

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

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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 19th and early 20th 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.

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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.

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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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CHAPTER 1

Research Focus

Introduction

My thesis is a self-reflective narrative about my life as a teacher and adult educator. It is garnered from my personal observations, pedagogical insights, political adherences and professional practice over three decades in the New South Wales system of technical and further education system, or TAFE NSW, as it is more commonly known. Furthermore it is historical research in which I located and studied a wide range of teaching materials, policy and evaluation reports (most of which were unpublished) and drew on interviews with TAFE teachers and managers.

The focus of my research is on three programs targeting marginal adults. The programs were introduced into TAFE NSW in the mid to late 1970s and were in response to a call for TAFE to broaden its role from principally one of training apprentices for industry requirements, to create general educational opportunities for adults wanting to undertake bridging courses as the first step on a pathway to enrolling in accredited mainstream TAFE vocational courses. These programs became known as 'Special,' and they differed from those in mainstream departments because their emphasis was on adults who had previously been denied or had missed out on first- or second-chance education. An outstanding feature of the *Special Programs* was their preoccupation with social justice and the equal rights of every adult to education, irrespective of their economic status, gender, race, geographical or social location, literacy and/or numeracy levels, or ability.

The first program to be launched in 1976 was known as *Outreach*. It catered for adults in communities who wished to improve their education, but were not qualified or unable to attend a technical college. It had the unique function of reaching beyond traditional methods of enrolling in TAFE courses. Instead its program planners and teachers went into local neighbourhoods and communities to discover what people desired and wished to learn and consulting with leaders and representatives of local organizations. This consultation process included the formation of local citizen groups with a common goal of improving their knowledge and understanding of an issue of relevance in their particular location. This might be the provision of English language teaching for employment, or introductory child-care skills, oral history for the elderly in nursing homes. Courses would differ in content depending upon whether the participants were resident in metropolitan, regional or remote parts of New South Wales. The task of the Outreach coordinators in TAFE colleges was to help set up programs, recruit teachers with the requisite knowledge and skills and ensure the smooth running and administration of each course.

The second program, and the one most closely allied to my own work as a feminist radical teacher, was designed specifically for mature-age women wishing to return to work and/or study and to update their skills in line with the new work-related technology. Although there were several policy and program initiatives when the TAFE NSW Women's Coordination Unit came into being in 1982, largely as a result of lobbying by feminist organisations (Eisenstein 1996), I will be concentrating on one particular program entitled, *New Opportunities for Women* or N.O.W. as it was popularly known. This is because it is a prime example of a program which had as its main aim, equality of opportunity for women and which perhaps most of all other TAFE initiatives, deepened my awareness and understanding of the complex issues and barriers facing older women in their necessity and desire to re-enter the workforce. It demonstrated that in relation to women's liberation, the personal was indeed political.

The third program is something of a hybrid since, although it met the criteria of improving access and opportunity for marginal adults, it was located

within an existing mainstream section of TAFE. This was *Adult Basic Education* which was a part of the then School of General Studies. *Reading and Writing for Adults*, or R.A.W.F.A., was designed to improve the literacy and/or numeracy skills of illiterate or semi-literate adults. It was not work-related but open to any adult who felt in need of extra help and support.

All of the above programs and my close association and involvement with them happened during an era of great hope and optimism in Australia's national life when, after twenty three years (1949-1972) of Liberal National coalition rule under Robert Menzies. Menzies was finally defeated in the national election of 1972 led by Gough Whitlam a social democrat in essence, whose vision for the nation stressed the place of education in bringing about economic and social change. The Department of Technical and Further Education became instrumental in unlocking the gates of adult education for people who previously had been denied entry because they failed to meet formal entry requirements for mainstream study.

I entered the TAFE NSW system in 1975 as a teacher in the Child-Care Studies section of the Department of General Studies at Randwick technical college in metropolitan Sydney. However, I was drawn to the new Outreach section and in 1977 effected a transfer there as a part-time teacher. My first role as an Outreach teacher was to join a colleague in canvassing local residents on nearby housing estate to find out how many housebound young women there were in high rise flats with a view to establishing a support and information program that could be of assistance to them in getting back into TAFE study.

The college was located in a highly populated migrant area and there was a settlement camp for Vietnamese immigrants and refugees in the vicinity. There was also a highly visible and much used neighbourhood centre which was an important contact point between the workers there and we in Outreach. Usually before any program was officially approved and funded a great deal of social action research preceded it.

Epistemological orientation

When I first began my doctoral research I was haunted for many months by the problem of how I could possibly weave together the various strands of my teaching experience into a coherent whole. I considered my abilities more practical than theoretical and so lacked confidence. However, I was encouraged by reading what Ian Martin considered relevant knowledge in considering the future of adult education as a discipline. He argued for a different kind of research from the more usual academic model, one based on the real, lived experiences of teachers at the coal-face and describing: 'What they have worked for, lived through [and] what this has done to them' (1992: 17). In particular, my attention was drawn to Martin's last few words: 'and what this has done to them.' They suggested to me a number of different connotations and interpretations, for no teacher works in a vacuum sealed off from the political, bureaucratic and dominant discourses that help determine how they must plan and carry out their work and which have negative, as well as positive effects on how teachers feel about their work (see Clemans and Seddon 2000, Black 2012). I make no bones that the type of knowledge I value – in other words my interpretive epistemological orientation – are the narrative stories and accounts of teaching and learning practice from students, teachers and managers.

Throughout the late 1970s, 1980s and into the early 1990s, I was indeed fortunate to have one of the most deeply absorbing, satisfying and socially useful jobs as a TAFE teacher, working almost entirely with individuals in disadvantaged circumstances. These included both men and women and at one stage I was teaching male and female inmates in maximum security correctional centres.

I spent four years teaching mature-age women who wished to re-enter the workforce or engage in further study. Most had been early school leavers who had given up short-term employment to marry and raise children. The women's work and study re-entry programs in NSW TAFE were designed to give them a second chance to up-skill in new technologies and improve their

confidence and self-esteem with the encouragement of empathetic teachers. I worked, too, amongst functionally and semi-literate adults to develop their literacy skills both in groups and on a one-one-basis. In so doing I witnessed first-hand the effects of class, race, gender, and other kinds of discrimination which inhibit lives and damage feelings of self-worth in dealing with the affairs of the world on an equal footing.

The theoretical influences arising from my exposure at various stages of my life to Marxism, feminism, psychoanalysis, humanistic psychology and radical education, have caused me to consider adult teaching and learning from many different perspectives including the realisation of how powerful and vested interests underwrite structural inequalities. Equally I have seen oppressed lives changed for the better by education and inspired teaching. So, even though I recognise the damage caused to both individual lives and society by oppression and exploitation, I do not treat learners as victims. I accept their marginal status, but only insofar as it provides opportunities for challenge and change in the way they regard their lives. There exists in the downtrodden and outcast the seeds of resilience, courage and hope. The task of teaching is to nurture these qualities through critical enquiry and experienced-based teaching and learning, as I hope my dissertation will demonstrate.

Abraham Maslow (1962) and Carl Rogers (1969) emphasised in their theories of humanistic psychology the drive of human beings towards satisfaction of certain basic needs. Affect and emotion have an important place in teaching those whom society has neglected or rejected from mainstream participation. Teaching students who had been denied a meaningful role in society and had suffered the effects of discriminatory attitudes, was both challenging and sometimes humbling, particularly when they changed their perceptions of themselves and began to move forward in life. It is for these students, as much as to the dedicated efforts of their TAFE teachers who motivated them, which are the bones on which I flesh out the dominant themes and issues of my thesis.

Even as I write this, I am reminded of an inmate serving a long sentence in a maximum correctional centre where I taught. He never divulged nor did I seek to know the nature of his crime. What I most remember about this man was not so much the depth of his degradation or despair, but his determination and willpower to educating himself even though there was no hope of release for many years to come. Every week he waited at the gate of his cell block, books at the ready for when I arrived. This man's story, like many other adult students from disadvantaged situations, illustrates the importance of providing appropriate adult education opportunities for those who missed out at an earlier stage in their lives.

The stories and experiences of teachers and students who participated in the TAFE NSW Special Programs are an important record in the history and development of adult education in Australia, all the more so, given that the chief discourse in adult education in TAFE in the twenty-first century is what one commentator has described as a:

hegemony of technical rationality and narrowly conceived and economic forms of vocationalism and competence in which we seem to know the cost of everything and the value of nothing (Martin *and* Allen 1992: 15).

This sentiment is echoed in the mission statement for TAFE NSW in a directive issued by Marie Persson in 2008, the then Deputy Director-General of TAFE and Community Education which was headed: *TAFENSW: Doing business in the 21st century* (Persson 2008). Doing business substituting 'doing' education! At the time of putting the finishing touches to my thesis, the barbarians have breached the adult education citadel and captured a public institution for privatisation and profit. Once again the economically and educationally disadvantaged have been marginalised and excluded from the new-look TAFE system seeking a competitive edge, as they were pre-Kangan. Their former teachers have been required to adopt a changed approach to their roles too so that they are now more commonly referred to as 'trainers' doing TAFE business and their professional status downgraded. In this changed workplace and atmosphere they must spend inordinate amounts of time form-filling to meet auditing and

assessment requirements, while their real work of teaching and education is downplayed.

Two types of narrative: self-reflective and historical

My data is constituted by accounts of who I taught, what I taught, how I taught, what policies at the time influenced my teaching. These accounts are rich and detailed descriptions of the teaching materials I developed, the students – their class backgrounds, labour market positions, their gendered status, and the barriers the students faced in returning or commencing TAFE study. I describe the classroom teaching strategies I deployed and how they were received; and the philosophies that underpinned my teaching practices. I describe and discuss the relationships between myself as teacher and the students. I make a point of not only describing materials and practices but also feelings and values; for example, anxieties and insecurities of adult students in TAFE education programs.

There are various methodological approaches that I could have deployed. They include oral history, memory work, auto-ethnography, self-study, autobiographical analysis and self-reflective narrative. I will describe and discuss each and explain how and why I chose to deploy two types of narratives, namely self-reflective and historical.

Did I deploy oral history?

If oral history is defined as a researcher interviewing or talking to others – be they other teachers, TAFE managers and policy people, students – then my thesis clearly is not predominantly that. This thesis is a study of Barbara Bee's teaching practice, her thinking and reflections on teaching practice, and what she learnt. I refer to myself in the third-person intentionally here to emphasise the focus towards self-study.

Did I deploy memory work?

My accounts are coloured heavily by my memories and to a lesser extent by the memories of colleagues. I use the word 'coloured' to acknowledge that memories produce accounts that are subjective and may represent invented fictions. But what I want to emphasise is that I do not rely only on memories. I do have extensive documentation of a wide range of curriculum and teaching materials. Some of these materials were ones that developed and used. Others were archival materials that I located in libraries and through colleagues. Furthermore, in the 1980s and 1990s I published two book chapters, a journal paper, and had three teaching manuals published by TAFE.

Did I do auto-ethnography?

If this denotes attempts to prepare detached accounts as from a fly-on-the-wall, then I did not. I was partisan, subjective and impassioned. I focused on how I made sense and meaning of my teaching, of student responses and policy interventions. For ethnographers, rich descriptions form a central part of the data. In my case, I prepared detailed descriptions of particular incidents but my emphasis was less on analysing rich accounts and more on pedagogical processes and policy interventions.

Was it self-study?

If self-study is defined as a mixture of a autobiography and memoir, then to a large extent I did do this. 'If feminism is concerned with social change, self-study as methodology is concerned with personal change' (Gamelin 2005: 185). I see self-study and creativity as a way of transgressing the traditional boundaries of expression in academia, and view feminism as the political tool that makes this possible. I was interested in my processes of personal change and so I discuss at length my doubts and worries. The travel through self-study taught me that vulnerability is the 'place', the stance from which I write and teach. Ruth Behar captured my sentiments well. 'When you write vulnerably, others respond vulnerably ... To write vulnerably is like a Pandora's box. Who can say what will

come flying out' (in Mitchell, O'Reilly-Scanlon and Weber 2005: 185). But I was concerned less about my personal change and more about the social change that NSW TAFE courses during the 1980s and 1990s were bringing about. And so in this respect I deployed much more than self-study.

Did I undertake autobiographical analysis?

Amongst the many academics who define biographical, autobiographical and narrative methodologies, those who have had the greatest influence on my research include Jane Thompson (1997), Jean Barr (1999), Claudia Mitchell, Kathleen O'Reilly Scanlon & Sandra Webber (2005), and Barbara Merrill & Linden West (2009), all who were strong advocates for autobiographical research methodology. I present an autobiographical description and analysis not only of my working life but also of the ways in which my family, schools, and various communal living arrangements influenced by pedagogical philosophical perspectives. I present an autobiographical account trying to understand how I became a Friern educator.

Self-reflective narrative

Having said all this, I call my approach a self-reflective narrative because I believe it evokes a more critical approach than the concept of autobiography. In describing and interpreting my teaching work among various disadvantaged minorities in TAFE, I do not intend to do so in any self-referential way, although my thesis is essentially a personal account. My purpose is to imbue significant historical events with fresh insights and inferences, because the story of the Special Programs in NSW TAFE is too important to pass unremarked into the mists of history; at least in my judgement. A workplace training narrative may be the dominant mode of operation in TAFE as I write this account, but it was not always the case and due recognition should be given to the overall contribution made by technical and further education to the concept of equality and social justice, in which, for a few short years at least, TAFE had a commanding advantage. In deploying narrative approaches that are oriented towards self-

reflection and autobiography any doubts and misgivings which I have entertained, have been allayed by reading Mitchell, O'Reilly-Scanlon and Weber's and edited collection on methodologies for autobiographical and self-study in teaching (2005). Their book addresses issues of teaching identity and 're-visioning, pedagogical spaces for studying our teaching selves' (2005: 6). In addition, when I read Jane Thompson's anguished, passionate lament for the re-visioning of radical education in the lives of working class women (Thompson 1997) I felt sisterly solidarity, confidence and conviction in stating my own position and identifying my own concerns about what I believe to be the parlous state of adult education in my former places of employment. I was further encouraged by the biographical-based research of Barr (1999) reflecting on the meanings she had previously attributed to programs for women, which, with hindsight, she set out to re-examine from a more critical, self-reflective position. Merrill and West spoke about the importance of 'bringing us into the text' (2009: 4). They argued that we cannot write the stories of other people 'without reflecting our own histories, social and cultural locations as well as subjectivities and values' (2009: 4). It seemed the time was right for applying this kind of investigative process which I value and I felt a strong affinity with Barr and Thompson, both women of my era whose work I greatly admire and whose commitment to equal opportunities in working women's lives I share.

Warning of the dangers of hesitating too long in order to be certain about what you want to say before you commit your thoughts to paper Christa Wolf commented:

You can sit to your dying day, recollecting and taking notes, living and reflecting on the process. But that can be dangerous. One has to draw the line somewhere before one reaches the end of one's rope (cited in Barr 1999: 21).

Like Barr and Wolf I have had more than my share of hesitations and doubts about my ability to express my pedagogical thoughts, ideas and beliefs and this dissertation journey has been at times difficult and precarious. Sometimes I have been unable to write, so fierce was my inner critic demanding to know: Who do I think I am? and by what right?

The most helpful story about managing self-doubts was written by another doctoral candidate, Anastasia Kamanos Gamelin (2005) who tells how she planned the steps along the way to writing her doctorate. She set out:

to mark stations during my personal and public journey as a female academic, artist and educator and to illustrate points of digression and intercession, between lived experiences, cultural knowledge and academic ways of knowing (2005: 183).

Gamelin describes in painful detail her self-doubts and lack of confidence each time she had to commence writing, citing how her ideas never felt good enough and her experiences unrefined and unsubtle, 'like dragging something up from the depths of the ocean floor with all the vegetation, sea urchins and moss still hugging it for nourishment' (2005: 189). She relates how her feelings of fear and inadequacy return time and time again as she asks herself: 'Do I really know what I know? Who do you think you are?' There are however, parts of her life and how she has interpreted them in her doctorate where she can assert with absolute confidence, as can I: 'Of this much I am sure' (2005: 188).

Here I stand, I can no other

During the course of my dissertation I have tried to make sense and meaning of the connections between my life experiences and the continuing commitment I have to a model of adult teaching and learning which aims to strengthen individuals and build social capital. Like Jane Thompson, my pedagogy has its roots firmly anchored in radical education philosophy and practice. In the classroom I try to cultivate critical intelligence, emancipate lives from ignorance and oppression and develop useful knowledge. In what follows, I want to present in fine detail how I have planned and taught adults whose lives, like mine, were inhibited and restricted by lack of educational opportunities and for whom adult education opened up a second chance for success. It is these students' stories and experiences, as much as my own and those of the dedicated and skilled TAFE teachers who supported their efforts that

I wish to reveal and analyse during my thesis. I believe what bound them together was an allegiance to the principle of educational equality and social justice. This thesis is a reflection of my pedagogical foundation honed over decades of grass-roots teaching and planning. but not, I trust, in any self-reverential or narcissistic way because like Jean Barr, I want to remain both critical *and* personal throughout (Barr 1999: 4).

Research aims

- Relate the subjective history, my story, and life experiences as a teacher and how they have shaped my epistemological beliefs.
- Document the history and evolution of adult vocational education at a particular period in the NSW system of technical and further education (TAFE).
- Demonstrate the link between the doctrine of equality and the rise of identity politics ,policies and programs for marginal adult groups.
- Affirm the primacy of subjective, experience-based teaching and learning as the foundation for knowledge and transformational change in individuals and society.
- Critically analyse and assess the pedagogical effects of the shift in TAFE's former role and status as a public provider of second-chance adult education to that of a privatised training and entrepreneurial, user-pays organisation.

Formative influences

I am a former teacher and adult educator in the seventh decade of my life. I began teaching in 1959 and finally ceased in 2012. I was born in 1938 in the Midland city of Coventry, England, at the commencement of the second world

war. Coventry was destroyed one particular November by wave after wave of aerial German bombing and I can still recall, as young as I was, being wakened each night and rushed to an air-raid shelter crammed with neighbours at the bottom of our garden. We lived across the railway from a former car manufacturing factory which had had been converted to producing armaments. This meant we were close targets for regular bombing raids day and night as was most of Coventry, particularly during the November raids when the city was blitzed to ruins.

Until I was thirteen I was an only child of a mother who worked in a factory during the war and a father who was drafted into the Merchant Navy, while I was still a baby. I did not see him again until I was five years old when he was granted shore leave after his ship went down in the Atlantic Ocean. By the time I was nine, two years after his demobilisation, my father died from a brain tumour and I was neither allowed to visit him in hospital, nor attend his funeral. After his death my mother raised me with the help of my grandmother and relatives. My grandmother took care of me while my mother was out working in with her sisters, my aunts, in factories. Both my mother, and her mother before her, had worked in factories weaving name labels for clothing. My mother remarried when I was thirteen and we moved further along the same street but into a slightly larger house with its own bathroom. My half-sister arrived soon after.

Like Jean Barr (1999) I, too, was a beneficiary of free state schooling, re-constituted orange juice, a bottle of school milk and a daily dose of cod liver oil with malt. These were provided to all British school children by the State during the war years. Unlike Barr's parents, neither my mother nor my stepfather recognised the importance of education. Despite being successful in passing the eleven-plus examination, due mostly, I now recognise, to the coaching efforts of a dedicated teacher in my final year at the primary school, I was made to leave school at sixteen and find a job. My stepfather, in particular, informed the principal of the high school I attended, and where I showed academic prowess in subjects like history, English and civics, that it was a waste of time educating

girls and so I was not allowed to go into the sixth form nor try for a university place. This sharpened my determination and supporting myself financially, I was accepted into a residential teacher training college in 1957, when I was nineteen and I never returned home. There I discovered a passion for teaching, which, despite bureaucratic setbacks, I have never lost.

In his doctorate reflecting on the formative influences that shaped his academic life, Stephen Black has commented: 'It was a long time [...] before I could articulate this 'sense' into any form of academic or political positioning' (Black 2001: 9). The 'sense' he referred to was his developing consciousness and unease about inequality and injustice in the English class-based education system.

By contrast, I realised from quite an early age that class mattered greatly in England and that education was geared to keeping you in your place. In primary school I had become friends with a girl who came from a wealthy background. She was forbidden to invite me back to her home after the first occasion I visited because her mother realised I came from 'the wrong side of the tracks' I understood at the time, young as I was, that there was a wide social gap between the home environment of my friend and my own.

Also, my experiences at the girls grammar school I attended brought home to me that I did not belong. I was not acceptable to the girls in my class, who hailed from comfortable homes in the leafier suburbs of Coventry and whose parents expected them to excel in life, although females. They wore the approved but expensive school uniform, owned hockey sticks and tennis gear and some even had their own pony. By contrast, I was a scholarship girl who wore a school uniform donated by the Salvation Army, my sports gear was borrowed, and when my school shoes finally wore out in my fourth year, they had to be cobbled together because there was no money to replace them. I felt keenly the disgrace of poverty and of not belonging.

The school principal held that girls had only three possible career options which carried any merit as far as she was concerned. These were, in descending order of approval, teaching, nursing or secretarial work. By the time I was fifteen I clearly understood that, while I might not entirely escape my working class roots, if I succeeded academically, I could at least move up a step on the class ladder through excelling educationally. This became my escape and a way out from my disadvantaged circumstances. Once I left home to begin my teacher training and thence to my first teaching appointment in the north of England, I never returned to Coventry, my home town.

I think, too, it partly explains why, throughout my professional life as both a teacher and adult educator, I have been drawn to working with marginal adults, children and communities-those existing at the edges of mainstream society. The aristocracy of birth may be absent in Australia, but the existence of the aristocracy of wealth allows inequality and privilege to prevail, a clear example being the division between public and private schools.

For a short period when I couldn't find a teaching position in a public school, I worked part-time in a Great Public School for boys. Here my experiences confirmed that class, race and gender discrimination were well and truly alive in these private enclaves of privilege and patronage. Despite the image such schools seek to convey of equality, service and high moral values, they perpetuate inequality, social division and elitism.

