<sup>7</sup> In Tables 6.2 to 6.8 the term “citizenship” is conceptualised as aligning with notions of progressive education, where notions of teachers as liberal educators, with a focus on lifelong learning, personal transformation, collaborative relationships and social responsibility are prominent. This cell is indicative of a participant’s preference towards a discourse of liberal education.

or detracts somehow from, practice, possibly by influencing her to think “too much” at the expense of acting.

### **6.3.2 Mitchell (Interviewed 23 May 2008)**

Mitchell was a teacher at a regional TAFE institute in southern Queensland. He came from a retail and business background, and taught competencies from a business training package. Mitchell held several VET qualifications, including a Diploma of Business and a Diploma of Retail Management. Mitchell completed the Certificate IV BSZ, and had upgraded to the Certificate IV TAA. At the time of the interview Mitchell had been a full-time TAFE teacher for 12 years.

#### **6.3.2.1 What did Mitchell construct as significant in his relationship with TAFE?**

Mitchell’s preconceptions of a TAFE teacher were influenced by his first engagement with TAFE as a student in his early 20s, when he studied and completed successfully a diploma in retail management. He said that he “didn’t have much of a picture” other than the viewpoint of a TAFE student, but when the opportunity came up to become a TAFE teacher he embraced it. In Stanza 1 Mitchell builds an impression of TAFE as the means through which he could escape the pressures of “a career that was full on in retail management”.

Stanza 1

M: the jobs that I was in ..

M: they basically took over your life

M: I was .. just ..

M: so keen

M: to get out of the retail world

M: an opportunity

M: came up for me ..  
M: to use my skills and knowledge  
M: and apply them to  
M: a teaching environment.  
M: I applied for the position  
M: and I got it.

Mitchell then moved to how it was for him when he “got into” TAFE teaching.

In Stanza 2 Mitchell constructed a picture of TAFE that was very different from the one that he had before taking up employment. Mitchell built a notion that positions TAFE as a challenging bureaucracy.

Stanza 2  
M: BUT when I got into it,  
M: it was a real eye opener  
M: because I'd never been used to .. um  
M: so much .. paperwork  
M: paper trails .. filling out forms ..  
M: and that sort of thing ..  
M: I wasn't used to .. eh ..  
M: not being able  
M: to do things straight away.

### **6.3.2.2 What teaching identities did Mitchell construct?**

In assembling his enactments of the activities of a TAFE teacher, Mitchell positioned himself as a capable teacher who had made the transition from the retail industry into TAFE teaching with little angst, and also as a teacher who was continually learning. Stanza 3 highlights the apparent ease with which Mitchell took up the teaching component of TAFE teaching, whilst in Stanza 4 Mitchell qualified his experience by

again commenting on organisational aspects of TAFE. In Stanza 5, Mitchell talked about his perspective of himself as a lifelong learner.

Stanza 3

M: I seemed to adapt to it fairly well ..

M: 'cause I did ..

M: I was training staff in the retail world ..

M: but .. as far as me getting up

M: in front of a class .. I was fine.

Stanza 4

M: BUT what I found .. frustrating

M: was the total .. um .. sorta .. disorganisation .. of TAFE

M: in the sense of .. from a HR [human resources] perspective

M: like on my first day ..

M: nobody knew I was even starting work.

Stanza 5

M: and even now I'm still learning now ..

M: 'cause things are changing all the time

M: we never stop learning as we know ..

M: lifelong learning and that sort of thing.

In the course of our interview Mitchell continually referred to himself as a trainer. In asking Mitchell to clarify his use of the term “trainer” as opposed to “teacher”, he said that “trainers teach skills for employment”. I drew his attention to his use of the word “teach”. His reply follows in Stanza 6.

Stanza 6

M: a lot of it too is .. mindset ..

M: until I get my teaching qualification

M: I don't consider myself as a teacher.

Interesting in this exchange is the apparently restless position that Mitchell inhabits in relation to his identity as a ‘trainer’. New vocational discourse suggests that the position of ‘trainer’ or ‘learning facilitator’ is adequate for teaching in VET. As previously mentioned, this position of ‘trainer’ is achieved by the means of having suitable industry qualifications and experience, and successfully completing a level four VET qualification in training. This qualification is much cheaper and easier to complete than a degree in teaching (Smith & Keating, 2003); hence it is more attractive for TAFE institutes as the minimum qualification required to deliver VET competencies (Harris et al., 2001). In the above stanza Mitchell’s identity as a ‘trainer’ appears inadequate for him, and by undertaking a teaching degree he wants the identity of a ‘teacher’ and the access to its apparent status – for example, in having a greater say over curriculum, particularly VET curriculum (Smith & Keating, 2003).

### **6.3.2.3 How is a critical spirit discourse positioned in relation to its value to Mitchell?**

Mitchell’s initial reaction to an introduction to critical spirit was one of uncertainty. In Stanza 7 Mitchell was frank in articulating his position of perplexity.

Stanza 7

M: about the concept or helping you?

I: no .. the concept.

M: I didn’t understand it.

I: Okay.

M: ah .. I probably still don’t ..

M: to a large degree.

In Stanza 8 Mitchell began to build some clarity in his understanding of critical spirit as having a relationship to his thinking and his part in encouraging the effective



thinking of others. This directed me towards Mitchell's take on critical spirit as a different means of helping him engage with his students.

Stanza 8

M: I think .. it's about ..

M: and I might be totally off the mark ..

M: ME thinking about how I think

M: which in turn will help other people

M: improve their thinking.

As Mitchell and I took the discussion about critical spirit further, Mitchell's relationship to the concept began to become more confident. It was as if Mitchell was using the interview on 'critical spirit' to build on his thoughts and an apparent alliance with the concept. In Stanza 9 Mitchell articulated evidence of this constructive activity. Mitchell began to consider that he, and myself as the researcher, were using critical spirit to look at what we do, and to assess what we do. This position appeared as a new consideration to him.

Stanza 9

M: I think we're looking ..

M: looking at what we do

M: you should always do this anyway ..

I: Mm.

M: But .. um .. with me as an individual

M: I think .. from what I've been doing

M: that's got me to think ..

M: How can I do better in my job?

I: Mm .. mm.

M: when in the past

M: I probably never thought like that.

In Stanza 10, Mitchell alluded to a kind of moral responsibility in keeping an engagement with critical spirit, especially now that he had been exposed to the concept. Even though Mitchell appeared to claim this responsibility as his own, he did emphasise my position as being an accomplice to the necessity, because it was I who introduced him to the concept.

Stanza 10

M: it forces you to think about yourself.

I: It forces you ..

I: is it like .. “Now that I read that

I: I have to engage with it?”

M: Yes .. that’s right.

I: Whereas .. “If I didn’t know about it

I: I wouldn’t have to?”

M: Well .. YES

M: I’d never heard

M: about it .. until

M: YOU gave it to me.

I asked Mitchell to consider positioning critical spirit as being a cumbersome concept.

In Stanza 11 Mitchell wasn’t moved by this invitation, but did consider thinking more about the concept.

Stanza 11

M: I don’t think

M: it is that cumbersome.

M: But if I get

M: my head around it a bit more

M: .. it will make more sense to me.

Table 6.3 depicts a synthesis of Mitchell’s position as gleaned from his interview.

Even though the level of bureaucracy in TAFE surprised Mitchell, it did not appear to

produce a high amount of tension in the relationship. He described his adaptation to teaching at TAFE as a smooth one. This, and his reporting of TAFE as offering a way out of the retail industry, also appeared as a contributing factor to the relationship.

Table 6.3: *A synthesis of Mitchell’s position as obtained from the analysis of his interview*

	Degree of perceived tension		Produced by	The position of others	
<b>Significance to relationship with TAFE</b>	High		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• An apparent acceptance of the TAFE bureaucracy.</li> <li>• A self-nominated position as a lifelong learner.</li> <li>• TAFE experienced as a more favourable occupation than the one previously held.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In the interview there was no explicit articulation of the position of others.</li> </ul>	
	Medium				
	Low	√			
<b>Built subjectivities</b>	Teaching for economic imperatives		Teaching for citizenship	Example(s)	
	√		√	Implied examples: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Data in case narrative artefact.</li> <li>• Alliance to lifelong learning principles.</li> </ul>	
<b>The value position of critical spirit</b>	As a holistic concept		As individual elements	How is it valuable?	How is it less valuable?
	√			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• As a reflective tool.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Position on less value uncertain. Need for more understanding articulated.</li> </ul>
<b>The value position of “Other discourse”</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No position on “Other discourse” value.</li> </ul>				

Although there were no explicit data in the interview associated with Mitchell’s alignment of his teaching with economic imperatives or with citizenship, Mitchell did indicate his consideration of both in data obtained from his case narrative artefact – for example: “At all times I was aware of the need to meet my students[’] needs but also maintain the integrity of the qualification” (Mitchell, cn). Adding to this is the perspective of himself as a lifelong learner. This led me to extrapolate that he

favoured subjectivities that aligned with teaching for citizenship. But when I considered his disquiet with the identity of a ‘trainer’, a label associated with the new vocational discourse, and his desire for a teaching degree, where he will obtain a broader concept of education, I am further perplexed. There is the possibility that Mitchell had resolved the tensions between the two discourses and saw his subjectivity as a teacher as aligning with both discourses; therefore in the table I indicated both positions.

With regard to critical spirit being conceptualised as a holistic concept or as individual elements, I interpreted Mitchell’s position to be around its value as a holistic concept. This is because he still articulated his degree of conceptual uncertainty with the concept when reduced to its constituent elements when discussed in the credibility check, and also within discussion in the interview. Critical spirit’s value to Mitchell was in its prompting him to think, “How can I better do my job?” This again points to its value as a professional reflective tool.

### **6.3.3 Kat (Interviewed 12 June 2008)**

Kat was a registered nurse and was a nurse educator at an Indigenous college in the Northern Territory, where she taught remote area nursing, midwifery and mental health nursing. Kat then took up employment at a regional TAFE college in northern Queensland where she worked as a full-time teacher for three years. During this time Kat taught competencies from the health industry training package. At the time of the interview Kat had recently left her full-time position at TAFE and was teaching at TAFE on a casual basis.

### 6.3.3.1 What did Kat construct as significant in her relationship with TAFE?

Significance for Kat lay in her position of exhaustion in relation to her engagement with TAFE. She began to assemble this position from the beginning of the interview and it lurked in the background throughout the interview, as Stanza 1 attests.

Stanza 1

K: That .. totally

K: like .. burnt me out ..

K: I'm .. I'm just pleased it's OVER.

Kat's experience appeared as an emotionally taxing one, one that had implications and tensions around her sense of agency, and that of TAFE acting as a social agent. Kat gave voice to this apprehensive relationship in Stanzas 2 and 3. In these stanzas Kat talked about a specific incident, also referred to in her case narrative, where she had been given the responsibility to liaise with the health industry in order to write and “set up” to teach the Certificate IV in Mental Health.

Stanza 2

K: “Okay .. off you go ..

K: YOU can go do that” ..

K: .. with no real direction or terms of reference.

Stanza 3

K: then they put in rules

K: one's that ..

K: you don't really understand ..

K: leaves .. you feeling .. oh [sigh] ..

K: really incompetent.

In Stanza 2 Kat built an identity around being a ‘battler’, left without resources and left to fend for herself. The dimensions of this building included a reference to the

voice of the organisation, an ‘uncaring’ voice that sends “YOU” off to do work without guidance.

Stanza 3 particularly relates to the ‘rules’ of the AQTF (Department of Employment and Training, 2007) that prescribed the manner in which VET curriculum should be written. This prescription appeared as another element of new vocational discourse. Of the AQTF, Kat acknowledged that she knew little. Whether Kat held the training qualification of the Certificate IV BSZ or TAA was unclear (these being the sources through which it could be assumed that Kat would attain that knowledge), but this lack of knowledge clearly caused her some distress. Kat told of her unsuccessful attempts to “get informed” by “hierarchy”. Kat placed responsibility for her knowing in the hands of the TAFE organisation. I wanted to know what kept Kat in the project. Stanza 4 tells of her motivation.

Stanza 4

I: What kept you going?

K: Because .. I .. made links with industry.

I: So you had that professional standing to worry about?

K: YEAH .. yeah .. that especially

K: I might want to get another job one day.

One of Kat’s motivations was her connection with others, especially in relation to future employment; she wanted be on good terms with these connections. She shaped a professional identity that was seen to keep intact future useful relationships; her means of achieving this was by sticking with the aforementioned curriculum project.

This positioning of a professional identity appeared to have ‘paid off’ for Kat, for at the time of the interview she was employed elsewhere and had returned to TAFE as a

casual employee. Kat's new casual position at TAFE appeared to give her licence to disclose an exasperating feature about her relationship with TAFE. Stanza 5 alluded to the degree of tension within this relationship. This tension appeared to be reduced when Kat became a casual teacher. Kat also articulated what she saw as the cause.

Stanza 5

I: It's a good position to be in as a casual TAFE teacher?

K: Yeah .. BECAUSE .. AH [sigh] .. it's just ..

K: the bureaucracy ..

K: .. OH .. [sigh] .. you know .. like nobody communicates ..

K: nobody .. REALLY.. seems to have a grip on ..

K: really .. what's going on.

Kat appeared to struggle to find the words to describe her experience adequately. This struggle built a picture of her experience as one that had created a great deal of stress for her and that eventually played a role in her leaving her full-time teaching position at TAFE.

### **6.3.3.2 What teaching identities did Kat construct?**

Kat built a picture of herself as a teacher who was very different from the preconceptions that she held about what TAFE teachers do. These preconceptions involved her specifically in face-to-face teaching a present-day curriculum. This dichotomy is evident in Stanza 6.

Stanza 6

K: a broader focus .. on contemporary issues around health care ..

K: BUT .. it felt like I was going back to when I did nursing training ..

K: about 30 years ago.

In Stanza 6 Kat appeared as a teacher who was straining with her curriculum. She associated herself with contemporary nursing issues and positioned the nursing curriculum that she taught as representing out of date nursing practice. Furthermore, she arranged herself as at odds with the “person who ran the show ..”, suggesting that engagement with the students was prescribed and that it had to be: “like .. [sigh] .. a rigid and .. hierarchical structure”. In Stanza 7 Kat articulated this as a *modus operandi* that she was uncomfortable with.

Stanza 7

K: this is not .. really ..

K: it’s what I’m not good at.

The words “rigid” and “hierarchical structure” are words that again appear to resonate with new vocational discourse. The seeming rigidity of an outcomes-focused curriculum (Billett et al., 1998) and the hierarchical notion of a propensity to control and privilege certain ways of doing (Gouthro, 2002) are in discord with other ways of engaging with curriculum and other ways of teacher decision-making (Palmer, 1998). As mentioned above, in Stanza 7 Kat added to her identity through her acknowledgment of her discomfort with these ways of ‘doing’. This suggested that she was more comfortable with notions of a collaborative curriculum and inclusive decision-making practices.

In the interview, Kat shaped her identity as a TAFE teacher as being different from what she constructs as the teacher that TAFE wants. In Stanza 8 Kat responded to my question: “What type of teacher do you think TAFE wants you to be?” and in Stanza 9 she put together her conception of the teacher she wanted to be.



Stanza 8

K: aw .. [sigh] ..

K: um .. [sigh] .. a robot ..

K: and one who sort of ..

K: who doesn't use ..

K: any imagination

K.. and a pure deliverer of information

K: .. within a framework

K: that attracts funding.

Stanza 9

K: honest .. ah .. trust your own decisions

K: you know ..

K: adapt .. I suppose .. your teaching

K: to different learning styles.

In a follow up question I asked: “How do you reconcile these two positions?”

Kat's response was sure and certain, given with no hesitation: “I just do my own thing, especially now I'm a casual.” It appears that Kat's new position at TAFE has somehow allowed her to relinquish the tensions that had built up among herself, the curriculum and the organisation.

### **6.3.3.3 How is a critical spirit discourse positioned in relation to its value to Kat?**

Because much of Kat's interview was imbued with a sense of endurance within an acrimonious relationship, I wondered if critical spirit might play a part in moderating this experience. Kat described herself as a “survivor” several times and in Stanza 10 I used this to segue into an exploration of critical spirit.

Stanza 10

I: Is an understanding of critical spirit

- I: part of that survival .. do you think?  
K: .. well, I think it is .. and  
K: you know .. having it identified  
K: or um .. given some sort of name  
K: creates a whole new life of its own.  
K: Because .. you're able to think ..  
K: "That's what that is ..  
K: and that's why I behave the way I did .."  
K: so .. I'd like it to build on my strengths.

