CHAPTER THREE: *WOMEN'S WAYS OF KNOWING*: A REVIEW AND CRITIQUE

In this chapter I aim to provide a review and critique of *Women's Ways of Knowing*: *The Development of Self, Voice and Mind* (Belenky *et al*., 1986).[1] The ideas that this book have given rise to are especially relevant to this thesis. I first read this book within a few years of its initial publication. Its ideas had resonance for me and gave me the tools to describe my own learning history. Furthermore, I believe it shaped my emergent 'living theory' of what developmental education required, in turn, influencing the design of the MAPOD, in respect of an approach to learning based on a community of learners. During my inquiry, I have read this book many times, developing with each reading a deeper understanding of the text, helping me clarify over time how I could improve my practice.

I begin with an introduction and overview of the study that forms the basis of this book, and then develop a more fulsome account of the five epistemological perspectives that shape the order of presentation of this book. In doing so, I aim to help the reader who may be unfamiliar with this work to gain an appreciation and understanding of how it has influenced my research. I develop my account by explaining how these perspectives resonated for me, and by providing a glimpse of how they helped me understand and know myself better as a learner. In addition, I indicate where they have influenced my thinking and living theory as a professional educator. By placing myself as knower within the text, I hope to show how the reading of this book and its subsequent review and critique was for me, not an activity of detached intellectual curiosity, used

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[1] Hereinafter in this chapter referred to as *WWK*.

to produce a traditional literature review, but rather a process of engagement with ideas in which I as a knower was intimately connected and attached to that which was also known to and communicated by others. The reading of this book began a relationship with those ideas that the authors brought into the public domain, leading to a personal and organisational learning trajectory of transformation. Finally, I will address issues of critique, drawing out in particular some of the key criticisms brought to light in the work of Goldberger *et al*. (1996).

Introduction

Belenky *et al*. (1986) describe ways of knowing that women reported to them, based on their individual life experiences. In the process, the authors identified particular ways of knowing that women have cultivated and valued, ways of knowing, they argue, that have been denigrated and neglected by the dominant intellectual ethos of our time. These ways of knowing, claim the authors, though gender related, are not gender specific, thus suggesting that whilst these ways of knowing might be held in common by women, they are also accessible to men. Their research involved intensive interviews with 135 women from higher education and the wider social sphere.

In developing their theory of knowledge, Belenky *et al.* were concerned to understand 'how women know what they know'. They believed that what women considered to be truth and reality affects the way in which they see the world, including perceptions of self, and views of teaching and learning. The book shows how women's self concepts and ways of knowing are intertwined. Epistemology is presented as an organising framework of the book.

They describe five epistemological perspectives from which women view reality and draw conclusions about truth, knowledge and authority. Moreover, they show how women struggle to claim the power of their own minds.

The context of this study needs to be appreciated in respect of what had gone before and the growing awareness that, in the majority of social science research, there had been a distinct absence of women, not least because academic research traditionally was conducted in universities, populated predominantly by male students.

The starting point for the authors had been Perry's work (1970) on intellectual and ethical development.[2] Perry identified stages of development in intellectual and ethical thought. Significantly, this included a shift from dualism to multiplicity – the ability to differentiate between right and wrong, giving way to a multiplicity of perspectives. He also noted that students move beyond dependence on authority towards a position where they hold their own opinion. Beyond that, he recorded a stage of development which he called 'full relativism', in which meaning and context are relative. At this stage, the student appreciates that knowledge is constructed, not given; contextual, not absolute; mutable, not fixed.

Significantly, the authors of *WWK*, in contrast to Perry (1970), reported *perspectives* on ways of knowing, not stages of development and they reported *differences* in the ways of knowing not present in Perry's study. The authors state that their wish is to *share* their findings, not *prove* anything.

That women speak in a different voice was not entirely a new concept. Gilligan (1977) showed that women differed from men in their orientation. She showed

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[2] Conducted at Harvard, an ivy league university in the United States, populated by male students.

that women's moral development was more likely to be marked and differentiated by concerns about care, responsibilities and connectedness, whereas rights, autonomy and separateness were characteristic of men's approach to moral thinking, decision-making and action. *WWK* thus serves to extend the work of Perry and Gilligan, thus extending our knowledge of theories of knowing.

Additionally, *WWK* was groundbreaking in that it studied women from diverse backgrounds. As well as samples of women from the university population (the traditional source of participants and informants in social science research), the authors specifically included women from what they termed 'the invisible colleges'. By contrast, these women were outside the formal higher education system and compared to students in higher education the women from the 'invisible colleges' had limited formal education. Generally, these women came from poor and working class backgrounds. They tended to need social support and instruction on parenting skills, which the 'invisible colleges' provided. Significantly, therefore, there was diversity in terms of class differences, education and life experience in the sample that informed this study. This particular feature of the research design is not insignificant, because by including women from such diverse backgrounds the authors were able to identify 'voice' as the anchoring point of the study. It is testimony to the collaborative approach of the authors, who found a way of working together that addressed the different interests of their client groups and the research questions they wished to pursue. The focus of the interviews was on women's experiences of life and learning:

> "We were particularly interested in how maternal practice might shape women's thinking about human development and the teaching relationship. We expected that by listening to women talk about mothers and mothering, we might hear themes that were especially distinctive in a women's voice" (Belenky *et al*., 1986:13).