The influences shaping my pedagogy

My teaching career spans half a century in which I have worked with children, tertiary students and adult learners formally and informally. I commenced teaching in England in 1959 and the last class I taught in the University of Technology, Sydney in 2012, was for post-graduate students in the faculty of Adult Education. I have always had a deep love and sense of purpose in teaching and throughout my professional career, it has afforded me great

satisfaction and happiness. I feel I have been fortunate in my vocation, which was first suggested to me by an inspirational history/English teacher in secondary school. Looking back, I suspect she recognised a potential in me that I did not yet realise I possessed. I recall her with gratitude and affection.

In the foreword to a book about inspiring teachers edited by Andrew Metcalfe and Ann Game, Michel Serres has observed: how 'we feel a special gratitude to those extraordinary pedagogues who make it possible for us to enter new worlds (2006: ix). That particular teacher did indeed put wings under my feet to look beyond the restrictions of my home environment and to aim higher. I, too, began to imagine that I could become a teacher. I am certain too, that my life history has shaped my preference for teaching marginal groups, as well as making them the focus of this thesis and writing about their own efforts to transform their lives, as mine was transformed.

The years I spent teaching in technical colleges in New South Wales (TAFE NSW), were spent predominantly with adults seeking a chance at education, having missed out when they were younger. Amongst them were women who had been early school leavers, refugees and immigrants who needed to undertake basic education, or improve their English for employment purposes, adults who were geographically or socially isolated, adults incarcerated in correctional institutions, and those for whom lack of functional literacy was an impediment in their lives. My interest and commitment to working class lives, is also reflected in Barbara Merrill's account of how she developed an interest in working with marginal students (2009: 5). Our backgrounds are identical; female, working class, and drawn to Marxist and feminist ideologies and politics in our younger years. Like her, I have been drawn to study how class, gender and race intersect to create class division, inequality and social injustice (Merrill 2009: 5).

My prevailing view of adult education is that it should help transform individual lives and help create a more just social order. This conviction has been strengthened by my exposure to Jean Barr (1999), Paulo Freire (1972a, 1972b), bell

hooks (1994), Myles Horton (1990), Lyn Tett (1995) and Jane Thompson (1997). When I first read bell hooks' comments about university teaching, I was deeply moved as well as motivated by her declaration of the classroom as 'the most radical space of possibility' and further on when she declares, she 'celebrate[s] teaching that enables transgressions – a movement against and beyond boundaries' (1994: 12). These words inform and inspire my own epistemology and pedagogical emphases.

The act of teaching has always meant much more than the inculcation and accumulation of factual knowledge and information – whether for lifelong learning or for the preparation of workplace skills. I am driven by the need to awaken in people the realisation of their own potential whatever their circumstances, just as my former high school teacher lifted my gaze beyond a limited horizon. Of all the espoused philosophies of adult education I have consulted in preparing this thesis, none have come closer, nor more forcefully than that of bell hooks, in describing my attitude to teaching marginal individuals and groups. To put it another way in the words of the great German theologian, Martin Luther pronounced in 1521: 'Here I stand. I can no other' (sourced at [www. christianitytoday.com](http://www.christianitytoday.com) accessed 2015).

I moved into adult education after working for eleven years as a primary school teacher, first in the English state school system and then, when I emigrated to Australia, in the New South Wales system of public education, where my teaching appointments were in Sydney. I also worked for seven years in a teacher training college as a lecturer in education and English. Each in its own way, has helped and influenced my conceptual framework of teaching.

Stephen Brookfield (1995) has written that even though teachers may embrace philosophies of teaching through formal instruction

the most deeply embedded in the human psyche are the images, models and conceptions of teaching derived from our own experiences (1994: 4).

Brookfield's assertions ring true in relation to my own memories and experiences of being both a learner and a teacher over the course of my journey. Two probationary teaching experiences which are both still deeply embedded in my psyche, neither one of them positive, helped me to understand what kind of teacher I did not wish to become nor emulate. Both relate to my experiences as a probationary teacher, the first in Sheffield, England, and the second, Sydney, Australia.

Failure to conform (Sheffield, England)

My first position as a qualified primary school teacher was in Sheffield, England. The school to which I was appointed was situated in an affluent suburb where many parents of the children were academics at the nearby university. This was in 1959 and was my first teaching position after graduating from my teacher training college with outstanding results. During my time in college, my lecturer in education had instilled in us a concept of teaching readiness as defined by age, stage, and readiness and had also instilled in me the philosophies of progressive educators with their emphasis on child-centred teaching. However, when I began teaching in the Sheffield school, I found an environment which was anything but central to children's stage of development, or their needs and interests. Quite the opposite. From the minute the children moved out of the infants department and into the junior school, the pressure to excel began, the ultimate goal being success in the Eleven Plus examination and selection into the most prestigious selective schools. With the constant, pervasive threat of demotion, the children were graded A, B or C and were constantly assessed, and tested, by which results they were moved up or down a grade.

The principal was under severe pressure from both the local education authority and parents to maintain the school's high academic success rate and this created a prevailing atmosphere of tension among teachers and fear in children. Within a few weeks of taking over the class, it was made clear to me

that my group of seven year olds had better quickly learn to adapt to an academic and authoritarian regime. With limited opportunities to interact with the children and form a positive learning atmosphere, I quickly realised I had no chance of succeeding as a teacher in this hot-house environment. The kinds of educational activities, which I enjoyed teaching and thought children should have as a normal part of their schooling such as creative writing, story-telling, arts and crafts, music and movement were not considered of sufficient academic value to be given a place on the timetable. I resigned my position before the end of my probation, much to the displeasure of the local inspector. The more serious consequence of my action was that with an incomplete probation I was not eligible to apply for another position in my immediate region.

Failure to conform again: Sydney, Australia

The second failure to complete my teaching probation was in a public school, in Sydney, Australia. This happened in 1965, after I had emigrated to Australia. This school was totally different from the environment in Sheffield. Situated in an inner-west suburb of Sydney, the school catered for the children of Greek and Italian parents, the sons and daughters of post-war immigrants and whose mother tongue was other than English. The children frequently had learning difficulties because of their lack of fluency and there were no special language teachers to support them. The principal and his two male deputies had done their teacher-education qualification immediately after they returned from service in the Second World War. This entailed a shorter study-time than usual in order to quickly increase the supply of teachers. In other words, they were 'emergency-trained teachers' and I soon realised that the prevailing form of control and discipline in the school was similar to that of an army boot camp – lots of marching, standing to attention, saluting the flag and singing the English National Anthem. Children were constantly shouted at and threatened and boys were subject to caning. Like their English counterparts, great attention was paid to tests, assessments and grades, and the school was rife with both racial and

gender discrimination with the Greek and Italian boys most often being singled out for detention or caning for the smallest infringement of the rules.

Teachers were required to fill in a weekly program book detailing exactly which exercise and from which textbook they would be teaching and at every hour of the day. I tried hard to defend my nine-year old girls against constant failure in weekly tests prepared by those who taught the classes of boys. These boys were coached with the correct answers beforehand so that they always outshone the girls. It was impossible to develop confidence in the girls who intuited they could not compete equally with the boys. I found myself constantly being reprimanded for not conforming to the principal's demands and so one day in which he called me into his office and called me to order, I left the school grounds and did not return. This was the second time I failed to complete my teaching probationary year.

In hindsight, these two negative experiences of trying to teach in schools concerned only with academic standards and authoritarian methods were useful in so far as they cemented my epistemological beliefs in child-centred education and progressivism. In three other schools where I was privileged to teach, two in the UK and a demonstration school in Sydney, my beliefs were vindicated. These particular schools, contrary to those above, were vibrant, dynamic and creative learning centres which were child-centred and administered by humane and caring principals. They did not stay cloistered in their offices but were out and about in the school and classrooms, speaking to teachers and interacting with children and parents, no matter how large their establishments. Innovations were encouraged, creativity and imagination were nurtured and valued for their own sake and allowances were made for socio-economic and cultural differences. The schools were authentic communities of learners, and teaching in them was inspiring, highly motivating exciting and rewarding.

The difference between those who believed in conservative and more authoritarian methods of educating children and those who espoused progressive pedagogy is well explained by Leila Berg, *Risinghill: Death of a*

comprehensive school (1972). She wrote a powerful and moving account of one dedicated educator's attempts to radically change a destructive and hopeless comprehensive school – Raisinghill in England - into a vibrant multicultural community. Michael Douane was a Quaker who became the Headmaster of Raisinghill, when it was known by the local education authority and the neighbourhood as one of the most notorious and racially divided and divisive comprehensive schools in North Islington, London. Academic standards were abysmal, truancy and delinquency rife, teachers dispirited and parent involvement negligible. Douane gradually transformed Raisinghill it into a model of multi-racial harmony, outstanding academic achievement, and parental and community involvement, but not without the resignation of teachers who did not support his approach. Thatcherite Conservative policies finally forced the closure of the school and Douane moved on. Berg's book is about how vision, dedication in the face of overwhelming odds can and did transform a school's culture. I did not know of the school's existence even though I was teaching in a junior school just a short distance away from Raisinghill and having my own battles with uncooperative marginalised children suffering extreme poverty, hunger, slum living conditions and, in some cases, neglect and abuse. This was at the beginning of the 1960s when racial tension between Greek and Turkish Cypriots spilled over into clashes and riots in the streets and fights were common in the school playground. I marvelled at what Michael Douane achieved in his few short years as principal. When I read Berg's account of Douane's struggles and how he inspired his pupils to engage academically, her book became a guide, almost a bible, when I doubted my own pedagogical methods in teaching disturbed children. Raisinghill was proof to me of how humanistic methods of teaching and learning can make a school a centre of excellence in every sense of the word.

Mature-age entrance to university

In 1966 I applied and was accepted as a mature-age student during the first such intake at Sydney University. I compare my reactions to this hallowed place of academia with those of Barbara Merrill (2009) who attended the University of Warwick in the UK. and felt out of place. Like Merrill and for that matter also Jean Barr (1999), I was overwhelmed by the prevailing middle-class culture at Sydney University and the privileged lives of many of its students. Like the above I had feelings of inferiority and of not really belonging in a university environment.

Most difficult of all was when I began to study in the Faculty of Education and I found it very difficult indeed to relate academic constructs of philosophy and psychology compared with the real life of the classroom. They were too far removed from my experience of education, and I could not see their relevance to my understanding and practice as an educator. The notable exception was a course in developmental psychology and taught by Marie Neale, a brilliant academic who was also an outstanding tertiary teacher. She not only had a thorough command of her subject, but could make it live in the minds of her students. She spoke about the many different ways humans grow and develop at different ages and stages of their lives and how different socio-cultural environments influence cognition, social and emotional skills and physical maturity.

One of the theorists she spoke about in depth was the Danish ego-psychologist, Erik Erikson, whom I chose as the subject of my my Bachelor honours thesis. His ground-breaking studies in identity formation, particularly among gifted adolescents, piqued my curiosity. Erikson's view of human nature was so much more hopeful and less deterministic than Freud's, even though Erikson was a Freudian psychoanalyst. In part, my interest in Erikson's theories was a personal response to a dysfunctional adolescence caused by a bullying, repressive stepfather, which had left me lacking in confidence and timid. I suspected I had become emotionally repressed despite appearances to the contrary. Only in the confines of a classroom and with children did I feel at home and confident of my abilities. However, I was greatly helped and encouraged by

the comments Erikson made in relation to the capacity of human beings to both heal and recover equilibrium after adversity. He wrote: 'There is little that cannot be remedied later, there is much that can be prevented from happening at all' (1959: 104). These words leapt off the page and became a kind of mantra.

They have also continued over many years to influence how I respond to teaching students who may present as damaged, difficult, uncommunicative, or lacking confidence. Age and stage theories are no longer dominant discourses in human developmental theories, but I have found their insights continue to be most useful and relevant when teaching adult learners, be they marginal or mainstream. I remain acutely conscious of how past experiences of life may have shaped learners' self-beliefs and on occasions have given rise to negative responses in the learning environment.

Fomenting revolt

I am comfortable with critically reflexive and experiential methods of adult education and believe I 'fit' within the psychotherapeutic and humanistic traditions of adult education, finding significance in highlighting human experience as the fulcrum for my teaching and as a means of uncovering new pathways for adult learners to travel, reflecting and analysing past events and their reactions to these. I believe self-reflection and reasoned analysis can help prevent states of victimhood from prevailing amongst people long used to their welfare status. It is possible for them to gradually internalise the belief: 'it doesn't have to continue like this.' Such a realisation can encourage learners to adopt a more optimistic outlook for studying. There is strong evidence for this in the adults who are the subjects of case studies in the three programs described in this thesis, particularly for mature-age women who enrolled in a return to a work and study program called New Opportunities for Women (N.O.W.). More than any other group, many N.O.W. students overcame their supposed limitations, developed their strengths and changed attitudes.

Teacher training and education

In the early 1970s I was persuaded to move from school teaching into teacher training. This came about due to an English lecturer at Sydney Teachers College, who regularly brought groups of trainees to observe my lessons in a demonstration school. He explained that while the majority of the teaching staff in the college had high school teaching backgrounds his particular section was seeking someone whose teaching background and experience was in primary schools.

It was during the six years I taught both in the Education and English departments at the college that I was exposed to Marxism, feminism and radical concepts of education relating to class, gender and race. During the same period I moved into a communal household with nine adults and two children. These arrangements became popular during the seventies decade in which there were widespread changes in Australian culture and society which had an impact on education too. Radical education in Australia was given a spurt of support with the visit in 1972 of two American Marxist educators to Australia, Sam Bowles and Herbert Gintis. They contended that schooling was a reflection of underlying power relations in society and that no amount of progressive pedagogy would succeed in a capitalist system (Bowles and Gintis 1976). Indeed, they argued that doing progressive pedagogy would be counter-productive.

For practising teachers who loved their work, as I did, this was a depressing message but Bowles and Gintis were lauded by young, Marxist academics who in the oft-quoted words attributed to Antonio Gramsci 'began the long march through the institutions.' These Marxist academics were in Schools of Philosophy in the universities of Sydney, NSW and Macquarie respectively. I came on to the scene after Bowles and Gintis had visited Sydney in 1972. I can, nonetheless, recollect the energy that their visit inspired.

Despite second-wave feminism, anti-Vietnam protests and the radicalism

of the 1960s, things had been morbid for so long in the Australian scene. For example, Bill (W.F.) Connell was a guiding force in School of Education at the University of Sydney and he had a liberal view exemplified by his doctoral thesis on Matthew Arnold and his book *Reshaping Australian Education 1960-1985* (1993). My honours' year in 1970 at Sydney University was not the most intellectually stimulating experience I thought it might be. One of my students at Sydney Teacher's College failed his first economics essay in his Graduate Diploma Teaching when his lecturer wrote on his paper 'there is no such thing as Marxist economics,' which kind of sums up the tenor of teacher education in the late sixties.

In this time, I was despondent about the outdated methods of teaching and learning deployed in NSW schools. I remember turning to Ivan Illich's anarchist tome *Deschooling Society* (1973) where he argued that like the buildings of the institutional church and religion were obsolete because the spirit had gone out into the world; so schools as institutional buildings and keepers of knowledge were redundant. He proposed sort of pop-up learning sites which could service local needs, then close. Bowles and Gintis came like a breath of fresh air with their radicalism. I remember just how mono-cultural Australia was at that time; how gender stereotypes prevailed; and the conservative social clubs of the Returned Soldier's Leagues dominated country towns and city suburbs.

The formation of a radical education collective, of which I was a member, grew out of the Bowles and Gintis visit and resulted in the publication of a new magazine devoted to Marxist education. Known as *Radical Education Dossier*, or *RED*, it was published on a monthly basis by a small collective of university academics, school teachers and students to promote and raise educational issues on Marxist themes. When RED began, feminist women, some avowedly Marxist; and others like me, more culturally attracted to changes in schools, jumped on the band-wagon and wrote articles in RED about gender, race and class in curricula.

Looking back now, I think I was never a true Marxist. Academics like Bob

Mackie, Kevin Harris , Bob Boughton, Peter Stevens and Jim Young were 'pure' Marxists while Michael Matthew was more into the theological implications of Marxism and liberation theology hence the attraction to Freire. Rachel Sharpe and Carol O'Donnell, amongst the female contributors to RED, were also unadulterated Marxists, while other feminists like me, were less into anti-schooling and more into radical transformation through curriculum reform drawing on anti-sexist, anti-racist books and child-centred teaching methods. Even the breakaway progressive primary and secondary schools which sprouted up in Sydney at that time - Currambena, Yinbilliko, Westhead, Beecroft and Sydney Co-operative, Progressive Primary School - were more about kids' and parents' rights to be free from authoritarian strictures in traditional schools and to experiment with democratic methods and decision-making. They were inspired more by the ideas of John Dewey than Karl Marx.

In hindsight, I went along for the ride and I suspect others did at the time. Abolishing schools was the brainchild of academics who never set foot outside the university and did not see the good things schools could bring to working-class kids who needed a kick-start in improving their lives. They argued that schools reflected and reinforced the class system - the rich to rule and the poor to serve. You could certainly see this philosophy at work in the British education system. In the UK there was a clear hierarchy in the schooling system. At the top of this hierarchy were private but strangely branded as 'Public Schools' like Eton and Winchester. Then there were the more progressive, but still essentially private public schools like Dartington Hall, Abbotsholme and Bedales. They were followed by the grammar schools for the middle classes, and at the bottom rung were the comprehensive and secondary modern schools for the kids of artisans and labourers. Australia followed the mother country and so our system was similar. I understood why the Marxists opposed the schooling system, and I think this anger fuelled energy and desire to bring about change.

Cultural Literacy

My life in the communal household was busy on several fronts because the house was a focus of political activity and meetings around issues like abortion, uranium, mining, women's rights, communal child-care, trade unionism and radical education. By contrast, in my job at the Teachers College not much changed or was responsive to the new Marxist educational philosophy, except amongst postgraduate students where there began strong protests against the traditional liberal philosophies and received knowledge.

Students began to rebel and refuse to accept what their education lecturers were presenting as fixed and unalterable truths. Questions and issues around class, race and gender began to infiltrate lectures and workshops and at one stage in the Graduate Diploma year there was a lecture-boycott action in which the majority of students stayed away from their classes. In a spirit of unity and agreement with students, a small group of faculty who were permanent but junior members in Education, arranged a series of twice-weekly lunchtime seminars. The series was entitled *Not Only, But Also*, and consisted of speakers who addressed radical, critical concerns in teaching around Marxism, feminism and human rights, including homosexuality and lesbianism. Through participating in these seminars, I became increasingly aware how it felt to be outside the mainstream, or on the fringes of academia and facing censure from the college authorities. I was subject to criticism from the older, senior colleagues in my workplace, both because of my alternative lifestyle and my political affiliations. The judgement was that I was a 'hippy.'

There was little understanding that living in a community was a highly disciplined lifestyle and not hedonistic. There were young children to take into account, many rosters around household duties, childcare, cooking, shopping and cleaning which all involved commitment and time, over and above one's own desires. The personal had become linked to the political and a desire to change from more traditional forms of living as a nuclear family living and cohabitation.

Although I aligned myself with the radical left wing of the graduate students, in the college, my teaching work was predominantly among students preparing to work in primary schools. Amongst these groups who had entered the college straight from high schools, there was less motivation or interest in educational ideas, theirs was a mentality honed by textbook learning and conformity. There were a few outstanding individuals open to new ways of thinking about the purposes of schooling and they made the job of teaching rewarding. These students devoured the additional texts I had read and recommended which were highly critical of schools and traditional knowledge including Herbert Kohl (1968) Ivan Illich (1973) Everitt Reimer (1971) Neill Postman and Harvey Weingartner (1971) Johnathon Kozol (1969) Herbert Ginsberg (1972) and John Holt (1973). But in addition to these educationists, mostly American, there appeared increasing numbers of books coming from teachers in English schools such as Leila Berg (1972) A.S. Neill (1961) Chris Searle (1977) Sylvia Ashton-Warner (1963) and particularly Martin Hoyles ,who edited a seminal collection of radical Marxist essays concerning the relation of class, race and gender to curriculum design and literacy (1977).

However, the book which most set me re-thinking about the teaching and acquisition of literacy, was by a New Zealand teacher who wrote about how she designed culturally appropriate reading primers for a group of young children to enable them to make sense and meaning out of words and actions associated with their Maori culture, rather than impose on them western-style reading books. *Teacher* (1963) is the book Sylvia Ashton-Warner wrote to describe her experiences of teaching Maori children in New Zealand. The children lived in an enclosed community or 'Pa,' and like other indigenous societies, had their own customs and traditions radically different from mainstream society. The children were not shielded from life's events, birth, death, and sometimes violence and drunkenness, yet the only reading books available for the children to read were written for, and from, the experiences of middle class, white children in England. Ashton-Warner (now deceased) discarded these and set about compiling her own local reading resources based on what she called key words and themes based on children's understandings of life. She pre-dated Paulo Freire who

subsequently developed what he called generative words to work thematically with adult illiterates (Freire 1972b). The stories and experiences which Ashton-Warner listened to demonstrated how even though young, these children were not sheltered from the more intense and sometimes violent aspects of adult life in Maori society.

Paulo Freire's body of work was more extensive than Ashton-Warner's and became much more widely known. In reflecting on Freire's works concerning education and literacy as essentially a liberation project designed to conscientize Brazilian peasants to rise up against their oppression by rich landowners, I recognised there were certain links or similarities between Freire's teaching methods and Ashton-Warner's. Freire worked with adults applying andragogical insights to how adults best learn, while Ashton-Warner employed pedagogical methods appropriate for children's learning styles; but even so, both eschewed themes and words imposed by alien cultures and both emphasised themes and charged words to reinforce a sense of identification and belonging in the world. Clues to unpacking and internalising meaning were transmitted through key or generative words and themes to both capture interest and create a sense of belonging and place in the world; they in turn, were embedded in the familiar and personally meaningful scenes and experiences evoking powerful emotional as well as cognitive responses. In both adult and child contexts, different though they were, nothing alien or unfamiliar was imposed and teachers utilised experience-based learning as the fulcrum for acquiring new knowledge and literacy skills, which subsequently enhanced cultural values and meaning. Freire and Ashton-Warner developed teaching themes and resources which reinforced cultural identity and encouraged learners to talk about and make sense of things and events formerly denied them. At an adult level Freire pursued a political and liberatory project, but both he and Ashton-Warner were concerned with breaking the abiding dominance of colonial knowledges and concepts in their learners, be they adults or children.