Kat talked of her personal connection to this project and her embracing the attention paid to her by being asked to be included in the project. She contrasted this with a lack of attention paid to her by the TAFE organisation. At first she wondered if she had any spirit left at all "after going through the system". In Stanza 11 Kat's sense of self received a boost through the receipt of my interpretation of her case narrative in the form of a credibility check.

- Stanza 11  
K: I felt good about it  
K: because .. that ..  
K: it demonstrated that  
K: I really was quite passionate about ..  
K: what I was doing ..

The above appeared as a validation of herself as a 'good' teacher. This was opposite to how she thought that she was perceived by the TAFE organisation. In Stanza 12 Kat tells of her being in a valueless position.

- Stanza 12  
K: where .. you weren't sort of .. valued  
K: your professional credentials weren't ..  
K: you know .. just go get a Certificate IV .. and ..

K: anyone can do it.

Stanza 12 also implicates TAFE in ascribing a lack of value to Kat as a teacher and to the act of teaching. Kat closed this section of the interview by disclosing that being included in the project “was redeeming for my self-esteem”.

When asked if the concept of critical spirit was cumbersome, Kat offered different insights. Kat acknowledged its usefulness in terms of its offering a structure upon which to “reflect on my professionalism”, yet posited a secondary consideration. In Stanzas 13 and 14, Kat suggested a possible double-edged sword.

Stanza 13

K: if you want to reflect ..

K: you try not to .. because .. sometimes ..

K: I suppose .. it's nice to be in denial.

Stanza 14

K: also .. also is um ..

K: you've got to be careful ..

K: you can't be too spirited.

In Stanza 13 Kat highlighted that it requires work (the expenditure of intellectual and emotional energy) to reflect upon self, and that being in a state of denial, or a state of not knowing, allows one time just to rest, or possibly to avoid. Possibly, by reflecting using a critical spirit discourse, “one may find out something about oneself that needs changing”. This may not be easy for an exhausted teacher. Yet in Stanza 15 Kat articulated an alliance.

Stanza 15

K: I fully support it and it should be

K: out there a bit more

K: .. it should be nurtured and recognised.

Kat's support was sobered by what was akin to a warning. This warning is about being too spirited. Kat had previously identified herself as acting in concert with critical spirit, yet in Stanza 13 she warns us to be careful. In the interview Kat and I laughed about the "eye of Mordor", from the celebrated *Lord of the Rings* trilogy by J. R. R. Tolkien, as an example of oppressive surveillance. Kat's connection with this metaphor implied that, by drawing attention to herself by being spirited, she had produced a surveillance response from management in her TAFE institute, a position that can be juxtaposed to that in Stanza 2, where Kat reported that she had received little attention by way of support for the curriculum development task that she had been asked to manage. This suggests that for Kat one can be spirited in TAFE but not too spirited.

Towards the end of the interview I turned our attention to *a test of fortitude*, a possible discourse found in participants' case narratives. Kat's 'test' was evident by her various contests with the TAFE organisation. Nevertheless, Kat appeared to build some value into this facet. Stanza 14 talks about the value of *a test of fortitude*.

Stanza 14

K: it is .. it is really uncomfortable

K: because it pushes you .. outside of your ZONE

K: into another area that might be brand new .. [sigh]

K: BUT .. if you can maintain

K: a manageable level of anxiety and stress

K: um .. you can get through it.

I asked if it would be a useful element to include in critical spirit. Kat replied, “Yes”, but only to the extent that it could help people make a decision about whether a person was in the right job or not.

Stanza 15

K: help that person

K: decide .. if that was

K: really the right sort of workplace for them.

This suggested that this ‘test’ wasn’t one in which there was a pass or fail, but one in which a person could ‘test’ her or his fortitude for resonance or dissonance within the workplace, ‘test’ for like or dislike, ‘test’ for opportunities to grow, or ‘test’ to inform choice. Kat ‘tested’ and chose to exercise her fortitude elsewhere.

A synthesis of Kat’s position, as built by her interview, is evident in Table 6.4. Kat’s position was a picture of a tempestuous relationship with TAFE where she was ‘under pressure’. Her relationship with a teacher in her team was also one of tension. Kat positioned her subjectivity as not being comfortable with notions of rigidity and hierarchy, stating that TAFE wanted “robot[s]” as teachers. This I believe put Kat in a position of antipathy with regard to the new vocational discourse. Kat reconciled her want to be creative, adaptive, and keeping up with contemporary nursing issues, with being “a pure deliver of information .. within a framework that attracts funding” by “doing [her] own thing”, and stated that her new position as a casual teacher allowed her the opportunity to do this. She demonstrated a preference for being left alone to exercise her professional judgement as a nurse educator/TAFE teacher. The value of critical spirit as either a holistic or a deconstructed concept was left blank, as Kat offered no discussion of the individual elements; all reference to critical spirit was in general terms. For example, “it” answered some of the questions that she had about

herself and her interactions, as when she stated: “[T]hat’s what that is .. and that’s why I behave the way I did”.

Table 6.4: A synthesis of Kat’s position as obtained from the analysis of her interview

	Degree of perceived tension		Produced by	The place of others	
<b>Significance to relationship with TAFE</b>	High	√	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The undertaking of a curriculum project with “no real terms of reference” and an application of “rules” and/or managerialist surveillance after project implementation left “you feeling ... really incompetent”.</li> <li>• TAFE bureaucracy.</li> <li>• Inadequacy of certificate level four training to prepare for teaching.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Professionals outside TAFE were valuable. These links allowed for a change in employment.</li> <li>• Teaching colleague considered to be out of touch with contemporary nursing.</li> </ul>	
	Medium				
	Low				
<b>Built subjectivities</b>	Teaching for economic imperatives		Teaching for citizenship	Example(s)	
			√	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Uncomfortable with prescribed curriculum; saw it as rigid, out of date and unimaginative.</li> <li>• Taught outside prescribed curriculum. As a casual teacher, “I do my own thing”.</li> <li>• “[N]ot good at rigidity and hierarchy”.</li> <li>• Preference for professional choice in deploying the dynamic adaptations required for teaching.</li> </ul>	
<b>The value position of critical spirit</b>	As a holistic concept		As individual elements	How is it valuable?	How is it less valuable?
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A <i>test of fortitude</i> seen as an addition to critical spirit. Yes, but only as a means to “test” the compatibility of self to the working environment.</li> </ul>			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• As a means of gaining greater self-understanding</li> <li>• As validation of self as a ‘good’ teacher.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• As another burden on the already exhausted teacher.</li> <li>• Making one more visible to managerialist surveillance.</li> </ul>
<b>The value position of “Other discourse”</b>					

What was valuable to Kat was my interpretation of critical spirit being evident in her case narrative, and that this boosted her self-esteem. Critical spirit was less valuable, according to Kat, in instances where the teacher was exhausted. She indicated that by reflecting on critical spirit “one may find out something about oneself that needs changing”, and that a position of exhaustion may influence a teacher to deny this information, just to get a rest. Kat does not say that she is this teacher, but I get the feeling that Kat was exhausted.

Kat’s take on *a test of fortitude* was very different from those of the other teachers in this study. She saw it as useful as an extender of capability and capacity, but only if the stress and anxiety that it caused were manageable. Kat emphasised that the ‘test’ was more about the person herself or himself testing the compatibility between self and workplace than it was a test of that person’s character.

#### **6.3.4 Tina (Interviewed 2 July 2008)**

At the time of interview Tina had been a TAFE teacher for nearly four years. Tina taught a business training package at a TAFE institute located in a popular tourist destination in south east Queensland. Tina’s qualifications were an accounting degree and the Certificate IV TAA.

##### **6.3.4.1 What did Tina construct as significant in her relationship with TAFE?**

In constructing significance in her relationship with TAFE, Tina began by disclosing that she sought perceptions about TAFE from other people prior to her commencement in her current role. The significance of this was emphasised in the last

line in Stanza 1: “No one will help you.” This implied a particular reality of working in TAFE with little help from colleagues or the organisation. Apart from this occasion, Tina did not confirm whether or not this was the reality for her.

Stanza 1

T: .. it was probably .. ah

T: um, I'd spoken to a few people and they said

T: the first thing they said was that

T: no one will help you .. .

The degree to which this discourse influenced Tina's relationship with TAFE and her identity is moot, but disclosing it at the beginning of the interview positions Tina as a person who is prepared to work without help. Building a heroine identity is possibly too rich an interpretation, but to suggest that she is prepared to exercise her agency in an unsupported work environment implies a position of personal strength. Having set the tone of her engagement with TAFE, Tina moves onto the processes of dealing with TAFE students, including educational delivery and assessment.

In the interview Tina indicated an expectation that classes would be “tutorial like”, comparing them to university, and that she would be engaging with students who would want to pass. Her experience of students being ambivalent to wanting to pass a module of study, and the resubmission policy of TAFE, that she describes as unlimited, “shocked” Tina. In Stanza 2 Tina assembled elements of her ‘accountant’ discourse kit, which emphasised using certain knowledge to “finish what you started” and to “[get] things right the first time”, and used it to confront the CBT assessment practice of resubmission.

Stanza 2

T: There wasn't that expectation that they would GRADUATE,



T: that they would finish the course [and]

T: Oh .. wait a minute .. HAVE ANOTHER GO.

T: The .. the resubmit policy was .. probably one of the hardest things

T: I had .. to .. um .. I didn't realise about this resubmit

T: because .. you know .. especially when in ACCOUNTING

T: the ATO [Australian Taxation Office] doesn't really give you an opportunity to resubmit.

As noted above, certain student attitudes and a particular organisational policy were challenging to Tina, but perhaps the most challenging element was the workload at TAFE. In Stanza 3, Tina built a connection between working in TAFE and experiencing high workloads when compared to her past employment.

Stanza 3

T: I thought it would be easier than

T: the end of the financial year as an accountant.

T: I NEVER thought there would be

T: the amount of pressure.

T: I REALLY didn't.

Tina delivered this stanza in one breath and with no pauses. She checked herself at the end of the stanza, possibly suggesting that it would be best to leave this subject alone because of the heightened emotions that workload appeared to induce within her. She closes her discussion on this topic with “My expectations were very naïve.”

Nevertheless, despite the possibilities of working in an alienating environment and with an accompanying high workload, Tina built a view of TAFE as an organisation that has its place and that what it does has positive influences. Stanza 4 bears out this position.

Stanza 4

I: Do you think .. um that your conceptions of

I: TAFE as an organisation

I: has changed from

I: that time when you were naïve as you first described yourself?

T: Yes .. I REALLY think .. um .. you know

T: the role of TAFE is .. is changing

T: .. um .. I would see TAFE as being an alternat[iv]e option,

T: not an easy option.

Tina could have continued with constructing a perspective that TAFE as an organisation was putting pressure on her to be a particular type of teacher, but she chose to acknowledge a perception of the organisation as doing social good by offering to students an alternative path to skills and knowledge and, in her view, a greater social acceptance of this role.

#### 6.3.4.2 What teaching identities did Tina construct?

In assembling her identities as a TAFE teacher, Tina began with her preconceptions of what she thought that TAFE teaching was about. Stanza 5 constructed a preconception around teaching where the teacher is the ‘giver’ of knowledge and the ‘assessor’ of what counts as an appropriate application of knowledge.

Stanza 5

I: What about in terms of teaching?

T: I .. I thought it would be ..

T: you know .. go in

T: give some knowledge .. they’ll do an assignment

T: um .. I’ll mark it .. and .. that would be about it.

In Stanza 6 Tina shifted her attention to the present. In this stanza Tina answered my request to compare her preconceptions with the conceptions that she held at the time of the interview.

Stanza 6

T: OH .. NOW ..

T: you have to entertain

T: you have to .. get them very much involved.

T: I try to facilitate now more than teach.

Tina framed what she said by a positive, upbeat manner. She said that she had changed her teaching style and that this gave her pleasure because she saw it as a useful way to “encourage those who want to learn”. I asked, “What type of teacher do you want to be?” and in Stanza 7 Tina described her engagement as a “leader toward learning”.

Stanza 7

T: I want to be the type of teacher that ..

T: can .. facilitate .. more than actually teach ..

T: that can lead people to the enjoyment of learning what they’re learning.

In this stanza, I discern a discourse about educational delivery influencing how Tina perceived her engagement as a teacher. Tina offered a value position. This appeared to say for her that ‘facilitation is privileged over teaching’. It would appear that Tina saw these two activities as separate. Whether this is the work of a new vocational discourse that privileges educational delivery conducted by ‘trainers who facilitate’ rather than ‘teachers who teach’, or an adult education discourse that places importance upon the students being leaders in their own learning and that positions teachers as facilitators of this process, is hard to determine. But what was evident was

that Tina had been prompted to enact an identity that had not aligned with a teacher identity that simply delivers and assesses content knowledge, but rather a facilitator of learning who places the onus on students' self-determination in their acquisition of self-relevant knowledge, skills and attitudes.

In this next stanza, Stanza 8, Tina clearly positioned herself as a teacher who was pressured by TAFE to be a teacher who engages only in a particular way with students.

Stanza 8

T: TAFE wants us to be able to ..

T: get them through ..

T: we .. you .. you know .. you assess only what needs to be assessed

T: as far as .. critical aspects of evidence

T: don't worry about what industry wants

T: don't worry about what they actually NEED.

Stanza 8 appeared as evidence of Tina being subjected to the new vocational discourse that positions TAFE teachers as players in a market economy where the emphasis in VET education is placed upon 'product turnover'. Despite this influence, Tina did not appear to be too put off by this prescription of teacher engagement, but she did highlight her position of having a concern about what industry needs and what students need.

The above prescriptive notion of a teacher doesn't appear to be at odds with how Tina enjoys being a teacher. Tina went on to state: "I love what I do". But Tina also stated that "there are times when I hate it." Stanza 10 below appears to relate to particular times when her construction of herself as a teacher is in dissonance with the type of

teacher that TAFE wants her to be. Yet Tina built a coping subjectivity that was bolstered by greater self-understanding.

Stanza 10

T: I love what I do ..

T: um .. there are times when you hate it

T: but .. you know .. I am still as passionate today

T: as I was when I first started ..

T: Yes .. and even more so ..

T: as I'm getting more to know ..

T: UNDERSTANDING as to why I'm there.

#### **6.3.4.3 How is a critical spirit discourse positioned in relation to its value to Tina?**

Tina's initial reactions to the concept of critical spirit were not necessarily about the concept itself but more about her narrative being chosen to be included in the project.

In Stanza 10 Tina expressed a valued position in relation to being a part of this project.

Stanza 10

T: When I write .. as you said

T: I write quite passionately about why I'm here

T: .. it .. it was a nice feeling .. that um

T: you know .. that my work was ..

T: valued.

Here Tina acknowledged the pleasant feeling of having her work (case narrative) identified as being of value; this appeared to translate for her into her identity as also being of worth. This perception of worth was shaken a little when we moved to discuss the credibility check. In my analysis of Tina's case narrative I identified no chunks associated with the critical spirit element of *wholeheartedness*. Tina's

comments in the credibility check suggested that at the time of authoring her case narrative she had been busy and in ‘survival mode’. Tina claimed that once ‘survival’ was assured *wholeheartedness* would more than likely be evident. In Stanza 11 Tina resolved this issue by taking a broader perspective of critical spirit in relation to herself.

Stanza 11

T: Sometimes .. you look at things like that ..

T: and go “OH ..

T: haven’t I covered it properly?” .. but then

T: you go .. “Okay .. wait a minute

T: you’ve GOT to look at the whole thing” ..

T: not one thing .. not just that one section.

“[T]hat” in this instance is my coding of Tina’s narrative that did not show a chunk of *wholeheartedness*. Tina’s resolution was to take a holistic perspective of critical spirit. This told me that Tina’s alliance with the concept was useful to her because it positioned her as a reflective kind of person engaging in the world in the particular way that she likes, and in a manner that she can name as critical spirit.

Tina extracted value from her engagement with critical spirit. In Stanza 12 Tina aligned critical spirit with her teaching style.

Stanza 12

T: It kind of leads to a change in my teaching style

T: because .. with facilitation it’s a lot about the critical spirit

T: .. about getting them to

T: find their own ..

T: getting them to look at

T: the process .. rather than

T: only the outcome.

Here I also saw Tina contesting the new vocational discourse that focuses specifically on outcomes. She built a focus upon process as well as technique, as opposed to a new vocational position that focuses on technique alone. In this instance Tina may well be developing a borderland discourse (Alsup, 2006; Gee, 2005), a script that allows her to traverse the space where these two discourses overlap.