Drawing out the concept of 'maternal thinking' as described by Ruddick (1980, cited in Belenky *et al.*, 1986), the authors anticipated that wisdom (knowledge) gained through maternal thinking and practice might illuminate educators and practitioners in social services in their work regarding human development.

The five epistemological perspectives by which women know and view the world, as identified by this study provide an organising framework for the book. These are (1) silence, (2) subjective knowing, (3) received knowing, (4) procedural knowing, including two different types of procedures, called separate and connected knowing, and (5) constructed knowing. The book is presented in two parts; the first focuses on ways of knowing, whilst the second explores the context of development in families and schools. The final chapter develops the idea of 'connected teaching', the theme of which is bringing the maternal voice into the academy. The substance of each perspective can be differentiated as follows:

Silence: in silence women experience themselves as mindless and voiceless, and subject to the whims of authority.

Subjective knowing: from this perspective, truth and knowledge are conceived as personal and private and subjectively known and or intuited.

Received knowing: this is where women see themselves as capable of receiving and reproducing knowledge from external authorities. But these women do not see themselves as being able to construct or create knowledge themselves.

Procedural knowing: procedural knowledge is present where women are invested in learning. It describes methods for obtaining and communicating knowledge. Two types of procedural knowledge are reported; 'separate knowing' distinguished by evaluation and objectivity in judging an others

point of view, and 'connected knowing', distinguished by acceptance and appreciation of another's' point of view. These procedures build on 'different voice' theory (Gilligan, 1982), highlighting how separation and attachment influence ways in which men and women tend to think through and approach issues.

Constructed knowing: from this position, women view all knowledge as contextual. They experience themselves as creators of knowledge and place value on both subjective and objective strategies for knowing.

Voice: a Metaphor for Growth and Development

The authors noticed how the metaphor of finding or gaining voice appeared to reverberate throughout the interviews. Initially, they thought it was merely a form of shorthand for a point of view, but as they progressed with the interviews they began to appreciate it as a metaphor that applied to many aspects of women's experience and their development. Women spoke of voice and silence as they described their lives, using variously such terms as speaking up, speaking out, being silenced, really talking, really listening, feeling deaf and dumb, having no words, saying what you mean and listening to be heard. This range of comments fell within the five perspectives and was related to feelings and beliefs regarding sense of mind, self worth and the extent to which women felt isolated from or connected to others. The metaphor of voice became the unifying theme that linked both the perspectives and the chapters in the book. Furthermore, the idea of finding voice is symbolic of the journey that women have had to make to 'put the knower back into the known' and to reclaim the power of their minds and voices (Belenky *et al.*, 1986:19).

The authors draw our attention to the differences between the visual and oral traditions in respect of knowledge and knowing. The following quotation

shows the subtlety and influence of using this analogy when compared with the oral tradition in the shaping of the western mind:

> "Visual metaphors such as, 'the mind's eye' suggest a camera passively recording a static reality and promote the illusion that disengagement and objectification are central to the construction of knowledge" (Belenky *et al*., 1986:18).

The authors further point out that visual metaphors suggest that you need to stand or position yourself at a distance if you are to get a proper view. Contrast this with the oral tradition where "the ear requires closeness of subject and object" (ibid.) if one is to be heard and appreciated by the other. Put this way, the metaphor of voice and its importance in *WWK* takes on a very particular and enhanced significance, as will become clear when we examine the differences between 'separate' and 'connected' knowing.

In academia, when we speak in terms of the visual metaphor, we tend to invoke the qualities of illumination. For example, when we use theory to illuminate practice, the practice becomes a 'thing' for which the theory provides background objectification, and thus the minds eye is associated with intellect and reason. By contrast, more auditory or kinesthetic analogies, such as resonance, imply relationship and connectivity, within which subjectivity is an active component. Subjectivity was considered antithetical to the academic and scientific tradition until relatively recently. Though there has been some movement in this, academics tend to remain suspicious of subjectivity.

Taking the path less travelled, the authors choose to pay particular attention to the maternal voice and how it influences knowing.

> "The stories of the women drew us back into a kind of knowing that had too often been silenced by the institutions in which we grew up and of which we were a part. In the end we found that, in our attempt to bring forward the ordinary voice, that voice had educated us" (Belenky *et al.*, 1986:20).

In hearing and naming the maternal voice, not generally associated in institutions of higher education, *WWK* serves to facilitate the questioning of the dominant repertoire of theories of knowledge in the academy, and offers possibilities for its expansion.

A More Detailed Understanding of the Five Perspectives

Silence: For women whose voices were silenced, silence was synonymous with oppression. Belenky *et al*. (1986), utilising a question from Gilligan's (1982) study, asked the women to describe their sense of self as they see themselves now and in the past. For women who are 'silent' this was an impossible task, as they claimed that they "relied on what others told them about themselves to get any sense of self" (1986:31). In their interviews, they described their experience as being silenced by voices of authority, and they reported that these authorities were quick to tell them (with respect to their thinking) 'you've got it wrong'. In examples such as this, words were used as weapons, undermining or belittling them. For some women, silence provided a degree of safety, as they were fearful of speaking in the face of authority. Some described their experience as being akin to feeling "deaf and dumb" (Belenky *et al*., 1986:34). Authorities were described as "wordless authorities" (1986:27). By which, the women explained that those in authority seldom made it clear what they wanted or expected, moreover, such authority figures "expected you to know in advance" (1986:28). These women were effectively terrorised in their silence, defending themselves both psychologically and, in some cases, physically, by being on guard and anticipating the whims of authority. This type of silence is marked by violence. Silent women, the authors reported, often grew up in social isolation from others, with their families cut off from the wider community. In addition, discussion with other family members was often actively discouraged.