Freire advocated and became famous for notions of culturally- and experientially-based literacy; but I argue and demonstrate that Ashton-Warner

had already discovered and was using this with her Maori children. I, too, long before I came to Australia and was exposed to Freire, had been employing similar techniques in my teaching in England. There I had replaced sexist, racist and classist reading primers with my pupils in the 'slums' of London. I substituted the conventional primers with words and literacy materials which drew directly on their cultural, social and language experiences. In 1977 I published a chapter in which I describe and discuss the efforts of progressive school teachers who had been using Freireian literacy methods well before the academic world lionised him (Bee 1997). In 1980 I contributed to Bob Mackie's edited collection 'Literacy and Revolution,' and my chapter was the only one to discuss primary school teaching and makes the connection between pedagogy and andragogy as it relates to culturally appropriate literacy.

Both made a very deep impact on the way I had previously taught reading skills and what I came to believe as essential. When I was teaching about literacy methods at Sydney Teachers College, I was required to deliver a series of lectures on different techniques for acquiring literacy including those most commonly used, but often contested-whole word - or look-and-say - phonics; and the Gattegno method. However, and despite my experiences with severely disadvantaged children in a London school, I had never critically engaged with the middle-class bias in the content of the average reading primer. I accepted reading schemes as a given, yet I had failed to markedly improve the fluency of the London children who were indifferent to the Janet and John stories, the staple readers for English school children at the time.

The mythical Janet and John in the stories were sister and brother who lived in a nice semi-detached house with their perfect father and mother, a dog, a cat, a family car, a neat garden and a garage. John was pictured helping father clean the car while Janet helped mother in the kitchen. This depiction of a happy and harmonious middle-class family life was about as far removed from my children's lives in the Islington school as could be. Their only preferred source of reading matter were comics like Beano and Dandy which were brought out of the cupboard to be avidly devoured during wet recess times. The homes in

which these children were raised were slum tenements without trees, gardens, bathrooms and even hot water. Unemployment among the males was chronic and many households were single-parent ones, usually headed by mothers entirely dependent on welfare. The overall atmosphere was one of poverty, neglect and in many cases alcohol abuse and criminality. The racial issues added yet another dimension to already extreme marginalisation, social dislocation and rigid gender roles.

When I finally read the Marxist essays in the edited collection by Hoyles (1977), I began to understand how education and schooling were never neutral but were impacted upon by issues of class, race and culture. It seemed that reading and writing did not serve any meaningful purpose as far as the London children were concerned, so why bother? They were pre-occupied with developing rebellion and resilience to survive dysfunctional situations. Yet a decade later, I had not thought to ask class or gendered questions to the trainee teachers in my reading method lectures to make them think beyond technical acquisition of reading ability. At this stage I was recognising the importance of being more reflexive and asking myself: Literacy to what purpose; and whose purposes does literacy serve? I began to realise that I needed my students to think deeply as well as imaginatively about the specific environments in the schools and communities in which they would be teaching literacy and language. As a result, I set an end-of-year project in which a group of primary school trainees had to plan, design and justify a set of thematic language and literacy combined resources for general use with different ages of primary school children. I recall being delighted and astounded by what the students produced and their grasping of literacy as being so much more than uniform technical, word and syllable building exercises.

A shift to Adult Education

When the Sydney Teachers College finally became aligned with higher education in the university, I resigned, because a condition of remaining on the staff as a tenured member was a Master's Degree and I wasn't ready to commit. After a short break I was invited to join the Department of Child-Care within the School of General Studies in the NSW Department of Technical and Further Education in Sydney. I accepted and found myself working on an exciting new program in a metropolitan technical college in Sydney where instead of adults coming into the institution to enrol and study in formal, certificated courses, we the teachers would go out into the surrounding neighbourhood to seek requests for informal courses to be conducted off-campus and requiring no formal entry qualification for enrolled students.

The program was known as Outreach and the immediate neighbourhood in the college where I was working comprised large numbers of newly arrived immigrants living in hostels as well as tower blocks of social housing. The co-ordinator of the Outreach Program wasted no time in identifying local needs for vocational and educational courses for marginalised groups and one of my earliest duties was to door-knock the public housing tower blocks with a colleague to find out how Outreach could help isolated young women with children to take their first step on the ladder of second chance education.

This transition from tertiary-based teaching to teaching in technical and further education marked the beginning of the rest of my professional career and for many years teaching in the TAFE system gave me opportunities to combine my feminist and radical emancipatory convictions with my belief in free public adult education for those people who through no fault of their own, had previously been shut out of access to and denied educational opportunities – the marginalised and disempowered.

Outreach

TAFE Outreach was the first TAFE department I was to become closely associated with during the years I was a teacher, the second being the women's return to work and study program and the third, adult basic education with particular reference to adult literacy. Even though each category of adult learners was different, requiring different curricula and teaching methods, they were distinct. Each program was committed to equalising adult educational access and opportunities. They could be described as emancipatory vocational educational projects, seeking to benefit not only individual lives but society as a whole.

CHAPTER 2

Theoretical Perspectives

A teaching narrative needs a philosophy

Robert Coles asks:

How to encompass in our mind the complexity of some lived moments in life? You don't do that with theories. You don't do that with a system of ideas. You do it with a story' (as cited in Bochner 2002: 264).

Except, of course if you are a teacher, in which case, as Howard Zinn (1990) identifies, our philosophical and pedagogical orientation is a reflection not only what we believe about the purposes of teaching and learning, but influences the methods of instruction we select and the ways we interact with and relate to learners. Zinn recommends that both adult educators and business and industry trainers develop a personal philosophy of education, or a number of philosophies which dovetail into a working model of what adult educators think they are doing in their approaches to teaching and what they actually are which may be discrepant and point to a situation where what teachers believe and say about their values, beliefs and philosophy is contrary to their actions in the classroom (Zinn 1990: 44). He goes on to contest what he labels the myth that philosophy is the exclusive domain of academics, pointing out the benefits of a personal philosophy to:

- help teachers to become critically aware of what they do;
- demonstrate alternative approaches to program planning and teaching strategies;

- enable teachers to become aware of how values, ethics and aesthetics influence practice;
- free teachers from dependence on others' doctrines;
- and citing Apps, to illustrate to us the importance of our own personal histories and their influence of what we do as educators (Zinn 1990: 45).

Traditional philosophies of education

John Elias and Sharan Merriam (as cited in Zinn 1990: 48) give a comprehensive overview of prevailing philosophies of adult education, which they categorise as:

- liberal
- progressive
- behaviourist
- humanistic
- radical.

Stephen Brookfield points out that adult education discourses are often distinguished by a false distinction between theory and practice, or philosophy and action, whereas a more accurate perspective, he contends, is to regard philosophising as one of the most practical things adult education does (2005: 475). Brookfield goes on to contend that questions and assumptions around such issues as what good adult education looks like, how adult educators should behave and what purposes adult education should serve are in fact as much philosophical as pedagogical and, according to Brookfield, 'they are the benchmarks we use to assess if we are doing good work or not' (2005: 475).

Putting to one side how the reader might translate Brookfield's imprecise use of the term 'good' to define a benchmark model of adult education, I find both his and Zinn's discourses on personal philosophies in the theory and

practice of adult education most edifying in that they have given weight and substance to my personal narrative and self-study as both teacher and adult educator. Without button-holing myself into one tradition entirely, I am able to question, reflect back and critically analyse my own assumptions about why I have behaved in certain ways in the classroom and what I was hopefully achieving educationally, socially and politically, for both have featured prominently in my epistemological beliefs and teaching objectives.

The politics of education

The politics of education is writ large in analysis of my practices. I recognise it as the result of my Marxist, socialist and feminist understanding of the world gained during the 1960s. As a young woman in that period, and like Jane Thompson, certain events 'sharpened my appetite for social change' (1999: 110). I thought, like many of my radical education colleagues and friends, social change was possible and likely with the election of the Whitlam Government in 1972. Education became a vehicle for national social change and a more equal society. In the stories I have told about three programs in which I was closely implicated as both teacher and sometimes co-ordinator, I intend to show how the link between one's beliefs about the purposes of education were acted upon in the teaching act. These programs, I hope, demonstrate my commitment to experienced-based teaching and learning as the foundation for knowledge that has the potential to be transformative and liberatory (Thompson 1999). Further to these purposes, I have wanted to re-kindle the kind of passion for teaching which hooks describes and discusses (1994).

Philosophy of hope

I had long been a convert to Freire's theory of liberatory education and the breaking of the silence of oppression among the poor in Brazil. My

description of my teaching of socially silenced and isolated immigrant women in Chippendale, Sydney, was an attempt to adapt Freire-ian teaching methods in an Australian context. There I place an emphasis on dialogue as replacing fear to speak. It was some time later that I read with growing enthusiasm what hooks believed and wrote about education and her close affinity with Freire's belief in education as the practice of freedom in a spirit of hope. hooks not only argued cogently for a progressive holistic education, which she encapsulated in the term 'engaged pedagogy,' she wrote in a very personal way drawing upon her own experiences as a black woman, daughter feminist, teacher, writer and professor (hooks 1994: 15).

I was deeply influenced by hooks' views on education particularly in the areas of class, culture, gender and racist discrimination and domination as well as identifying with her attention to affect and feelings which underpin her concept of authentic, holistic teaching. She writes:

To teach in a manner that respects and cares for the souls of our students is essential if we are to provide the necessary conditions where learning can most deeply and intimately begin (hooks 1994: 13).

I am somewhat uncomfortable with the phrase, 'cares for the souls' and prefer to substitute these with care for the welfare and wellbeing of students. Even so, I intuit hooks' meaning and intention and I concur with her stress on caring for learners in ways which ensure their best interests if deep and meaningful learning is to occur. My counselling and psychotherapy training carried out over a long period - first in relationship counselling at the former Marriage Guidance Council of NSW (1975) and following on at The Counselling Training Centre in Annandale Sydney (1976-1978) - taught me how to look beneath the surface of people's lives to the core of their being and what promotes hope and interaction in teaching adults.

In this matter the mature-age women who joined the TAFE New Opportunities for Women (N.O.W.) course, often brought or carried with them anxieties and self-doubts about their courage to change their lives and the nature

of their relationships with their partners and children. It was therefore paramount to build into the curriculum, opportunities to problem-pose around these issues; share stories, sometimes humorous, sometimes harrowing, but always shared between the women in an understanding and supportive manner. Without these more personalised opportunities, I doubt the N.O.W. courses would have been able to achieve their goals in other areas of the syllabus, and in the courses I co-ordinated and taught. After a trial and error settling in period, I found an atmosphere of openness and trust prevailed in N.O.W. classrooms. Silences could be broken and formerly hesitant voices began to be heard in dialogue and debate. However, the comments hooks made about the classroom and its potential as a liberatory learning and teaching space really brought home to me what, throughout my life and work as a teacher, teacher educator and adult educator, has been integral to my beliefs about the purposes of classroom practice. hooks believed that despite the shortcomings of academia, learning

.....is a place where paradise can be created. The classroom with all its limitations remains the most radical space of possibility in the academy. [...] I celebrate teaching that enables transgressions – a movement against and beyond boundaries. It is that movement which makes education the practice of freedom. (hooks 1994: 12).

The classroom as a radical place and space

hooks' definition above is the closest I can get to defining transformative education as I understand this. With implications for classroom practice, I want to explore hooks' words. Beginning with the declaration that even with all its limitations, the classroom remains *the* most radical space of possibility. Almost everyone who has attended school, college or university has spent many hours of their lives listening attentively or inattentively to conventional forms of instruction. These require only passive responses from the learner. This is the kind of education which Paulo Freire referred to as 'the banking concept' of

teaching and involves a whole litany of oppressive attitudes and beliefs. These assume the authority and superiority of the teacher as the sole arbiter and gatekeeper of knowledge conveyed by teachers as if the students' minds are empty vessels waiting to be filled (Freire 1972b: 46-47).

Much of this teaching style I had experienced myself at the hands of my teachers and lecturers. It also replicates the kind of teaching I witnessed in two schools when I was just beginning my probationary teaching in a junior school in an affluent, upper middle-class suburb of Sheffield, England, and again when I was appointed to teach in a public school in an inner-western area of Sydney with a large concentration of Greek and Italian immigrants and their children. Despite the class, social and cultural differences, both schools were exact replicas of each other in their emphasis on the power and authority of teachers in each, which denied and damaged children's intellectual and creative potential. In both schools; fear, intimidation and the threat of the cane set the tone and atmosphere. Constant testing and assessment kept children in a state of apprehension and anxiety. Neither school offered opportunities for teachers to celebrate teaching or enjoy nurturing children's abilities, interests or demonstrate that they cared about children's wellbeing. In the Sydney school a sign that teachers were not genuinely involved in their children's potential beyond text-book rote learning was very evident. There were teachers who kept their coats on throughout the school day as if they did not wish to reside in the classroom. They were the last to arrive before the morning bell and the first to leave at the end of the day, often exiting the building at exactly same moment as the children. Some who taught the youngest children wore clothes more in keeping with a smart occasion, than work in a classroom.

Prior to my arrival in Sydney, I had been teaching in a school in North London where the children were severely deprived and disadvantaged and where there were few teaching resources to support teachers. Yet, despite severe limitations this school encouraged a humanistic and progressive form of teaching, due in large respects to the charismatic and dynamic leadership of its head teacher and his refusal to intimidate children. The same kind of atmosphere

was also evident in the Demonstration School in Sydney where I practised for two years and where the principal demonstrated the same charismatic leadership qualities.

In both schools, teachers came early before the lessons began and often stayed late after the children had gone home to prepare for the next day. They came appropriately dressed for work in a classroom involving subjects such as art, craft and sport. Their learning environments were productive, noisy, creative, bright and colourful with children's work. Each school placed heavy emphasis on progressive methods of teaching and there was a lot of group and collaborative work. Children were encouraged to be curious, ask questions and seek solutions to problems and teachers were more like guides and facilitators than arbiters of knowledge and figures of fear and authority.

It was a joy to teach and celebrate a fully engaged pedagogy in these learning spaces and places. I realise that hooks was referring to academic institutions of higher learning when she penned her ideas and beliefs about radical teaching, but I consider her philosophical stance is transferable to all pedagogues, whether teachers work with young children in schools, or adults and young adults in academic institutions. Each of us has to work out in our relationships with our students whether we will adopt a banking approach to their acquiring knowledge in a traditional manner where subjects predominate and the teacher dominates, or whether teachers engage in knowledge-building and sharing with learners in a joint enterprise, where everything is open to question and dialogue and boundaries may be crossed or transgressed. Reading hooks helped me better understand and put into perspective, defiant and rebellious times in my life as defined by Michael Newman (2006: 12) when I experienced disapproval by school managers because I took action against oppressive teaching and learning methods. In being required to conform, my beliefs and values about the best ways to engage children in the learning process, were tested many times.

One of the strongest neo-conservative attacks on Australian schooling and teaching in recent years comes from Kevin Donnelly (2007). Donnelly has taken particular exception to radical progressive pedagogy. He argues that it has led to the 'dumbing down' of learning and teaching in schools and colleges, which he attributes to what he calls the 'culture wars' and Marxist 'propaganda' in the universities. Donnelly argues for a 'back to basics' return in education and renewed emphasis on subject teaching involving knowledge which

has existed for a hundred years' and which encapsulates the 'grand narrative' of the rise of Judeo/Christian traditions' and values in as the foundation of Western civilisation (2007: 93).

He supports traditional, conservative methods of teaching, arguing that the best teaching method is that of a teacher

standing at the front of the class, directing students about what is to be done' and whose teaching legitimacy lies in, what I believe is a mistaken assumption, that they know more than their students do (2007: 200).

In my long experience as a teacher, I have discovered on more than one occasion that my students do indeed know more than I do about a particular subject or theme which has enriched learning. Donnelly refers to radical teachers like me who believe that education, social justice and change are inextricably bound together, as 'self-styled liberationary pedagogues' (2007: 131). This is a badge I am proud to wear.

I believe the personal and the political are closely connected but that identity politics can help adult educators to understand how class, race, gender and diversity are relevant constructs both in determining the direction curriculum planning should take and what is useful knowledge for learners to have. For example, when working with mature-age women students who are enrolled in courses to assist their re-entry into the workforce or further study, it was crucial to help them make the link between women's domestic roles at home and the barriers they face in the workplace and society generally.

I am critical of Adult Education classes, particularly in language and literacy acquisition, that are dominated by a discourse of individuality and self-expression as both the end-point and the method. When curricula and teaching strategies are structured around the mastery of self expression and creative writing this leads to teaching and learning which is devoid of any political coherence and social context. You can see this demonstrated in Adult Basic Education classrooms where text books and exercises are planned around individual interests and perceived needs. Thus, someone says they love cooking, and so the teacher structures all the adult literacy teaching and learning activities around recipes and cookery books to encourage the interested party to develop reading skills through this solo activity; but no attempt is made engage the whole group to share and talk about different food customs and cultures, famines and farming methods which could lead to a more focused social and political project for everyone to join in. This would make it a shared enterprise in which the teacher becomes a contributor and not sole arbiter of the knowledge proffered by the single individual. Creative writing and self-expression as models of 'good' teaching have been done to death both in schools and adult education institutions. I call into question the motivation for dwelling so much on individual production of words and ideas which positions the teacher or tutor as a passive recipient of the students' view of knowledge. I cannot stress enough the importance of individual personal experience as a crucial aspect of gaining both confidence and competence, but that's only a beginning. In chapter 8, I present a case study where I began to move the women away from concentrating only on their experience of social isolation and got them to see how they were connected socially, culturally and politically to the wider world of women's inequality. I was aiming not only to awaken individual women to an awareness of the potential for change (as with the wonderful Safiya who 'took on' her husband in the poem I described, but I wanted my teaching to shift away from creative self expression and risk the unknown and uncharted waters of transgressive learning.

The politics of Adult Education

For a time, immediately on graduating as a teacher, my only real commitment was to progressive education with its emphasis on discovery-learning in children. However, my exposure during the sixties and seventies to Marxism, socialism and, in particular, feminism put a political edge to my beliefs about the purposes of teaching as did New Left ideology and educational policies in the Whitlam era. I, in common with many other left-wing teachers believed in education as the vanguard of social change. I became responsive to the liberatory philosophy of social and political educators. In the case of Freire I particularly liked the way he highlighted the issue of the non-neutrality of education and the politics of literacy.

In his ground-breaking literacy campaigns with Brazilian peasants, Freire challenged the notion that learning to read was simply a matter of technical mastery over letters and vocabulary. Instead he argued that learning to read implied what he defined as 'conscientization' or 'critical consciousness' (Freire 1972). With this perspective, learners gradually begin to understand that the spoken and written word are powerful tools to generate both personal and political empowerment.

Harold Rosen, like Freire, asserts that the most significant aspect of language is its social context and not the dominant form of 'high culture.' He strongly defends the language of the working class as legitimate and refuses to accede to theories of cultural deprivation or poverty of expression. He said:

We have to choose between descriptions of impoverished restricted code and the unearthing of a living oral tradition, between visions of school as a well-ordered island in a sea of barbarism and anomie and the aspiration that they should be reincarnated through the nourishment of the neighbourhood and community, between reading 'schemes' and literacy through critical consciousness. Indeed all the choices we make, minute, urgent, even trivial, are more and more seen as taking sides. English teaching has become overtly a political matter (1977: 203).

I discovered Rosen at about the same time as I was trying to make sense of Freire's theory of critical consciousness. He said everything I was trying to do as a teacher of working class kids in London and as I had observed in the teaching of Sylvia Ashton-Warner with the Maori children. The title of the chapter - *Where did the masons go?* - is sheer genius and is taken from a poem by Bertolt Brecht entitled: *In the Evening when the Chinese Wall was Finished*. The Great Wall of China is a cultural icon, symbol of power and might, but it was the Chinese peasants who built it, gave their lives and who are buried within it. It could not have been made without the workers. When I visited and walked on the Great Wall in 1978, all I could think about was all the dead workers buried within it. The same is true of the convicts who built the first road over the Blue Mountains - as they died they were buried in it without name, so it is often the nameless, the unhonoured who really create and make history and culture.

In the case of my teaching, by the time I was working in NSW TAFE, I intentionally introduced issues of class, race, gender, culture, and diversity because they had an impact on how my students experienced their lives, as well as how they were received and treated in Australian society. I taught political literacy. When I imbibed what Freire, hooks and Thompson, all of them radical and boundary-crossing adult educators, I discovered a hard edge to their beliefs about the purposes of education. They offered an antidote to a literature replete with theories about self-actualisation and personal-growth. Such theories had their origins in the self-help and therapy movements of the sixties and seventies, which had little to say about oppressive structures in society, or the importance of public education, community loyalty or civic responsibility in a so-called democratic country.

Closer to home I found a refreshing honesty and encouragement in the books of Michael Newman, particularly, *Teaching Defiance* (2006). Newman advocated resistance to arbitrary and unjust systems of control and wrote that teachers should not remain impartial or neutral in the face of an enemy of truth but that they must side with the oppressed rather than the oppressor. Right-wing conservative governments do not champion equality or social justice –

witness the actions of a state Liberal Government in New South Wales which closed down NSW TAFE Women's Programs in 1988. As a feminist teacher in the TAFE Women's Programs back then you would have been politically naïve to believe that the Government's stated reason for summarily closing the NSW TAFE Women's Co-ordination Unit and removing all eighteen Women's Access Co-ordinators from TAFE colleges throughout the state was because their work was completed and it was now time to mainstream the women's special bridging courses programs. The real and covert reason was that it was payback for the successful infiltration of the femocrats into TAFE's bureaucracy and other NSW state government departments. The Liberal government's policy hit hard not only at policy makers and teachers, the majority of whom were part-time and female, but those women in TAFE who were enrolled in return-to-work and further education programs. This was a ploy to keep mature-aged women out of the workforce and so provide more job training opportunities for youth at cost to older women. TAFE suffered massive cutbacks as a direct result of the Greiner Government's policies which occasioned huge public outrage and demonstrations both within TAFE and the community.