In Stanza 13, critical spirit was considered as a reflective tool. Tina talked about her use of critical spirit being most useful when she would have time for reflection. She described her state at work during the time of interview as also “being in survival mode”, and that getting ready for an AQTF audit had not provided her with an opportunity to use it as such.

Stanza 13

T: Ah .. probably in the future .. yes

T: but .. [sigh] at the moment

T: it's just survival mode.

Next I endeavoured to move the interview towards discussing the *test of fortitude* evident in some participants' narratives. Tina likened this to “survival mode”, suggesting that it could get in the way of deploying a critical spirit.

On critical spirit being cumbersome, Tina brought my attention to occasions when its enactment can bring on more work. Stanza 14 talked about a workplace experience in which Tina questioned the *status quo* of curriculum decision-making in TAFE and enacted a different way of engaging with curriculum. Tina's actions brought a response from the TAFE management that called for her to provide an in-depth and

lengthy justification for her actions. After making the decision to rewrite a program that made the program align more accurately with what “the students wanted”, Tina reported: “I then had to spend four hours JUSTIFYING why I was doing that.”

Stanza 14

T: I know there are some .. many things I wanted to do ..

T: but the additional paperwork .. it creates.

Tina assembled a concordance with critical spirit, suggesting that her action of questioning curriculum decision-making practices was an enactment of critical spirit. The distractor for her was a bureaucratic response. In Tina’s case, the TAFE bureaucracy was positioned as a thwarting element to the enactment of critical spirit.

In Table 6.5 Tina’s position is synthesised. I have interpreted the degree of tension in her relationship with TAFE as being low, although, during Tina’s initial engagement with TAFE teaching, the unexpectedly high workload and the accompanying frustrations with an unknown bureaucracy and curriculum requirements did appear to produce a medium level of tension. Even though Tina explicitly noted the above, including CBT and the bureaucracy, as detractors from the relationship, she still believed that TAFE does a social good. This perspective was augmented by the sense of pleasure that Tina got from her teaching: “I love what I do”. The place of other colleagues was not evident. Tina positioned her subjectivity closer to a discourse on teaching for citizenship; for example, she questioned CBT, was buoyed by facilitating student growth and self-determination and contested the new vocational discourse that focuses only upon outcomes.



Table 6.5: A synthesis of Tina’s position as obtained from the analysis of her interview

	Degree of perceived tension		Produced by	The place of others	
<b>Significance to relationship with TAFE</b>	High		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The TAFE bureaucracy</li> <li>• Pressure of high workload.</li> <li>• Differences between preconceptions of workload and that experienced.</li> <li>• General perception of TAFE doing a social good.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Not significant. Appears to be contented with ‘going it alone’.</li> </ul>	
	Medium				
	Low	√			
<b>Built subjectivities</b>	Teaching for economic imperatives		Teaching for citizenship	Example(s)	
			√	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Questioning of CBT, doesn’t ‘fit’ with accountant discourse kit.</li> <li>• Commitment to the growth and development of students. Described herself as a “leader toward learning”, placing onus on student self-determination.</li> <li>• Contested the new vocational discourse for its lack of attention to ‘process’.</li> </ul>	
<b>The value position of critical spirit</b>	As a holistic concept		As individual elements	How is it valuable?	How is it less valuable?
	√			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To her self-esteem. Her case narrative was “valued”.</li> <li>• As a teaching style that resonates with facilitation and acknowledging the importance of ‘process’.</li> <li>• As a reflective tool.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• By breaking it down into elements, missing elements could be interpreted by ‘others’ as a possible character flaw.</li> <li>• Its enactment by questioning the <i>status quo</i> could bring on more work by making one more visible to management.</li> </ul>
<b>The value position of “Other discourse”</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Linked a <i>test of fortitude</i> with having to work in “survival mode”, leaving no room/energy for critical spirit.</li> </ul>				

The value of critical spirit for Tina lay in it as a holistic concept – “you’ve GOT to look at the whole thing”, as a teaching style and as a reflective tool.

Tina highlighted two instances of critical spirit being of less value. The first was connected with its being reduced to its constituent elements. She believed that it could produce opportunities for misinterpretation when applied as an indicator of character. The other is associated with making oneself more visible by deploying critical spirit, especially if this contests the *status quo*; by doing so Tina indicated that it can make the teacher a possible target for the enactment of micro management. Tina suggested that the “Other discourse”, a *test of fortitude*, could detract from one’s critical spirit.

### **6.3.5 Gus (Interviewed 23 June 2008)**

At the time of the interview Gus was employed at a regional TAFE in Northern Queensland. He taught refrigeration apprentices and had been doing so for three years. Gus’s previous position was as a service manager for a refrigeration and air-conditioning company. As well as having a trade certificate for refrigeration and air-conditioning, Gus held a diploma level qualification in the same trade area and the Certificates IV BSZ and TAA.

#### **6.3.5.1 What did Gus construct as significant in his relationship with TAFE?**

Gus built significance into his relationship with TAFE by his emphasis on the differences between his preconceptions about TAFE and his reported experience of the organisation. Gus began: “What I expected and what I SAW were two different things”. He went on to explain that he expected that he would turn up to TAFE and be officially inducted and be given an “armful of resources to actually teach with”. In

Stanza 1 Gus articulated concordance with a familiar phrase reported by other participants in this project.

Stanza 1

I: Would you describe it as

I: being thrown in the deep end?

G: Oh .. ABSOLUTELY .. absolutely, yeah.

What was different for Gus was that he shaped a perspective of himself that included an ability to cope with “being thrown in the deep end”. In Stanza 2 Gus assembled a view of his past job as being one where his efforts were fractured by competing tasks and that this was different from his view of teaching being a straightforward type of activity, and that because of his previous experience he would cope.

Stanza 2

G: There was an awful lot of things

G: going on all the time ..

G: and I felt that coming here ..

G: if nothing else ..

G: I could focus on one thing ..

G: which was actually teaching.

One aspect of teaching that attracted Gus was what he saw as “doing the one thing”, and he compared this to his previous job when he had “a thousand things going on in my mind”. Gus appeared invigorated by the challenge of getting resources for teaching and the actual teaching component. In Stanza 3 he identified himself as the type of person who coped with this challenge. Through this claim Gus built an image of teaching as a taxing activity, possibly similar to his past employment.

Stanza 3

G: I think if somebody else walked in

G: they would have walked out the back door on the same day.

When Gus was asked to describe himself three years after his initial appointment with TAFE, he continued by extending his perception of teaching in TAFE: the more or longer that he was engaged, the more complex that the activity was for him. In Stanza 4 Gus declared a particular level of comfort yet moved to an increase in realisation about TAFE teaching being more than just teaching *per se*.

Stanza 4

G: Quite comfortable .. in what I'm doing

G: in the sense that

G it doesn't daunt me at all.

G: HOWEVER, the longer I'm in the system

G: the more that I learn about ..

G: the duties of a teacher you

G: don't realise about ..

G: Your AQTF, your moderation, your validation type things.

Gus described an awakening to a conception that teaching was beyond his initial preconceptions. He has awakened to: "the issues that skirt around face-to-face teaching". His reality of 'not knowing' was positioned as: "It was a case of ignorance is bliss". In Stanza 5 Gus described his cloistered position.

Stanza 5

G: I was under the illusion ..

G: that I would .. teach ..

G: and that would be it .. lesson prep

G: .. E.A.S .. explain, activity, summarise.

With regard to Gus's relationship with the training needed to become a TAFE teacher, he positioned the initial Certificate IV BSZ, undertaken by him prior to getting

employment as a TAFE teacher, as “a walk in the park”. In Stanza 6 he engaged with a slightly more positive view of its replacement, the Certificate IV TAA.

Stanza 6

G: Whilst it is .. got a

G: few more modules to it ..

G: sorry, I shouldn't say modules ..

G: more competencies to it

G: .. um .. it still doesn't prepare you for becoming a teacher.

Here Gus built a view that alluded to a degree of dissatisfaction around the knowledge and skills that Gus wanted for his teaching. During the interview Gus did point out that the TAA certificate had provided him with useful information – for example, VET acronyms, qualification frameworks and auditing processes, of which he said: “I had no idea”. But the central tenet in his declaration was that a Certificate IV qualification was not enough for his teaching.

Gus formed other significant elements in his relationship with the TAFE organisation around his perceptions of aspects of organisational functioning. Stanza 7 suggested a system that took Gus away from what he saw as his primary task, teaching.

Stanza 7

G: The system is overadministered, I think.

G: We spend a very, very small amount of time

G: .. um .. with the actual .. delivery of what we are supposed to be doing.

G: There's [a] HUGE .. great big nucleus surrounding us

G: this WHOLE administration thing.

He juxtaposed his position in Stanza 7 with the claim that, even though TAFE has its shortcomings, he still sides with its central purpose, as Stanza 8 confirms.

Stanza 8

G: I am also passionate about the TAFE system.

G: Fundamentally .. I think it works

G: I don't think that there's anything better ..

G: um .. it just needs a huge overhaul ..

In Stanza 9, Gus returned to his position that possibly TAFE would benefit from having less administration. Previous to voicing Stanza 9 Gus had expressed a degree of exasperation about the amount of paperwork required in delivering training to “just 14 students”.

Stanza 9

G: I think the emphasis has been drawn

G: .. away from .. what it is that we're trying to achieve

G: which is .. to .. basically turn out tradespeople

G: and it gets washed around, so to speak

G: with so much administration.

### **6.3.5.2 What teaching identities did Gus construct?**

As a teacher, Gus built his identity through connecting it with the expression of a passion. Indeed, for Gus if one didn't hold a passion for teaching one would not do it. Stanza 10 confirms the building of an identity that is aligned with a passion for being a teacher. This alludes to the enactment of *wholeheartedness*, an element of critical spirit.

Stanza 10

G: I'm of the opinion .. that

G: when a certain person becomes a teacher ..

G: you have to be passionate about what you do

G: because you wouldn't do it otherwise ..

G: certainly wouldn't do it otherwise.

In Stanza 8 Gus told of his passion for the TAFE system and in Stanza 10 he built an identity that was passionate about teaching. It appeared that, regardless of the reported shortcomings that detract from working in TAFE, Gus had built subjectivities that allowed a connection between himself and the organisation. Indeed, fundamental to his relationship with TAFE is an identity that coped under pressure (Stanza 3) and one that sought to increase and improve knowledge (Stanza 6). A critical spirit discourse is also used by Gus to do identity work. This is reported on in the next subsection.

### **6.3.5.3 How is a critical spirit discourse positioned in relation to its value to Gus?**

Gus's initial reaction to the concept of critical spirit was in the forming of connections between his experience in TAFE and other TAFE teachers' experiences.

Gus acknowledged that he believed that he must not "be the only one", suggesting that, if I chose his case narrative, there must be other TAFE teachers with similar experiences and that this called for further examination. This indicated that Gus held the belief that his views and experiences of teaching at TAFE were shared. In Stanza 11 Gus also aligned himself with critical spirit. He implied a tacit knowledge of this discourse, a subjective position that claimed some embodiment of critical spirit.

Stanza 11

G: I think it highlighted something ..

G: subconsciously that I'd thought about.

G: To me .. it's another word

G: for something that's already there.

With regard to 'doing' critical spirit, Gus emphasised time as a factor for him.

He built a concordance with its utility as a reflective tool but in Stanza 12 highlighted that he needed time to do so.

Stanza 12

G: The TIME factor ..

G: we live in a world and an occupation ..

G: where I think that everything is just flat out ..

G: no time to .. sit down and reflect on very many things.

For Gus the above is the cumbersome aspect of critical spirit. In speaking about being time poor, Gus also positioned critical spirit as being connected with the acts of building knowledge and innovation. In Stanza 13 Gus suggested that the TAFE organisation is complicit in not allowing time for enactments of critical spirit that can lead to innovation.

Stanza 13

G: In my teaching

G: I'm running flat out getting through ..

G: what I've got to get through.

Gus connected critical spirit to himself and his teaching by highlighting what he saw as a central quality. In Stanza 14 Gus assembled this quality as one that contested the notion of compliance (and by association a prescriptive curriculum) by openly acknowledging that he taught outside the curriculum.

Stanza 14

G: Tend to move toward delivering what

G: we believe they need ..

G: to be competent with ..

G: as opposed to the training package ..

G: which is more about compliance ..

G: which has little relevance to



G: the trade .. even now.

Gus's emphasis on "more about compliance" and "little relevance" suggests that his teaching is political, in that it is of value to be a teacher who teaches outside the prescribed curriculum because a 'good' teacher does the right thing by his/her students through equipping them with what they 'really' need. In Stanza 15 Gus appeared to arrange critical spirit and the compliant nature of a prescriptive curriculum as a dichotomy. Gus appeared to position critical spirit as being resisted by compliance and *vice versa*.

Stanza 15

G: On one side ..

G: we think we are doing the right thing

G: and .. on the other side ..

G: a system saying you have to

G: do this, this, this and THIS ..

G: A lot of critical spirit is stifled

G: to a certain extent with conformity.

Gus's tension with the new vocational discourse is evident here. The tension appears to lie with the compliant nature of its auditing culture through the AQTF. Gus positioned this auditing culture as being responsible for his educational delivery, and that of his colleagues, coming under unnecessary scrutiny. This is a scrutiny that doesn't necessarily look at the "quality of [his] teaching", but rather at how well he "fills out paperwork". Gus concluded this section of the interview in Stanza 16 by announcing his perception that "compliance" also stifles innovation. Yet he also suggested critical spirit as a means to contest compliance and possibly to upset the *status quo*.

Stanza 16

G: Compliance ..

G: stifles the critical spirit .. the enthusiasm

G: of trying to look at something

G: a different way but at the same time

G: critical spirit .. somehow .. fights compliance.

At the conclusion of the interview Gus made a belief claim around the *test of fortitude* discourse found in his case narrative. Gus said that he would privilege its future development within a critical spirit discourse in terms of its “resilience and determination”. Gus talked about himself as a “passionate go getter” and stated that critical spirit with a test of fortitude suited him, but he acknowledged that it may not suit all, and that for others it may not be suitable because “they may not be built that way”. This implied that there are other ways that ‘one can be built’ and that we possibly need to be mindful of these. What struck me in relation to this position was Gus’s apparent acceptance of diversity and his openmindedness to difference, although this appears to be qualified in relation to members of the TAFE organisational hierarchy (this is also evident in the results of my analysis of his case narrative). He could have positioned himself as a hero surviving in the face of adversity, thereby leveraging himself into an elite position. Rather he chose a position that appeared to say that “tests of fortitude were okay for me, but possibly not for others”.

Table 6.6 is a synthesis of Gus’s position in relation to his interview. Even though Gus articulated a high degree of tension in his relationship with TAFE during the period of his initial engagement, what was evident at the time of the interview was a much lower level of tension. Gus’s built identity portrayed a teacher whose capabilities, even though stretched at times, enabled him to cope. Despite annoyances

– for example, the perceived inadequacy of the Certificate IV TAA, AQTF audits and administrative complexity – Gus demonstrated confidence in the TAFE system.

Table 6.6: A synthesis of Gus’s position as obtained from the analysis of his interview

	Degree of perceived tension		Highlighted factor(s)	The place of others	
<b>Significance to relationship with TAFE</b>	High		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The TAFE bureaucracy balanced by self-perception as having an internal disposition that would cope.</li> <li>• Not daunted by “the system”.</li> <li>• Inadequacy of certificate level four training to prepare for teaching.</li> <li>• Overall held a positive view of the TAFE system.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Connects with the possibility that other TAFE teachers are having similar experiences.</li> </ul>	
	Medium				
	Low	√			
<b>Built subjectivities</b>	Teaching for economic imperatives		Teaching for citizenship	Example(s)	
			√	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Passionate about teaching.</li> <li>• Good teachers teach outside the prescribed curriculum.</li> <li>• Uncomfortable with AQTF and compliance.</li> </ul>	
<b>The value position of critical spirit</b>	As a holistic concept		As individual elements	How is it valuable?	How is it less valuable?
				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• As a reflective tool.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• When ‘time poor’.</li> </ul>
<b>The value position of “Other discourse”</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A <i>test of fortitude</i> seen a useful personal indicator, but it might not be suitable for all TAFE teachers.</li> </ul>				

Gus’s subjectivity sided with ‘teaching for citizenship’. He articulated discomfort with the new vocational discourse and highlighted his passion for teaching, including his need to teach outside the prescriptive curriculum. The value of using critical spirit as a holistic concept or in its individual elements was not clear, although Gus did tend to refer to it holistically in relation to his tacit embodiment of critical spirit.