"The silent women lived cut off from others in a world full of rumor and innuendo" (1986:25).

Conditions of social isolation, coupled with a lack of opportunity to play with other children, or the chance to engage in dialogic relations with others, served to arrest the development of silent women. Through dialogue 'inner' and 'outer' speech is developed. Whilst the former facilitates an awareness of one's thought process, in other words, an awareness of the development of mind, the latter facilitates a development of voice. Whilst these are 'home' factors, the school context was not necessarily any more supportive for silent women. Belenky *et al.* (1986) point out that schools provide little for the development of outer speech and inner speech, where the traditional role of the teacher is that of the knowledge authority. Thus, the teaching methods serve to reinforce the experience of silence. Furthermore, Belenky *et al.* argue that to concentrate on developing the written form before the oral process has been developed is likely to be tragic. They describe these silent women as "…lost in the sea of words and numbers that flooded their schools" (1986:34). For them, school was an unlikely place to find voice, "…it only confirmed their fears of feeling 'deaf and dumb'" (ibid.). And, in the words of one women, "in school you get detention for talking to others" (ibid.). The term and perspective of silence became a benchmark for the study.

> "This position though rare, at least in our sample, is an important anchoring point for our epistemological scheme, representing an extreme in denial of self and in dependence on external authority for direction" (Belenky *et al.*, 1986:24).

From my perspective

The descriptions of silence, as described in *WWK*, strongly resonated with my childhood recollections and observations of my mother. I was born in Coventry

in the 1950s. My parents had emigrated from Scotland so that my father could work in one of the car factories. My mother, the youngest of ten, struggled to cope. Socially isolated, she had no-one to turn to, to help her in developing her skills in cooking and parenting. Money was tight, we lived in relative poverty, and due to the onset of illness in pregnancy my mother had lost her job. She had epilepsy, and without a reference she was unable to find another job, not that she could have coped with a job and a child at that time. To keep a roof over our heads my father worked long hours, but he was unable to cope with the domestic chaos that prevailed and, in turn, he took his frustration out on my mother, subjecting her to regular beatings. Thus, domestic violence, social isolation, the lack of opportunity to play, and the absence of dialogue with others bounded my childhood experience within a wall of silence.

Like the silenced women that Belenky *et al.* describe, I had learned that survival depended on obeying wordless authorities. I grew up knowing that I should not wait to be told to do something; rather, I should anticipate what they wanted. Being seen and not heard was required.

Subjective Knowing: The hallmark of subjective knowing is the emergence of 'the inner voice'. This perspective marks a developmental shift from passivity to action, in effect, from silence to a "protesting inner voice and infallible gut" (Belenky e*t al.*, 1986:54), which facilitates a sense of self, agency and control.

Significantly, 'truth' now resides in the person, this transition enabling women to become their own authorities. This is the key difference, when compared with the perspective of received knowing. However, both perspectives still share the tendency toward dualism, that being the belief in right and wrong answers. Belenky *et al.* suggest that a shift toward this perspective is linked to the experience and reaction women have to "failed male authority" (Belenky *et al*., 1986:57).

> "For women, the freedom from social convention and definitions implied in the shift into subjectivism represents a more greater autonomy and independence" (Belenky *et al*,. 1986:55).

Subjectivism is in essence the antithesis of rationalism and scientific thought; therefore, this perspective is not without risk to the knower in a world dominated by the scientific and rational tradition. Belenky *et al.* inform us that some women are 'shaky' about the power of their own judgment.

The developmental process in this period of subjective knowing lays the ground for experiential learning through reflection, as the women learn to 'hear themselves think' and take heed of their observations and listening.

From my perspective

Though I remained confidant as I entered my teenage years that the right answers were to be found through those in authority, particularly in education, I began to experience doubt both in respect to parental authority, and that of church, whose doctrine of blind faith defied both logic and plausibility. Being brought up a Roman Catholic, attending a girls' catholic school and taught mainly by nuns,[3] I gradually became more cynical about the wisdom of many of my teachers. I could not see how such apparently intelligent people could be fooled by the double standards portrayed by the clergy (who governed the school).

In the mid-sixties, the role of women in society was changing, yet at the same time the clergy, by Papal decree, was charged to preach from the pulpit on women, their place in society and the doctrine of the church, which banned the

[3] There were a number of lay teachers, though they were required to be practicing Catholics.

use of the pill. Though at the time I was too young for these matters to affect me directly, they did affect the decisions of women of my mother's generation, many of whom, like my mother, neither wanted nor could cope with another pregnancy. There were rumours about one of the parish priests having an affair with a local woman. Many years later, another was to be charged and found guilty of child sex abuse. The parish priest had no interested in the poor or needy in the parish; he was only interested in building up the wealth of the parish, and to this end he only had time for 'his' wealthy sponsors. I found this deplorable, since the majority of parishioners were working-class, and selflessly gave significant sums of money to the church every week. Though unable to speak up or speak out against these failed authority figures, my inner voice was beginning to inform my thinking.

