

**Transformative Learning and Frontline Teaching  
in NSW Technical and Further Education since  
Myer-Kangan: An Adult Educator's Account**

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2014

PhD Education

UTS

## **CERTIFICATE OF AUTHORSHIP/ORIGINALITY**

I certify that the work in this thesis has not been previously submitted for a degree, nor has it been submitted as part of requirements for a degree. I also certify that the thesis has been written by me. Any help that I have received in my research and the preparation of this thesis itself has been duly acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

Barbara Bee

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Writing a doctoral thesis can be a solitary journey at times, but I have had lots of help from friends and TAFE colleagues along the way. I thank them all for their belief in me.

My biological father started the academic ball rolling when I was seven and promised he would reward me each time I topped the school exams. He was uneducated, but he must have realised back then that education mattered even for a daughter. I honour his memory.

The second influence, during my high school years, was my English-History teacher, Margaret Turner. Through her inspired teaching I entered the world of Shakespeare, the English poets and above all, English social and political history during the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Despite opposition from my bigoted stepfather, Mrs Turner maintained her interest in my academic potential and encouraged me on to the pathway of tertiary studies. I honour her memory.

The third great influence in my professional life as a teacher of adults was the former Head of the NSW TAFE Women's Coordination Unit, Kaye Schofield. Kaye, who both inspired and supported me, was a mentor. She it was who encouraged and supported my teaching approaches, when I applied Freire's conscientizing and thematic methods with my first Outreach group of socially isolated mature age women at Chippendale, Sydney. Kaye encouraged me to design curriculum and teaching resources for other TAFE teachers working with similar groups of disadvantaged students in the community. Kaye's backing enabled me to expand my knowledge and understanding of the particular barriers facing working class and immigrant women in accessing TAFE. I remain deeply grateful for her faith in me and the impact she had on my professional development as a teacher of marginal adults.

Shauna Butterwick was a visiting academic from the University of British Columbia in Canada. We met informally and I discussed with her the barrier I was facing at the beginning of writing my thesis in using traditional

academic language. She gave me very sound advice that I should begin writing from the heart and trust that as I progressed the theoretical aspects and methodology would emerge. Her advice proved invaluable. She has my thanks and deep appreciation.

At the University of Technology Sydney, Michael Newman and Keiko Yasukawa gave me guidance and support from their wealth of experience as both academics and inspiring teachers. I thank them.

However, my greatest appreciation and gratitude must go to the former TAFE teachers and officers whose names appear below. Nearly all have now retired, resigned or moved to other employment areas. They epitomise the zeal and commitment of those who administered, or taught in the Special Programs which are the subject of my research. They include: Dr. Allan Pattison who was the Director-General of TAFE NSW from 1980-1988 and presided during a period of great upheaval and change during the first restructuring of the NSW TAFE system under the Greiner Liberal Government. Dr Pattison kindly filled the gaps in my knowledge and understanding of that turbulent period and I thank him for his generous assistance. Others include Stephen Black, Jude Cook, Camila Couch, Jill Finch, Sally Gray, Elizabeth Harrison, Alan Miller, Vicki Potter, Jozefa Sobski and Cheryl Taylor.

Jozefa and Vicki aided my research with a wealth of archival material and press cuttings which painted a vivid picture of the of the first cut-backs to the Special Programs and their detrimental impacts on learners and teachers. TAFE is a large, complex bureaucracy so the materials provided by Jozefa and Vicki were invaluable in my attempts to get to grips and make sense of the Scott Report and its aim to begin the privatisation and corporatisation of TAFE in the interests of business and the economy and forsaking its charter of public education provider.

I owe thanks to Margaret Smalbil and Beryl Jamieson (deceased) for their clerical assistance, particularly Margaret who word processed all the many early draft chapters.

I wish also to acknowledge Louise Kelaher for her technical editorial work and expertise.

I have indeed been most fortunate in having Dr Rick Flowers from UTS as my main supervisor throughout the thesis preparation. He has been unstinting in his time, support, patience and encouragement. I could not have succeeded without him - my heartfelt thanks Rick.

Finally, I wish to pay tribute to all those adults and children who, over the lifetime I have been a teacher, shaped the beliefs and values I have come to hold dear. In my first teaching appointment after I graduated from my teacher training college in England, I had in my class a seven year old boy named Jonathan. He came to me with a record card from the Infant Department on which the following comment appeared. 'This child will never amount to anything'. Subsequently, Jonathan and I together proved this to be a false prophecy, for Jonathan was a very clever and creative small boy with an enquiring mind.

This is a story drawn from outside the realm of adult education, but I use it here as an example of the many adults enrolled in the Special TAFE programs who had internalised the belief that they would never amount to anything. An outstanding achievement of the Special TAFE access programs was the ways in which they helped supplant feelings and beliefs of worthlessness and victim mentality and implant a positive self-concept and motivation in their place. An outstanding example of this changed attitude is to be found in a letter of a TAFE mature age woman who had accessed a number of TAFE courses before entering university. Joanne's letter of protest to her local politician when her programs were at risk of funding cuts is witness to the capacity of adult education to change a life.(See Appendix ). She is one of many adult learners in TAFE who through participating in courses designed specifically to tackle barriers arising from gender, race and poverty, found a new purpose and direction in life. It is to these students and their gifted teachers that my thesis is dedicated. This is their story, as much as mine.

## ABSTRACT

In this thesis, I present an historical account from the mid 1970s until the mid- 2000s of three programs that were delivered by the Department of Technical and Further Education (TAFE) in the state of New South Wales, Australia. They are (a) an Outreach community education program; (b) an adult literacy program and (c) a women's return-to-work and study program. All three were borne out of educational policies introduced by a newly elected federal Labor Government in 1972, led by Gough Whitlam and spearheaded through the recommendations of the Myer-Kangan Committee Report (1973-4). These programs had in common their emphasis on first and/or second-chance learning opportunities for marginal adults. Furthermore, they shared a broad but clear philosophical commitment to a progressive and humanist approach to teaching that emphasised learners' own life experiences as the starting point and foundation of knowledge and learning.

The significance of my doctoral study should be understood against a backdrop in which over the last fifteen years there have been substantial shifts in philosophical and policy approaches by different governments. There was once much to admire in these programs because they were overtly committed to social justice and equality. Today, TAFE has moved in a different direction and away from its commitment to equality of educational opportunity. Instead there is now a stronger policy commitment to vocational outcomes, greater emphasis on youth workplace preparation and training and a user-pays philosophy.

It is one thing to espouse a commitment to social justice and equity in adult education, it is another to develop and deliver strategies that realise it. In my thesis I describe and analyse in detail the efforts of frontline teachers to do this. I draw heavily on my experience as someone who has developed curriculum materials and engaged in classroom teaching across all three programs over a period of three decades. The rich and analytical description that I present offers insights into the possibilities for frontline teachers of developing and delivering what I call transformative education.

I present case studies from the three programs which describe and analyse the nature of teaching strategies that led to transformative learning. I place value on building theoretical insights about teaching in a bottom-up perspective by critically discussing the details of curriculum and teaching-in-action. Having said that I value a bottom-up process of theory development, I should state the major bodies of literature and educational philosophies that I draw on include progressive schooling, radical adult education, feminism, and humanist developmental psychology.

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