Amidst the outpouring of anger and grief at the actions of the government in deliberately under-cutting funding for marginal groups in TAFE, one act of protest stood out for me which happened at college where I was then working. It was orchestrated entirely by the N.O.W. students, all of them mature-age women. The newly elected Minister for Education, the hapless Terence Metherell, made an appeasement visit to the TAFE college where I was the Women's Access Co-ordinator. In a spirit of support and empathy for me, the principal thought it might sway the Minister's actions and those of the government he represented, if he brought Dr. Metherell to meet the women to learn for himself what the N.O.W. course involved and why it was important for older women. By this stage the students all knew that theirs was the last N.O.W. course being directly supported by the Women's Co-ordination Unit and that all future women's initiatives would happen through Outreach which meant they would have less dedicated funding. This is not to overlook that under equity

policies many fine and effective women's Outreach courses eventuated, but with reduced hours and resources.

The students and I had discussed in class what the proposed cuts would mean for any future N.O.W. courses and about what actions the women could instigate in their capacities as voters and citizens. The Minister needed to understand the implications of the cuts for women's employment options and the distinct possibility many would have to go back on to social welfare. I did not help the women in working out what they wanted to say to the Minister, but I reminded them it had to be in their own words. After the Minister had been introduced I explained that the students would like to speak to him about the proposed cuts and what the changes would mean for them. Then a number of the students presented their case for continuing the N.O.W. course. They asked the Minister if it were possible for the course to continue so they could go on developing both their skills and in time move into paid work and off social security benefits? However, the Minister remained unmoved, indicating that the Government's decision was final and not open to negotiation. His visit to the campus childcare centre elicited the same stony-faced response.

The point I wish to make in telling this story is how proud and impressed I was by the courage of the women in informing the Minister of the likely consequences of his government's high-handed actions. It seemed that in enabling and helping the women acquire and understand knowledge relating to the personal realm, somewhere along the line it had shifted their awareness into the political realm and the choice to take sides. The proposed cuts and changes to the TAFE system by the Greiner Liberal Government resulted in huge demonstrations in TAFE, in the media and in the community and the most vociferous protests came from individuals and organisations in disadvantaged circumstances including women, the unemployed, the illiterate and those geographically isolated for whom TAFE had become their lifeline, not only educationally, but in community strengthening and building social capital.

Recently I sifted through an archive documenting the protests and actions of the Greiner/Metherell era which a former TAFE senior administrator had taken the trouble to collect and collate. It made fascinating and moving reading if only because the contents revealed just how important the TAFE system was in the overall system of further education. Even with all its flaws and over-abundance of managers, hundreds of people in urban, regional and remote areas of the state had benefitted from the opportunities TAFE provided free of charge. Josefa Sobski, a former TAFE project officer who visited almost every TAFE college in NSW in the course of her duties, told how when she went into country colleges she realised their value and contribution to the community. Steve Black, a former A.B.E. head teacher commented that, in his view, during the period covering the 1970s through to the major restructure in the late 1980s, no other educational institution had the infrastructure or the teaching workforce with the range of life and work experience, that existed in TAFE, or the support and resources that were provided for struggling adult learners.

Sobski came from high school teaching into NSW TAFE as an advisor on sexism where she was on committees for the advancement of women and girls advisory boards and committees and so met and was influenced by women in TAFE who wanted to change and reform the excessively male culture. She travelled around the State to familiarise herself with the TAFE system and was influenced by people like Terry Tobin, Bob Moorcroft and Dave Rumsey who were the antithesis of senior male trade teachers and bureaucrats and distinctive for their humanitarian, egalitarian and social justice approaches to TAFE education. Sobski observed that before the advent of Outreach, the only courses available in rural, regional and remote TAFE colleges were hobby courses like hat-making, cake decoration, and car maintenance; which appeared in course outlines as Stream 1000 Recreational/Leisure/Enrichment. These were the closest to any form of adult or general education provision and according to Josefa:

where in many cases there was nothing else to provide any sort of cultural focus ... I don't think there's a TAFE college in the State I haven't been to and visited. I thought was an important part of my job when I first joined TAFE, so I went into country colleges and I realised what an important cultural and social contribution they were making. However, it was arguable how much education was occurring.

She goes on to say the reason for this was that the same people re-enrolled for the same packet of skills year in and year out, making little progression. But Sobski also commented that she thought a lot of TAFE students in country areas who enrolled in the hobby courses, did so as much for the social contact as the skills' packet. It was only when the Outreach Project began and men and women with educational qualifications joined TAFE that the focus changed from hobby courses to further education.

Times have changed but the direction TAFE has had forced upon it along with universities and college institutions have not lessened the impact of neo-liberal and neo-conservative policies and discourses which have drastically altered its agenda and identity. It has traded adult education for workplace training. Its once rich, varied and diverse curricula have become tightly packaged into one-size-fit-all formats dedicated to learning outcomes and closely monitored assessment and auditing. Richard Berlach wrote a stringent criticism of outcomes-based teaching and learning and the emphasis on performance indicators, declaring:

It becomes easy to assume that that which is or can be measured is important, while what cannot be measured appears to be of less value (Berlach 2004: 27).

He goes on to question the absence of values in outcomes-based regimes and their likely detrimental effect on affective aspects of the learning process:

The more affective outcomes are likely to be made subordinate to those which are more easily quantifiable. (Berlach 2004: 10).

CHAPTER 3

It's Time! The Egalitarian Ideal

Education the key to equality of opportunity

Simon Marginson notes that the great advances in public sector provision of education climaxed with the Whitlam Labor Government that was in power from 1972 to 1975 (1993). Those advances included profound changes to the system of technical and further education, which had hitherto been regarded as a poor relation of the tertiary sector and regarded as merely a dumping ground for secondary school failures' (Fleming 1976: 36).

With the election of the federal Labor Government in 1972 after eleven years of Liberal-National Coalition Government, the new government placed education high on its reform agenda of social justice and equality. Gough Whitlam was a committed socialist and egalitarian idealist whose campaign slogan 'It's time!' signalled radical change in the governing of the country. On November 13, 1972 at Blacktown Civic Centre in the western suburbs of Sydney, home to a staunchly working class population, Whitlam, as Prime Minister-elect, delivered a stirring policy speech in which he declared:

Education is the key to equality of opportunity [...] the great instrument for the promotion of equality.

Whitlam's vision for Australia was that it should become a modern democratic country in which education would play a key role in bringing about social egalitarianism by not only regarding and respecting the rights of the individual citizen, as past Liberal National governments had proclaimed, but in prioritising the rights and special needs of those sectors of the population who

were both economically and educationally disadvantaged and marginal to mainstream society's benefits and wealth. Whitlam appealed to the national consciousness and identity declaring:

I do not for a moment believe we should set limits on what we can achieve together, for our country, our people, our future' (Marginson 1993: 18).

Citizenship and identity politics

A prominent feature of the government's equal educational policy was its emphasis and definition of citizenship to be realised in the three ways – the promotion of equality, involving people in political decisions regarding government and community and through liberating the talents and uplifting the horizon of the Australian people (Marginson 1993: 16). Citizenship in Whitlam's terms did not infer economic equality, but rested instead on recognition of 'equal legal and political rights and equal access to public services such as health and welfare' (Marginson 1993: 17).

Where the government was more proactive in its determination to remove class barriers to equality, was in reforming education and addressing career discrimination against women. The causes of discrimination against women included:

- inadequate child-care and pre-school services preventing their full participation in employment,
- the failure to offer girls aspirational non-traditional career options,
- little access to education and justice for migrants,
- and the non-recognition of migrants' overseas qualifications, thereby depriving them of income-earning opportunities.

For example a highly experienced Vietnamese nursing sister I encountered in my teaching, who spoke excellent English and who had spent most of the Vietnam war as a theatre nurse dealing with frontline casualties, was unable to understand how it was that Australian medical requirements for registration here in this country meant that she had to re-commence first-year training in order to meet our standards. She came to NSW TAFE seeking shorter re-training alternatives because she needed to financially support her family. She could neither afford the loss of potential income or time needed to re-qualify. In so doing she relinquished skills which were needed in our hospitals.

However, Whitlam's Priority Review Staff reserved its most trenchant criticism for the unequal status and lack of justice for Aboriginal and Islander people, describing them as 'the most deprived groups in Australian society in terms of their command over goods and services' (Marginson 1993: 17). Marginson observed how citizenship and citizenship power was only defined as the right of access to career and consumption, rather than an equal measure of economic resources and important social decisions. He notes, too, a rare acknowledgment and admission of the problems of difference – in my interpretation, these are the politics of identity – which, in due course, were identified and addressed by the Kangan Review (1974) in its recommendations for the re-organisation and expansion of the TAFE system.

Too much too soon

Though his, or perhaps because his government set a cracking pace of reform in which the Commonwealth began to intervene at every level of states' legislation and public service – establishing a needs-based aid program for public schools, instituting a Schools Commission to enquire into the state of the nation's education system, began a national employment and training scheme, abolished university tuition fees and broadened the Commonwealth's role in states' educational jurisdiction - it did not prevent Whitlam's sudden dismissal after

only just under three years in parliamentary office. Simon Marginson gives as the principal reason for Whitlam's downfall his attempt to do too much too soon and that, contrary to embracing the Government's agenda for radical change, the nation resisted the pace and instability it caused and thus helped bring about Whitlam's downfall and his dismissal from Office. – 'It's time!' as a popular slogan of Labor electioneering quickly became it's time to get rid of Gough Whitlam! However, after twenty three years on the opposition benches during the Menzies era, it is little wonder once Labor came to power, that the Whitlam Government wasted no time in implementing change.

Personally I found the Whitlam years the most stimulating and exciting era of my teaching experience because of the passionate fiery debates around Whitlam's proposed radical changes to education. I served as a counsellor at two different stages on an Innovations Program instituted by the Whitlam Government as a result of the findings of the Interim Committee for the Schools Commission chaired by Peter Karmel.

The report the *Karmel Commission* produced, was released in May 1973 to what Marginson has described as 'almost universal acclaim', noting: 'Few government reports have secured such an impact' (1993: 46). Within two years, the funding had lifted Commonwealth spending on schools from \$364 million to \$1,091 million and transformed the financial position of all schools whether government or non-government (Marginson 1993).

Marginson refers to the *Disadvantaged Schools Programs* as the high-water mark of efforts to eradicate poverty through education. What he does not refer to, because it does not relate directly to the themes of his book, is, in my estimation the smaller but equally successful *Innovations Program* which the Whitlam Government introduced to kick-start innovatory ideas and practices in schools within their particular communities and systems. In this program, regardless of their status, or length of service, teachers were permitted and encouraged to apply for seeding grants to stimulate innovations in classrooms and systems. I was one of a number of NSW counsellors drawn from

representative educational organizations and systems throughout the state who were chosen to evaluate applications for innovations' funding. Our responsibilities included culling grant applications, visiting and interviewing applicants in their particular circumstances and finally making recommendations to the Federal Commissioners in Canberra.

School innovations

The purpose of the *Innovations Program* was to breathe new life into a moribund, rigid bureaucracy, particularly in New South Wales. Here the Teachers Handbook was the bible of the bureaucracy and deviations from the letter of its laws were regarded as heresies, as I had discovered on finding caning of children was sanctioned when I first began teaching in Sydney in 1965. Projects funded by the *Innovations Program* included, for example, a few hundred dollars to install outdoor playing equipment in a remote school so children could improve their physical coordination, and the creation of a reading platform in a classroom in a Sydney public school where children who were proficient readers could read alone in a quiet space while their teacher helped those children who needed special attention with their literacy needs. Much larger grants funded innovations such as the *Inner City Teachers Support and Resource Centre* in Stanmore, Sydney – which became an important educational meeting and resource centre for not only teachers, but for parent and citizen groups and secondary school students. This was the brainchild of Bob Moorcroft, who later was to head the TAFE NSW Outreach Unit.

What I most recall about my experiences as a counsellor on the *Innovations Program* was not only the many highly creative and imaginative ideas emanating from teachers, many of them new to teaching, and others invested in modernising education and schooling, but rather the many passionate debates and discussions which arose when counsellors met to discuss and assess applications. There was always an air of intense engagement and debate which

brought into prominence identity politics and policy issues involving class, race, gender and their implications for a new approach to curricula development and teaching strategies. Sometimes differences of opinions spilled over into conflict, but at least back then education mattered sufficiently for it to become a bone of contention, in contrast to its lower status today and the subsequent rise of vocational training favoured by successive governments which drowns out all other considerations except in the cases of a few die-hard academics and teachers.

The TAFE NSW *Special Programs* as they became known to distinguish them from the more normal mainstream courses conducted by TAFE colleges, begun as a result of the findings of the *Kangan Commission* in 1974, and their inception gave rise to a heightened sense of excitement among TAFE teachers and heads of newly created departments appointed to administer them. It was the beginning of an exciting new era in technical and further education with a stronger commitment to providing first and second- chance learning opportunities for adults previously denied them. However, when the *Special Programs* began, they were not received with universal approval in some quarters by an old guard who wished to preserve their patriarchal control and patronage in the way TAFE was run and managed and who did their best to hinder the changes, as I will demonstrate in other parts of my thesis.

CHAPTER 4

The Myer-Kangan Report

Training versus education

The second enquiry into the state of the nation's education system after the *Karmel Commission*, was the *Myer-Kangan Enquiry*. It was begun in 1973 and named after the Head of the Commission, Myer Kangan. Its brief was to enquire into, and make recommendations for changes to the system of technical and further education. Its findings were added to and expanded in 1975 to become the *Richardson Report*.

Critical of TAFE's narrow focus on apprenticeship and workplace training and preparation, the Committee was of the opinion that it should broaden its mission, declaring:

The main purpose of education is the betterment of individual people and their contribution to the good of the community. Technical and Further Education should be planned accordingly. Emphasis on the needs of the individual should lead to easier access to learning, to suitable student and teacher amenities, to welfare activities, and to the highest standard of health and safety in workshops and laboratories.

The emphasis in Technical College-type institutions should be primarily on the needs of the individuals for vocationally orientated education, and the manpower needs of industry should be seen as the context of courses (Myer-Kangan Report 1974: 16).

Later in the same year that the Kangan Report was published, its Chairman, Myer Kangan addressed the *Technical Teachers Association of Victoria*, in which he again made a clear distinction between education and training:

It is my view that education relates to the development of the whole person as an individual, his (sic) personality, social skills and manual skills. Training is concerned with a part of education, the skill part, whether manipulative or cognitive. This distinction means that although training has a place in a TAFE institution, it is a narrow place and omits the advantages of an educational approach (Myer-Kangan 1979: 21).

TAFE: a system in crisis

The Kangan Inquiry came about as the result of lobbying by technical education teachers and representatives to the Federal Minister of Education at that time, Kim Beazley (the elder). In a commemorative speech paying tribute twenty years later to the *Myer-Kangan Committee*, the former Labor Prime Minister, Paul Keating, reminded his audience just how bad things were in TAFE before Kangan. He referred to the ramshackle accommodation, lack of basic facilities such as classrooms and libraries, insufficient student amenities and services, a chronic lack of funding for 'extras' including teacher training, counselling services and curriculum development and the absence of any form of national co-ordination. According to Paul Keating all these added up to a system in crisis (Clarke 1992). Keating praised the achievements of Kangan saying it presented the Commonwealth Government 'with a series of principles and strategies to transform the system' (Keating 1994).

The main thrust of the Kangan findings was that it should not be the responsibility of the technical and further education system to satisfy the needs and requirements of industry, but rather it should provide opportunities for recurrent education opportunities to adults whenever and wherever indicated, and so creating flexible learning pathways and conditions of entry. Secondly, and a high priority, the organization required a massive injection of Federal government funding and thirdly, it should no longer be an arm of the Department of Education, but should have its own separate charter and identity

as a public institution to bring it out from under the shadow of the university sector of higher education and colleges of advanced education. In other words the Commission intended to create a new, third level of tertiary education in order to give more choices to school leavers and adults .

TAFE was granted a more proactive role and status in which it would no longer be seen as the poor relation of post-secondary education. From now on it would become the instrument for Whitlam's vision of education as the great equaliser. Marginson records a huge increase in Commonwealth spending on TAFE from \$47 million in 1969-70, to \$177 million in 1975-76. This enabled the Commonwealth-government endowed *Special Programs* to be launched in technical colleges throughout NSW, beginning in 1976 with the Outreach program, quickly followed by other special initiatives for disadvantaged adult learners looking to TAFE to improve their educational access and opportunities. The States maintained some financial control over the new programs, but it was the first Commonwealth intervention and was part of Whitlam's plan to unify education under a national banner.

Limitations of Whitlam's policy of equality of education.

Certainly Whitlam's bold economic reforms in education were necessary, according to Marginson, but their effects on equality outcomes might have been more successful if they had not been counteracted by the subsequent collapse of the youth labour market and the inclusion of the private school sector in being allocated public funding support under Malcolm Fraser's government which also allocated monies from the *Innovations Program* of the Australian Schools Commission where I became an Innovations Counsellor. Subsequently, although I was a supporter of the original concept and had witnessed its beneficial effects, I resigned because I was in disagreement with the increased allocation of Commonwealth funding to elite private schools when so many public schools, particularly in remote regions, were more deserving.

A more serious criticism of the Whitlam education reforms according to Marginson, was that they left untouched two major structural sources of inequality in school education. The first was the continuation of a merit-based competitive assessment and the second more serious omission, was that Whitlam left the private school system untouched. Both these factors, discriminated heavily in favour of students from privileged backgrounds and created divisions between rich private schools and poorly resourced public schools particularly in low economic areas.

Marginson goes on to discredit Whitlam's concept of merit as misleading. 'Merit,' he pointed out, is not an objective or fixed human quality but one that is socially, as much individually determined and under a different type of education system, poorer students could succeed in greater numbers. However, 'this would require changes to sectorial structure, internal democracy, funding levels, the cultural content of the curriculum, and the use to which student assessment is put' (Marginson 1986).

A compassionate idealism

The shift to the right in TAFE, begun in the 1980s and continuing right through and into the twenty-first century has seen its educational programs reduced to training opportunities on a **user-pays basis** completely **obliterating** any notion of Whitlam's compassionate idealism and visionary passion, his belief in education as a basic human right for the public good, and an informed citizenship for a more democratic society. The TAFE system is a bargaining chip in a neo-conservative government agenda aimed at privatizing it and downgrading the status and conditions of teachers to that of trainers on short-term contracts. The educational agenda of the Whitlam era was underpinned by a social democratic philosophy which, while it addressed the issue of

individual rights, prioritised disadvantaged groups in society including the indigenous, women, migrants, refugees and the unemployed. The Whitlam Labor government's egalitarian emphasis plus the Kangan recommendations helped raise the public profile and status of the technical and further education sector, backed by a large increase in funding, allowing significant improvements throughout. In New South Wales this had far-reaching implications for TAFE's excessively bureaucratic administration, policy changes, curricula design, college culture and teacher preparation.

CHAPTER 5

TAFE Expansion

An educationally and socially accountable focus

Until 1948, the Department of Technical and Further Education was included in school education and part of the same bureaucracy. In 1948, however, it became a separate department in its own right independent of the Department of Education. Its task was to provide apprenticeship training for high school leavers and it maintained strong links with industry bodies and their workplace requirements. It also provided para-professional courses such as podiatry, radiography and medical technology, to name but three. The status quo remained until 1974 with the publication of the *Kangan Report* with its recommendations of a greatly changed and expanded role and focus for the organisation. Even though it was to continue its traditional historical trade-training function, its new and more progressive brief was to provide general access programs for educationally and socially disadvantaged adults in order for them to develop employment related skills and / or to enrol in accredited mainstream TAFE courses. This was in line with Whitlam's vision and ideology of education as the vanguard for social change and equality with a new focus on adult education as proposed by the *Kangan Commission*.

In recommending on the one hand, that TAFE maintain its role of trade training for industry, while on the other increasing its spending and commitment to general education, Kangan unwittingly created a divided system. Loyalties became split between those administrators and teachers who enthusiastically embraced the new social justice agenda and introduced adult education teaching and learning methods into their classrooms for marginal groups, and the more

traditional trade teachers whose teaching styles and methods continued to be didactic, subject and theory driven.

Impact of the National Training Reform agenda on general education in TAFE NSW

However, when the *National Training Reform Agenda* came into being during the 1990s with its competency-based workplace skills to enhance Australia's international competitiveness; vocational training once again became privileged over adult education and has continued its influence right up until the present day. The TAFE system deals almost exclusively with training for the workplace and is much more responsive to government, business and employer demands than to public education needs. In fact it is fair to assert that the access ladder for marginal adult learners has been removed and it is up to the disadvantaged in society to rely on their own unsupported efforts- sink or swim. Since I wrote the preceding paragraph, there has been a NSW state election in March 2015, in which the Liberals, under John Baird were returned to power, but with a reduced majority. In Baird's new government, TAFE has been moved from the Education portfolio over to the Business and Industry portfolio which appears to be the final nail in the coffin of TAFE NSW as an adult education provider.

Allie Clemans and Terri Seddon have documented the schismatic impacts on TAFE teachers caught between their changed roles from teachers to trainers and although they confine their analysis to the Victorian system, the confusion and resentment are just as prevalent in New South Wales (2000). As an experienced adult educator and teacher working with marginal groups of adult students in TAFE, I always commenced each new program by enquiring into their previous experiences of education, discovering why they had enrolled in my particular course and what their needs and expectations were. So within broad subject and curricula parameters, I then had an idea of how to plan a

relevant, meaningful learning experience for them. The difficulties began for this practice when pro-forma curricula were introduced and the emphasis switched from learner needs to prescribed competency attainments and the emphasis switched from learners to employer demands.