For me, the turning point in my quest for self came following a long period of illness in my fourteenth and fifteen years, when my educational future was placed in doubt, and when the options being presented to me were typing skills, a quiet little job in an office, and a good marriage prospect. I could no longer see my life in terms of the values of the community in which I lived, or indeed, imagine fulfilling their expectations of me. I began to plan my escape and, with the help of my doctor, I determined to make education my ally.[4]

Received Knowers: This perspective involves listening to the voices of others as a means of knowing what to know. Thus, within this perspective listening, receiving or taking in what authorities have to say is equated with being a learner.

> "While received knowers can be very open to take in what others have to offer, they have little confidence in their ability to speak. Believing that truth comes from others, they still their own voices to hear the voices of others" (Belenky *et al.*, 1986:37).

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[4] I continue this story in Part Two of this thesis.

From this perspective, the notion that 'truth' is received and is somehow 'out there' and experienced as external, is the predominant view of women who have this perspective. The idea that 'truth' is constructed is out with the perspective of these women. One of the features of this perspective is that it is difficult to believe that authorities themselves might disagree or hold competing views. I recall vividly a particular occasion with the first MAPOD cohort, when one of the students, frustrated by the different views expressed by the tutor team, shouted: "Why can't you lot get your act together", reflecting her expectation that authorities should be clear about 'the truth'.

Received knowers are listeners and tend toward conformist thinking. Belenky *et al*. suggest that the socialisation of women in society to 'be seen and not heard' conditions them to "cultivate their capacities for listening while encouraging men to speak" (1986:45). It is further argued that when women speak they are judged not in comparison to men but by this taken for granted 'standard' of behaviour. This view is supported by Cline and Spender (1987).[5]

Though there have been changes to society's norms in the west, facilitating opportunities for more equal relationships between men and women, particularly with regard to educational opportunity, change on the home front by comparison, for many working mothers, has been in my experience been minimal, whilst in the boardroom very little has changed. Received knowers are potentially very vulnerable. According to Belenky *et al*.:

> "Received knowers are especially at the mercy of authorities judgments. If someone in a powerful position tells such a woman that she is wrong or bad or crazy, she believes it" (Belenky *et al*., 1986:49).

[5] In their aptly named book, *Reflecting Men at Twice their Natural Size.*

On the other hand, if the authority demonstrates belief in the woman, it is likely to cause the woman to believe in herself.

From my perspective

As a child I experienced myself as dumb and without a voice though I did not experience myself as deaf. Rather, I depended on authorities for guidance and believed that if I listened well to those in authority I would learn. But like the women in Belenky *et al.*'s study, I was vulnerable to the judgments of authorities, and their view of me shaped my own view of myself. I went to my first primary school until I was approximately eight years old, where most of the teachers I encountered gave me some encouragement to positively see myself as a learner and a potentially useful citizen. But in my next school the message changed. The school was pioneering discovery methods of learning, where the children were being sent out to complete tasks and projects and learn for themselves, but with little or no guidance. I was used to being instructed and found myself at sea in this new regime. The school authorities demanded due deference from pupils, which translated as 'carry out instructions as given by authority figures and don't ask questions'. Consequently, I found myself in a double bind. I did not thrive in this environment. I was not considered suitable grammar school material and I duly failed the eleven plus examination, leaving to attend a local secondary modern school. Despite this experience of perceived failure as a learner, I persevered, believing that I just had to listen harder and pay more attention if I was to become a successful learner.

Procedural knowing: Procedural knowledge is generally thought of as 'the voice of reason'. Belenky *et al.* tell us how the voice of reason stifles the inner voice. One example given is the procedures taught for analysing a painting. They describe five criteria on which one's evaluation and judgment of a paining is made, namely:

- the composition;
- the texture;
- the colour;
- the lighting;
- how the artist expresses his/her feelings.

The self is noticeably absent from this procedure.

> "The inner voice turns critical; it tells them their ideas may be stupid, and because their ideas must measure up to certain objective standards they speak in measured tones. Often they do not speak at all. But this is not a passive silence; on the other side of this silence, reason is stirring" (Belenky *et al.*, 1986:95).

In academia, there are conventions supporting this type of reasoning. In particular, argument and adversarial discourse. Gilligan (1982) and Lyons (1983, in Belenky *et al.*, 1986:102) described two different self-concepts. One a 'separate self', that is autonomous, which gives its name to 'separate knowing', and the other, in which one is 'connected' to others in relationship, and thus named 'connected knowing'.

Separate Knowing: Doubting is at the heart of separate knowing. Citing Elbow, who coined the phrase 'the doubting game', we are told that this involves "putting something on trial to see if it is wanting or not" (1973, in Belenky *et al*., 1986:104). In short, this procedure requires us to look for what is wrong and/or missing, taking the contrary position, or playing devils advocate. It is a procedure commonly applied in academia toward teaching learning and assessment.

From my perspective

This was the game I would learn as an undergraduate and further refine as postgraduate and new academic. Paradoxically, in finding voice in the academy, the doubting game can leave students feeling that they rather than their ideas are being put on trial. Belenky *et al.* suggest that students may become pawns in the doubting game.