Nevertheless, no indication was recorded in the table. Critical spirit’s value as a

reflective tool is evident, but only when time permitted – Gus’s identity as a ‘busy’ teacher is clearly evident. What Gus does highlight, and what is not evident in the table, is his positioning of critical spirit as the antithesis of compliance: “critical spirit .. somehow .. fights compliance”. Whether or not this is of value to Gus is not evident. But the possibility of Gus forming an alliance with critical spirit to contest compliance is there, especially when I consider that Gus voiced discordance with ‘compliance’s’ administrative properties. Gus’s position on *a test of fortitude* had changed from when he initially articulated a “survival of the fittest” perspective. He related it to having more of a personal meaning. That is, it is not necessarily a ‘mettle’ measuring device for all.

### **6.3.6 Ryan (Interviewed 7 August 2008)**

Ryan was a TAFE teacher in North Western Australia. His regional TAFE institute employed him six years ago to teach competencies from a tourism training package. Ryan, previously a wildlife officer and a tourism operator, reported that he was approached by TAFE to teach, rather than him seeking employment with TAFE. Ryan’s formal qualifications were not specifically disclosed. I made the assumption that he met the minimum employment standard of holding an industry qualification with a significant number of years of experience and that he held a Certificate IV TAA or equivalent.

#### **6.3.6.1 What did Ryan construct as significant in his relationship with TAFE?**

Ryan positioned himself in a positive relationship with TAFE. Significant in this was TAFE as the provider of an avenue for Ryan to continue his enactments of successful

relationships with the Indigenous peoples of northern Australia. In Stanza 1 Ryan began to build a picture of himself as an ‘enabler’ from TAFE.

Stanza 1

R: Help people in remote communities

R: receive .. you know ..

R: education and training

R: develop .. and find their own aspirations.

TAFE teaching was a means for Ryan to continue to get satisfaction from working with Indigenous people and that this was “just an extension on what [he had] been doing before”.

The quality of his relationship appeared to be built around the activities of networking. In Stanza 2 Ryan asserts a position in which he had latitude to ‘conduct business in his own way’. Significantly he referred to this latitude allowing him to exercise his *independence of mind*.

Stanza 2

R: We’re able to .. to

R: use our independence of mind to get out ..

R and locate those people in other organisations

R: who can help us.

By contrast, over the course of the interview Ryan also highlighted relationship tensions with the TAFE organisation. He arranged teacher and manager perspectives in conflict with each other. Stanza 3 is indicative of his experiencing two discourses nudging each other to gain favour with teachers and managers. Ryan himself made a distinction between the new vocational discourse and that of critical spirit. Ryan

aligned himself with a critical spirit discourse, and appeared to align managers with a discourse of new vocationalism.

Stanza 3

R: With the language of new vocationalism

R: there's .. almost a competition

R: between the two groups ..

R: We come up with ..

R: words like .. “pedagogy

R: and critical spirit manifestation”.. and the like

R: and the bureaucrats will say ..

R: .. “Well, these .. are our words .. and

R: you'll have to understand

R: our language as well.”

In the above stanza, Ryan used “these” to refer to words like “benchmarking, customers and efficiencies”. Ryan did not take this observation further but did conclude with the chunk: “Finding a common ground is what this thing has helped with.” This chunk appears to indicate Ryan’s use of critical spirit as a possible common discourse that TAFE teachers and their managers could agree on. When I considered Ryan’s other comments that critical spirit offered a means “for me to communicate with others what I do” and in his credibility check that critical spirit “could be used to add to the process of engagement with policymakers”, I am inclined to interpret that Ryan held the perception that critical spirit could be a useful concept for managers and bureaucrats as well and therefore not necessarily a means to distinguish between ‘them and us’.

### **6.3.6.2 What teaching identities did Ryan construct?**

In Stanza 4 and indeed in other stanzas throughout the interview, Ryan built a picture of himself as an individual with something to offer. In his telling about his initial hiring experience of being approached by TAFE to teach and not his approaching TAFE for employment, he announces his value. This appears to imbue a personal confidence within his interview and in himself. This is the position of a confident individual with skills to offer – in particular, an ability to move in and around Australian Indigenous cultures. Ryan described this in a modest way and acknowledged that he also received something back. This appeared to be an enrichment of his identity gained through varied experiences with a number of other people.

Stanza 4

I: Anything daunting about the move into TAFE?

R: No .. at the time ..

R: and it still is the case ..

R: I've got a bit to offer .. and

R: a bit to contribute ..

R: the ability to ..

R: move between cultures ..

R: and .. you know ..

R: meet new people ..

### **6.3.6.3 How is a critical spirit discourse positioned in relation to its value to Ryan?**

In answering a question about how critical spirit was of value to him, Ryan constructed a personal and professional image of himself that embodied the elements of critical spirit. This aligned with his credibility check. In Stanza 5 he articulated an

openmindedness to Indigenous culture and in Stanza 6 he explicated an intellectually responsible act of seeking understanding before choosing to engage.

Stanza 5

R: Finding out where ..

R: they want to be.

Stanza 6

R: Understanding a situation

R: before I stick my nose in.

Ryan built confidence in his embodiment of the element *independence of mind*. Ryan announced his confidence in his knowledge of how to engage with the Indigenous culture by avoiding a situation where he may “perhaps .. make a cultural mistake”. Stanzas 7 and 8 provide evidence of Ryan’s connection with *wholeheartedness* and *respect for others*.

Stanza 7

R: The work to be done

R: before .. you know ..

R: before you can actually

R: get out .. and start to ..

R: deliver .. and teach people ..

R: and share knowledge .. and ..

Stanza 8

R: And help them on

R: that journey of ..

R: finding our where they

R want to be.



What appears with some clarity to me is Ryan embracing a discourse of critical spirit to an extent that it appears as central to how he sees himself and how he presents to others. The relationship is a positive one, in that he built no tension around his incorporation of the elements into his day-to-day engagements with the education of Indigenous people. His use of the critical spirit elements in “identifying what we are good at” offered for Ryan a means to explain to “other teachers how to engage with Indigenous people”. In Stanza 9 Ryan explained how he uses the “words” to put a particular type of engagement. The words he refers to are the words of the critical spirit discourse referred to in this project.

Stanza 9

R: They were words I could incorporate

R: into descriptions for other people.

Here critical spirit discourse did work for Ryan. It appears to have helped him to communicate the ‘how to’ of working with and educating a particular group of people who are identified as Indigenous to Australia. This implies that this kind of work is different and in need of a different perspective.

Ryan built connections between critical spirit and other TAFE teachers.

In Stanza 10 his perception is that some teachers are not in resonance with what they are achieving or with what they could achieve. Ryan built the possibility that, if these teachers engaged with critical spirit, they might obtain resonance between what they had achieved and what they would like to achieve.

Stanza 10

R: The beauty about it .. you know ..

R: if it’s presented to them ..

R: For one .. it makes

- R: people be honest about  
R: what they are .. what they are actually achieving.  
I: So you think it prompts  
I: a certain amount  
I: of honesty?  
R: Yeah .. they're power words ..  
R: intellectual responsibility .. wholeheartedness ..  
R: which should prompt people  
R: to reflect on what they are actually doing.

In the above stanza Ryan used the word “honest” and suggested that possibly some other teachers are not honest with themselves. By doing so he positioned himself as different, perhaps “honest” with himself, because he saw himself as deploying critical spirit as a reflective tool and achieving what he wanted to achieve.

For Ryan, access to the label of a ‘good’ TAFE teacher appears to align with those who deploy critical spirit, as he believed that he did. In discussing how critical spirit might be cumbersome for some teachers, he highlighted in Stanza 11 those who appear to position themselves differently.

- Stanza 11  
R: Set in their ways  
R: those .. perhaps ..  
R: [who] have been delivering  
R: and working in the TAFE system for too long ..  
R: who .. are not sure exactly  
R: of how they fit into the new system  
R: .. who don't see a need to change ..  
R: who are bitter about  
R: the situation.

Ryan described these TAFE teachers as ones who have been subjected to the “continual policy [and practice] changes” within contemporary TAFE institutes, and who appear to be resistant to continued change, or at least to the apparent speed of change within the VET sector. He described these TAFE teachers as being “closed-minded to the idea of critical spirit”. Ryan appeared not to have considered other possibilities – for example, that these teachers might be in ‘pre-retirement mode’ and that the *status quo* suits them at this particular stage of their careers, or that they are like Kat, in that they have ‘tested the water’ and are choosing a future move away from TAFE.

Ryan’s privileging of *a test of fortitude* discourse as an addition to the elements of critical spirit was a distant one. He did not articulate a test of fortitude in his case narrative. But he did position TAFE as offering a particular type of challenge. Ryan constructed TAFE as being unique by offering experiences with Indigenous people that he believed that no other organisation was offering. This contributed to his attraction to TAFE. In Stanza 12 Ryan constructed a preference for employment that implied his preference for a unique challenge.

Stanza 12

R: I’ve been offered, offered .. you know

R: positions back in the private enterprise ..

R: which are .. I guess pay a lot more than what I’m actually earning here at TAFE ..

R: but .. um .. there is nobody really

R: working with Indigenous groups .. that

R: the TAFE sector is.

This was Ryan's challenge and during the course of the interview he positioned himself as having the wherewithal to match that challenge. This wherewithal appears to reside with his alliance with a discourse of critical spirit. He did not appear to place value in a *test of fortitude* discourse.

Table 6.7 depicts a synthesis of Ryan's position as gleaned from his interview.

Noted is the low degree of tension in the relationship between TAFE and himself. It is my belief that his relationship had the least degree of tension when compared to the other teachers in this study.

The contributing factors were: his enabling of successful relationships among Indigenous people himself and his employing TAFE institute; his seemingly 'free hand' in conducting business; and his high degree of self-confidence. The position of others in his relationships included: the important position that teaching Indigenous people has within Ryan's identity; and his suggestion that critical spirit may have a place in benefiting 'others' within TAFE – for example, by providing a "common language". Ryan had a preference for a 'teaching for citizenship' subjectivity, and clearly articulated a preference for a critical spirit discourse over the new vocational discourse. Ryan showed ease with understanding and using critical spirit both as a holistic concept and in its elementary form; this was indicated in the table by choosing both value positions. Critical spirit was valuable to Ryan as a corporeal label as well as a subjective position. He saw it as a possible common ground between teachers and managers. He used it as a reflective tool, and suggested that it could be used to explore an individual's experience of congruence between what individuals were actually achieving in teaching and what they wanted to achieve. He suggested

that critical spirit might be less useful for those “set in their ways”. Ryan articulated no value in relation to a *test of fortitude* discourse.

Table 6.7: A synthesis of Ryan’s position as obtained from the analysis of his interview

	Degree of perceived tension		Highlighted factor(s)	The place of others	
<b>Significance to relationship with TAFE</b>	High		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• TAFE as a means to continue successful relationships with Indigenous people.</li> <li>• TAFE allowed him to ‘conduct business his own way’.</li> <li>• Overall held a positive view of the TAFE system.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Indigenous people play an important part in his teaching identity.</li> <li>• Bureaucrats and other teachers as possible beneficiaries of critical spirit.</li> </ul>	
	Medium				
	Low	√			
<b>Built subjectivities</b>	Teaching for economic imperatives		Teaching for citizenship	Example(s)	
			√	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More comfortable with a critical spirit discourse than with the new vocational discourse.</li> <li>• High commitment to teaching Indigenous people.</li> </ul>	
<b>The value position of critical spirit</b>	As a holistic concept		As individual elements	How is it valuable?	How is it less valuable?
	√		√	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• As a subjective position.</li> <li>• As a corporeal position.</li> <li>• As a reflective tool.</li> <li>• As a common discourse that teachers and managers can agree on.</li> <li>• As a means to build congruence between teaching realities and desires.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• For ‘others’ who are “set in their ways”.</li> </ul>
<b>The value position of “Other discourse”</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Appears to place little value in a <i>test of fortitude</i> discourse.</li> </ul>				

### **6.3.7 Matt (Interviewed 8 August 2008)**

Matt was a teacher at a regional institute of TAFE in southern Queensland. He was a boilermaker by trade and at the time of interview taught into a metals training package. Matt had some prior teaching experience at an agricultural college where he worked as a welding instructor and fabricator. Matt stated that he had been a TAFE teacher for three years and held the Certificate IV BSZ.

#### **6.3.7.1 What did Matt construct as significant in his relationship with TAFE?**

Like some other teachers in this project, Matt used the expression “thrown in the deep end” to assemble his particular relationship with TAFE. Matt endeavoured to emphasise disenchantment with the organisation, and in Stanza 1 highlighted this by appearing to want to use a stronger word to describe his situation.

Stanza 1

M: .. I was virtually told ..

M: to sink or swim ..

M: and THAT was a shock.

M: ah .. I was disappointed .. I suppose .. ha ha for want of a better WORD.

M: I was disappointed at being thrown in the deep end .. so to speak.

M: .. Fair enough .. I could handle it .. BUT.

In the above stanza Matt also qualified his view with the word “virtually”, suggesting that possibly he was not told directly “to sink or swim”, but that it was an implied message from the organisation. Matt built this perspective on the basis of what he saw as TAFE not supporting its beginning teachers. Matt also finished this stanza by positioning himself as a teacher who could handle this apparent lack of support. His “BUT” at the end of the stanza appears to ask if he should have had to handle such a situation.

In Stanza 2 Matt continued to assemble a particular conception of TAFE. This is a picture of TAFE as an organisation that lacked an adequate understanding of educational engagement and what it's like to teach or train at the "coal face".

Stanza 2

M: The attitude was at the time

M: um .. "You're a professional ..

M: Make your OWN judgement."

M: Because I'd done a ..

M: I'd worked eight Fridays doing a BSZ Cert 4 ..

M: ah .. with 20 .. 20 odd years of industry experience.

M: That was deemed enough.

I: Mm.

M: BUT .. that's not enough

M: to learn the art of teaching.

Further on in the interview Matt returned to the issue of preparedness for teaching. In Stanza 3 Matt reiterated his underpreparedness and positioned the organisation as responsible for that situation.

Stanza 3

I: We talked about that BSZ and 25 years of experience as being okay,

I: but it wasn't good enough to prepare you to teach?

M: NO, NO .. NO.

I: So .. yeah ..

M: THAT's a slur on good teachers ..

M: that have done the hard yards.

"[T]hat" in this case is used by Matt to refer to the Certificate IV BSZ, and with the words "hard yards" Matt refers to the work that particular teachers – teachers with whom he has had a close association – had had to carry out at teachers training

college or university. Matt expressed distaste at an “attitude from higher up” that hoisted him to the same level as teachers who have obtained bachelor and masters level teaching qualifications. This he expresses as the “slur” on their hard work. Matt’s position of indignation at the suggestion that he is as ‘good’ as teachers with a degree situates him as a teacher who has ‘something to learn’, and possibly as occupying a position of humility. Matt’s indignation also appears to label TAFE as not having empathy with the level of skill, knowledge and attitude that Matt believed was required by TAFE teachers to undertake their roles.

### **6.3.7.2 What teaching identities did Matt construct?**

In the preceding discussion of Matt’s relationship with TAFE, I have shown Matt to construct an identity around a teacher who can cope with challenge and who is keen to learn more about teaching. In the interview he added to this identity, a teacher who took a critical perspective of the contexts around him. This criticality continued in Matt’s talk about his interactions with students. In Stanza 4 Matt highlighted the importance that he placed on his role by building an impression around his teaching as having a large impact on his students. He compared failure to having negative implications for student learning and success as having positive effects on student learning. Matt equated doing “a GOOD job” with having a positive impact on that learning.

Stanza 4

M: If .. if I’m just thrown in the deep end .. um

M: I’m very mindful .. you know ..

M: if I make a .. a balls up of it ..

M. then it could impact on that person ..

M: but if I do a GOOD job .. alternatively ..

M: that could have a positive impact too ..



Even in this stanza Matt again highlighted the impact that context had on his teaching. For Matt the impact of context influences the degree to which he can make claim to doing “a GOOD job” and by implication to being a good teacher.

In Stanza 5 Matt told of how his preconceptions of TAFE teachers were shaped by his experiences as an apprentice. These he states were “trade teachers teaching a trade with learning resources provided and a similarity of curriculum from one TAFE college to the next”.

Stanza 5

M: There would be ..