It seems the pendulum has swung right back to pre-Kangan models of TAFE instruction, so that one of the most important purposes of my thesis is to place on public record the period in TAFE's history immediately following the publication of Kangan Report when its agenda broadened and became distinctly more emancipatory in emphasis. Thus one reads the 'Aims of TAFE' expressed in the Department's Annual Report to Paul Landa, the NSW Minister for Education in 1979, as not simply to improve vocational competency but also to enable individuals from all walks of life to develop their talents and pursue their interests. Quite apart from the emphasis in the annual report on anyone in society having the right to seek access to TAFE and not simply for vocational competency, there is a call to:

respond to the needs of the community and the challenge of change in an imaginative and energetic way... and to afford maximum opportunity to access further education and to training for skilled employment for disadvantaged and minority groups (NSW TAFE 1979).

By the time the 1979 TAFE Report to the Minister was presented, the first and now the longest lasting special program for disadvantaged adults had been operating since 1976. This was Outreach, which began at what was then known as West Sydney Technical College in Petersham, and in Liverpool, for the outer west of Sydney which had many unemployed and socially excluded immigrants from mainstream opportunities. What makes the Landa Report notable is it no longer makes apologies or excuses for why technical colleges excluded certain groups in society, such as women and girls, adults from non-English speaking backgrounds or the disabled. Instead it states in clear terms the responsibility of the NSW Department of Technical and Further Education (TAFE) to cater for and provide the widest possible range of post-secondary educational programs, the

inference being its status was no longer inferior to its university and colleges of further education cousins but is of equal status as a post-secondary option.

CHAPTER 6

In from the Margins

The great divide

The intention of the *Kangan Commission* was to reform the vocational narrowness in the TAFE system and broaden it to include general education and communication skills considered essential for intelligent workers in a modern workforce. But as Marginson has pointed out in his analysis of the vocational - general divide, Government reformers were introducing a new and different kind of general education, not the classical liberal model, but 'a reconceptualised general education' (Marginson 1993: 175.). The difficulty of combining the two was far from simple in relation to the reorganisation of TAFE and a melding of the general with the vocational. Much later the *Myer Committee* (1992) slotted in what were labelled as key special competencies along with occupationally specific ones, but the TAFE culture was much less flexible or willing to accommodate other than occupational specific courses or styles of teaching into its time-honoured and comfortable system characterised by patriarchal power, patronage and paternalism. So when the new *Special Programs*, beginning with Outreach began to operate during the 1970s, there is no doubt there was resistance to their inclusion as legitimate courses from both Heads of traditional departments in mainstream sections of technical colleges as well as senior TAFE managers and bureaucrats.

The Outreach Project – off-campus

The Outreach Project posed hardly any threat to the mainstream because although the programs' co-ordinators were based in offices, on-campus, they were meant to research local community needs and then respond to them by setting up courses in locations – often off-campus - to suit participants. One Outreach Co-ordinator whom I interviewed for this thesis explained that in her first position she was rarely if ever in her designated office in her regional technical college, but spent nearly all of her time – including evenings and even some weekends out on the road – meeting all sorts of groups, identifying local needs and liaising with people to assist them designing a program to help them overcome personal barriers to TAFE formal access, or geographical isolation from their nearest technical college. Vicki Potter was one the earliest Co-ordinators to be employed in Outreach who observed that she covered a region 'the size of England' setting up personal contacts, establishing information networks, and arranging programs and seeking teachers or experts in particular skills fields to conduct programs. By the way she was the Outreach Representative elected by all Outreach staff for a two-year period to ensure a flexible, non-hierarchical organizational structure.

On-campus programs

But some Outreach pilot programs began on-campus and the women's return-to-work and study programs as well as the reading and writing classes for adults (R.A.W.F.A.) had to be accommodated at on-college campuses. Again, and mostly because the mainstream trade sections relied on tutorial support from the Adult Basic Education departments for their less proficient readers and writers undertaking trade training and apprenticeship courses, there was little opposition or resistance from program and section heads in mainstream TAFE.

Gender opposition

The most entrenched opposition and resistance was reserved for the TAFE Women's Co-ordination Unit and its regional access co-ordinators and teachers because the feminist ideology posed a direct threat to the gendered and discriminatory arrangements, programs and teaching assumptions which prevailed throughout the TAFE culture prior to the commencement of courses based on policies of Affirmative Action for Women. These included *Women and Work* (W.O.W.), *New Opportunities for Women* (N.O.W.) and *Introduction to Trades* (I.N.T.O.).

Barbara Pocock's report, *Demanding Skill: Women and Technical Education in Australia* (1988a) was a searing indictment of discrimination against women in TAFE, and not only in relation to student access, but in the privileging of men over women in the TAFE bureaucracy and senior position in colleges. The Bedford Report (1976), the TAFE Annual Report to the Minister of Education, was defensive against charges of discrimination concerning the lack of females in trade courses, arguing that women and girls were free to enrol in any TAFE course where they satisfied entry requirements; thereby neatly sidestepping the almost insurmountable structural barriers in schooling and society. Referring to the introduction of the *Special Course* enrolments which were opening the gates to a broader range of students wanting to study in TAFE colleges, the Report declared that enrolments in what came to be commonly known as *Special Programs*:

includes most of the courses regarded by the community as particularly appropriate for women such as those in the Schools of Fashion, Home Science and Secretarial Studies. (Myer-Kangan 1979: 11).

That TAFE assumed it reflected community attitudes at that time to what was considered appropriate for females to study, sounds more like an excuse for its failure to devise policies or become pro-active on behalf of the needs and

unrecognised talents of women and girls in TAFE non-traditional vocational options. Nevertheless by the time the 1979 TAFE Annual Report to Paul Landa, the NSW Minister for Education, came out, the tone and language of the report was more indicative of the system's efforts to enter the modern age. It acknowledged and highlighted the particular needs of marginalised target-groups including mature-age women and female apprentices, immigrants and refugees, isolated communities, and people with intellectual disabilities; and was sensitive to their need for special provision in the TAFE system. Once TAFE's post-Kangan recommendations led to a policy of open access and the introduction of Commonwealth supported special programs, a priority was to upgrade the facilities and services in colleges, including new buildings, classrooms, services and amenities.

In addition, and crucial for TAFE's new and expanded role, was the recruitment of teachers with highly developed teaching skills and attitudes to create a supportive learning environment for disadvantaged adult learners. Six years after the first special program, Outreach was launched in 1976 in the inner-west of Sydney at what is now, Petersham College of TAFE, the Annual TAFE Report to the NSW Minister of Education reported that:

In 1981 TAFE employed more teaching staff than at any time in its history [...] Their skills and knowledge are the Department's most important resource and their salaries account for nearly half the total TAFE expenditure (1976: 18).

At the time of writing this thesis, I doubt the Department of TAFE continues its once high regard of its teachers over trainers, or sees them as an important resource. General education for adults most in need has disappeared, managers proliferate and a *Certificate in Workplace Training and Assessment* will guarantee employment as a TAFE teacher with no requirement to study or qualify as an adult educator. Social justice and equity are no longer principles TAFE upholds except in the narrowest of vocational interpretations.

Re-defining the social justice goalposts (in this way) shattered the image of TAFE as a social justice solution and re-represented TAFE as a social justice problem. (Clemans & Seddon, 2000: 118).

By contrast TAFE's Director-General in 1986, Alan Pattison who was a powerful advocate for the Special Programs observed in his annual report for 1986 that:

TAFE is the major point of entry to all forms of post-compulsory education for adults who for economic, social, or personal reasons have left school without completing secondary education (NSW TAFE 1986: 8).

Pattison and many in the senior ranks of TAFE at that time fully accepted the responsibility, even the privilege, of catering for economically and educationally disadvantaged 'clients' and did not regard them as a social justice problem.

CHAPTER 7

TAFE Outreach: Here come the Missionaries

Origins of Outreach: a commitment to more inclusion

Any human anywhere will blossom in a hundred unexpected talents and capacities by being given the opportunity to do so (Doris Lessing, cited in Chang 2006).

Doris Lessing's words could easily apply to the NSW TAFE Outreach program, because its underpinning philosophy was founded on the assumption that there were many people in the community who were either unwilling or unqualified to study in mainstream courses in technical colleges, but they should be given the opportunity to uncover their talents and capacities.

In the NSW TAFE Outreach Handbook (1979) the reasons given for lack of access were also referred to in both the 1974 and 1975 Reports of the Australian Committee on Technical and Further Education. They presented evidence of a closed off technical education system in which many different sectors of the population remained under-represented in mainstream courses and for whom TAFE represented an excessively bureaucratic organisation. Rather than seeking to encourage second-chance learners into its classrooms, it ensured they remained outside its gates. The two Reports of the Committees highlighted difficulties arising from complex formal enrolment procedures, the lack of a positive public image, outmoded teaching methods, failure to acknowledge life experiences as the foundation for building new and relevant knowledge, skills and critical understanding in older learners and a curriculum dominated by the needs of industry and business. In short, until Kangan created an expanded role for technical colleges to include broad, general education, TAFE remained aloof

from the radical political, economic and social changes going on all round it. However, when the demand began for it to adopt a policy to create broader access for specifically marginalised adult learners, the organisation was shaken out of its torpor to create a new image and identity for itself, as befitted the dynamic, radical changes in education by the Federal Labor Government.

One of the boldest and most innovative programs introduced into TAFE was designed to increase community participation in technical education. Outreach, as this program was called, was the first of the new general education initiatives, or Special Programs (implying in name the difference from mainstream courses and outcomes). It began in 1974 and its mission was to:

reach out into the local community, identify needs which it might be possible to satisfy and when possible, assist people to overcome their personal barriers to education and/or employment (NSW TAFE Annual Report: The Bedford Report 1977).

The Outreach arm of TAFE would not advertise itself in the local community and wait for people to come to it. It would go out and be visible and proactive in researching the needs and wishes of individuals and groups and thus

enabling individuals from all walks of life and from all areas of the State to acquire and improve vocational competency, develop talents and pursue interests (NSW TAFE Annual Report: The Landa Report 1979: 3).

Paul Landa was the Minister of Education who oversaw this report, but unfortunately died after only a short time in office. His untimely death was doubly unfortunate for TAFE, since Landa was regarded as progressive. In this report he supported a call for technical colleges throughout NSW to respond to restructuring and changes to its role 'in an imaginative and energetic way', dynamic words not previously appearing in TAFE Reports.

Two Outreach case studies – Introduction

In continuing this chapter, I will write about the history of the Outreach Program, and its founding policy and teaching staff, some of whom had completed a degree in adult education overseas in Ontario, Canada. I will highlight efforts to realise its goal of broadening equal access and opportunities for all kinds of disadvantaged individuals and groups, those who by their birth, ethnicity, gender, physical, social or geographical isolation had traditionally no place or vocational possibilities in technical college campuses throughout the land. The final part of this chapter will be given over to a critically reflective account of two case studies of courses in which I was closely involved as both an Outreach teacher and facilitator.

The first case study concerns an Outreach course for a group of long term resident immigrant Greek and Turkish mature age women, living in an inner-Sydney neighbourhood and socially isolated with low self-esteem. The second case study is about a group of adolescent boys labelled 'at-risk' by their schools. I include the Outreach language and literacy program for the immigrant women because in the period I worked with them, the experience radically challenged and altered my views about teaching semi-literate and illiterate students and I had to completely change my approaches to accommodate my new insights.

I selected the 'boys at-risk' project since it is the best practice example I experienced of how youth at-risk in secondary schools revived their motivation and interest in vocational training because their special program had in-built risk-taking activities pertaining to everyday life which called for leadership and team building. Secondly, the program is a particularly good example of what can be achieved when both school and community agencies join together to co-operate and collaborate in a common goal which has benefits for each in different ways.

Committed to social justice and equity

The above sub-heading is best summed up in the words of Dr Camilla Couch, one of Outreach's longest serving and most committed coordinators as follows:

The uniqueness of the Outreach model lies in the program's commitment to social justice. The underlying ethic in all Outreach programs is the social justice principle. This is not merely a fair go for all scenario but a strategic and informed approach to the holistic needs of disadvantaged students within the socio-cultural and economic context of their communities. Outreach employs this strategic approach to ensure sustainable vocational and education outcomes. Education and training is not delivered in isolation to the complex needs of students and their wider community issues (Couch, 1990).

With the creation of new departments in TAFE's central office, the winds of change began to blow through the corridors, jolting the complacency of the 'old guard', men and a few women who had risen through the ranks of their particular trade to become Heads of the schools and departments in colleges, or senior bureaucrats in Head Office. Many did not take kindly to the influx of younger policy and program officers with educational qualifications and a mission statement emphasizing social justice and equal educational rights. A Special Programs Unit was set up with its own Director and all of the newly emerging administrative units of programs located in a cluster arrangement next to each other – Outreach, the Women's Unit, Youth Employment, Aboriginal Unit.

As it happened just after the release of the Kangan Report, the Assistant Director of TAFE, Don Phillips went to the USA to visit some of their community Outreach programs and how they functioned. On his return, he was shortly after made the Director of Curriculum in the newly established Special Programs Unit. He brought into the unit Bob Moorcroft, who had previously and successfully managed the Stanmore Inner City Education Centre funded by the Australian Schools Commission as part of their Innovations' Program. This was an initiative to encourage teachers, parents, schools and educational institutions to

experiment with and try out new ideas and practices to benefit their particular locations. This particular Education Centre throughout its entire existence was a great success in bringing together under one roof diverse groups and education campaigns and it served as a library, homework centre, meeting place and campaign headquarters for rallies. Moorcroft had also worked in the School of Education at Macquarie University, but more importantly he had completed an MA Degree in the newly emerging field of adult education at the Ontario Institute of Secondary Education in Canada.

Geoff Scott, another fresh graduate from the Ontario Institute of Secondary Education, who was later to become Professor of Education at The University of Technology, Sydney, also joined the Special Programs Curriculum Unit, along with Richard Fletcher, a community educator. Their combined brief was to investigate how TAFE might begin effectively to reach out to adults in the community, who had until that point, remained faceless and excluded from mainstream entry. These included adults who remained on the fringes of life by being disadvantaged educationally, economically and socially, or by age, gender, ethnicity, physical and mental disability, geographical and social isolation.

The first Outreach Coordinators: prioritising disadvantaged learners

In July 1977, the first two positions of Outreach Co-ordinators were advertised, one to be located in what was then the Inner West Technical College (now Petersham College of TAFE) and the other on the fringes of southwestern Sydney, Liverpool College. These locations were selected because they were areas of high migrant populations, low employment and lack of English and literacy proficiency. Geoff Scott was appointed to Petersham and Cassandra Pybus to Liverpool. Scott captured the enthusiasm for the newly emerging program and its potential, exclaiming

With clogs, long hair, youth and God on our side we had a common moral purpose; we were looking at how education might best contribute to the

development of the total social, intellectual, creative and cultural capital of the country, not just that of an advantaged elite (Scott, 2001).

The missionary label for the role of those first Outreach Co-ordinators is appropriate because they were required to go out into the community and spread the word about opportunities to set up the equivalent of learning circles in local communities, so that people would not need to enrol in TAFE but TAFE would come to them. Via leaflets, posters, broadcasts on local community radio stations, meetings with leaders of church and welfare groups, gradually an Outreach Co-ordinator would build up a profile about adult education needs and interests in a particular location, predicated on the basic assumption of second chance learning as distinct from hobby courses leading no-where. In every Outreach program, the planning stage would be informed by participants interested in the course, but equally the content would be influenced by the requirement to include knowledge building, skills acquisition and improved self-esteem as a result of undertaking a course.

Another important distinguishing feature of the approach taken by Outreach co-ordinators was the priority they gave to working with those parts of the community that were most fragile, vulnerable or disadvantaged. To illustrate, where I first worked as an Outreach teacher in TAFE in a college situated close to social housing and high rise flats there had been, several years running, an Outreach course in dressmaking for a small number of local residents on a housing commission estate. The class had its own teacher supplied by Outreach, and at the heart of it, was a small social group of older women engaged in the same activities semester after semester. A new Outreach co-ordinator, ceased funding it despite protests, because it was not (a) opening up opportunities and building knowledge and skills to enable people to find work; (b) addressing questions of identity by strengthening self-esteem; or (c) engaging with learners disadvantaged by low income, long history of unemployment, masculinist attitudes that discouraged women from paid work, and previous failure in schooling. In its place the new Outreach Co-ordinator began a group for young women on the estate who wished to discover what opportunities there existed in

their local TAFE colleges for study leading to employment. The approach to these young women of which some were single mothers, was low key, informal and importantly, included child-care funded by Outreach so the participants would be free to attend the course and have their pre-school children occupied while they discussed their options.

Always the main intention of Outreach courses was to provide a comfortable, non-threatening learning environment in which topics were negotiated and invariably would commence with a summary of participants' own knowledge and experience of the subject matter and what they wished to acquire. Outreach programs provided disadvantaged learners with their first hesitant steps into formal study, but using 'informal' methods.

Expansion of Outreach throughout New South Wales

The spread of Outreach in its first decade was eased by the de-centralisation of the TAFE system which released the dead-hand of authoritarianism and rigid bureaucratic conformity. Colleges were suddenly granted the freedom to run their own affairs, set up their own governing bodies including local representatives and decide what courses to offer, in keeping with their geographical location and whether metropolitan, regional, rural or isolated.

Principals were afforded much greater independence in managing their colleges and so were able to be pro-active in fulfilling the conditions of the TAFE charter, a document creating the Department of Technical and Further Education separate and distinct from the NSW Department of Education. The rising number of Outreach Co-ordinators was due to principals who recognised the value of Outreach in reaching those who lived too far away in many country areas to travel to a TAFE college site, or did not feel ready to enrol in formal education or training.

Examples of two typical Outreach projects

Because Outreach had its roots in non-credentialled community based adult education, its popularity soon spread and Outreach Co-ordinators and teachers found themselves conducting courses in a wide variety of locations such as private homes, church halls, school classrooms, aged-care centres. Often programs had to be tailored to outside school and care centres so that classes might be in the evenings, at weekends, or over one or two days. Key words which capture those early attempts to start programs are 'negotiation' and 'location.' Both were crucial to explain the organisation of a program which needed to both satisfy local needs and be conducted in an easy-to-reach place.

A pioneering Outreach co-ordinator, Vicki Potter, told how daunted she was when she first calculated the size of the region she was expected to cover on her rounds for it was the equivalent of the whole of the British Isles. Potter travelled by car and began to connect urban, regional and rural communities, and find out what were their needs and interests and to suggest ways these could be met by a tailored Outreach program. She told of meeting farming families in their homes, at livestock and cattle sales, even in paddocks and how many of them were in their words, 'doing it tough.' Some farmers' wives wished to help their partners by taking over some of the book-keeping responsibilities associated with running farms and properties and wished to learn basic accounting to ease their husband's work pressures particularly in times of drought. So, while Co-ordinators in Outreach sections in inner-city and metropolitan fringe neighbourhoods were busy setting up vocationally based literacy language and numeracy classes for both skilled and unskilled immigrant workers and up-skilling others, their country counterparts were negotiating different needs and developing courses to satisfy the needs and interests of their rural counterparts.

In 1979, Paul Landa, was made NSW Minister for Education in the Labor Cabinet. Although highly talented, he was still considered relatively young and inexperienced to take on such an important portfolio. He became the chief

minister for the NSW TAFE system and it seemed he would stamp his mark on the organization, but unfortunately died prematurely from a heart attack. In examining the many TAFE annual reports to the NSW Minister for Education, it is noticeable how the Landa documents are free from departmental jargon, as the Minister directs TAFE NSW to begin to rise to the challenges of new community expectations 'in an imaginative and challenging way' (NSW TAFE Annual Report: The Bedford Report, 1977). The Minister reminded the organization that it must begin to broaden its focus to enable individuals 'from all walks of life and from all areas of the State to acquire and improve vocational competency, develop talents and pursue interests' (NSW TAFE Annual Report: The Bedford Report, 1977). It seemed like at last the winds of change were at last beginning to blow through the TAFE system where previously they had become stuck in a mire of complacency and predictability. Paul Landa brought to his education management role, however short term, challenges to a stale, hidebound bureaucracy. He wished the TAFE NSW system to willingly and enthusiastically embrace the whole of the general public and not simply work trainees and apprentices.

By 1980, Outreach was well established in the community and constantly designing new programs to satisfy community needs and expectations. There were Outreach coordinators in Bankstown, Blacktown, Granville, Randwick and Wollongong. During that same year Outreach expanded to include the Hunter-Newcastle region, the North Coast of NSW, Central Western NSW, New England and the Riverina. Examples of typical Outreach courses are the following:

- English for trades
- Family day care skills for women of non-English speaking background
- Conversational Italian for seniors
- Oral history and poetry for aged-care residents
- Living in Sydney – a program and resources for immigrants
- Beginning conversational English
- Vocational opportunities for overseas trained teachers

- Parenting skills for single parents
- Bicycle maintenance.

These are just a few of the many Outreach courses and the Bedford report in 1997 gave the total number of Outreach programs throughout the State as 150 with 2,700 total enrolments. The Report commented that:

Any group of people with a common interest can approach an Outreach Coordinator, or a college principal and request a course. If TAFE can provide it, the group and the teacher work out the course together – what will be in it, how it will be taught, what materials and resources will be needed, how students will be assessed and where and when classes will be held (NSW TAFE Annual Report: The Bedford Report: 22).

Best teaching practice

Two highly successful Outreach courses for aged-care residents in nursing homes could usefully act as models for the present day ageing population, many of them languishing and lacking brain and mind stimulation. Chris Latona's oral history and poetry group was so popular and with such positive outcomes for its participants that Latona won a Churchill Fellowship and travelled overseas to continue researching aged-care provision. She also produced a manual, *Teaching for the Aged*.

