

**MACQUARIE UNIVERSITY**

**Student and Teacher Identity Construction  
in New South Wales Years 7 - 10  
English classrooms**

**DIANNE FRANCES PIZARRO  
B.A., Dip. ED., GRAD DIP. ED. STUDIES, MEd (Hons).**

**SCHOOL OF EDUCATION IN THE AUSTRALIAN  
CENTRE FOR EDUCATIONAL STUDIES**

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>INTRODUCTION.....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>CHAPTER 1 .....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>INTRODUCTION TO THE THESIS .....</b>	<b>2</b>
1.1 Rationale .....	2
1.2 Research Questions .....	5
1.3 Research Design and Method .....	5
1.5 Organisation of this thesis.....	6
<b>THE RESEARCH CONTEXT.....</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>CHAPTER 2 .....</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>BACKGROUND .....</b>	<b>10</b>
2.1 Public Education and the Commonwealth .....	10
2.2 Public Education in New South Wales Kindergarten to Year 12.....	10
2.3 History of Subject English .....	11
2.4 Antecedents of Subject English in New South Wales.....	11
2.5 Circa 1880s – 1920 .....	13
2.6 Circa 1920-1960.....	16
2.7 Circa 1960 -1975.....	18
2.8 Circa 1975-2007.....	23
<b>RECENT HISTORY OF N.S.W. YEARS 7 - 10 SYLLABUSES .....</b>	<b>30</b>
2.9 1971 English Syllabus for Forms 1 – 1V .....	30
2.10 English Syllabus Years 7 - 10 (1987) .....	32
2.11 English Syllabus Years 7 - 10 (2003) available at <a href="http://www.nswboardofstudies">www.nswboardofstudies</a> .....	33
<b>REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE .....</b>	<b>37</b>
<b>CHAPTER 3 .....</b>	<b>38</b>
<b>IDENTITY .....</b>	<b>38</b>
3.1 Introduction.....	38
3.2 Defining Identity .....	38
<b>STUDENT IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION .....</b>	<b>39</b>
3.3 Social/Cultural Reproduction and Student Identity Construction .....	39
3.3.1 Resistance Theory and Student Identity Construction .....	40
3.3.2 Alternatives to Reproduction and Resistance Theories and Student Identity Construction .....	41
3.3.3 Pedagogy and Student Identity Construction .....	44
3.3.4 Teacher Identity through student eyes .....	45
3.3.5 Critical/ Desire Theory and Student Identity Construction.....	45
3.3.6 Structure, Agency and Efficacy and Student Identity Construction.....	46
<b>GENDER AND STUDENT IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION.....</b>	<b>49</b>
3.4 (Re) production of Gender .....	50
3.4.1 Gender, Attentiveness and Achievement .....	51
3.4.2 Gender and Subject English .....	52

<b>TEACHER IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION.....</b>	<b>55</b>
3.5 The concept of the subjective ‘Self’ in creating teacher identities.....	58
3.5.1 Critical reflection, empathy and effective teaching self(s).....	58
3.5.2 Desire/Critical/Transformative Pedagogy and Teacher Identity .....	60
3.5.3 Desire Theory and Reading Pedagogy .....	62
3.5.4 Social/Cultural Reproduction Pedagogy and Teacher Identity .....	62
3.5.5 Resistance Theory .....	64
3.5.6 Authentic Pedagogy/Productive Pedagogy/Quality Teaching .....	66
<b>METHODOLOGY .....</b>	<b>72</b>
<b>CHAPTER 4 .....</b>	<b>73</b>
<b>RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHOD.....</b>	<b>73</b>
4.1 General research issue.....	73
4.1.1 Qualitative research paradigm.....	73
4.1.2 Ethnography as Narrative Journeys .....	73
4.1.3 The Case Study Approach.....	77
4.1.4 Fourth Generation Evaluation .....	78
<b>DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS.....</b>	<b>80</b>
4.2 Analysis of Documentation.....	80
4.2.1 Selection of the Site and Evaluand.....	80
4.2.2 Teacher Selection .....	82
4.2.3 Student Selection .....	82
4.2.4 Questionnaire .....	85
4.2.5 Reflection Logs.....	85
4.2.6 Initial discussions.....	85
4.2.7 Teacher Interviews.....	86
4.2.8 Student Interviews .....	86
4.2.9 Staff Meeting Observation .....	87
4.2.1.0 Informal Conversations.....	87
4.2.1.1 Observation Lessons .....	87
4.2.1.2 Analysis Methodology .....	87
<b>AUTO/BIOGRAPHIES .....</b>	<b>89</b>
4.3 The School Site.....	89
4.4 The English Faculty .....	90
4.5 Classes/Allocation of Teachers.....	91
4.6 Evaluand: The Stakeholders.....	91
4.6.1 The Researcher.....	92
4.6.2 Teacher Stakeholders .....	92
Mr K.....	92
Mrs C .....	92
Mr V.....	93
Mrs S.....	93
4.6.3 Student Stakeholders.....	93