M: a core of information to use ..

M: and that would be fairly common.

Matt built a view of a fraternity of like-minded teachers doing like-minded things – for example, all teachers passing on “extra information” that is not part of the curriculum but nevertheless of value to students – and of the existence of some kind of community that provided support. Stanza 6 assembles this community as providing mentoring and feedback on how Matt does his job.

Stanza 6

M: I hoped there would be a fair bit of mentoring .. in the early part

M: that I’d be .. under pressure ..

M: from a senior teacher to provide with some plans

M: who’d stick their head in the door .. and ..

M: and that sort of thing.

Matt talked about being put “under pressure” as a needed supervisory element. Matt depicted this as particular feedback on and guidance about his performance, not an

unrealistic expectation to test “one’s mettle”. Matt recalled certain kinds of teachers whom he had had as an apprentice, noting again certain ways of enacting teaching – for example, teaching beyond the curriculum, as mentioned above. Matt stated, “I wanted to emulate that.”

### **6.3.7.3 How is a critical spirit discourse positioned in relation to its value to Matt?**

Notable in Matt’s interview was the degree to which Matt aligned his identity with a critical spirit discourse. In Stanza 7 Matt talked about the value that it had for him as a ‘way of doing’, in that it helped him to “keep going” in his job.

Stanza 7

M: It did spark a chord .. I guess

M: .. that um .. like .. it wasn’t obviously just me

M: and .. I didn’t think it was either.

M: Critical spirit to me ..

M: is something inside that makes

M: us .. do certain things or ..

M: want to do things a certain way .. and um

M: I suppose you need that

M: to keep going in the job .. and

M: want to improve yourself ..

M: and to try to give the students

M: the best outcome .. you possibly can.

Matt began the above stanza with the assumption that ‘he’s not the only one’ – that he shared a particular identity with others and that critical spirit is part of this identity.

His relationship with critical spirit appeared to be explained as something internal to his being, and that this prompts action in certain ways. It would appear that Matt was making critical spirit do identity work for him, and that this work entailed building a

teacher who ‘does his best’ for students and who “keep[s] going” in a job that doesn’t appear to help him in doing his best. In Stanza 8 Matt continued this construction.

Stanza 8

M: To produce good outcomes both

M: for myself .. from a personal point of view .. and for the students ..

M: We need that .. that critical spirit.

In the last line of Stanza 8 Matt could have chosen to use “I” or even the second person “You”, but he chose instead the inclusive pronoun of “We”, once again indicating a perception that critical spirit is a social phenomenon with a utilitarian value for others as well as for himself.

In Stanza 9 Matt again positioned himself as being close to this discourse on critical spirit. He explained his belief that he enacted the disposition in an unconscious manner. This suggests some kind of tacit knowledge and concurs with my findings about Ryan, who also explicitly indicated his enactment of critical spirit.

Stanza 9

M: I guess .. to a point ..

M: a lot of those things I was doing automatically

M: unbeknown to myself.

Matt explicitly placed critical spirit in a position of being of value to him. In Stanza 10 Matt described the way that critical spirit “forces” him to take a look at himself.

Matt also saw it as a means of validating his view of himself.

Stanza 10

M: I suppose .. I suppose it was a way of saying

M: I am on the right track.

M: Maybe .. my attitudes to what I’m doing

M: are .. were .. OKAY.

Stanza 10 also alludes to a past positioning of Matt as being unsure of himself, a probable result of having perceived himself as being “thrown in the deep end”, and implies that critical spirit as a concept gave him licence to acknowledge a kind of certainty about himself that concurred with his efforts at teaching, a positioning that said, ‘You’re okay’.

In Stanza 11 Matt continued to assemble his becoming as a teacher around certain identity facets of his senior teachers’ teaching that he had found salient. He said that he wanted to emulate the “good” parts of his senior teachers.

Stanza 11

M: I observe my senior teachers ..

M: and what I’d like to do is to pick out the elements of different teachers

M: and roll them into one; that’s my goal.

Matt didn’t provide specific information but clarified “good” as aspects that impacted positively on student learning. I asked if he used critical spirit as a means of filtering and as a way to identify these admirable qualities, Matt was unsure at first, mentioning it was just a “gut feeling”. But then, with some reflection, he became stronger in his agreement with the proposition and again made a connection with critical spirit as a possible automatic internal response, as Stanza 12 demonstrates.

Stanza 12

I: I’m wondering whether

I: critical spirit is part of that filter.

M: .. Oh .. possibly .. possibly is.

M: .. YEAH, Well. I suppose .. um

M: sometimes people are

M: not particularly broad-minded as they should be.

M: I suppose you're right ..

M: I suppose we're doing things automatically

M: and that's part of the gut feeling I'm taking about.

In Stanza 13 Matt built further connection between critical spirit and the senior TAFE teachers whom he had referred to earlier. He described these teachers as embodying critical spirit and putting it to work for themselves in questioning “management decisions”.

Stanza 13

I: Now .. that you have engaged with the concept of critical spirit ..

I: and when you reflect upon the older tradesmen in your team ..

I: would you say that they had critical spirit?

M: .. Sure .. sure

M: making .. making .. ah .. good decisions.

Matt continued to present his relationship with the senior TAFE teachers as a positive one and so too their relationship to the unconscious presence of critical spirit. He appeared to relate to a discourse that positions older workers as valuable and wise. Particular value revolved around the application of their experience and wisdom to some current decisions made by his TAFE institute. In Stanza 14 Matt related senior teacher impact on that decision-making, which enabled quality curriculum decisions for students.

Stanza 14

M: They're not just saying. .. “No, no, no” to everything.

M: If you can prove to them

M: that yes .. this is a good idea

M: and it improves the outcomes for the students

M: they .. they embrace it [the suggested improvement].

Generally, Matt built an identity of a TAFE teacher who was under pressure from the organisation. He painted other TAFE teachers into this picture, especially beginning teachers. In Stanza 15, Matt extracted more value from a critical spirit discourse by identifying its usefulness in enabling him to take on greater self-confidence when he moved through his teaching community engaging with and supporting beginning teachers.

Stanza 15

M: In dialogue with other teachers

M: who are under the pump ..

M: it gives me a little bit more .. I suppose ..

M: I suppose I feel a little more confident when I talk

M: about the problems that new teachers face.

In Stanza 16 Matt continued to assemble a position on his level of confidence. He appeared to acknowledge that his agency has strengthened because of the observations from a meaningful other, myself.

Stanza 16

M: The fact that

M: someone from a higher academic level

M: sort of .. going along the same line ..

M: and highlighting some of the things ..

M: I suppose that I've done ..

M: but I've never really thought about.

This stanza is important in that it gives an example of the reflexive nature of discourse. I had highlighted and made explicit to Matt a critical spirit discourse in his narrative. Prior to this Matt was unaware of critical spirit as a concept or discourse. This discourse had influenced other identity discourses that Matt held about himself

as a tradesman and teacher. This critical spirit discourse resonated with Matt and he used it to do identity work as a particular type of TAFE teacher (in this case doing critical spirit discourse). This doing reflexes back on the discourse itself as it opens up new possibilities for Matt in his ‘doing’ of TAFE teaching.

In considering my question about critical spirit being cumbersome, Matt responded, “No .. No .. I think it’s a good thing.” Matt appeared to build distance between the discourse and a possible critique of it. Perhaps this was because it was of value to him, and he didn’t want to consider how this value might be questioned. Another possibility was that he didn’t want to consider a position on critical spirit that might be counter to my apparent position. But Stanza 17 offers strength to one particular interpretation of Matt’s distance from a critique of critical spirit. In Stanza 17 there appears a degree of lack of assuredness with the concept, suggesting a degree of immaturity in relation to Matt’s depth of deliberation on the concept. This suggests that Matt had not taken his reflections on a critical spirit discourse to the point of a critical examination.

In talking about the other discourses in these TAFE teachers narratives, Matt began to reflect upon a *test of fortitude* discourse in which he was confronted by an angry, noncompliant student who was pushing for a physical resolution of a difference of opinion. I asked Matt whether or not he believed that this *test of fortitude* could be considered a part of critical spirit in relation to a possible connection to hardiness or resilience. As can be seen in Stanza 17, Matt didn’t appear convinced, possibly because of the unpleasantness of the experience, yet he did acknowledge that his experience made him stronger.

Stanza 17

M: Well .. I'm sort of thinking that at the time

M: it wasn't a very good experience

M: but .. um .. in retrospect .. I suppose it's like the saying,

M: "What doesn't kill you makes you stronger" ..

M: It's a bit the same way .. um.

In this stanza Matt talks in low tones, and speaks with little inflection or emphasis, possibly indicating that he could have done without the experience, and that its personal effect on him was significant. He finished discussion of this subject by positioning himself as a teacher who has a better knowledge of the resources available to him in relation to how he would react if a situation like this were repeated. It appeared to me that Matt would not choose the experience of a test of fortitude over apparent alternative paths.

In Table 6.8 Matt's position is synthesised. The degree of tension within Matt's relationship with TAFE is evidently at a medium level. This was exemplified by the mismatch between his expectations about TAFE teaching and his actual experience. Matt believed that TAFE had little understanding of what it is like at the "coal face" of teaching, particularly the high demands placed upon beginning teachers. His perspective was that TAFE is incorrect in its assumption that a certificate four level qualification and industry experience are sufficient for teaching at TAFE.



Table 6.8: A synthesis of Matt’s position as obtained from the analysis of his interview

	Degree of perceived tension		Produced by	The place of others	
<b>Significance to relationship with TAFE</b>	High		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The TAFE bureaucracy and its lack of understanding of the work of teachers, particularly beginning teachers.</li> <li>• High workload.</li> <li>• Inadequacy of certificate level four training to prepare for teaching.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ‘Older’ teachers are examples of ‘good’ teachers.</li> <li>• Possibly the ‘older’ teachers enact a critical spirit.</li> <li>• Wanted ‘others’/supervisors to give more feedback on his teaching.</li> <li>• Other TAFE teachers ‘under pressure’.</li> </ul>	
	Medium	√			
	Low				
<b>Built subjectivities</b>	Teaching for economic imperatives		Teaching for citizenship	Example(s)	
			√	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Good teaching is having a positive impact on learning.</li> <li>• Teachers go beyond the prescribed curriculum to give ‘extra value’ to students.</li> <li>• “...try to give students the best outcome”.</li> </ul>	
<b>The value position of critical spirit</b>	As a holistic concept		As individual elements	How is it valuable?	How is it less valuable?
				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A corporeal position.</li> <li>• Of value to others.</li> <li>• Reflective tool.</li> <li>• A form of self-knowledge.</li> <li>• In making good decisions.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No critique offered.</li> </ul>
<b>The value position of “Other discourse”</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A <i>test of fortitude</i> possibly “...makes you stronger” but he appeared to question the need to undergo one.</li> </ul>				

Significant in his relationships are the older senior teachers and their provision of a type of role model to Matt. His perception was that they enact critical spirit. Matt’s subjectivity aligned to the preference ‘teaching for citizenship’. He clearly articulated his need to have a ‘good’ impact on the learning of his students by adding ‘extras’ to the curriculum. He articulated no connection with teaching for economic imperatives. Matt’s position about the value of conceptualising critical spirit as holistic or in its

elementary form is not indicated; hence these cells remain blank. Critical spirit's value for Matt lay in its embodiment; Matt claimed that he had 'done' critical spirit – "a lot of things I was doing automatically" – and that this realisation provided him with self-confidence. This is evidence of Matt's using critical spirit as a reflective tool. He believed that he also saw critical spirit being enacted by the older teachers in his team when they were in the process of making "good decisions". Matt's connection with a *test of fortitude* as the "Other discourse" appeared undecided. He thought that it made him "stronger", but wondered as to whether or not he 'needed' it.

#### **6.4 An overview of seven TAFE teacher 'kits' as built within seven interviews**

The above data depict the realities that seven TAFE teachers had built within their respective interviews. These realities constituted conceptions around these TAFE teachers' contexts of work, their particular identities and their constructions in relation to an engagement with a critical spirit discourse. Common within these construction sites were positions of tension between these teachers and TAFE as an organisation; tension between these teachers' notions of themselves and the collective notions of TAFE teachers built by the new vocational discourse; and instances of "recognition work" (Gee, 2005, p. 29) that resulted from these teachers' explicit engagements with a critical spirit discourse.

The strain in the relationships between the majority of these teachers and TAFE was articulated in terms of their relationship with TAFE, its bureaucracy and certain managerial practices. Kat's relationship was the most fractious, influencing her to leave her full-time position, whilst Linda, Matt and to a lesser extent Tina articulated their perspective as one in which TAFE was complicit with their respective levels of

self-confidence about themselves as teachers. Furthermore, they positioned the TAFE bureaucracy as thwarting their efforts to enact their own particular identities as ‘good’ teachers and the activities of ‘good’ teaching.

In Mitchell and Gus’s interviews they assembled a more encouraging relationship with TAFE. While they too acknowledged the stress of being ‘thrown in the deep end’, they constructed identities that presented them as capable and less affected by the degree of the challenge presented by the bureaucracy. Their level of agency did not seem as subjugated by the relationship as did Kat, Linda and Matt’s.

The most positive relationship with TAFE was built in the interview with Ryan. Assembled too within Ryan’s relationship was a slight awkwardness with TAFE’s bureaucracy, but central to this relationship was a particular opportunity that TAFE provided for Ryan. This was an opportunity to enact a vital personal teaching identity in relation to his engagement with the Indigenous people of northern Australia. It appeared that there were particular conditions that allowed this identity to flourish, one of which appeared connected to his claim that TAFE actively recruited him, not *vice versa*.

Revealed in the data are instances of these teachers being socially situated by the discourses in which they were immersed (see for example Britzman, 1991; Casey, 1993; Miller Marsh, 2002b). The interviews were instances of “... language get[ting] recruited on site, to enact specific social activities and social identities” (Gee, 1999, p. 1). There is evidence of historical discourses shaping identities (Gibson, 1995; Webb, 2005) – for example, Matt looking to emulate the particular qualities of teachers who

had taught him as an apprentice, and to take on some notable teaching practices of senior teachers with whom he had worked. Demonstrated also are instances of these TAFE teachers actively engaging in their own identity construction (Danielewicz, 2001). These identities appear to be assembled from these teachers questioning their experience in instances where their “narratives of subjectivity” (Zembylas, 2003, p. 221) meet the narratives of their sociopolitical contexts. For example, Tina constructed the identity of a passionate teacher who increased her knowledge and understanding of herself as a teacher through continually enacting the role, and Mitchell positioned his identity as a capable teacher who coped relatively well with the move from industry to the uncertainty of teaching.

Also within these data are illustrations of these teachers contesting the attempts of the new vocational discourse at positioning them as particular TAFE teachers – for example, positioning them: as TAFE teachers who focus solely on the skill or technique based aspects of teaching (Ramsey, 2000); as enactors of a teacher practice that aligns teacher suitability with an education market with its outputs of quantitative measurement (Seddon, 1998); as different from the traditional teacher identity – the teacher as a professional with specialised knowledge; and as exhibiting teaching identities that align with marketing, customer service, entrepreneurship and facilitators of learning (Black, 2005; Chappell, 1999; Harris & Simons, 2003). These teachers have built identities as teachers who do more than just teach prescriptive curriculum. Their ‘more’ was positioned as being closely associated with their students. Examples included Linda “going the extra step” for students in helping them with their job applications, Matt “passing on extra information” to students that was seen as essential but was not a part of the prescribed VET curriculum and Ryan’s

deep respect for culture, a respect that he positioned as essential to the success of any educational engagement with Indigenous people.

These teachers also contested the new vocational discourse's notion that to enact the role of a TAFE teacher within the VET training market a level four certificate in training and assessment with appropriate industry experience provided the necessary skills, knowledge and attitude to undertake the role. As all of the participants in this project were enrolled in a three-year teaching degree, it is fair to make the claim that by their actions they had already contested that aspect of the discourse. In the interviews these teachers, except Ryan, explicitly voiced personal dissatisfaction with the level four VET training qualification, claiming it as unsatisfactory to their teaching identities. This desire for more satisfactory levels of training and professional development for themselves as teachers may also be a further expression of particular attitudes to professional development programs in TAFE. Black (2005) noted that the TAFE head teachers whom he studied had strong negative responses to TAFE run professional development: "[R]esponses include[ed] the following: 'it's all crap'; 'learnt nothing'; 'an abuse of resources'; 'waste of time'; 'we were all treated like idiots'" (p. 5). Some participants articulated that it was an attempt at brainwashing, because of the professional development's "emphasis on business and marketing related aspects at the expense of the classroom and pedagogy" (Black, 2005, p. 5). These data also concur with Harris, Simons and Clayton's (2005) findings that VET practitioners believe that "professionalism" has been eroded "by practices which promote attainment of the Certificate IV in Assessment and Workplace Training as distinct from tertiary educational qualifications as a basis for practice" (p. 30) within the VET sector.