Derek Waddell, was an Outreach Coordinator of great skill and wide experience. He appeared as a facilitator in a video, *What does Grey Matter?* (1978), which recorded his experiences in teaching a ten-week course with a group of aged residents in a private nursing home. The brainchild of Chris Latona, the video was produced by NSW TAFE Staff Development Unit and TAFE Outreach. What is so impressive, even moving, as you watch the video, is how gradually Waddell first awakens and gradually captures the interest and enthusiasm of his participants. At first they sit silent and passive when Waddell invites them to volunteer ideas about what they might like to study, but by the middle of the

course, residents are out of their seats, writing accounts of a visit to a local museum which Waddell had arranged at their instigation. By the end of the course the group had produced and edited a magazine containing some of what they had discussed and thought about during the program. As well, the video shows how residents became proactive and vocal during the sessions, listening and commenting on each other's work with suggestions and ideas. Their improved confidence and renewed interest in life and each other is palpable and moving to observe. During the last session when Waddell is asking residents what they have most gained from their Outreach course, a woman tells how she had felt isolated from her fellow residents, but because of taking part in the course she had made friends in the home and felt happier and less isolated.

Outreach is one of the great success stories of TAFE with its emphasis on general adult education, as distinct from narrow vocational training. It was conceived to be always innovative, flexible and negotiable which stands in contrast to the curriculum approaches that place value on standardisation and pre-determined and detailed competency standards. It is short-sighted of governments and senior bureaucrats to dismiss the social capital wealth Outreach builds in communities while inspiring individual learners to seek further learning opportunities, both formal and informal. In his keynote address as guest speaker on the occasion of the 25th anniversary of the Outreach Project, Geoff Scott listed the foundational principles which underpinned its success and popularity in communities. They were:

- All people have a right to access the best quality of education, irrespective of their background, abilities, needs or experience.
- Education is an investment not a cost – not just in the workforce but in the development of the total social, intellectual and creative capital of Australia.
- Overcoming any disadvantage arising from the accident of one's birth is a national responsibility not just an individual one.

- Working in partnership can achieve far more than working in competition. This working co-operatively rather than competitively towards a common goal can make a difference. [Scott fails to elaborate on this.]
- Listen then lead. Empathic listening lends itself to working towards a common solution and is likely to achieve a better outcome.
- The single-minded pursuit of material wealth or status is not the source of human connection or satisfaction in life. (Scott, 2001: paraphrase of the speech).

Scott went on to identify the hallmarks of teaching practice in Outreach as:

- Relevant to participants' backgrounds, abilities, needs and experiences.
- Addresses real life issues and problems.
- Acknowledges prior knowledge and experience.
- Incorporates varied active learning experiences.
- Links theory and practice.
- Ensures clear directions and proceeds in 'digestible chunks'.
- Uses peer group input as a learning support and resource.
- Has inbuilt expectations of knowledge and skills and alternatives as a result of the learning experience.
- Gives constructive and detailed feedback.
- Provides further pathways to learning.
- Student- centred rather than teacher dependent.
- Ensures convenience of time, place and support systems to ensure access and participation.

The above, together with freedom from bureaucratic constraints, has enabled Outreach help marginalised and educationally disadvantaged people find an educational pathway and discover their potential, break the silence of their lives,

build trust in themselves and their teachers and utilise Outreach to support their efforts best.

I hope the following two very different case studies from my own experiences as a former Outreach facilitator and teacher will demonstrate how TAFE teachers can instil learning outside and beyond the more usual formal classroom arrangements.

CHAPTER 8

TAFE Outreach: Case study 1 – ‘The roar that lies on the other side of silence’ (Eliot 2008: 361)

Introduction

In the title for this chapter, I chose a quotation from one of George Eliot’s most popular novels, *Middlemarch* as having resonance for a group of isolated immigrant women resident in Chippendale, an inner–Sydney neighbourhood who participated in an Outreach course that was designed to promote their skill in oral English, but ended up achieving well beyond its original purpose and aim. During the semester the course ran, the women began to tell stories about their lives and in some instances break their silence of oppression and fear.

Just as significantly, the case study tells of my own gradual change from a teacher dependent on textbook props for teaching purposes, to one who became willing and able to allow the students to dictate and determine the direction and content of the course. In time, when trust had been established between the group and myself we were able to undertake an exploration of women’s lives at both an individual level and in the broader context of immigrant women in Australian society. As a result of my encounters with this group, I began better to understand the connection between the personal and the political and the cultural divides between them.

Prior to meeting the group I had extensively read and studied Paulo Freire’s methods of teaching cultural literacy (1972a, 1972b, 1976 and 1991) to illiterate peasants and farm workers in Brazil and Guinea–Bissau made popular in Australia and published throughout the 1970s. I had been the only woman and

non-university teacher in a study group based on Freire's philosophy. This had led to a joint project to write a book, which was entitled, *Literacy and Revolution: the Pedagogy of Paulo Freire*, (Mackie1980.) in which I contributed an essay on the politics of literacy (Bee 1980). I understood theoretically what Freire meant when he wrote about and attacked 'the culture of silence' and why he emphasised the importance of encouraging adult learners to deal creatively with their reality by problematising oppressive situations in their lives as the first step to transforming them. However, it was not until I faced this small group of mostly Greek and Turkish Cypriot women for the first time in a small, cramped upstairs room of an inner-city women's community and resource centre, that I realised that I did not have a clue about how to practically apply Freire's teaching methods however much I agreed with them in theory. Thus, in the early stages of the program, I leaned heavily on a textbook approach to teaching the women despite the fact that my efforts met with blank faces and polite silences.

Freire's generative words and themes with Ashton-Warner's primers

Before going on to describe and discuss how I first learned to apply Freire's approach in my own teaching practice in an Outreach course, I will outline two key practical concepts that are central. In his book, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1972) Paulo Freire introduced the concepts of both generative words and generative themes as appropriate for teaching 'illiterate' adults to read and write with meaning and purpose. Generative words, as defined by Freire, assumed that adults, like children, learned to read quickly and more easily with words that were already part and parcel of their everyday lives and experiences—that were familiar and meaningful in their particular, cultural and linguistic milieu. So, before compiling an actual reading program, Freire sent teams of teachers and volunteers into communities and settlements to investigate their culture and to make a list of commonly used words and expressions having relevance and meaning for that particular group of adults. Then the team would take these words and from them compile a shortlist based on two equally

important criteria, their affective (emotional) impact and potential for provoking discussion. Secondly, words were garnered whose phonetic values could easily be broken down to include all the phonetic sounds of the spoken Portuguese language. This method of only using words which carried meaning and import for adult learners was crucial for both motivating and inspiring their efforts and achieved better results than the imposition of pre-packaged reading schemes and literacy kits having little or no relevance for the individual, social, cultural or political conditions of peasants' lives.

As a former literacy teacher of both children and adults, Freire's methods of teaching reading were not unfamiliar or unique at that time, for I had long since eschewed reading schemes which emphasised technical, phonetic prowess at cost to the living language and imagination of my students and their different cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Neither was I the only primary school teacher who, at that time, was motivating and capturing the interest of young children in reading by listening to and getting them to provide words which they wanted and enjoyed.

I also took as my model the inspirational work of Sylvia Ashton-Warner who beautifully describes a teacher working with young Maori children in New Zealand (1963). This is the perfect example of one who, without knowing Freire's emphasis on generative words to motivate and instil reading skills, listened carefully to the words and expressions her young learners brought into the classroom and made flash cards of those words the children remembered because of their powerful associations with their experiences in their close-knit Maori community. No colonial hark-backs in the guise of Janet and John primers for Ashton-Warner's students, or pre-packaged literacy kits. In their place she compiled a set of primers based on the stories and happenings in her children's lives that were exuberant and vibrant expressions of what they experienced first-hand in their families and community. I was soon to tread the same path; first with young children and later with adult learners. Whilst I found Freire's style of writing hard to digest, I instantly bonded with his teaching and learning

methods particularly in relation to generative words and the themes, which in turn these words generated.

Paulo Freire used generative words as a stepping stone on the journey towards a deeper and more actively liberatory use of words and ideas through his construct of generative themes. These were part and parcel of the cultural circles which Freire and his teams set up in rural communities to encourage critical reflection and discussion. Central to Freire's understanding of literacy was its close association with politics and education and the cultural circles were the means of encouraging peasants to explore the themes of exploitation, domestication in their own lives and circumstances. But more significantly, participants in the circles were encouraged to talk about local problems and unfair treatment and to share ideas about how to liberate their lives from oppression. The most important aim of these cultural circles was to raise the people's awareness of their domination and servitude by unscrupulous landowners and to enable them to understand that liberation or freedom from inequalities lay in their own hands.

Like words which evoked powerful emotional connections and associations and so generated motivation and engagement, themes introduced in the circles whether by a picture, photograph, word, a phrase, or a story, were always chosen because they resonated in the consciousness of the learners and provided the motivation and means for discussion and dialogue. Just as importantly, however, they became the means by which participants could move beyond a subjective interpretation to a broader and more objective understanding and de-coding of reality. Freire's use of themes to generate critical discussion and dialogue aimed to make adult learners realise that they were their own creators of knowledge who need not remain silent or dependent on higher authority. They could become powerful agents for change and intervention and need no longer see themselves as passive and silent objects rather than subjects in their world.

Many years ago when I was helping to spread the word and work of Freire amongst literacy teachers, some were uneasy about his overtly political stance in relation to education and I recall one teacher exiting the group with the words: 'I teach literacy, not politics.' I understood her doubts, but in the times I have worked with groups of women identified with poverty and inequality, I have come to understand the importance of choosing words and themes which generate meaning and meaningfulness in their lives. By so doing, these same words and themes seem naturally to lead to a politicised stance. This type of 'politics' go far deeper than surface allegiances to parties with their particular ideologies and policies. Take, for example, the word 'woman' and consider how many words and themes it suggests; in turn consider how this generates dialogue.

In the remainder of this chapter I will tell the story of my experiences with a group of socially isolated immigrant women and how my contact with them changed the emphasis in my teaching. The group, my first in Outreach, came to embody everything I learned to admire and emulate about Freire and his methods of teaching illiterates. In our 'culture circle' we taught and learned together through both generative words and themes and we were never short of new words, problems or ideas to talk about and explore.

Background to the Chippendale Project

I first became an Outreach teacher/facilitator in 1979 having transferred from my former part-time position as the Multicultural Co-ordinator in a large metropolitan technical college with increasing numbers of immigrants, including Vietnamese refugees seeking entrance to the college's mainstream trade and technical courses. I joined Outreach for two reasons, the first being that I welcomed the challenge of teaching subjects and courses requested by different community groups in an informal setting. Secondly, the Outreach Co-ordinator who first employed and mentored me as a teacher, had both insight and a special

interest in how TAFE Outreach might improve the educational chances of women and young women. This person was keen also to break the gender barrier for female students to enable more of them to enrol in areas which had been considered the prerogative of males.

One of her first pieces of action research in taking over the position of Outreach Co-ordinator at the College, was to establish a rapport with community representatives and residents, particularly women, on a nearby high-rise housing commission estate. To this end an Outreach colleague and myself both distributed leaflets about Outreach throughout the estate as well as visiting many of the women residing there. What we discovered was that other than a weekly sewing group there were no other outlets for the women on the estate especially single mothers cooped up in tiny living spaces often on the top floors of the buildings. Neither were there any courses operating in the immediate college vicinity on an informal basis, other than a neighbourhood centre a few blocks away.

We want to speak English

As the college's Outreach Co-ordinator, Kaye Schofield was approached by the co-ordinator of this particular centre which provided services and information for the large numbers of immigrant women in and around the area. Some of the Greek and Turkish women who were regulars at the centre had approached the co-ordinator to ask if she could find a teacher to help them improve their English. They did not want to learn to read and write English, but only to 'speak it better.' All of them were post-second world war migrants who had accompanied their husbands to Australia having left their kinship groups behind and all that was culturally familiar to them. They all lived in small terrace houses close to each other in the same street where the neighbourhood centre was too. Some had basic schooling but then had been withdrawn to help with family chores. The family unit was patriarchal and girls were married young,

usually to older men, sometimes relatives. One or two of the group had a rudimentary grasp of reading and writing, but for the most part were illiterate in their own language as well as English. All had arrived as assisted migrants from countries like Italy, Greece and Turkey when rural economies had failed and so they had come with their husbands to seek a better life in Australia. Apart from communication and connection with each other the women I was to teach led restricted, ghettoised lives, with limited exposure to Australian society or culture. Some had children who were enrolled in local Catholic parish schools and these appeared to be their one point of contact with the outside world. Otherwise the women carried out their responsibilities as homemakers, child-carers and supporters for their husbands to whom they were subservient. The extent of their social interaction was with each other, local shops, their church and the neighbourhood centre.

As far as Outreach was concerned, this group of marginalised women was one of its most urgent priorities. They had had few, if any, opportunities to overcome economic privation, social isolation, or lack of education. I was asked, in the first instance, to make contact with the group and trial a few exploratory oral English classes to discover more about the women's attainment levels, but more importantly to see if I could establish a rapport with the group. As motivated as I was to uncover the best ways to teach English, I was also fully aware of my responsibility to be culturally respectful and sensitive to the moral and social values the women held. I was feminist by conviction, childless and unmarried which put me at a disadvantage in connecting with my students, some of whom wondered why I wasn't married?

Only one participant had broken the convention of marriage, a Turkish woman in her seventies, who, on arrival in the country divorced her husband. She was feisty, independent and liable to upbraid the younger women in the group when she thought they needed it. She did not find it strange that I was without a husband, but some of the group did at first and joked they would find me a suitable partner! I found my feminist values unchanged, but I kept them to myself in all but my determination to demonstrate the importance of education

in giving women more opportunities in life. Two of the youngest Greek Cypriot women in the group spoke English reasonably well and were allies in translating for the rest of the group. Both, I discovered, were highly intelligent women curious to find out as much of the world as they were able to beyond their circumscribed lives. These women made rapid progress and 'blossomed' as the course progressed.

Another student only attended class sporadically and was often distressed which greatly concerned me. When I asked the other women the reason for her distress, they explained that she was the second wife of an older man who had married her when his first wife died. She was deeply unhappy because the union was childless and the husband blamed her for their situation. She never smiled and during activities rarely spoke or joined in. She later told me how the only time she was truly happy was when she drove a tractor on her parents' land! This image did not match with the depressed, silent adult who sat at the back of the group. I accepted that she was probably deeply depressed and that she came to class more for the social support it provided than to improve her English.

Peter Waterhouse has observed significant learning experiences do not simply happen in the head and brain (2004). Alongside and deeply influencing the cognitive content of a program is the affective domain which, he contended, permeates the richness and complexity of the learning process far beyond mere instrumental outcomes or competencies. Waterhouse has taught across Australia in a variety of tertiary programs and blogs about his explorations of experiential learning (see <http://www.storycatcher.net.au/> accessed September 2014). In the weeks following the dismal start to my conversational English program I discovered how right he was about the importance of the affective domain. The first few sessions with the group turned into a teacher's worst nightmare and I came close to asking for a replacement.

I had looked for teaching resources to help me plan my lessons, but these were either in the form of formal text and workbooks, which were too advanced in content, or inappropriate in context. Then I came across a set of conversational

aids specifically designed to develop English-language-speaking skills for new arrivals to Australia. Focusing on the city, the package was entitled, *Living in Sydney* (unpublished materials). The materials were produced in 1978 by two teachers, seconded from Sydney TAFE College. They were possibly the first new teaching materials commissioned by Outreach (source, correspondence with Bob Moorcroft). However, when I examined the contents carefully I considered them too stilted and unrealistic given my group's lack of exposure to the city beyond their own immediate location. For example, the unit of conversation about negotiating a visit to a seaside suburb on Sydney's northern beaches wasn't relevant because the women lacked the confidence, means or even interest in a far-off beach and, as well, the communication between the travellers and transport officials on bus and ferry, was artificial, stilted, overly formal and lacking vernacular. Manly might just as well have been on the other side of the world! In the meantime I was getting nowhere in breaking the long silences between myself and the students so that while before, mid-break and at the end of the class the women broke into their native tongues, laughing and chatting, my pathetic attempts to engage them in repetitious exercises beginning 'Say after me

I needed to be able to unlock and engage with life as they lived and experienced it, which is at the heart of Freire's epistemology in that he and his teachers used only drawings and words which resonated with the peasants and which generated a strong response as the start to a more detailed critical analysis of the objects or ideas. For example, when the peasants were shown a drawing of a well in a cultural circle, it represented far more than a mere object for drawing water but carried with it a deeply subjective meaning and response. Although the villagers had made (built) the well with their own hands, it was not common property because it was on land owned by a wealthy landlord who charged the peasants for using 'his' water to feed their crops. By means of strategic questions the peasants were encouraged to begin to think more deeply and critically about

'ownership' of water and their unacknowledged skills in creating the well whose use was controlled by a landlord, or oppressor.

There is no suggestion in the many accounts of Freire's work in critical literacy that he ever offered solutions to the many problems facing poverty-stricken peasants he and his teams worked with. Rather, through skilled questioning and simply drawn everyday objects, the men and women in his groups slowly came to be aware - 'conscientized' - to their own oppression and who were their oppressors. This is a highly politicised awakening and educational process which as a result, the 'wretched of the earth' as Franz Fanon named them, could think and act to liberate themselves. In thinking about how Freire's methods could possibly apply to alleviate my teaching failure and engage my group of adults, two different books about successful language and literacy schemes came to hand when I was at a very low point in my teaching. The first one was by a New Zealand teacher and I had been moved when first I read it. It told how a New Zealand teacher was sent to work in a mixed-age one-teacher school in a Maori community or 'Pa.' In discovering she had a set of primers to help the children learn to read that were culturally alien, she threw them out and compiled her own readers based on the lives and language of her Maori students.

The second inspiration - and the more readily useful since it was an account of a women's literacy project in a community centre in the racially mixed London borough of Peckham - contained stories and poems which immigrant women had written to describe and interpret their lives and experiences as immigrant women trying to survive in a society mired in racial prejudice, class and gender discrimination under a Thatcherite Tory government. It was called, *I want to write it down* (Peckham Publishing Project 1980).

The Peckham Publishing Project, a non-profit organisation, was part of the Bookplace on Peckham High Street, a community bookshop for people living in Southwark. It was anti-racist, multicultural and promoted ethnic minority literatures. Local people were given the opportunity to write and publish... Publications were widespread, from education titles to histories about the local

area, to titles about the community, women, reminiscence work and literacy. A series of books were published for adults to learn to read (Sunmonu 2002).

I noticed how the booklet's contents began with personal accounts of individual women writing about their experiences and feelings as housewives, mothers, paid workers and then gradually progressing to broader and more political themes, portraying women taking social action and protesting against social injustice and discrimination ending with an account of a women's anti-nuclear base protest and sit-in at Greenham Common which drew women from all over Britain. Clearly whoever had been behind the Peckham Publishing Project was not neutral in their teaching approach which was openly feminist, politically to the left and was presenting a view of women's lives which gave meaning to the slogan 'The personal is political' implying this particular group of women as with women in general were not to blame for their oppression, and that it arose from a society whose foundation and infrastructure had its roots in patriarchy and paternalism.

As I looked at the contents of the Peckham booklet I was struck by how the women in its pages had vividly brought to life the ordinary everyday events of their lives and struggles to make sense and meaning of them. They were painfully honest, reflective and full of insights. One short poem caught my attention, which I subsequently copied and handed out to the women in the group. Before the women arrived I copied the poem on the whiteboard. It read:

My job

*I am a full-time housewife
I work around the clock
I get no pay for what I do
I wash, cook, clean, iron and shop
I have no holidays
Sometimes I feel discouraged*

(Peckham Project, 1980: 39)

Here was a short verse compiled by a woman on the other side of the world whose perspective on her situation had given voice and meaning to theirs. More importantly, I had discovered a way into reaching the group, which made the women the subject of their own learning instead of having to rely on text-book themes and formats donated by language experts. What's more, my choice of one short poem which the students intuitively grasped, provided me with a way into adapting and applying Freire's teaching and learning methods in my own community classroom because the poem provided ample opportunities for critical reflection on women's oppression in the home through the value of their unpaid, undervalued housework to society. It had a generative theme to provoke an awakening consciousness in the students as they intuited that the words in the poem were addressed to them and described them.

Once I had answered questions about the meanings of words and phrases such as: working 'round' the clock and 'discouraged;' the women were able to 'recite' the poem first as a group and then most of them individually. You could detect their intuitive grasp that this short verse was about them. The rest of the session passed much more quickly as I asked questions strategic to the women's own understanding and feelings about housework.

1. *What is this woman's job?*
2. *What jobs does she do?*
3. *Is she paid for her work?*
4. *Does she have holidays?*
5. *Which words mean that she works all day and into the night?*
6. *Is she happy in her work?*
7. *Do you sometimes feel discouraged when you do housework? Tell about it?*
8. *When you do housework who helps you?*
9. *Do you think you would be rich if you were paid for the washing? cooking? cleaning? ironing and shopping?*
10. *How much do you think is a fair wage for the work you do in the home?*
11. *Do you feel the same as the women in the poem? Do you 'work round the clock'? Were you 'discouraged' sometimes?*

Generative theme: housework

Generative word: discouraged

If I had any doubts about using 'My job' as a stimulus to get my students speaking English without feeling a lack of ability, or staying silent because they were hoping I would translate its meaning to them as the expert, I need not have worried.