Kareena .....	93
Isabel.....	94
Steve Clein.....	94
Mike.....	95
Leah .....	95
McKayla.....	95
Nick.....	96
Roger.....	96
Moria Sack.....	97
Beyonce/Bianca .....	97
John Howard .....	98
Twitch.....	98
Fred.....	99
XXX.....	99
Bob.....	99
Leyla .....	100
<b>RESEARCH ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS.....</b>	<b>103</b>
<b>CHAPTER 5 .....</b>	<b>104</b>
<b>FACTORS INFLUENCING IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION IN ENGLISH AT HEARTBREAK HIGH .....</b>	<b>104</b>
5.1 Introduction.....	104
<b>STUDENT IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION AT HEARTBREAK HIGH .....</b>	<b>105</b>
5.2 Student perceptions of Ideal Teachers .....	105
5.2.1 Disengaged Student Perceptions of Teachers .....	106
5.2.2 Engaged Student Perceptions of Teachers .....	108
5.2.3 Disengaged Students and Ability, Achievement, Self-Concept and Reflection in English .....	108
5.2.4 Engaged Students and Ability, Achievement, Self-Concept and Reflection in English .....	112
5.2.5 Empathy and Engaged and Disengaged Students .....	115
5.2.6 Engaged and Disengaged Students' Perceptions of the Value of English.....	115
5.2.7 Disengaged Students, Culture, (Sub) Cultures and Agency.....	117
5.2.8 Engaged Students, Culture, Subcultures and Agency .....	122
<b>GENDER.....</b>	<b>123</b>
5.3 Gender and Valuing School.....	123
5.3.1 English as a 'Feminine' Subject.....	124
5.3.2 Gender and Student Attentiveness .....	127
5.3.3 Masculine and Feminine Stereotypes.....	128
<b>TEACHER IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION IN ENGLISH AT HEARTBREAK HIGH .....</b>	<b>130</b>
5.4 Personal 'Self' and Professional Identity .....	130
5.4.1 Teacher Agency .....	137
5.4.2 Subject English, Models of English and <i>English Years 7 – 10 Syllabus</i> (2003) .....	139
5.4.3 Critical Reflection.....	140
<b>CONCLUDING DISCUSSION.....</b>	<b>143</b>

<b>CHAPTER 6 .....</b>	<b>144</b>
6.1 Why do Students Engage or Disengage in Learning? .....	144
6.1.1 What is the Role of Pedagogy in Teacher Identity Construction? .....	148
6.1.2 What is the role of Curriculum (Subject English and <i>English Years 7 – 10 Syllabus</i> ) in Identity Construction?.....	150
<b>6.2 CONCLUSIONS .....</b>	<b>153</b>
<b>6.3 IMPLICATIONS OF THE RESEARCH .....</b>	<b>155</b>
<b>6.4 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH .....</b>	<b>157</b>
<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY .....</b>	<b>158</b>