These data indicate that these teachers' identities resonated with "a broader educational and social role based on ... the primacy of the individual learner and the need for continuing vocational education" (Harris, Simons & Clayton, 2005, p. 20). This aligns with traditional notions of teachers that related to curriculum development and teaching, as opposed to notions of the entrepreneurial teaching packaged curriculum in an education market (Angwin, 1997). Yates (2004) neatly articulated this difference between the old and new. Yates posited a liberal conception of education that is "... about developing greater vocational attributes, orientations and identity across *all* students" (p. 3: *emphasis in original*) compared to issues about "... *accredited vocational subjects* [that dominate] short-term ... industry-specific ... talk of 'enterprise'" (p. 4: *emphasis in original*). All of the participants built teaching identities in which their students and their development were primary connectors within their individual notions of themselves as teachers. Examples included Ryan's picture of himself as an "enabler" who "help[s] people in remote communities ... [to] develop and find their own aspirations", Tina's teaching identity "that can lead people to the enjoyment of learning what they're learning" and Kat's honesty in the "trust[ing] of [her] own decisions ... and adapt[ing] to [the] different learning styles" of students.

Some of these data position the new vocational discourse as a malefactor, but not all. In the work undertaken by Seddon, Brown and others (Brown, Seddon, Angus & Rushbrook 1996; Seddon, 1999a; Seddon & Brown, 1997) can be seen instances where change in the nature of TAFE teachers' work had led to opportunities as well as instances of disablement. This work has shown that the changes created by new

vocational discourse had been welcomed by some teachers and not by others. That also appeared the case with some of the teachers in this study. Ryan, Gus, Mitchell and Tina show instances of themselves building opportunities for the expression of certain personal teaching identities that resonate with TAFE and the new vocational discourse. Through this new version of TAFE: Ryan created a space for himself as an expert in engaging with Indigenous Australians; Tina saw herself as a conduit between vocational education and tertiary education in the business and accounting professions; Mitchell continued his keen relationship with retail practice and used it to empower others from disadvantaged backgrounds (as articulated in Chapter 5); and Gus continued his passion for delivering vocational skills in the TAFE system – he stated: “I am also passionate about the TAFE system ... fundamentally .. I think it works.” These teachers appear to have self-managed in order to open spaces for various expressions of themselves as TAFE teachers (Seddon, 1999b).

Returning to Oxman-Michelli’s (1992) perspective on critical spirit being the dispositions of mind that motivate a person to think critically, and therefore to avoid intellectually compliant and passive positions, these interviews show that something had indeed fulfilled this role for these TAFE teachers, and the evidence from my analysis points towards critical spirit having served that purpose. There is little doubt that these teachers had the will or spirit behind their actions within TAFE, and that they engaged in “reasonable reflective thinking that is focused on deciding what to believe or do” (Ennis, 1987, p. 10). Brookfield (1987) suggested, the critical thinker thinks and feels possibilities, is motivated by seeking reasons, and purposively questions givens both implicit and explicit. But do these teachers engage in rational passion (Paul, 1992), as the means through which they might prevent themselves from

becoming too wrapped up in their own views of the world? When I consider the element of openmindedness alone, I wonder how much openmindedness is displayed by these teachers in relation to TAFE as an organisation, to the ‘other teachers’ who are “too set in their ways” and to the managers who are pressured to implement new vocationalism, just as I wonder about the apparent binary that was built by some participants between ‘us’, the TAFE teachers, and ‘them’, the managers.

What appears in these data is an openmindedness towards some aspects of their work – for example, Indigenous culture, aspects of pedagogy, interpretations of curriculum and diversity of learners – and a closed-mindedness towards some aspects of the TAFE culture, particularly the bureaucracy. But does this mean that these teachers are closed-minded towards possibilities that might relieve some tension between themselves and the organisation of TAFE? The answer to this question is unknown, but it appears that the sheer pace and enormity of change that has occurred in the contemporary VET sector (Harris, Simons & Clayton, 2005) have impacted upon this willingness to show an active desire to listen to more than one side, to take note of facts from whatever their source and to recognise possibilities, even those that confront deeply held beliefs (Dewey, 1933), particularly if they emerge from the bureaucracy. Alternatively, one could say that these teachers had suspended judgement, undertaken bipartisanship and showed a willingness to consider new ideas during their initial engagement with TAFE, and that they had examined the ‘evidence’ and had chosen to build a particular position that was more or less critical of TAFE – not necessarily an inappropriate position, but instead a position that is more likely to ask the question “Why?” and therefore to challenge the *status quo*.



The data are indicative of the application of critical spirit as a holistic concept as well as of its use in deconstructed Oxman-Michelli (1992) elementary form. Whilst most participants, through their credibility checks in Chapter Five, claimed degrees of critical spirit embodiment, suggesting a possible holistic preference, preferences in the interview data were not conclusive. The preference appeared to relate to the use that the concept was put to. The major distinction was that, if the elements were used for personal reflection, participants felt degrees of comfort, but caution was aroused in relation to the elements being deployed as a dispositional checklist, especially if used by others to afford some measure of suitability.

Tina's situation was a case in point. Wholeheartedness did not appear in Tina's case narrative artefact. Tina's reasoning was that this was because of her state of exhaustion from being involved in AQTF audits. But, as the analysis of her interview suggests, this was not indicative of her willingness nor of her ability to enact wholehearted approaches to her work. She was just too tired. If someone were to use the elements of critical spirit as a dispositional checklist at that time, Tina's overall character would appear lacking. Kat's position is also informative and sides with the experience of Tina. Kat, who used critical spirit more holistically, suggested that "one could be too spirited" and thereby draw particular attention from management, attention that was designed to rein in spiritedness. Furthermore, Kat highlighted the effect of fatigue on teachers. Her perspective was that reflecting using critical spirit may cause teachers to find something in themselves that they need to change, and that change required more intellectual and emotional work. Therefore, in order to avoid this extra work, teachers may not reflect. A state of denial might be preferential because it involves less energy output.

As mentioned in Chapter Three, the term “critical” has different meanings, but central to particular understandings for this thesis was the critical in critical theory (Freire, 1970, 1973; Habermas, 1972, 1974; Mezirow, 1991). Ideological critique, critical awareness achieved in adulthood, critical argument and analysis, and pragmatic constructivism were all involved in the themes of critical theory (Brookfield, 2005). These themes were animated within these data – for example: the general questioning of the new vocational discourse; Ryan’s work with Indigenous communities; Matt’s personal awakening of himself as a critical being; Tanya’s skilled argument in relation to the effects that exhaustion had upon deploying the element of wholeheartedness; and Kat’s constructing a reality based upon the pragmatics of her own experience in TAFE and enacting her ‘voting rights’ to change from her full-time employment. The critical focal points in these teachers’ identities were their relationships with and within TAFE, and their senses of themselves as teachers mostly teaching for citizenship (see Footnote Four). Their explicit engagements with a critical spirit discourse influenced the addition of another critical focal point, one that offered value to them by adding to their understandings of themselves as teachers.

## **6.5 The value of a critical spirit discourse**

The interviews reported in this chapter have generated data that made explicit particular aspects of a world of work that was influential in these teachers’ “*becoming*” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 238) – that is, their continual redefining of themselves as TAFE teachers. Into this mix I introduced a discourse of critical spirit. I move now to summarise the positions of value that these teachers held in relation to

critical spirit, and theorise about what these findings might mean for their continued identity work.

Table 6.9 summarises the articulated value positions that these TAFE teachers held in relation to critical spirit. In the left hand column are the value positions that emerged from an explicit engagement with a critical spirit discourse, whilst in the right hand column are examples of particular teacher discursive chunks (minus the associated discourse notational devices) from which these positions emerged.

What also emerged were positions of circumspection in relation to an engagement with a critical spirit discourse. These came from Tina, Gus and Kat. Tina and Gus's heed was in relation to having time to use critical spirit constructs in day-to-day practice. They noted that they were "time poor". For Tina, "in survival mode" whilst attempting to deal with the heavy workload placed on her by AQTF audits, the deployment of, or reflecting using, critical spirit became less of a priority. Kat's circumspection appeared as a note of caution. Having aligned herself with the discourse, she suggested that one should take care with its deployment, suggesting that deploying critical spirit makes one more visible to surveillance by those who wield prescriptive managerialist practices, leaving oneself open to excessive control, a control that in turn subverts one's professionalism.

Within the interviews there was also an exploration of the notion of a *test of fortitude* being an additional element of this particular discourse of critical spirit. Whilst Tina built a positive perspective regarding the inclusion of a *test of fortitude* as an element of critical spirit, the majority of the participants were more circumspect.

Table 6.9: *The value of critical spirit to particular TAFE teachers*

<b>The value of critical spirit</b>	<b>Examples of participant discursive chunks</b>
Valuable as a reflective tool to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• review one’s teaching practice;</li> <li>• improve one’s thinking;</li> <li>• align what one would like to achieve with what one achieves; and</li> <li>• achieve authenticity.</li> </ul>	“[J]ust makes you think more in depth about what you’re doing.” (Linda, int)  “Me thinking about how I think.” (Mitchell, int)  “For one, it makes people be honest about what they are – what they are actually achieving.” (Ryan, int)
Valuable as a construct to increase understanding of self by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• making tacit knowledge about practice and self-explicit;</li> <li>• validating self; and</li> <li>• identifying what one is good at.</li> </ul>	“I could see myself in some of those aspects.” (Linda, int)  “Because you’re able to think, ‘That’s what that is, and that’s why I behaved the way I did.’ ” (Kat, int)  “I think it highlighted something subconsciously that I’d thought about.” (Gus, int)  “[A] lot of those things I was doing automatically, unbeknown to myself .” (Matt, int)  “I suppose it was a way of saying, ‘I am on the right track. Maybe my attitudes to what I’m doing ... are – were okay.’ ” (Matt, int)
Valuable as a construct of practice by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• enabling greater self-confidence and hence efficacy;</li> <li>• contributing a particular teaching style;</li> <li>• providing a model for practice;</li> <li>• helping to make explicit positive teaching practices in others; and</li> <li>• providing a means to contest compliance and conformity.</li> </ul>	“Critical spirit ... that makes us ... want to improve yourself [ <i>sic</i> ], and to try to give the students the best outcome.” (Matt, int)  “It kind of leads to a change in my teaching style.” (Tina, int)  “[W]hat I’d like to do is to pick out the elements of different teachers.” (Matt, int)  “[C]ritical spirit, somehow, fights compliance.” (Gus, int)
Valuable as an identity by offering: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• a positive public label; and</li> <li>• a professional identity.</li> </ul>	“[T]hey were words I could incorporate into descriptions for other people.” (Ryan, int)  “Critical spirit to me is something inside that makes us do certain things or want to do things a certain way.” (Matt, int)

For example, Gus noted its use as a personal construct for himself, and those like him, but not for everyone. Matt too acknowledged that it could be considered, but for him

he could have done without his ‘test’. Ryan attached little value to the notion, whilst Tina likened it to operating in “survival mode” and therefore getting in the way of actually engaging with the discourse. Kat’s approach to the element was novel, suggesting that tests of fortitude were more about the testing of a work context to see if it resonated with the degrees of fortitude that one held. For Kat, it appeared a dissonant match between TAFE and herself as a full-time teacher. She chose to take her fortitude elsewhere. From the constructs of these teachers, the inclusion of a *test of fortitude* as an element of critical spirit discourse appeared to be less of a priority.

The preceding discussion takes us to the point of considering, from a poststructuralist perspective on discourse (Gee, 2005), what conclusions the data reported in this chapter allow me to draw. These data are examples of these teachers doing discourse work (Miller Marsh, 2002a). These TAFE teachers have been explicitly examining a critical spirit discourse and how it fits into the fashioning of their own identities, and how this discourse rubs shoulders with other discourses that influence this fashioning, including the new vocational discourse. This discourse work has provided the teachers and myself with examples of how their identities have been subjected to the power of external discourses (see for example Fairclough, 1989; Foucault, 1984; Gee, 2005) in shaping access to social goods of what it is to be a ‘good’ TAFE teacher. Their personal identity work has contested notions of ‘good’ TAFE teachers as entrepreneurs with a consumer focus teaching prescriptive curriculum in an educational market. These teachers have constructed identities that side with the knowledges and skills in their respective trades or professional disciplines and with the quality of their relationships with their students. As previous researchers (for example, Black, 2005; Chappell, 1999; Harris & Simons, 2003; and Harris, Simons,

& Clayton, 2005) have found, TAFE teachers have particular understandings of themselves that are different from dominant governmental discourses in Australia. The data in this chapter support this position.

At the end of Chapter Five I mentioned the possibility of a critical spirit discourse doing the work of a borderland discourse, a “transformative teacher identity discourse” (Alsup, 2006, p. 5) that enables teachers to traverse the complex terrain “between disparate personal and professional subjectivities” (p. 36). As mentioned in the literature review chapter, Alsup (2006) stated that “borderland discourse was so named because it occurred on the borders of other types of discourse and associated subjectivities” (p. 37). Alsup described the engagement with borderland discourse as occurring when teachers:

... did not repudiate completely their own discourses ... accepted (in perhaps modified form) some of the discourses of the “other” ... changed their minds, ... when they realized they didn’t know it all, or realized that they indeed knew something (depending on their level of self-confidence) ... [and] they became teachers without giving up on themselves. (pp. 9-10)

The interview data show these teachers engaging with the personal discourses of themselves as TAFE teachers, TAFE discourses of teachers and teaching, and a critical spirit discourse. This would be, according to Alsup (2006), them doing borderland discourse.

The realities constructed in the interviews indicated particular dissonances existing for these TAFE teachers among their personal subjectivities as TAFE teachers, the

subjectivities fostered by TAFE’s enactment of the new vocational discourse and the subjectivity of being introduced to what was an arguably new discourse for them, a critical spirit discourse. It was within these borderlands that these teachers did “identity work” (Alsup, 2006, p. 9) on their respective states of dissonance and also in “increasing their metacognitive awareness” (p. 9) of themselves.

Even though these teachers were engaging in borderland discourse in constructing their subjectivities around various identity discourses – for example, that of a liberal educator and that of a neo vocational educator – they also engaged with and embraced those subjectivities that positioned themselves as teachers who enacted a critical spirit discourse. Examples included Linda aligning herself with critical spirit as a means to win back some self-confidence reported as lost owing to her experiences with TAFE, Mitchell’s use of critical spirit as a means of doing his job better, Tina crediting critical spirit as enabling a growing understanding of herself as a teacher as one who fosters self-determination in students as opposed to a teacher as one who simply delivers and assesses content, and Ryan’s deepening self-awareness with a clearer understanding that he personally did have something to offer and in his using a critical spirit discourse to articulate this to others.

The above discussion and indeed the data presented in this chapter – for example, the positions of value that participants constructed in relation to their engagements with a critical spirit discourse – allow me to make several theoretical claims, including that:

1. The use of critical spirit elements as markers of dispositions should be done cautiously.

2. An explicit engagement with a critical spirit discourse was of value to these TAFE teachers (as presented in Table 6.9).
3. In the respective interviews these TAFE teachers did borderland discourse (Alsup, 2006; Gee, 2005).
4. A critical spirit discourse could be considered as doing work in the borderlands where disparate discourses jostle for a privileged position within the particular subjectivities of teachers.

## **6.6 Chapter summary**

This chapter has answered the second research question framing this thesis:

*How might an explicit engagement with and reflection upon a critical spirit discourse be of value to particular TAFE teachers in relation to their identities and their relationships with TAFE as an organisation?*

The chapter reported on data obtained from the semi-structured interviews conducted with seven TAFE teachers. The themes covered within the interviews included past and present conceptions of TAFE teaching, personal conceptions as teachers, these teachers' particular relationships with TAFE as an organisation, their teaching and their encounters with a critical spirit discourse. The data from these interviews were considered as being discourse that was part of these TAFE teachers' big "D" discourse, named as "kits" (Gee, 2005, p. 32). These kits were considered as indicators of the teachers' situated identities that were built to enact specific ways of being within specific contexts. These TAFE teachers put their kits to work in an active building process to shape particular realities within their interviews. These interviews were considered as co-constructions clustered around Gee's (2005) seven



reality building tasks of language: significance, activities, identities, relationships, politics, connections, and sign systems and knowledge.