> "In accepting authorities' standards, separate knowers make themselves vulnerable to their criticism. The authorities have a right to find fault with the reasoning of separate knowers; and since there is nothing personal in their criticism, the separate knowers must accept it with equanimity" (Belenky *et al.*, 1986:107).

That this is the dominant way of knowing in academia is not insignificant. As a tutor, I have felt obliged to teach my students how to play the doubting game. I wanted them to know how to construct a good enough argument and to know that they should back up their claims with evidence. Not least, because I know that they would likely be judged by that standard by other authorities. Separate knowing is a public language expressed in public performance and based on reason and critical thinking, in contrast to subjective knowing which is a private language based on intuition. But I have learned that, for some students, even teaching them how to play this game can hinder their development, as they experience and/or perceive this procedure to be destructive. For students who have yet to find their voice, and who are vulnerable to criticism, the location of criticism as personal and not in the context of their ideas is often how they hear feedback, which can undermine their development and, in some cases, lead to feelings of failure. This experience as a tutor is borne out by the findings of Belenky *et al.* who report that "on the whole, women found the experience of being doubted debilitating rather than energizing" (1986:227).

In developing their argument, the authors describe it as "the doubting model as peculiarly inappropriate for women" and further state that they are "not convinced" that it is any more "appropriate for men" (Belenky *et al.*, 1986:228). At times this traditional approach to academic judgment on MAPOD became a source of tension between staff and students, raising questions concerning what constitutes academic rigour and 'valid knowing'. It has been a significant question for my own practice, and one that has influenced my research.

The language of separate knowing is a public one based on reason. Belenky *et al*. remind us that we are governed not by men but by laws. This type of procedural knowledge extracts the self from the known. It relies on objectivity and pure reason. It is an adversarial form and has significant power implications. On this very issue, Belenky *et al.* state:

> "This is not the common ground of genuine colleagues. The teacher has not, in the words of radical educator Paulo Freire, become a genuine 'partner of the students', a 'student among students' (1971,p.62). The teachers still weald the power: They write the rules of the game and rate the players' performances. But teachers and students can now speak a common language, and they can at least play at being colleagues" (1986:107).

Despite shifts in power relations on MAPOD toward greater equity between students and tutors through practices such as peer assessment, partnership as described by Belenky *et al.* remained problematic. It is one of the living contradictions experienced in my practice as a tutor and is a paradox that sat uncomfortably at times with the broader efforts of tutors and the programme to facilitate a different way of being in educative relations with students, that being a more collegiate relationship, and one responsive to students' needs.

Separate knowing is engrained as the dominant mode of discourse in business and society. It is characterised by debate and the notion of the better argument.

Schweickart (1996) suggests that we are not easily able to conceive of a way that is different and yet, still valid.

Connected knowing: Connected knowers develop procedures for gaining access to other people's experiential knowledge through resonance and empathy. It involves acceptances and precludes evaluative judgment. It is the opposite of the 'doubting game'; it is 'the believing game' (Elbow, 1973, in Belenky *et al*., 1986:113). It involves "seeing the other not in their own terms but in the other's terms".[6] Schweickart cites the definition offered by Clinchy (1989) of the 'believing game', stating:

> "[it is where you] suspend your disbelief, put your own views aside, and try to see the logic in the idea. Ultimately, you need not agree with it, but while you are entertaining it, as Elbow says, 'say yes to it': you must empathise with it, feel with it and think with the person who created it" (Clinchy, 1989, cited in Schweickart, 1996:310).

Connected knowing is marked by "really listening". It involves the "capacity to attend to another person and to feel related to that person in spite of what may be enormous differences" (Belenky *et al*., 1986:143).

Contrasting the Two Procedures

In separate knowing, evaluation serves to place the object at a distance and the self above it, creating mastery over it, whereas connected knowing requires intimacy and equity with the person and their ideas. Knowledge as judgment and knowledge as understanding would seem to differentiate these two procedures.

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[6] The work of Elbow (1973), a composition theorist is cited by Belenky *et al* (1986:104). They state that he had run a programme at one of the participatory colleges in their study, on innovative writing for new students. Though his ideas of believing and doubting originate in the context of composition writing, Belenky *et al*. use them as an explanatory framework to explore the way in which a reader and specifically an academic authority might approach a text.

> "Connected knowers begin with an interest in the facts of other people's lives, but they gradually shift the focus to other people's ways of thinking. As in all procedural knowing, it is the form rather than the content of knowing that is central. Separate knowers learn through explicit formal instruction how to adopt a different lens -how, for example, how to think like a sociologist. Connected knowers learn through empathy. Both learn to get out from behind their own eyes and use a different lens, in one case the lens of a discipline, in the other the lens of another person (Belenky *et al.*, 1986:115).

Though connected knowers avoid making judgments, this should not be taken as a sign of passivity or lack of agency. The attitude of trust and the assumption that the person has something good to say would, according to Belenky *et al.*, suggest forbearance, if not an intentional form of passivity, reflecting a relationship in tune with the other.