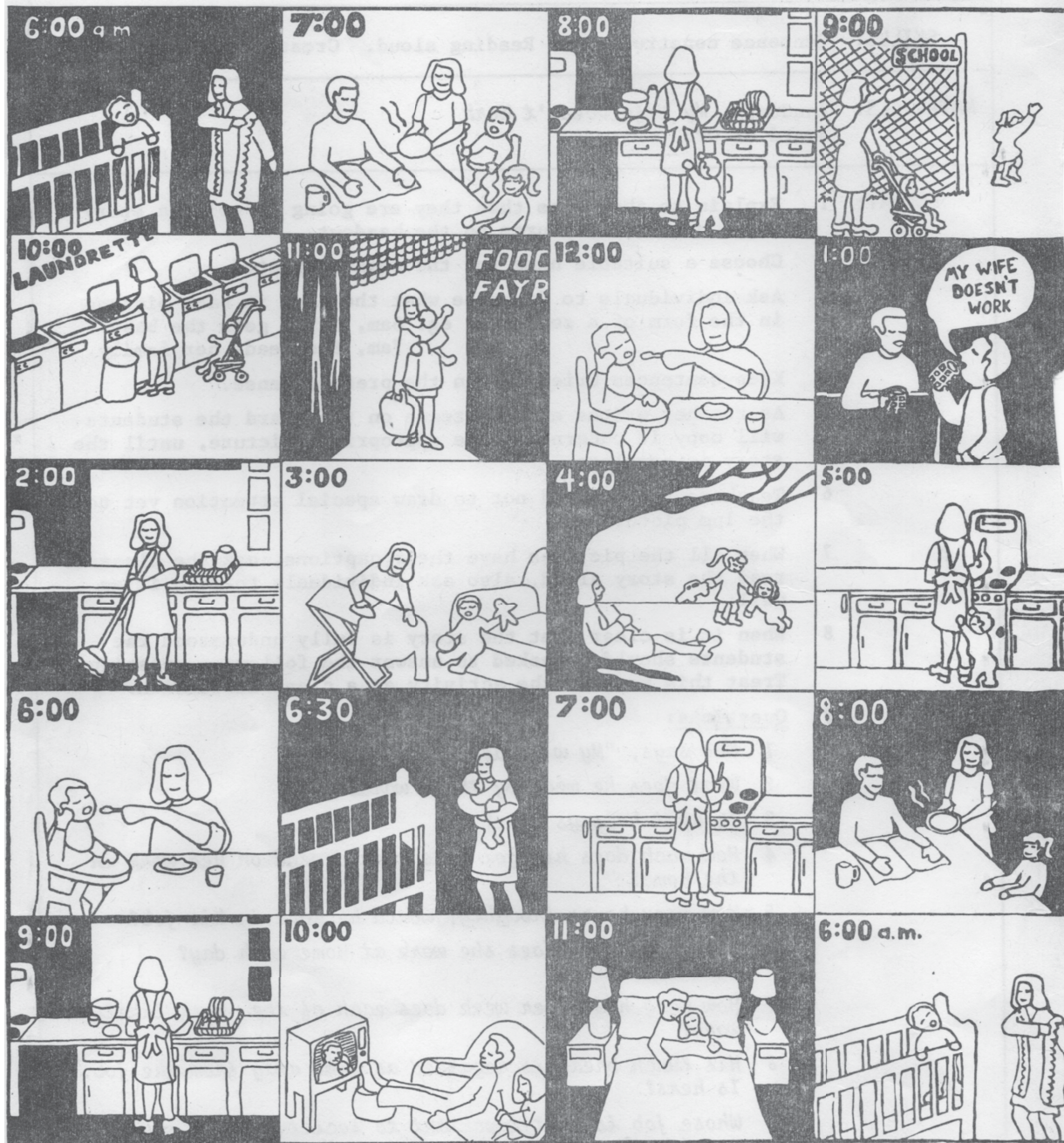
One student, the brightest and most articulate of the group, who, it was clear by the end of the program, could easily have gained access to a TAFE women's work and study course, was usually never late for class, despite having a difficult husband who did not approve of her learning English. I will call her S. She was, however, very late the session following the introduction of the poem. When she finally arrived, she was flushed and excited and when I invited her to tell us what had happened to make her late, she told how that morning her husband had said she was not come to class, but stay home to be with him and make his coffee. She had retorted by reciting the entire *My job* to him, emphasising with feeling the word 'discouraged.' Then, she went on 'and I put my coat on, I slam the door and I come to class!' She looked at me, remarking, 'I like this word "discouraged." I feel like this a lot.' One Freire-ian conscientizing experience was enabled through workshopping with one oppressive word.

In the weeks following I made heavy use of the words, cartoons and resources in the Peckham women's booklet (1980) to raise concerns around the generative theme of women's work and lives. These were effective in drawing the group into responding enthusiastically because the subject matter was all about their experiences in their adopted land and culture and were full of feeling about how immigrants were treated.

On one occasion I handed out copies of the following story in comic form. The pictures depict a typical day in the life of a wife and mother starting at 6 am when she goes to get her crying baby. The pictures follow her progress throughout her busy day hour by hour: preparing meals, washing dishes,

delivering her eldest child to school, shopping, feeding and walking the baby, putting it to bed, preparing dinner for her husband and child and finally at 10 pm managing one hour to herself. At 11 pm she is shown in bed with her husband looking as if he is leaning towards her hopefully. The last picture shows her at 6 am the next day going to get her crying baby from its cot. Only the 1pm picture is not about her, but shows her husband drinking in a bar and remarking to his male friend, 'My wife doesn't work.' I describe this cartoon in full because it provided such a rich visual stimulus for each picture and easily enabled the students to caption them, which they really enjoyed.

MY WIFE DOESN'T WORK.



Source: Peckham Publishing Project 1980

In time and with the woman in the story given the chosen name of Maria, we had captions to explain and describe Maria's busy day from beginning to end:

6 am Maria gets her baby.

7 am She cooks breakfast.

8 am She washes the dishes.

And so on, throughout one day in Maria's life. We practised reading what was on the blackboard and the majority of the group were able to remember the words using the visual clues. Some of the group listened to themselves reading aloud after being individually recorded and they became more confident in their attempts to do so. Their response to the husband's words 'My wife doesn't work' simply made them laugh ironically. Two years later, as part of a major teaching package which I developed for NSW TAFE Outreach, I prepared a series of strategic questions that could be used alongside the cartoon.

1. *Give the group a few minutes to study all the pictures.*
2. *Ask what story do the pictures tell?*
3. *Ask who says "My wife doesn't work".*
4. *What does he mean?*
5. *Do you agree with the husband's words?*
6. *Whose work is more important?*
7. *How could this husband help his wife share the household tasks?*
8. *What's your view of this cartoon?*
Is it a true picture of women's work at home?
9. *In some developed nations in the world there are campaigns to pay women for housework. In your view what would be a fair rate of pay for the woman in the picture based on how many hours a day she works? (Source: Bee 1984).*

This is a long description of one case study based on the Outreach program aimed at a pre-vocational group of socially isolated migrant women to help them overcome the language barrier in ways which not only improved their grasp and use of English, but just as relevantly began the process of breaking the habitual silence of their lives and gradually finding their voices to talk about their difficulties, feelings and attitudes. Equality of opportunity is an empty and meaningless phrase if you lack the means and the knowledge to find entry into mainstream society. You stay, as these women had for decades, on the margins, constrained and silenced.

There is no sense in which I set out to upset the balance or the good things in their lives. Most showed remarkable resilience and tenacity to what they believed could not be changed, particularly in view of their patriarchal dominated lives and authoritarian attitudes that governed their upbringing in isolated rural villages. E. the closest friend of S. once told me how she had attempted to break the chains by suicide rather than marry an older relative chosen for her by her father. However, she talked about how this desperate act made her father relent and she was able to marry the man with whom she had fallen in love, after which they migrated to Australia. She had a family of two boys and appeared to be the happiest as well as one of the most capable women in the group who was always helping others in the class and who had a partner who approved of her independence. In time, the students were able to progress beyond the themes of the Peckham booklet and began to bring to the class issues and questions of their own. They were thirsting for knowledge and information about their children's schools and Australian teaching methods. They wanted to discuss their beliefs that discipline in Australian schools was too slack. They did not know about the existence of community women's organisations that were funded to assist women with health, legal, childcare and welfare services. In particular they were surprised by the knowledge that Leichhardt Women's Health Centre had female doctors who could communicate in different languages and conducted programs to help women free themselves from tranquillizer addiction and offered exercise and relaxation classes.

Towards the end of the first course I put together a personal booklet for each student in which I included her individual responses to requests for her to tell the group one thing about her role as a wife, a mother, a daughter and lastly as a woman. I had recorded, kept and collated the students' replies and when they were complete handed out to each student a copy of her story. We then listened as each woman recalled and read aloud what she had spoken about in the various roles. Although the request before the program began was for speaking English and not for reading and writing, somewhere along the way reading as well as writing had made their way into the course so that some students had begun to note down words which appealed to them and I made a habit of encouraging students to practise reading short sentences from the board which they had dictated to me. They enjoyed hearing themselves on the tape recorder too.

Interestingly the group had found it relatively easy to say a few words about themselves as wives, mothers, etc but when I wrote 'woman' on the board it was met with a puzzled silence at first and I then kept getting responses that characterized their other roles, which I interpreted as a diminished sense of self-identity beyond their traditional roles, but I persisted. So although it was hard at first to get each woman to say something positive about herself as a woman, in the end they succeeded along the lines of in her own right (write!) 'I have a nice smile', 'I am a good student' and then to my surprise from the woman who was carrying within herself the burden and blame for infertility, 'I drive a tractor'. When I enquired further she explained that when she helped with the chores on her family's land, her father had allowed her to drive a tractor alone and unaided. It was extremely difficult to equate this woman as a happy young girl careering across the land on a tractor, with the fearful and silent woman who was often absent from class because, I was told, she was 'unwell' and most likely caused by depression.

Breaking the silences of women's lives

The course which had begun as a formal attempt to improve spoken English among the participants in the course of time turned into a group of students telling stories about their lives, hopes and fears in which dexterity in using English to express themselves became almost secondary to the important task of developing confidence in using one's voice to speak out loud about their experiences, as well as ask question after question. By so doing they began to link their issues and concerns with those of women the world over in a broader context of political, cultural, social and economic subjugation and liberatory potential.

Lisa Baumgartner quotes Jack Mezirow as stressing the importance of the affective, emotional and social contexts of teaching adults, pointing out that in the real world learning happens in 'complex, institutional, interpersonal and historical settings [and] must be understood in the context of cultural orientations embodied in our frames of reference' (2001: 24) while Mary Belenky, Blythe Clinchy, Nancy Goldberger and Jill Tarule (1986) in their seminal collection of essays about women's ways of knowing, assert that one perspective from which women draw their reality is around how their concepts of identity and self and their ways of knowing are intertwined. In the same book, Belenky et al cite the research of Carol Gilligan into women's voices and developmental theory in which she found that women's morality is organised around notions of responsibility and care (Gilligan, cited in Belenky et al 1986: 8). I found this to be very much so in my group.

Although as a committed feminist with a firm view that language and literacy is essentially partisan, especially when bestowed upon or given with the best of intentions from a dominant culture to a less dominant one, the question of what knowledge is appropriate or useful and who decides is crucial to the content, context and outcomes of the teaching act. In this, my first Outreach teaching experience and my first sustained course with immigrant women, I learned by trial and error that in encouraging them to tell stories about their own

lives, gradually context-centered content around critical issues and socio-cultural perspectives emerged so that I no longer relied on formal textbooks or outcomes-based curricula to create a safe space and place for the participants to own the knowledge they desired. Furthermore, I witnessed them thinking deeply about their accorded place in home, family and society. This represented a to shift from the purely personal to the more political when thinking about the oppression of women in general, whatever the culture.

When I first began teaching, the women's silence was so palpable and my voice was the only one to be heard in the room towards the end of the first semester. But as the women's voices grew louder as their confidence increased and they felt to be in a safe place, I could barely get words in edgewise. We were well on the way to the roar that lies on the other side of silence when S. for whom I had the most hope for beginning on a TAFE accredited pathway, lost her youngest child who drowned in the bath as the result of a faulty gas heater. She was sitting in the bath with her older sister and the door was locked against the father. The older girl survived but the small girl became unconscious and slipped under the surface of the water. The group closed protectively around S. and kept vigil day and night. No-one came to class and it was suggested that it cease for the remainder of the semester and recommence at a later date. I went to see S., sat with her and her closest friend in class. No-one spoke; for once words that had surfaced and became pregnant with meaning in class were useless in the face of her grief.

Reflections on the Chippendale project

The course I ran for the Chippendale women matched the aims of the Outreach program with the exception of providing further pathways to learning. At that stage the women would not have had the remotest interest because their self-esteem was located in their culturally and socially acceptable roles as wives, mothers and economically dependent on their husbands. Only A. whose father

had finally allowed her to marry the man equal in age to her and with whom she had fallen deeply in love, rather than 'hand her over' to an older distant relative, seemed entirely at ease in her domesticity. Neither was she constrained as others were. S. by far the most perceptive as well as receptive person in the group was, as she described it when I asked each woman to tell me a few words about her role as wife, 'not a happy wife', which became abundantly clear as I came to know her better. Her husband was abusive and controlling and held her back from developing in her own right, or behaving autonomously.

When I first began teaching the class I was bewildered by the students' lack of responsiveness and quickly hid my uncertainty by falling into the tried and supposedly true method of following textbook exercises to improve spoken English. But to me, these formal teaching resources and texts were similar to the reading books supplied to primary-age children in working-class England in my time because they were remote from the children's actual home and social environments. These particular reading books, standard text for state schools, depicted happy, middle-class nuclear families in comfortable houses with gardens and garages. Unfortunately they bore little if any relevance or interest for the children I was teaching at the time.

The literacy materials available to me at the time I began working with the migrant women at the centre presented similar problems in relation to generative themes of culture, class and gender. For example, there was little purpose in getting the women to learn and practise words and phrases taken from a set of materials with a theme of living in Sydney based on a day's outing to a beachside suburb a long way from the women's homes when lack of financial resources, household duties and the insecurity of these women around new and unfamiliar situations, made it highly unlikely they could relate to the beachside theme and its attendant vocabulary!

If a matrix had been developed depicting the distances travelled by these women on average, it would most likely have shown very little if any movement beyond the boundaries of street, immediate neighbourhood, shops, schools and

church. Financially it would have been a struggle to find the fares for a trip to Manly and more importantly if you lack both the words to communicate and the confidence to try, textbook designed exercises based on supposed or imagined needs and situations of adult learners do not 'cut the mustard' and are likely to produce a limited response without context or affect.

What Freire's philosophy and pedagogy enabled me to grasp, was to make knowledge student-centred, content- and context-related. It had to emerge from the women's cultural and social backgrounds, abilities, needs and experiences. But most importantly, as far as I understood, if I wanted the students to begin speaking and contributing they needed to feel they were in a safe place and could risk speaking, however hesitantly to begin with, about their lives and needs. My role was not to be one of an expert who knew the answers to their enquiries, but rather to reflect back to them what they thought and felt as individuals in their own right, but also as women in the broader gendered context. The women would become the subject matter of their learning expressed in words and themes to which they could relate and consider.

Although I have spoken against formal teaching and learning resources as they appear in language textbooks, I found the gendered themes and stories I discovered in a small collection of immigrant women's writing about their experiences in Peckham, England was exactly what I needed to help me get started and plan my sessions with the women in Chippendale, Sydney, whose lives as outsiders mirrored in many ways the experiences and reactions of their immigrant sisters in the UK. I should point out that the Peckham Publishing Project enjoyed funding support from various government agencies, including the London Borough of Southwark Race Equality Unit and the Greater London Council Community Arts Committee (Sunmonu 2002).

Most significantly the Peckham booklet drew upon the personal lives of the women to make connections with the general oppression of women in a capitalist society. So, for example, when I discussed the cartoon 'My wife doesn't work' taken directly from the Peckham booklet, not a single woman in my group

failed to grasp the covert failure of society to measure the economic value of housework. To illustrate the connections she was beginning to make for herself with the woman in the cartoon, Sophia told the group how she was able to recite every line of 'My job' to her husband when he tried to stop her coming to class and how much she liked the word 'discouraged' because that's how she felt about her life at home,. In turn, I could not have predicted what a rich harvest of generative themes and words familiar to these women – mother, wife, daughter, sister, woman, worker, would be called into being. Gradually, but with growing awareness and confidence, my students broke their silences, found their voices, talked, shared and listened to others in respectful silence, followed by discussion, agreement and sometimes dissension from opinions expressed.

I did not set out to transform or emancipate these women's lives through my teaching. Indeed, I proceeded with caution. My adolescence had been marked by oppressive attitudes from my stepfather which had taught me to be silent and submissive, and so I was empathetic to similar conditioning in the lives of my students. But I had escaped my past and tertiary education had enabled me to decide my own pathway in life. By contrast, the women's lack of educational opportunities had denied them access to independent lives. I came to Australia freely because I chose too, but the majority of my students came because they had no choice in the matter and accompanied husbands in search of a better life financially. I think it is true to say my hopes for my life rested in my own hands. Their hopes were not so much for themselves, but for their children's futures.

What I believe this Outreach course achieved, as did many other similar courses begun throughout NSW for the marginalised and educationally disadvantaged, was to challenge the presumption that formal education is only for the clever and privileged. The Outreach Project overall demonstrated that there are many different kinds and levels of cleverness. In providing a different kind and level of teaching and learning for those who did not want to go to university or colleges of advanced education, the TAFE system, particularly programs such as Outreach encouraged and nurtured learning and opportunities

which were not dependent on academic achievement or privilege alone, but indicative of a broader foundation for adult education and human development.

Changing women's perceptions of themselves and the world

What makes feminist education special is that we are making women-centred knowledge in collective ways. We're linking together personal experience, powerful ideas, strong emotions and political action on our own behalf, in a way that makes education not just about being clever and getting qualifications but about changing the world of women (Thompson 1997: 106). I have described how insecure and powerless I felt in the face of the participant's respectful silence when I first interacted with the women and how, in desperation, I resorted to textbook depictions of conversational English but which had little appeal for the group or myself. The women only began to open up and speak about their lives, when I discovered teaching and learning resource materials which mirrored serious issues in their own lives and which I leaned on heavily until the responses in the group helped me to plan and develop my own content in line with the issues raised by my group.

As the months went by, I developed a very close relationship with the group which, while I was saddened by the restrictions in their lives, I neither deplored nor tried to highlight. Rather I came to admire the stoicism and resilience which the group displayed. At the same time my pedagogy was markedly feminist and Freire-ian influenced. I wanted to shift the women's beliefs that their problems were personal, rather than political. I wanted them to gain knowledge about structural inequalities and to reflect on their general lack of power and control in the world.

What opportunities could there be for radicalising them to transformative actions and liberatory education? The answers to these and other concerns were not to be found in academic discourses in the mid-seventies and, if they were, I was not familiar with them. However, I was thinking and talking to my

own college facilitator at the time about how to avoid a therapeutic teaching atmosphere (Thompson 1997) in which the students leaned on me for solutions to their personal problems, rather than think about and act to empower themselves. For example, after I had been working with the group for a short time, I began to observe how many women appeared to rely on each other and myself for over-the-counter remedies for their pain or if they felt sick or unwell (as I have previously described). Undoubtedly there were individual women who were trapped in marriages where the power over what they did, or whom they related to was strictly monitored by their husbands. It seemed to have a harmful effect on their general health. In reflecting how this health issue might be taken from the purely personal realm and into the broader social and cultural context it made sense to take the group to a newly established women's health centre in Leichhardt. There the women learned that the clinic employed only female doctors, nurses and translators. Classes were set-up in yoga, relaxation and meditation and programs were in place to help women overcome tranquillizer addiction. This visit not only let the women know that there existed a woman-friendly medical service where they could discuss freely and without inhibition issues around birth control, pregnancy, period pains and general malaise but it also opened up new avenues for discussion in class. One example of a new theme related to newly emerging alternative health services such as massage, acupuncture and chiropractice which interested the group. I never tried to actively influence how the women treated their bodies. Rather my aim was to broaden their understanding that women's health was just as much a broad social and structural concern as it was individually and personal and they were not to blame for their physical state or pain. The covert message was that the women did not have to rely on popular remedies, but they had it in their power to change their practice and make practical use of new knowledge.

My overall aim in teaching the group became one of encouraging them to reflect on the situations they talked about in class, expand their knowledge and deal with the powerful emotions they evoked. I have described S's strong emotional response when she learned the meaning of the word 'discouraged' and as I grew to know her more closely, I began to grasp why that particular

word empowered her and helped her articulate the difficult circumstances of her domestic and family relations. During the course I always kept to hand an extra resource in case the group did not have questions or issues but I rarely needed to assume responsibility. For example, one morning S. came to class in tears because she had quarrelled with her adolescent daughter, who had shouted at her mother and run out of the house in a very dramatic way. The source of the problem was that the school the girl attended had arranged to take her particular class away on a camping trip to help them bond. It appeared all of the girls' parents had given their permission for them to attend except the woman in my class. When I invited her to say why she refused, (after all this was an all-girls Catholic secondary school and the camp was to be supervised by nuns) the student explained that her daughter had never slept away from home before. More significantly, she felt that teachers in general were slack in relation to matters of respect and control (even though they were teaching nuns!). I kept my opinion to myself and asked the rest of the group what did they think and feel about their friend's dilemma. The responses, many of them surprisingly vehement agreed with the mother and soon the basis of the discussion had shifted from one student's dissatisfaction with how education was carried out in Australian schools, to cultural differences in childrearing. Again, this is an explanation where the personal nature of power and control shifted to a broader discussion about the politics of discipline, or supposed lack of, in Australian schools in general. For my part I was surprised to discover how timid the women were in voicing their fears and misgivings to school principals, as well as not wanting to attend Parent and Citizen meetings.

What I am arguing for in through this close analysis is that teaching and learning practice may be located in the personal, in requiring the group to critically reflect on their experiences as they met in the safety and security of women's space and place, but invariably teaching and learning led into analysis of structural forces and inequality because they are inextricably linked.

Jack Mezirow (1987) once defined his concept of individual perspective transformation as comprising the following steps:

- What do you think?
- How do you know?
- What do you feel?
- What needs to change?
- How can you change it?
- Reflect on how life could be if you change your perspective?

I am not claiming to have followed Mezirow's steps exactly in order to change, transform, or emancipate the lives of the women I taught, but I believe his problem-posing method is a most useful tool for teachers wishing to teach adult learners how to think critically and become more self-aware.

I regard this particular teaching experience as the most important and transformative of my professional life as a teacher in which I learned more than I taught and where it became clear that whatever gender, race, economic status or cultural belief, adult learning and teaching could foster the extension of knowledge built on a foundation of critical, reflexive thought, affect and action and attack the barriers of discrimination and gender bias. My hesitant, unsure and tentative first attempts in an Outreach course for immigrant women, inner-city dwellers, remote from mainstream life and opportunities due to gender, ethnic and language barriers, helped pave the way for the kind of teaching and learning methods I realised I wished to apply and rely on in future longer, more sustained women's courses in TAFE.