With these building tasks in mind, three data organising questions were formulated and applied. The data were grouped according to the constructs that related to aspects of significance within these teachers' relationships with TAFE as an organisation, their constructed identities and the positions of value that they assembled in relation to a critical spirit discourse.

The data revealed particular realities where these teachers' identities were in tension with TAFE as an organisation. To a lesser extent, there were instances where these teachers' identities were consonant with TAFE. There were instances of personal subjectivities contesting publicly defined subjectivities and also instances of "recognition work" (Gee, 2005, p. 29) that was claimed to be partly the result of an explicit engagement with a critical spirit discourse. Significantly, the data supported Chappell's (1999) claim that TAFE teachers held quite different conceptions of themselves as teachers, when compared to those conceptions espoused by the new vocational discourse.

The data revealed that an explicit engagement with a critical spirit discourse was of value to these TAFE teachers' identities and their encounters within their world of work – for example, as a reflective tool, as a construct to increase self-understanding and as a construct for teaching practice. The chapter concluded with the claim that a critical spirit discourse does work as a borderland discourse (Alsup, 2006; Gee, 2005) by enabling a means to traverse the troubled personal terrain produced by incongruent

personal and professional subjectivities that may be thwarting a deeper understanding of their respective teacher identities.

## **Chapter Seven – Conclusion**

### **7.1 A review of the thesis**

In Chapter One, I introduced the problem that this thesis explored. This problem was located at the intersection between the TAFE teacher and educational reform in the VET sector within Australia. TAFE teachers are experiencing the impact of educational reform in VET, in particular the effects of economic rationalism and neo vocationalism. The pace of this change has been swift and its reach deep. This has produced degrees of tension between TAFE teachers and their employing bodies, TAFE institutes. Much tension was manifested by way of expectations from the VET sector, and its conduit TAFE, for TAFE teachers to realign their “habits, beliefs, values, skills and knowledge” (Harris, Simons & Clayton 2005, p. 10) with the new vocational discourse. As a result, researchers have found that TAFE teachers have experienced not only “negative feelings” (p. 10), but also positions of marginalisation, as they are pressured to “change their identity” (Chappell, 1999, p. 3). This study focused on particular TAFE teachers and their personal subjectivities in relation to how those subjectivities were buffeted by the winds of the above-mentioned change, and how the concept of critical spirit could “strengthen their sense of professional identity” (McKenna & Mitchell, 2006, p. 2) and enhance a sense of personal agency. In order to guide this endeavour, two research questions were posed:

1. What might be identified as the elements of critical spirit in particular TAFE teachers’ discourse?

2. How might an explicit engagement with and reflection upon a critical spirit discourse be of value to particular TAFE teachers in relation to their identities and their relationships with TAFE as an organisation?

In Chapter Two, I examined the relevant literature in relation to teacher identity and the identities of TAFE teachers. Poststructural perspectives of identity were highlighted, in particular the position that identity was less about the constructs that arose from individual agency, and more about sociocultural perspectives where identity construction is the influence of social interaction, especially the role of discourse. Included in this perspective was the notion that, as discourses are rich and complex and vary over time, so too are identities. Therefore the position that subjectivities are multifaceted and variable in relation to context applied. The literature on TAFE teachers and the context of their work was also explored. The chapter traced the winds of change and noted the central players in the malleable VET landscape. Central to this exploration was TAFE teacher notions of themselves as liberal educators, and neo vocational notions of TAFE teachers as educators for economic imperatives, and the effect that the tension between the two has had on TAFE teachers and their work world.

Chapter Three made claim to a conceptual position in relation to dealing with this research problem. In this chapter I unpacked the conceptual heart of this thesis, critical spirit. If critical spirit was to be used as a means for TAFE teachers to gain purchase on their terrains, I needed to conceive an argument to justify such a choice. I did so by employing the ideas of relevant scholars in the critical thinking field.

Important in this justification were scholars such as Dewey, Brookfield, Siegel and

Oxman-Michelli, who referred to the person behind the thinking and their ‘will’ or ‘spirit’ to engage in critical thinking. This will, habit of mind or disposition is critical spirit. Chosen for conceptual deployment were Oxman-Michelli’s (1992) elements of critical spirit – independence of mind, openmindedness, wholeheartedness, intellectual responsibility and respect for others – to which the dispositional concepts of resilience and hardiness were added.

In Chapter Four, the methodology chapter, I was faced with the interplay between sociocultural notions of identities built through discourses and the concept of critical spirit, and with the notion that this interplay may benefit TAFE teachers and how they engage in their work world. Gee’s (2005) perspectives on how discourses build realities, in particular his seven reality building tasks, were deployed in relation to the five elements of critical spirit. Critical spirit was positioned as a discourse, and this discourse was used to produce a coding framework to examine specific TAFE teacher discourse produced prior to the initiation of this research project.

Chapter Five reported on the data that emerged from the overlaying of this critical spirit framework on case narrative artefacts produced by the participant TAFE teachers. The chapter also explored the results of a credibility check conducted with these teachers in relation to my analysis of their artefacts. So began an explicit engagement with these teachers on the elements of critical spirit and other emergent discourses. This engagement was extended in the subsequent semi-structured interviews.

In Chapter Six, Gee's seven reality building tasks were redeployed to analyse data from participant interviews. On this occasion closer attention was paid to the particular discourse building tasks relating to significance, activities, relationships and identities. Also explored were the outcomes of the participants' explicit engagement with a critical spirit discourse.

## **7.2 Some answers to the research questions**

Dewey (1933) highlighted the importance of attitudes in relation to thought; his position was that particular attitudes produced "the best forms of thought" (p. 29), and that these attitudes were openmindedness, wholeheartedness and responsibility. This is a conceptual position in which internal dispositions 'will' good thinking. This position was taken further by Siegel (1988). He suggested that this 'will' included habits of mind and character traits that move the person towards reasoned or critical thinking. This perspective, identified by Siegel as critical spirit, was further conceptualised by Oxman-Michelli (1992) as the elements of critical spirit; inclusive of Dewey's attitudes, these were: openmindedness; independence of mind; intellectual responsibility; wholeheartedness; and respect for others. One of Siegel's critics, Missimer (1990), suggested that to view critical thinking from a character perspective was too complex and that the concept of critical spirit "lack[ed] deeper investigation" (p. 146). Siegel (1993) agreed by acknowledging that not enough was known about the character view of critical thinking, but still emphasised the importance of critical spirit as a causal contributor to "the determination of belief/action" (Siegel, 2001, p. 578). He called for more research into the dispositions of critical thinking – critical spirit. It is from this point forward that this study extends significantly our knowledge of critical spirit.

This contribution to extending our knowledge of critical spirit was borne out by two research questions. In the two subsections that follow, I report the findings in relation to the research questions. In the first, I address the question:

*What might be identified as the elements of critical spirit in particular TAFE teachers' discourse?*

And in the second subsection I address the question:

*How might an explicit engagement with and reflection upon a critical spirit discourse be of value to particular TAFE teachers in relation to their identities and their relationships with TAFE as an organisation?*

### **7.2.1 Elements of critical spirit in TAFE teachers' discourse**

Through the deployment of a critical spirit framework (Tyler, 2008a) and through positioning critical spirit as a discourse, elements of critical spirit were found to be evident in TAFE teacher discourse. Specifically, independence of mind, openmindedness, wholeheartedness, intellectual responsibility and respect for others (Oxman-Michelli, 1992) were evident in the participant teacher case narrative artefacts. These artefacts related instances of experiences significant to participants' identities as TAFE teachers, their practice as teachers and their relationships with the TAFE organisation. The instances that these teachers related were backgrounded by socio-political circumstances produced by the new vocational discourse that shaped and reshaped the VET territory in which they taught. This discourse produced changes to participant teachers' relationships with students and with the TAFE organisation. It pressured them to be particular kinds of teachers, those who closely matched the rhetoric associated with the notions of education as a market. The

teachers in this study deployed their critical spirit in order to build their identities as teachers. These identities were mostly contrary to notions of teachers operating as entrepreneurs within an education market, and favoured teacher identities that acted towards the goals of lifelong learning, personal transformation, collaborative relationships and social responsibility – educating for citizenship.

Other discourses were identified whilst using the critical spirit framework. These I identified as a *test of fortitude* discourse and a *community of support* discourse. The former was more prominent than the latter. In Chapter Three, I used the ideas of Berkeley (1952) and others to help in conceptualising ‘spirit’ as a ‘will’ behind action, to which I added the dispositional concepts of resilience (Bonanno, 2004) and hardiness (Maddi, 1999). I added these to my conceptualising of critical spirit because I was acting on the assumption that they could become an extension of Oxman-Michelli’s elements. When the above mentioned discourses became evident in the teachers’ narrative artefacts, I began to make connections between resilience and hardiness and these discourses: for example, a *community of support* used to support oneself during times of distress, and a *test of fortitude* used to signal particular ‘mettle’ qualities in teachers (indicative of grit, determination, steel, courageousness, valour and resolve). The data indicated that these connections were weak. A minority of participants reported a *community of support* as having only a small effect in ameliorating their experience. With regard to a *test of fortitude*, even though it was more prominent and engaged with to a greater depth by participants, once it was unpacked further, rather than being an identifier of being made of the ‘right mettle’, it was used more as a *personal* indicator of this quality, and by one participant as an indicator of the appropriate mix between job and person. Furthermore, in some



interviews the discussion of this discourse was plainly perfunctory. Consequently, there were no conclusive findings to support an extension of Oxman-Michelli's five elements of critical spirit.

### **7.2.2 The value of an explicit engagement with critical spirit**

Significant to the second research question was the findings that an explicit engagement with a critical spirit discourse was of value to the participant TAFE teachers (see Table 6.9). The concept of critical spirit was valuable to these teachers as: a reflective tool; a construct to increase self-understanding; a construct of practice; and a particular subjective position. These teachers reported themselves as experiencing varying degrees of tension with their world of work produced by changing and influential notions of 'good' teaching and 'good' teachers. The power of the new vocational discourse in influencing change within these teachers' work sector, and the power of their personal discourses of teachers and teaching, converged to produce the degrees of turbulence noted in their respective relationships with TAFE. These TAFE teachers used a critical spirit discourse to perform "recognition work" (Gee, 2005, p. 29) to build particular subjectivities that aligned with their personal discourses of self; some also used it as a salve to soothe the uncertainty fostered by the new vocational discourse and its attempts at shaping their identities.

These findings were indicative of the value that this critical spirit discourse held for these TAFE teachers in its performing the work of a borderland discourse. Critical spirit afforded these teachers a means to traverse the terrain "between disparate personal and professional subjectivities" (Alsup, 2006, p. 5). The task of dealing with the discord that existed between expectations of teachers exercised by neo

vocationalism, and their personal perceptions of themselves as mostly liberal educators appears to have produced much emotional labour (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1993), the relief from which was alluded to by one of the participants in the study. Ryan suggested that critical spirit could well be used as a common language between TAFE managers and TAFE teachers, a notion that I believe is a worthy future research endeavour.

The data were also indicative of a propensity for critical spirit to show a resistance towards being reduced to its elementary form. This leads to considerations of critical spirit as a holistic concept. The data reported in Chapter Five showed that the elements of critical spirit, when positioned as a discourse and used within the aforementioned framework, revealed instances when the same chunks of discourse produced by individual participants could be interpreted as examples of more than one element; for example, instances of *openmindedness* could often be paired with instances of *respect for others*. I acknowledge that this could be considered a flaw in the methodology behind the conceptualising of the critical spirit framework, and that more research using the framework might yield a clearer picture as to its trustworthiness. But this propensity was further borne out in Chapter Six by instances of: some participants appearing reluctant in their discussion of the individual elements, preferring to remain with a holistic concept; some participants building a picture of their embodiment of critical spirit; and the aroused caution about the use of the individual elements as markers of disposition – for example, if supervisors used the individual elements of critical spirit as a marker of an employee with the ‘right’ disposition and if, for instance, *wholeheartedness* was not evident, did this mean that the individual’s character was lacking? The data suggested that it was unwise to

consider one element unaccompanied by its four partners. Siegel's (1993) position that critical spirit is more about degrees of disposition or character appears to have been borne out.

### **7.3 Contributions to knowledge**

So what have these findings contributed to extending our knowledge about TAFE teachers, their work world and the concept of critical spirit? In the following subsections I address the contributions that this research has made to conceptual, methodological and substantive knowledge.

#### **7.3.1 Contributions to conceptual knowledge**

In Chapter One, I theorised that the concept of critical spirit would be helpful to TAFE teachers as a way of dealing with the changes and pressures produced within the contemporary VET sector by the new vocational discourse. How TAFE teachers went about dealing with the educational reform of new directions, policies and curriculum, and how this impacted upon their identity formation and relationships with their employers and colleagues, were significant factors within this study, to which the concept of critical spirit as a discourse was applied.

Critical spirit within the literature constituted the habits of mind, dispositions and character traits of critical thinkers. Conceptual and empirical research produced particular notions and lists of these dispositions and character traits. For me, as the researcher taking a poststructuralist stance, I was faced with the problem of utilising these potentially structuralist notions of identity to explore realities that were built in postmodern times where poststructuralist notions of identities were deployed. My

solution was to conceptualise critical spirit as a discourse. By utilising Gee's (1999, 2005) seven reality building tasks of discourse, I positioned critical spirit as a discourse and conceptualised particular indicators of critical spirit based upon Oxman-Michelli's (1992) five elements of critical spirit. This enabled me to undertake an exploration of realities as mediated and built within the individual artefacts produced by selected TAFE teachers. This action resonated with Gee's theory of discourse and its analysis, whereby: "... when we speak and write, we design what we have to say to fit the situation in which we are communicating .... [and] at the same time, how we speak and write creates that very situation" (2005, p. 10), a situation that includes building "an identity here-and-now" (p. 11).

### **7.3.2 Contributions to methodological knowledge**

From what can be determined, this research is the first qualitative study of critical spirit as defined by this thesis. The research was unique in that it synthesised the conceptual position of discourse as a reality building tool (Gee, 2005) with the five elements of critical spirit (Oxman-Michelli, 1992) to position critical spirit as a discourse, and also highlighted the holism of critical spirit as a concept. This was different from using attitudes or character traits as indicators of internal disposition. It was this that enabled a new focus on critical spirit to unlock its potentialities and complexities that lay outside the development of incomplete lists and definitions of character, a similar condition that exists with scholarly theorising about the skills of critical thinking (Siegel, 1993). The synthesis of discourse and a critical spirit enabled the development of a coding framework for identifying the elements of critical spirit in the narrative artefacts. In Chapter Five I deployed this framework and found examples of the five elements of critical spirit and other significant discourses in narrative artefacts authored by particular TAFE teachers. This analysis was conducted

prior to the participants' explicit engagements with a critical spirit discourse, which increases the degree of warrant of my claims.

With the deployment of the credibility checks (Elliott, Fisher & Rennie, 1999), I not only contributed to the plausibility of critical spirit being evident in TAFE teacher discourse but also provided the initial opportunity for explicitly engaging with these TAFE teachers in the 'talk' of a critical spirit discourse. Hence, their rich and varied responses to the concept, and how they synthesised that concept with their reality building, became available to me for exploration. The vigour with which these teachers engaged with the discourse of critical spirit was a surprise. It appeared that they wanted to say something, wanted some recognition and acknowledgment, and that the methods chosen afforded them an opportunity to do so. The methods deployed encouraged and facilitated the articulation of these teachers' voices (O'Sullivan, 2002).

The vigour with which participants took to critical spirit discourse and their use of it in building their identities were again evident in the number and the depth of data produced by the semi-structured interviews that were reported in Chapter Six. The choice to deploy interviewing as a methodological tool, resonated with the concept of discourse and provided the conduit through which "[l]anguage as action and affiliation" (Gee, 2005, p. 1) was facilitated. This was the data that showed these teachers "build[ing] identit[ies] in the here-and-now" (Gee, 2005, p. 11) to produce their various "identity kits" (Gee, 2005, p. 32).