Connected Teaching

Linked to connected knowing is connected teaching. It is concerned with bringing the feminine principle into the educational learning relationship. "It is time for the voice of the mother to be heard in education" (Noddings, in Belenky *et al.*, 1986:214). This is a clear reference to the maternal voice, the caring voice of the mother. Belenky *et al.* invoke the metaphor of 'teacher as midwife'. This is where the teacher helps the student draw out and give birth to their own ideas. Where the women in their study reported occasions for developmental/cognitive growth, it was where a midwife model of teaching and learning had been employed (Belenky *et al.*, 1986:227). The authors further describe connected teachers as "believers [who] trust their students' thinking and encourage them to expand it" (Belenky *et al.*, 1986:227).

From my perspective

As a tutor, I have had to work much harder to develop this kind of knowing in my teaching and learning relationships, grappling with and learning how to really listen, and be accepting of student accounts. The challenge this has presented has given rise to an area of inquiry within my research, which I offer as storied account of working with students, in Part Two of this thesis.

Constructed knowing: This is a perspective that integrates ways of knowing, creating a voice in which women embrace the pieces of themselves, in search of their own unique voice.

> "It is in the process of sorting out the pieces of the self and of searching for a unique and authentic voice that women come to the basic insights of constructivist thought: **All knowledge is constructed, and the knower is an intimate part of the known**" (Belenky *et al*., 1986:137) emphasis original.

To be able to see knowledge as constructed expands our possibilities for thinking about things. Constructed knowers appreciate the relevance and uniqueness of context to knowledge. Constructed knowing greatly expands the power of the mind. Building on Polyanyi's (1958) contribution to our understanding of the role of 'personal knowledge' in scientific thinking, Belenky *et al.* suggest that constructed knowing excites a passion for knowing: "the passionate participation of the knower in the act of the known" (1986:141).

From my perspective

This thesis involves such passion as described above, in that a self-study places my 'I' at the centre of my inquiry, as I engage reflexively with the construction of my own living theory, and its reconstruction, as I come to know myself as a living contradiction, and as I passionately engage with improving

my practice in my teaching and learning relationships. Commenting on this quality of knowing. Belenky *et al.* state:

> "What we are calling passionate knowing is the elaborated form connected knowing takes after women learn to use the self as an instrument of understanding" (Belenky *et al*., 1986:141).

The capacity to 'really listen' goes hand in hand with the capacity to 'really talk'. It involves constructed discourse, such as exploration, talking and listening, asking questions, argumentation, hypothesising and the sharing of ideas. It is a reciprocal process where listening and taking on board the ideas of another no longer has the oppressive elements, as experienced by the received knower. "In 'real talk' domination is absent, reciprocity and cooperation are prominent" (Belenky *et al*., 1986:145-146).

'Really talking' is likened to the 'ideal speech' situation of Jurgen Habermas and is based on each person being able to speak their truth unencumbered by power plays from the other. Habermas emphasises both understanding and achieving consensus concerning validity of claims, assessed by truth, truthfulness and normative rightness. Habermas relies on the process of intersubjective understanding as the litmus test for assessing validity claims, or a warrant to the argument. Intersubjectivity is taken as primordial by Habermas for the co-ordination of action.

Criticisms of *Women's Ways of Knowing*

Perspectives or stage theory?

WWK has not been without its critics. Despite the authors' assertions that the five epistemological perspectives identified in the study are not presented as a developmental stage theory, they have faced criticism on this front.

> "Despite the explicit disclaimers, the rhetoric of the book, reinforced by its organisation and the invocation of other developmental psychologists, continually evokes notions of progress from simpler to more complex, less to more adequate ways of knowing or epistemological perspectives" (Ruddick, 1996:252).

This seems fair criticism, since the journey from silence to voice as described by the five perspectives does give the illusion of progress, and as Ruddick points out this journey mirrors the educational process of development utilised in the United States. Indeed, the progress marked by constructed knowing in education is rewarded and seen as a mark of epistemological and intellectual success.

Valuing Diversity or Concealing its Complexity?

WWK made a distinctive contribution to its field, because it drew on the experience of women both at universities (the traditional location for participants in social science studies) and 'invisible colleges' of America, thus including women who had not had a formal education, and who were from poorer working class backgrounds and usually excluded from such studies. We are told that the study included a number of women from diverse ethnic minority backgrounds. However, criticism has been made in respect of its limited application to non-white American and Anglo Saxon cultures. Who are these women from ethnic minority backgrounds? The merging of the data into a melting pot of women's responses conceals rather than reveals the uniqueness of their experience. Consequently, we do not get an appreciation of the richness or complexity of the diversity that women from ethnic minority communities bring to the study. Referring to the way in which the authors of *WWK* describe how they worked with the interview data, Maher and Tetreault make the point that "few of these individual 'whole stories' are heard" (1996:155). Indeed, they argue that what is missing is a perspective of the societal and structural

influences of race and class, culture and other factors that serve to shape and influence the growth and development of self. This concealment of positionality, that is, the location of identity within a network of relationships, including cultural, political and economic, obscures the very differences that a study of inclusionality ought to achieve.

Silence: a Negative or Positive Experience?

Not unconnected to the view on diversity and positionality is the criticism of *WWK* for its rendering of silence as an inadequacy. Though there is no doubt that the women cited were silenced due to powerful voices in authority that left them feeling deaf and dumb, criticism suggests that silence may be a virtue in some cultural contexts and not a lack as implied by this study.