## **List of Appendices**

Appendix A	Student Questionnaire and summary of responses.....	179
Appendix B	Teacher Reflection Log Questions.....	186
Appendix C	Student Reflection Log Questions.....	189
Appendix D	Research Observation Scaffold.....	191
Appendix E	Transcripts of Interviews and group discussions.....	193
Appendix F	Learning log samples.....	245
Appendix G	Heartbreak High Faculty Program.....	249
Appendix H	Unit of work.....	265

## **List of Figures**

	Page
Figure 1 English in the 1971 and 1987 English syllabuses schema.....	32
Figure 2 Model of Methodology.....	102

## **List of Tables**

	Page
Table1	Productive Pedagogies .....68
Table 2	NSW Quality Teaching model .....70
Table 3	Chronology of data collection at Heartbreak High..... 81
Table 4	Teacher participants, engaged/disengaged student participants.....84



## **List of Transcript Abbreviations**

[ ] Background information

... Pause

(...) Edited material

“ ” Direct quotations from reflection logs

*Italics* Conversations

## **Abstract**

This thesis examines student identity construction and teacher identity construction in the context of secondary English Years 7-10 classrooms in a comprehensive high school in Western Sydney, New South Wales, Australia. The research journey chronicles the teaching and learning experiences of a small group of students and teachers at Heartbreak High. The narrative provides insights into the factors responsible for creating teacher identity(s) and the identities of both engaged and disengaged students.

Previous studies have tended to focus on the construction of disaffected student identities. In contrast, this case study tells the stories of both engaged and disengaged students and of their teachers utilising a unique framework that adapts and combines a range of theoretical perspectives. These include ethnography as a narrative journey (Atkinson, 1990), Fourth Generation Evaluation (Guba & Lincoln, 1990; Lincoln & Guba, 1989), reflexivity (Jordan & Yeomans, 1995), Grounded Theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1990; Sugrue, 1974) and multiple realities (Stake, 1984).

The classical notion of the student-teacher dynamic is questioned in this inquiry. Students did not present powerless, passive, able-to-be motivated identities; they displayed significant agency in (re) creating 'self(s)' at Heartbreak High based largely on 'desires'. Engaged student identities reflected a teacher's culture and generally exhibited a "desire to know." In contrast, disaffected students exhibited a "desire for ignorance," rejecting the teacher's culture in order to fulfil their desire to belong to peer subculture(s). The capacity for critical reflection and empathy were also key factors in the process of their identity constructions. Disengaged students displayed limited capacity to empathise with, or to critically reflect about, those whom they perceived as "different". In contrast, engaged students exhibited a significant capacity to empathise with others and a desire to critically reflect on their own behaviour, abilities and learning.

This ethnographic narrative offers an alternate lens with which to view pedagogy from the perspectives that currently dominate educational debate. The findings of this study support a multifaceted model of teacher identity construction that integrates the personal 'self(s)' and the professional 'self(s)' that are underpinned by 'desires'. Current tensions inherent in the composition of teacher identities are portrayed in this thesis and it reveals the teacher self(s) as possessing concepts that are desirous of being efficacious, autonomous and valued but are diminished by disempowerment and fear.

## **Certificate**

I hereby certify that this thesis has not been submitted for a higher degree at any other university or institution. Ethics Committee approval protocol number:  
HE26MAR2004-D02881

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**Dianne Frances Pizarro**

**10<sup>th</sup> July 2008**

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### **Those Gods Made Permanent**

And so the scenes unravel as they  
must do, some long, some so brief  
a glimpse encompasses them, and the story  
constructs itself by stacking up  
one incident against another,  
the agile puppets clashing together  
and interacting with these two-dimensional  
representations of a bank, a bottle shop,  
a clock, a loaded gun, and out of this  
tangle of particulars rendered by a camera  
the optic nerves fake a kind of motion -  
and you supply an ending and a moral scaffolding  
that locks the plot together in your brain.  
But that's the mad professor's method  
of looking at things - the obsessive neatness  
gives it away.

John Tranter