### **7.3.3 Contributions to substantive knowledge**

This interpretivist research has supported the position of a critical spirit discourse being evident in TAFE teacher discourse and that an explicit engagement with this discourse produced benefits to particular TAFE teachers in their building of their identities. This project's contribution to substantive knowledge lies to the area of teacher identity within the VET sector. Miller Marsh (2002a) petitions teachers to examine the discourses that shape their identities. She tells of how she struggled to be aware of her evolving theoretical framework that shaped her practice and her identity as a teacher. There is a resonance between what Miller Marsh disclosed and the personal tensions expressed by the TAFE teachers in this study. As adult educators these teachers' notions of their personal identity discourse (Gaudelli, 2001), influenced by critical spirit, have uncovered conceptions of 'who they are' and have presented powerful constructs for understanding how these teachers have gone about teaching in their educational space, TAFE.

This discourse, the language and "stuff" (Gee, 2005, p.7) of these teachers, confirms that TAFE teacher identity is not a simplified category such as hero teachers – "... the teachers who are clear successes and therefore represent the ideal to which all 'good' teachers strive" (Alsup, 2006, p. 24) or as skilled teachers with standardised, prescriptive subjectivities put forward by teacher accreditation bodies. Instead they emerge as themselves – teachers' own voices in relation to who they are and what they do (for example, O'Sullivan, 2002; Palmer, 1998; Danielewicz, 2001). This contribution to teacher identity has emphasised:

... the rich, problematic and dynamic nature of using identity discourse to open doors to the complexities, interconnectedness and arbitrariness used to credit what is considered meaningful and valuable in relation to what it means

to identify, and be identified[,] as a teacher. (Danaher, Tyler & Arden, 2008, p. 113)

The implications of this contribution to substantive knowledge are in part in relation to TAFE teachers' professional development and learning. This research has provided insight into some of the reasons as to why some TAFE teachers negatively respond to the professional development offered by TAFE (Black, 2005). It does not appeal to those teachers who have built identities as liberal educators. The value that the participant TAFE teachers placed on their engagement with this critical spirit discourse was high, therefore there is a prima-facie case for this opportunity to be expanded and offered to other TAFE teachers. The suggestion by one participant that an engagement with a critical spirit discourse be considered for managers in TAFE is also a worthy suggestion. This would open space for conversations within the borderlands (Alsup, 2006) between teacher discourse and managerial discourse. This would be a pragmatic step, a move toward capability and capacity building within the VET workforce through "strengthen[ing] ... sense(s) of professional identity" (McKenna & Mitchell, 2006, p. 2).

#### **7.4 Revisiting my personal note**

In Chapter One, I included a personal note to 'come clean', so to speak, in relation to my subjectivities and the possible influence that these might have had on the musings and intellectual itineraries and insights that emerged from this study. My position as a qualitative researcher, one who holds the perspective that individuals' subjectivities are built within "multiple and competing discourses" (Weedon, 1996, p. 518), has influenced my understandings of one's identity as complex subjectivities that are sometimes shifting, sometimes contradictory and rarely stable, fixed or rigid. This has been borne out in the actioning of this thesis, with the understanding that I had

interpreted participants' subjectivities during a moment in time, and in the context of this research.

In the aforementioned personal note, I acknowledged my past employment as a TAFE teacher. I had experienced similar struggles with the new vocational discourse, managerial surveillance, and personal understandings of myself as a teacher. I too 'tossed and turned' about what sort of TAFE teacher I wanted to be, and what sort of teacher TAFE wanted me to be. This subjective position no doubt influenced some nuances in my writing that might have been perceived as instances of positioning the TAFE teacher in the role of victim and TAFE as the perpetrator. In these nuances (which I hope were more ethereal than real), a differentiation between what my subjectivity was and what my biases were proved difficult. Nevertheless, my reality was that, as I read the artefacts, engaged with the participants at the interviews, and analysed the data, I could not help but be transported back to instances of my personal experience in TAFE. My experience appeared as double-edged. On the one hand, it was of benefit in its ability to gain access to these teachers' perspectives of themselves and their work worlds, and on the other, it was a major player in helping me to distil particular interpretations of the data.

My personal experience as a TAFE teacher undoubtedly gave me a licence to access these teachers' worlds and to establish a greater rapport with them. Because of this, I believe that I was privileged in relation to accessing the disclosure of information that tended to be known only to 'insiders'. Therefore it is within reason that participant disclosures were more rich, deep, and genuine when compared to what might be obtained from research conducted by an 'outsider'. However, because of my



subjectivity was I being coopted into a simple ‘them’ and ‘us’ dualism?

As was mentioned in Chapter One and elsewhere (Tyler, 2006), I had developed my own criticality. As I explored the problem articulated in this study, it was this criticality that resonated with the concept of critical spirit, and which led to my eventual utilisation of the concept. Throughout this research, I have been touched by this discourse of critical spirit and, in my strivings towards being authentic to its nature, I too attempted to be mindful of all the five elements as I enacted this research. The process of doing this heightened my attention to this possible partisan position and the plausible ‘blind spots’ that this might have produced. Specifically, I was mindful, to the extent that one can ever be – “one doesn’t know what one doesn’t know” (Confucius 551 - 479 BC) – of enacting an openmindedness towards the other possibilities present in the data. I enacted my own, *albeit* fallible, ‘critical spirit’.

## **7.5 Possible directions for future research**

In the preface to his book, *An Introduction to Discourse Analysis*, Gee (2005) highlighted his attempts at making clearer one of his micro-worlds, discourse analysis, through the theme of “second readings” (p. xi). Too often, Gee suggested, we humans find meaning based upon one interpretation, and then spend little time reflecting in order to discover “better[,] deeper and more humane interpretations” (p. xi). Mindful of this position, I suggest future research endeavours that take a second, and possibly a third and fourth, look at the critical spirit discourse co-constructed in this study and at critical spirit discourse *per se*.

A ‘second look’ is recommended in relation to the overlaying of the initial coding

framework on discourse produced by a different assemblage of participants. Would critical spirit be manifested, for example, in discourse produced by secondary teachers, coaches or even TAFE managers, and how would an explicit engagement with critical spirit be of value to them?

An extension to the epistemology behind my positioning of the elements of critical spirit as a discourse is also recommended for deeper investigation. What might others identify as the indicators of critical spirit in their considerations of it as a discourse (see Table 4.1)? For example, if a group of academics, critical thinkers or indeed TAFE teachers developed a framework, how different might this critical spirit framework then look, what elements of critical spirit might this framework explicate and what other discourses might emerge? Could they unravel the mysteries of Siegel's (1993) suggestion that critical spirit is a matter of degree?

As Wood and Kroger (2000) suggested, a part of conducting discourse analysis is asking the question of the data "what is not there?" (p. 96). I wonder about the exploration of discourse with the antithesis of critical spirit in mind. What might be a coding framework for closed-mindedness, dependence of mind, half-heartedness, intellectual irresponsibility and disrespect for others, and what might be their connections and disconnections in relation to critical thinking? How can we expand on Missimer's (1990) venal characteristics of critical thinkers?

Notable within the background of this study is critical thinking, This 'back seat' position is one that Barnett (1997) would be comfortable with, as he believed that "we should dispense with critical thinking as a core concept of higher education and

replace it with the wider concept of critical being” (p. 7). This thesis has offered new possibilities in relation to the participant teachers’ understandings of self and their actions within their world; the two domains that Barnett believed had been neglected by higher education. Hence the possibility also arises for research into students’ engagement with a critical spirit discourse prior to, or alongside, their introduction to the skills of critical thinking. This is supported by Oxman-Michelli’s position that critical thinking skills can develop in meaningful ways only if they are acquired alongside the development of dispositions, and that “[d]ispositions will develop only as they are welcomed, encouraged, supported and rewarded” (1992, p. 6).

As is the nature of research, it uncovers more questions in its enactment than can often be humanly dealt with. Hence this is not the ‘final’ question, just one more added suggestion for future research: “What are the possibilities that arise from considering critical spirit as a creative tool?” Certainly successful corporations have used criticality to great effect: for example, Alfred Sloan, former chairman of General Motors, called for his executives always to give themselves time to develop disagreement, and by doing so gain greater understanding of what particular decisions are all about (Drucker, 1974). The ruminations of Barnett are also supportive of this suggested direction. He claimed that it is through “an integration of the critical spirit, [that] critical but creative persons will result, capable of living effectively in the world” (1997, p. 8). Also, the intellectual, critical, and satirical wit of Oscar Wilde swathes a path to this consideration with his statement: “It is the critical spirit that creates” (ThinkExist, 2006). As I metaphorically lay down my pen, I cast my mind to the future and wonder, “To what creative uses will the enduring and endearing participant TAFE teachers in this study put their critical spirit?”

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**Appendix A - Letter of invitation to participate in the  
research project**

Dear...

You are invited to participate in the research project described below.

TITLE OF PROJECT: Critical spirit manifestation in TAFE teachers and their work.  
NAME OF RESEARCHER: Mr Mark Tyler

This research seeks to underline the significance of studying critical spirit as it is deployed by a group of TAFE teachers within a vocational education and training environment. Critical spirit is said to exist in the form of dispositions of the critical thinker. This has been acknowledged through positivist research that has generalised the importance of specific dispositional aspects of the critical thinker. By contrast, this study will utilise an interpretative paradigm that situates the research with a group of TAFE teachers in their world of work. By analysing and interpreting these teachers' discourse this study seeks to collect and analyse data that assist with answering the following questions:

1. What might be identified as the elements of critical spirit in TAFE teacher discourse?
2. How might an explicit engagement with and reflection upon a critical spirit discourse be of value to particular TAFE teachers in relation to their identities and their relationships with TAFE as an organisation?

Your assessment artefact on Case Pedagogy produced for the course TEA2301 Instructional Theory and Practice has been chosen to be of value to this research as being representative of TAFE teacher discourse. This letter firstly seeks your permission to use this artefact in this investigation and secondly asks for your participation in further data collection based upon this artefact and the researcher's analysis of it. In this second stage you will be asked to provide comment on the researcher's interpretations of your artefact. This is known as a credibility check. These contributions will be further used in the researcher's iterative analytical process.

It is not anticipated that there will be any personal risk or inconvenience to any participant. It is anticipated that your occasional contributions will take no more than one hour.

Following are some potential benefits from this research:

- Investigating critical spirit as the disposition of the critical thinker can shed further light onto the propensity to think critically.
- The deployment of critical spirit may be a predictor of an individual's motivation to become innovative and to be critical.
- For TAFE teachers this research may shed light on areas of their teaching that are important to them; it may also highlight areas of concern which produce stress and burnout.
- It may help identification of areas for TAFE teacher capacity building.
- It may offer a means to predict TAFE teachers' tendencies to act in or react to a variety of circumstances within their world of work.
- It could offer an alternative way of knowing about the dispositions of a critical thinker.

All participants who are invited to take part in the research are free to refuse consent altogether without having to justify their decision, and all are free to withdraw consent and discontinue participation in the study at any time without giving a reason.

Participants are assured of confidentiality with regard to the storing of assessment artefacts and subsequent participant contributions. Confidentiality is also assured in relation to the information provided and in relation to any publications that may arise from the research. Data will be secured at The University of Southern Queensland.

The outcomes of this research will be available on request at its conclusion. The Human Research Ethics Committee has approved this study. In the event that you have any complaint or concern about the way you have been treated during this study, or if you have any query that the researcher or supervisor has not been able to satisfy, you may write to the Chair of the Human Research Ethics Committee c/- Office of Research and Higher Degrees, Second Floor, B Block, The University of Southern Queensland. Any complaint or concern will be treated in confidence and fully investigated. The participant will be informed of the outcome.

Any questions regarding this project should be directed to the researcher on 07 4631 2336.

If you agree to participate in this project, you are asked to sign both copies of the consent form, retain one copy for your records and return the other copy to the researcher.

Yours faithfully

Mr Mark Tyler  
Lecturer  
Faculty of Education

## **Appendix B - Sample consent form**

## Participant Consent Form

TITLE OF PROJECT: Critical spirit manifestation in TAFE teachers and their work.  
NAME OF RESEARCHER: Mr Mark Tyler

I, ....., have read the attached letter and agree/disagree  
(cross out which does not apply) to participate in this research.

I also acknowledge that I can withdraw my participation at any time without giving a  
reason and with no negative consequences.

Signature:.....

Date:.....

Please return this form to the researcher in the self addressed prepaid envelope  
provided.

Thank you

Mark Tyler

## **Appendix C - Statement of ethical clearance**



Samuel Tickell  
The Office of Research and Higher Degrees  
Telephone: 07 46 311 438  
Facsimile: 07 46 312 955  
Email: [stickle@usq.edu.au](mailto:stickle@usq.edu.au)

23 April 2007

Mr Mark Tyler  
Faculty of Education  
USQ

Dear Mr Tyler

**Re: Ethics Clearance for Research Project, *Critical spirit manifestation in TAFE teachers and their work***

The USQ Human Research Ethics Committee recently reviewed your application for ethics clearance. Your project has been endorsed and full ethics approval is confirmed. Reference number **H07REA646** is assigned to this approval that remains valid to **23 April 2008**.

The Committee is required to monitor research projects that have received ethics clearance to ensure their conduct is not jeopardising the rights and interests of those who agreed to participate. Accordingly, you are asked to forward a **written report** to this office after twelve months from the date of this approval or upon completion of the project.

A questionnaire will be sent to you requesting details that will include: the status of the project; a statement from you as principal investigator, that the project is in compliance with any special conditions stated as a condition of ethical approval; and confirming the security of the data collected and the conditions governing access to the data. The questionnaire, available on the web, can be forwarded with your written report.

Please note that you are responsible for notifying the Committee immediately of any matter that might affect the continued ethical acceptability of the proposed procedure.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'S. Tickell', written over a horizontal line.

Samuel Tickell  
Postgraduate and Ethics Officer  
Office of Research and Higher Degrees



**Appendix D - Letter to participants regarding credibility  
check phase**

Dear ...

Re: Research project

I hope you are well and had an enjoyable Easter.

I have conducted an analysis of your case narrative. Using a coding method developed by myself I have endeavoured to identify those areas of your narrative that imply a deployment of the various elements of critical spirit.

Attached are three documents:

1. A table indicating the elements of critical spirit and various indicators.
2. A table where I have matched sections of your narrative with the elements of critical spirit.
3. A feedback form.

In the analysis of your narrative I have selected various phrases that align with the specific elements of critical spirit. At the top of these phrases are the italicised indicators in “Table 1: A coding for critical spirit”. You will note that in some cases the selected phrase(s) of narrative might fulfil two elements of critical spirit. In these instances I have preceded the selected phrase with the initial of the other element of critical spirit that I believe also applies. (For example, “IM” after a particular phrase in the section “Openmindedness” would mean that it could also be an indicator of Independence of Mind.) Any numbers preceding the selected phrase(s) bears no relationship to how I have interpreted the phrase(s). Note that there is “other stuff” that has been identified thematically in the narratives. These are: personal test of fortitude and community of support. I have noted these outside the table. In some narratives no phrases were identified as being an indicator of these and hence this section may have been left blank.

What I ask you to do now is to perform a credibility check. This is where you have your say in how I have analysed your narrative. On this occasion I need you to do five (5) tasks:

1. Reread your case narrative (that was produced for TEA2301).
2. Read and make yourself familiar with the coding in Table 1.
3. Read my analysis of your narrative.
4. Comment on and/or add to my analysis on the comment sheet provided.
5. Return your comments via email to: [tylerm@usq.edu.au](mailto:tylerm@usq.edu.au)

This should take approximately 20-30 minutes.

Many thanks for your continued involvement in this research project.

Mark Tyler

## **Appendix E - Credibility check feedback form**

**Feedback form for: “Critical spirit manifestation in TAFE teachers and their work”**

Researcher: Mark A Tyler

University: University of Southern Queensland.

Please comment on the researcher’s analysis of your narrative using the coding method for critical spirit provided. Feel free to add to or subtract from this analysis by adding your views to the table below. Please type your responses in the spaces provided. These spaces will automatically enlarge to fit your comments.

<b>Elements of critical spirit (Oxman-Michelli, 1992)</b>	<b>Participant’s views of researcher’s analysis</b>
Independence of mind	
Openmindedness	
Wholeheartedness	
Intellectual responsibility	
Respect for others	

“Other discourse”

Personal test of fortitude	
Community of support	

**Please answer the following questions:**

1. What did you find out about yourself through the analysis of your narrative using this method?

2. How might this understanding of critical spirit have value to you in understanding your identity as a TAFE teacher?

3. How might you use this concept?

4. What questions came to mind when you engaged with this analysis?

Please save as: (your first name) credibilitycheck.doc and send to [tylerm@usq.edu.au](mailto:tylerm@usq.edu.au)

Many thanks

Mark Tyler