One such alternative has come from Patricinio Schweickart (1996). A Filipino, Schweickart begins her essay with reflections on the meaning and tradition of silence in her own culture, in which silence is valued. In particular, Schweickart presents a positive relationship between silence as a way of knowing and wisdom, and asserts that "thoughtful silence is a highly valued form of agency" (1996:306).

Though the criticism that Schweickart offers recognises the potential for difference, it does not in my opinion diminish the particular perspective on silence that the authors of *WWK* found. Adding further clarity to this perspective, in the light of such differences, Belenky (1996) adds a 'd' to the word silence. Not wishing to disrupt but clarify this perspective as an anchor for their epistemological framework, Belenky argues that what specifically distinguished these women whose stories informed this perspective was that they were silenced (Belenky, 1996:427). In her notes on page 427, Belenky points out that in studies of non Western cultures as those reported by

Goldberger,[7] silence is linked to powerful accounts of "connecting with and apprehending the world" independent of language and ways of being that for those of us who are what she calls 'word people', dependent on language, find difficult to understand. Defending the original perspectives of silence and received knowing, Belenky (1996) argues that retention of these epistemological perspectives in their original form is important to projects concerned with emancipation, in other words, where the aim is to overcome the stifling of the human condition caused by silence, and where the goal is to facilitate human liberation and the facilitation of voice.

The journey from silence to voice involves awareness of how one's voice has been stifled, and a critique of the oppressor, thus enabling one to distinguish and construct a voice of one's own, and a sense of self and mind. A similar position is taken by Freire, who says:

> "In order for the oppressed to be able to wage the struggle for their liberation, they must perceive the reality of their oppression, not as a close world from which there is no exit, but as a limiting situation which they can transform. This perception is necessary, but not a sufficient condition by itself for liberation; it must become the motivating force for liberating action… The oppressed can overcome the contradiction in which they are caught only when this perception enlists them in the struggle to free themselves" (1972:25).

Personally, I find Belenky's (1996) clarification to add a 'd' to silence, immensely helpful. I have both experienced the perspective of silence as a child growing up in a chaotic world that mirrors the descriptions offered by Belenky *et al.* (1986), and as described earlier, and I have experienced being silenced as a mature professional woman in the face of overwhelming voices of authority. This is despite otherwise being considered by colleagues to have a strong sense of personal agency. I thus want to suggest that the experience of silence

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[7] And of course by Schweickart in the same book, *Knowledge, Difference and Power*, Goldberger *et al*. (1996).

is not only an anchor point, as described by the authors of *WWK* for their findings, but in addition, I perceive silence like a virus, ever contagious in an authoritarian and androcentric social order. Not wishing to understate my view on this issue, I cite Richard Shaull:[8]

> "At first sight Paulo Freire's method of teaching illiterates in Latin America seems to belong to a different world from that in which we find ourselves. Certainly it would be absurd to claim that it be copied here. But there are certain parallels in the two situations which should not be overlooked. Our advanced technological society is rapidly making objects of most of us and subtly programming us into conformity to the logic of its system. To the degree that this happens, we are also being submerged in a new 'culture of silence'" (Shaull, in Freire, 1972:foreword).

I think Shaull makes the case that silence remains a real and present danger for all of us in the modern world.

'Ideal Speech' and 'Really Talking': a Different Perspective

Whilst appreciating Habermas' effort to put intersubjectivity in the forefront of cognitive and moral theories, Schweickart critiques what she calls her 'counterintuitive' response to his reduction of 'understanding' to 'agreement', (1996).

> "In my view Habermas offers a stripped down version of communication, one that has been emptied of substance in order to render it theoretically manageable. One theoretical consequence of the exclusion of 'feminised' substance is a theory that misrepresents the structure of intersubjectivity and communication. Women's Ways of Knowing recuperates the substance that has been dumped out (or 'muted') by Habermas" (Schweickart, 1996:309).

Schweickart's argument is an important one for feminist standpoint theorists, because it highlights how the force of the better argument and the debate takes

[8] Who wrote the foreword for Freire's (1972) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed.*

prime position in normative discourse. Feminist standpoint theory suggests that connected knowing need not be seen as subservient, rather it needs to be seen as different and valuable in it own right. Feminist standpoint theory aims to convince us that we can adopt an appreciative stance.

Standpoint Theory: an Advantage or Disadvantage?

From the point of view of the authors of *WWK*, the intention to specifically draw on the experience of women stood in contrast to the male voices heard in the Perry (1970) study and the predominantly masculine perspective of social science studies in general. However, one anticipated criticism of a feminist standpoint approach to theory is that in the same way as those studies it criticises for excluding the feminine perspective, in turn it employs the exclusion of the male perspective.

It has been suggested to me by male students that the very title of *Women's Ways of Knowing* creates an assumption that any perspective relevant to them will be absent from the text. Whilst I believe that the specific intention to represent the experience of women, traditionally excluded from such studies was right and is a cause for celebration, I do empathise with the view expressed by those male students. More significantly, the danger with feminist standpoint theories, if they are seen to be exclusive, perpetuates the gender specific rather than gender related myth that the authors tried to explicitly avoid. Ruddick (1996) in defence of *WWK*, points out that the authors speak of particular women, not woman in general. Furthermore, she asserts that identities are not fixed.

Significantly, the perspective of connected knowing revealed in the study is relevant to both men and women if we are to cultivate a different way of being in relationship with others, specifically in education and industry. Ruddick

points out that both "Women and Men are limited by a **system** that makes it difficult to think in a 'voice' that is both 'different' and credible" (1996:266, emphasis original). Indeed, in drawing out her argument for maternal leadership, Belenky cites Ruddick, who says:

> "it is a struggle for women to make their own viewpoint heard, even to each other and to themselves. She says maternal thinking is a 'revolutionary discourse' that has been silenced. 'As a central discourse', she says, '(it could) transform dominant, so-called normal ways of thinking' (Ruddick, 1989:p.269)" (Belenky, 1996:416).

Why then has society never recognised maternal thinking as an asset? Belenky (1996) suggests that mothers are ignored precisely because they are seen as irrelevant to public life. She develops her argument to suggest that because the role of motherhood is seen as natural, in other words, in essence, a gift of nature, the mother is seen to be exerting no 'agency' and thus her caring work is counted as contributing nothing. 'Agency' implies activeness and self-directedness. Thus, Belenky is suggesting that in the perceived absence of 'agency' we might understand how it is that the role of motherhood is assumed to be natural. That this myth needs to be tackled and shattered is important, if the discipline of maternal thinking is to be appreciated as a discipline and quality that is gender related and not gender specific, in other words, confined to women, and if it is to serve the thinking, understanding and behavioural changes that this different way of knowing can facilitate leadership roles.

Belenky provides an explanation of why this myth has become embedded in society. She points to economic accounting systems used world wide for assessing a nations wealth. "Whereas Women's traditional work is classified as 'reproductive' waging war is classified as 'productive'" (1996:416). Belenky explains that accounting systems were invented to help nations work out how they would pay for their wars, arguing that even today in many countries military expenditure can be allocated in accounting terms as though it were

contributing to the wealth of a nation "in spite of the fact that military spending allocates resources to unproductive and destructive endeavors" (1996:416).

Conclusions

Despite the criticisms, *WWK* has provided an expanded theory of knowledge, which has identified ways of knowing that are associated with the feminine principal, hitherto not recognised in earlier epistemic or developmental studies. It has contributed to our understanding of knowledge as a socially constructed phenomenon and one in which the maternal voice plays a significant part. This is important in a society that values reason and which has largely failed to recognise and place value on what we can learn from a different procedure, yet equally disciplined way of thinking. Its epistemological framework with its distinct anchor point of silence draws our attention the relationships and conditions that cause oppression, and helps us understand the development processes involved in moving from silence to voice. Notwithstanding criticism, it would seem that *WWK* has touched the lives and minds of many women and I am one of the many. It is a force for a liberating pedagogy.

At the beginning of this chapter I suggested that *WWK* shaped my emergent living theory in respect of influencing the MAPOD design as a community of learners. Like the 'public homeplaces' that Belenky (1996) describes,[9] MAPOD was founded with the idea that a community of learners would provide a safe haven in which learners, battered by the experience of inhumane workplace organisations, might find a space where they could recuperate in the company of peers and, in the process, develop a critical stance toward the social and political organisational arrangements that give rise to inhumane practice. At the

[9] "Public homeplaces: nurturing the development of people, families and communities" by Mary Field Belenky, was one of the essays inspired by *WWK*, ten years after the initial study. See Belenky (1996).

time of launching MAPOD, in the mid-1990s, many of my students were Human Resource professionals, who were managing in difficult and changing circumstances, dealing with the onslaught of mergers, acquisitions and redundancy programmes. These professionals were often absorbed with the work of 'emotional labour' (Fineman, 1993), which drained many of them of energy and assaulted their integrity. The values of care and respect amongst equals and relationships based on mutuality and reciprocity, as reported by Belenky (1996:395), were similarly espoused in the MAPOD recruitment process and reinforced on the programme, in the expectation that participants were responsible not only for their own learning but that of others. Learning how to facilitate a good company of learners became an important strand of my practice inquiry, not least as I would have to learn how to live up to the values and process that I espoused. Given my conditioning in the academy to be an effective procedural knower, I had much to discover in my inquiry about my way of thinking and coming to terms with myself as a living contradiction. The ideas in this book helped me do that.

Just as the authors of *WWK* returned to the work of Gilligan (1982) to develop their different voice theory, I too revisited her work so that I might better understand the storied accounts she gave to illustrate the differences in the rights and responsibilities orientation of participants in her studies on moral decision making. Moreover, it helped me to better understand how separation and attachment in the lives on men and women give rise to how 'truth' is carried by different modes of language and thought. Gilligan suggests that:

> "To understand how the tension between responsibilities and rights sustains the dialectic of human development is to see the integrity of two disparate modes of experience that are in the end connected. While an ethic of justice proceeds from the premise of equality - that everyone should be treated the same - an ethic of care rests on the premise of non-violence - that no one should be hurt. In the representation of maturity, both perspectives converge in the realisation that just as inequality adversely affects both

> parties in an unequal relationship, so too violence is destructive for everyone involved" (1982:174).

In my own case, developing my understanding of these different truths has helped me grapple with and work through tensions between responsibilities and rights in my teaching and learning relationships, and in the course of this inquiry.

In this chapter, I have provided a review and critique of *WWK*. I have indicated how the ideas borne from this study resonated with my experience and how those ideas have influenced my thinking, professional practice and inquiry.