Technically, the experience provided ongoing opportunities for learning to improve spoken English (and students were encouraged always to practise reading aloud their own sentences and some even began to write down that which they wanted to remember). But most importantly, the emphasis throughout the project was to encourage and enable the women to gain confidence in expressing their own thoughts, feelings, beliefs and ideas. As the weeks passed, the program content and context became more student-centred and less teacher-dominated and the learning more collective and collaborative. In summary, the Chippendale situation was a significant influence on my emerging pedagogical belief that we learn most fruitfully, not through isolated endeavour, but rather through shared knowledge, mutuality and trust.

CHAPTER 9

TAFE Outreach: Case Study 2 – Jump if you dare! Youth Maritime Project

Background

The *Youth-at-Risk Maritime Project*, which commenced in May 2006, targeted a group of students identified by their schools as 'at risk of prematurely exiting the education system - dropping out.' Called the *Youth Maritime Project*, it aimed to keep young people at school to complete their secondary education so as to have established a future vocational and/or further education pathway. The project was to prepare these students for a potential career as a qualified deckhand in the marine industry.

Although the project presented in this case study was the first collaborative community initiative for the *Youth Maritime Project*, many similar ones followed in its wake, but this particular course was the only one in which I participated as the TAFE Outreach representative. This is not the reason why I have chosen to write about it, but rather because of what it achieved in providing its participants with a dynamic learning experience which involved not only formal knowledge and skills required to qualify as a marine deckhand, but also undertaking extremely challenging and (properly supervised) risk-taking behaviour as the other part of the course which to a notable extent not only re-ignited their interest and continued involvement in schooling, but also strengthened their self-identity and confidence. This is worth highlighting when you consider how changing public policy interventions allied to cultural clashes have impacted on youth in Western society, helping to create an environment which limits the identities of adolescents to academic achievements in the main

and holds them in the wings of society. In this sense schools serve not only an academic and vocational role, but they stand in the role of *loco parentis*, governing what is permitted and not permitted in behaviour and attitudes among youth. Those in disadvantaged and marginal communities in first-world countries like Australia, have often been the object of public policies focused on protection, regulation and diversion for young people (Coburn 2008).

I also know from my own exposure to young people in Outreach transition programs from school to TAFE, they can be extremely difficult to teach or inspire. For this reason, my preference as a teacher was to work with second-chance adult learners who in the main, know what they need and want from their TAFE exposure and do not waste time. But the *Youth Maritime Project* challenged my accepted, uncritical beliefs about how hard it is getting younger students to co-operate in educational processes and agendas so that by the time the maritime program ended and I witnessed first-hand the empowering effects of making the theory-part of the curriculum live in the life-threatening tasks to be conquered as students were expected to perform them safely and co-operatively, I began to take on an altogether different perspective on youth's disenchantment with formal learning in classrooms and skewing teaching to meet examination standards and marks.

From the start and planning stage of the *Youth Maritime Project* it was meant to include community representatives on the steering committee which reflected the intention of building social capital on the foreshores of a former working harbour on Sydney's foreshores. An important link was that Sydney Secondary College was situated on the shores of Blackwattle Bay on the inner Harbour with its rich history of boat-building and maintenance, so that the residents who lived in many of the small former shipyard workers' cottages held strong connections with the sea and harbour craft. The room at the school where the steering committee sometimes met was situated above the local rowing club boathouse. Steering committee members came from a number of community organisations including Sydney City Council, who funded the project from its community grants scheme. Also represented were the following organisations:

- Sydney and Leichhardt Councils
- Sydney Heritage Fleet Museum
- Pyrmont Heritage Boat Club
- Pyrmont Progress Association Incorporated
- Sydney Secondary College at Glebe and two satellite schools – Leichhardt and Balmain
- Pyrmont Youth Centre
- Outreach Sydney Institute TAFE
- Marine Technology Centre, Sydney Institute TAFE.

Originally conceived as a mentoring project, the course was designed to provide opportunities for up to twelve 'at-risk' young people from inner-city secondary schools and youth centres to gain a formal TAFE practical training *Certificate 1 in TAFE Transport and Distribution* leading to formal qualifications and the beginnings of a vocational pathway and employment opportunities in maritime operations. The course was planned to commence during TAFE's first semester in January 2006, but owing to various delays due to the steering committee's fine tuning of the course – grant signing, insurance, parental permission etc. - it did not get underway until May 2006 and so continued over and into Semester 2 of the TAFE calendar and academic year. Also, the success of such an innovative community and TAFE partnership was highly dependent on complex inter-organisational co-operation involving the development of effective working relations and divergent priorities between all parties involved in the project.

Mentor training

A part of the original proposal was for experienced and long-standing members of the Heritage Boat Club and volunteer helpers associated with the museum to mentor the students in the *Youth Maritime Project*. These proposed

mentors were highly skilled with specialised skills of boat restoration and who spent much of their time focused on their particular craft.

All were retired. At one meeting it was suggested that they might like to take the students sailing after school or during part of the weekends, but it was clear when I put the suggestion to the men as a group, all bar one, were reluctant. Furthermore, they were not interested in formal mentor training and the various checks and balances as part of this process.

Another challenge, which did not emerge during discussions, but which I uncovered, was that the boys had no real interest in sailing, did not take lightly to older mentors who seemed like symbols of authority to their youthful eyes and finally as one boy remarked; he, like his friends, liked to stay in bed at the weekends, and only emerge at night to meet friends and 'hangout.' So, given the reluctance of the potential mentors to commit themselves to mentor training, plus the reluctance of the students to be mentored, this part of the overall plan lapsed. However, one aspect was successfully taken up and developed by the Outreach section at Petersham TAFE college in which volunteers taught a second group of school students boat building, maintenance and sailing skills. I describe and discuss this below.

Project objectives

The students were expected to develop a whole range of pre-employment skills and experiences, including boat restoration, coastal navigation, safety at sea and on land, anchorage and knot tying, occupational health and safety. Students were also expected to pass a Senior First Aid Course. Course intended learning outcomes included:

- Practical vocational skills to aid a career in the maritime industry.
- Knowledge and skills towards Certificate 1 Deckhand General Purpose Course – Pathways.

- Team work – water and fire safety procedures.
- Leadership potential in team tasks.
- Improved communication.
- Listening attentively to follow instructions.
- Heightened self-esteem through achievements in various aspects of course.
- Rekindled enthusiasm and application to complete secondary education.
- More aware of self-responsibility in setting and realising goals.
- Independent motivation to learn.

Project management

From the beginning, managing the *Youth Maritime Project* was a complex enterprise requiring the combined co-operation of various representatives from different agencies having a stake in it and being willing to attend and participate in regular steering committee meetings. In my estimation, the ultimate success of the Project was largely due to the complex inter-organisational co-operation between stakeholders having their own particular areas of interest, yet uniting and developing effective, collaborative working relationships between all parties involved for the success of the whole. A formal *Certificate 1 General Purpose Hand Course* was conducted by a TAFE teacher from the institution's Maritime Technology Centre, but was co-ordinated and managed by Outreach because it was to be conducted off-campus and was at heart, a community development and education project.

Recruiting and selecting students

Fifteen students judged to be 'at-risk' – or difficult to keep on-track in their school programmed activities, were selected by their respective vocational

careers advisors to take part in the Project. The majority were fifteen years old with the exception of a fourteen year old for whom permission had to be given by the NSW Department of Education in order for him to participate. Although deemed to be highly intelligent this particular boy was considered by not only his teachers, but also his mother, to be 'at-risk' and out of control. Both vocational teachers were invaluable in their support of the Project, carefully selecting students who did not lack literacy or numeracy skills, but who were disruptive and lacking concentration in the classroom. The teachers and I felt it incumbent to select students without learning difficulties for what amounted to a trial run of the Project so there was every chance of ultimate success.

In addition to the steering committee's promotion of the project through the two secondary schools and the inner city's network of youth centres, an Open-Day barbeque was held for intending students, members of the steering committee, teachers and City Council members. The event was convened at the Heritage Fleet's showpiece vessel, the *James Craig*, docked alongside the Museum. Not many of group attended and the few secondary students who did, showed little interest at that time in the impressively restored *James Craig* vessel. I felt at the time that this was not a very promising beginning to a project that had already taken a lot of planning and organisation for so little result.

Classroom teaching

Formal teaching and training sessions were arranged to take place in either the Board Room or Staff Training Room at the Darling Harbour Maritime Heritage Museum and away from the more familiar classroom and school atmosphere. Each Friday, the students were expected to attend the training sessions on time and regularly as per a normal school day. These sessions were conducted by the qualified and highly experienced TAFE maritime teacher. In attendance also were the vocational education teachers from the two participating schools and myself as the TAFE Outreach representative. Apart

from making certain that the educational side of the training program ran smoothly and liaising with the representative school representatives, I assisted in making arrangements when the program included visits to training facilities off-site, including water-survival training at QANTAS, fire-fighting instruction at a training centre in Western Sydney and mooring and anchoring training on a Harbour-side vessel. All of the above meant that I came to know the group well because I accompanied them and their maritime teacher whenever they had an excursion to an off-site training venue. Being required to do this led me to observe a marked improvement in both motivation and conduct part way through the Project – something shifted which was clearly observable in the improved application and even enthusiasm, particularly among the less amenable students instilling confidence and interest.

As an adult educator and more particularly an Outreach community teacher with groups on the fringes of mainstream participation, I have always tried to be involved with innovative Outreach projects which have potential beyond formal learning outcomes and competencies. What makes the Outreach Special Program different from other in-house initiatives aimed mainly at second-chance learners is that it provides a bridge or pathway into mainstream TAFE courses at the same time as it nurtures and develops confidence and feelings of self-worth in learners who have entered their adult years with a fair degree of self-blame and inferiority that they lack education and/or employment skills.

So a central element of any Outreach program is to discover what motivates these under-confident learners as the basis for further, as well as unfamiliar, knowledge, (as was the case in Case Study 1 concerning isolated, immigrant women with limited schooling). When I first read the theory section of the *Certificate 1 General Purpose Hand Course*, I became fearful that the chalk and talk approach in many secondary schools and which turns off learning or interest at a developmental stage of adolescence - when two crucial motivators for motivation should embody challenge and risk-taking, but in safe situations where the boundaries are clear and firmly established - would predominate.

More than likely, a predominantly chalk and talk emphasis would most likely alienate this group of boys who had been selected because they had been identified as 'at-risk' of dropping out of secondary education and 'turned off' by classroom tuition. However, the dilemma according to the maritime teacher was that the boys could not begin the more exciting and challenging parts of the program, fire-fighting and water-safety for example, until they had been assessed as satisfactory in the formal knowledge-components such as navigation, mooring, knots, safety procedures and anchoring skills.

Induction – Pros and cons

On the first day of the induction component, there was a long, detailed power-point presentation about the history and restoration of the James Craig sailing vessel. Then the group divided into three smaller groups to discuss, suggest and agree upon boundaries and reasonable standards of behaviour. Later these were typed and each student handed a copy to sign. A maritime officer then described the course content and competency requirements, while a second spoke about opportunities beyond the program for learning to sail at weekends. Finally, the boys received an information package from Sydney Ferries about future employment opportunities. The Sydney Ferries representative was female and emphasised equal employment opportunities for females as well as males and invited questions. During the afternoon the group visited the Maritime Heritage Museum nearby, but my impression was by this stage they were well and truly satiated with information and failed to pay attention to the magnificent archival collection in the museum.

A more usual introduction to an Outreach program would be to limit the amount of time a teacher or facilitator spoke, while giving the maximum amount of time for students to introduce themselves and provide a brief summary of what drew them to the course and what they hope to get out of it. Such a procedure at the very first session of a new course enables participants to make

contacts with each other, share relevant interests, background experience and information so that they begin developing a sense of shared ownership and joint responsibility for what transpires during the course's duration. Everyone is invited to contribute and encouraged to share past experiences, knowledge, thoughts and ideas. This pedagogical procedure in effect, precludes formal classroom seating arrangements where the teacher or instructor stands at the front of the classroom and assumes authority. Most Outreach programs are delivered informally and so adopt informal learning circle arrangements which suit the learning styles of many mature-age students for whom educational experiences in the past have had negative effects on their sense of self and confidence in their ability to think for themselves.

So, while from my vantage point, I decided there was far too much information and rules for this group of 'at-risk' adolescent boys to either absorb or take account of in their introduction to the maritime course, I needed to remember the complex nature of the Project and that there were many different aims and interests amongst the main stakeholders represented on the Steering Committee. While the students were released each Friday for sixteen weeks from school, for the duration of the Program, there were legalities to be adhered to as required by the NSW Department of Education, such as maintaining a rollbook, following classroom health and safety procedures; rules governing the proper supervision and guardianship of students at all times, in or out of the training room; as well as administrative matters and protocols to be observed. The ultimate success of this project depended on all parties working collaboratively and collectively including the representatives from Sydney Council, schools, TAFE, progress associations, the Maritime Heritage Museum and youth organizations. I translated my responsibilities as liaising between the Maritime Technology Centre and Outreach, regularly attending and reporting to the Steering Committee, ensuring a room was always available for the theory sessions each Friday at the Museum, supporting the two careers and vocational counselling teachers who attended nearly every Friday session to supervise students, and advising and making all necessary arrangements for off-site training sessions.

Lastly, and to my mind, most importantly of all, I both interacted with and monitored the boys extremely closely. This meant I sat with them in class, applauded their successes and kept them reasonably on track even when incidents like their wholesale exodus to (!) during the short lunch break inevitably resulted in a delayed start to the afternoon session. I also insisted, with the support of two outstanding school vocational teachers on the ‘no-eating-anything-in-class’ rule. I was on tenterhooks during the early stages of the group’s formal tuition as part of the TAFE Certificate Course when it was difficult to hold the students’ attention while the maritime instructor read from a manual whole sections of facts and procedures for the correct handling and mooring of vessels, followed a ‘check-your-progress’ question-and-answer test. In all there were seventy pages of highly specific theoretical knowledge for these attention-deficit boys to remember. Despite that, although each student had his own copy of the student notes as a learning resource and guide, I thought it would be very, very hard for the group to master so much precise knowledge and I could see even by mid-morning most had lost concentration. Thus, it was something of a relief when the maritime instructor announced the first practical training activity at the Qantas Air and Sea Survival Facility was shortly to be arranged.

Qantas water safety training

Through the kind intervention of a member of Sydney City Council, Qantas waived the extremely high fee normally imposed for the use of this facility and its equipment, and they also provided a specialist trainer in air-and-sea rescue. This was a much valued contribution to the project and certainly had a huge impact on motivating the boys to take the course seriously. Every student had to have permission from his parent/s or guardians to take part in the training and they were required to have both swimming trunks and warm clothing on the day. A bus was arranged to transport them from the Marine Technology Centre in Broadway to Qantas and then back again at the conclusion

to the training. All these arrangements used up a great deal of time and energy in all of the teachers before the training itself, but it was worthwhile because what transpired at Qantas resulted in a drastic change in the boys' attitude and motivation.

It was also an important reminder of the potential of hands-on learning and experience over and above passive teaching and assimilation of abstract knowledge and outcomes. From the moment the boys changed out of their street clothes and into the pool area, a highly qualified and experienced trainer took over from myself and my colleague, blowing a whistle and barking an order for each boy to toe a line exactly in front of the pool. As soon as any boy spoke or moved out of line, he would pause and yell at the offenders. He reminded me of some of those authoritarian and forbidding teachers I had been most afraid of in schools. He wasted no time at all in informing the boys that in order to pass the training they needed to listen to instructions, obey them instantly and do exactly what he told them to do in the water and he would curry no favour. Perform all manoeuvres correctly and they would be given a 'pass' for the training.

My heart was in my mouth because this sergeant-major-like approach was not a pedagogical method I believed would achieve gain their attention. Indeed, the group stood shivering and scared while he barked out instructions. I feared at least some of the less confident of the boys would suddenly opt out. But the morning passed with no let up and the increasing complexity of life-saving techniques in the pool as well as practising how to inflate a full-size life raft in a very life-like simulated storm at sea. I began to notice how every boy, without exception was absorbed in the activities and paying close attention to their instructor as well as rising to the complex tasks and challenges. By lunchtime it was clear that the group was hooked on the training and couldn't wait for the life-raft session to commence during the afternoon. This occasioned the greatest challenge and risk because it proceeded from a first step of individually turning a fully inflated and extremely heavy life raft the right way up in the water to the danger when the pool lights were put out, thunder and lightning echoed over the upturned raft, giant hissing waves were created and the boys had to get

themselves onto the raft, unroll the cover, get signals for help ready and take a roll-call of everyone present. The whole event was terrifyingly real and nothing was simplified because the trainees were youths rather than men. Yet they all passed the water-safety training and had clearly loved the risk and challenges involved.

Finally, and not a requirement of the training program, the instructor invited any student who might like, to try jumping from the roof of a life-size model of a 747 jet airliner suspended over the deep end of, into, the pool. All but three students declined and I was apprehensive about possible risks for the three most daring. The first to jump was the smallest boy in the group and the one who came into the Maritime course with the most unruly and disruptive behaviour at home and school. I closed my eyes wondering what my fate and that of the course might be, let alone his, if the boy hurt himself. However, he made a perfect jump plummeting straight down like an arrow into the water. This was quickly followed by the other two of his fellow students who also made perfect entries into the pool. Their instructor was suitably impressed, as was I.

When the training finally finished and the boys climbed back into the bus, the atmosphere was completely different from our arrival as the boys animatedly chatted to each other and us about the day's events. I who had had concerns about whether we would be able to hold on to the group if the theoretical knowledge proved too much and too dull, began to relax and believe we had discovered a way to motivate and interest these adolescent boys in a way which taught them important life-skills but also provided deep satisfaction in the risks and challenges water safety training had provided. As well as instilling the necessity for boundaries, collaborative teamwork and discipline – important for their life stage - it was distinctly pleasing to pass on to the group the information that the next practical training would also be challenging: namely how to fight fires at sea in small boats and ferries!! In the meantime when the group were being instructed in the classroom, I made a point of telling the class how well they were performing and conveying praise for their conforming to boundaries. Noticeable, too, was not only a perceptible change for the better in the classroom

amongst the boys, but it seemed to carry over to their maritime instructor too (deceased since the course). When the course first began, he was only ever just on time, smoking, and not making any attempt to either greet or interact with the boys. This was not the ideal way to capture their attention, or maintain interest and motivation in his teaching.

All TAFE Outreach teachers implicitly understand the importance of connecting immediately with new groups of adult learners in community locations or formal learning sites. Outreach courses were designed to build trust and confidence in disadvantaged students, the majority being classed as 'second chance' learners. Yet, this mainstream teacher's start did not auger well but once the Qantas training was over, he seemed to relax and was more approachable. As a result, the boys became less guarded and were more openly responsive to him in class. Also, he could rely at all times on the back-up and support from the steering committee, the two vocational school teachers, the Pyrmont youth worker, and myself as the TAFE course organiser and facilitator.

There was an enormous amount of planning entailed in the Project, from promotion in schools and youth centres; enrolments (to satisfy both school and TAFE attendance requirements); liaison with schools and parents; committee meetings (monthly on average); funding arrangements; local council information leading to endorsements; photo IDs for Qantas, Blacktown Fire Training Centre, and silver sailing cards; organizing graduation day, ceremony and certificates; buying resources for Senior First Aid Course; booking bus transport; supervising the boys both in and out of the classroom; and maintaining and being accountable for different parts of the budget. From the different groups who worked to make the program a benchmark of innovation, there was the utmost co-operation from the very first meeting of the Committee, including the principal of the two schools, who was never less than supportive throughout. Outreach programs begin to take root only with the full cooperation of all parties both within TAFE and the local community. Although responsible for the most important theoretical aspects of the course, the maritime instructor was not solely responsible for seeing that the course ran smoothly and according to the

timetable. He was supported by both vocational teachers from the boys' schools, myself as the Outreach contact and the maritime museum staff.

Fire Safety Training

By the last week of the first semester, when the boys were to undertake a full day's fire-fighting practical training in the west of Sydney, they were excited and eager to participate and after a fairly predictable morning in which the group was taught, questioned about the various ways fires begin (whether accidental or deliberate), it was evident that the boys were itching to go outside and practise their new skills. The event was no less exciting and challenging than water-safety training and yet again the group was expected to listen attentively, work as a team, and carry out various drills in the correct fashion. After putting out relatively small fires using fire blankets and extinguishers, the students practised the correct procedure for uncoiling enormously heavy hoses, attaching them to a fire truck and attacking a very big blaze in a boiler. The boys were expected to work as a team, hold the hose steady and stand at a safe distance from the fire, which in turn, was threatening, and shooting flames and choking black smoke into the air. However, they performed competently and responded immediately to commands over and above the noise and heat. At the end of the session when the boys re-entered the training room there was the same buzz of excitement as the students shared their experience. Difficult now to remember that they had originally been selected for the course because they were under-achieving and un-cooperative in the classroom.

Once again, risk and challenge, even though closely monitored for safety, had given these boys a new sense of confidence as well as new practical skills. They were achieving beyond what they would have been expected to achieve in a traditional formal classroom and a passive learning environment. The course was proving to be a perfect amalgam of theoretical knowledge, practical skills and enthusiastic participation - the dream of all teachers!!!

Senior First Aid preparation

During the second part of the course the group learned how to moor and anchor a small vessel and gained practice on a boat moored at a nearby wharf. The students also began their course in Senior First Aid. I had few doubts if any student would fail the practical part on which they were required to demonstrate their skills on a dummy, but I had my doubts about their capacity to recall the highly specialised medical terminology. There was no room for error on the final assessment when anything less than 100% was to fail and because of my doubts, I persuaded the students to give up a half-day of their school holiday to discuss issues around the format of this short answer multiple choice exam format. The advice I gave and which we discussed included this advice:

1. Before the test you will have to learn and memorise the correct names and labels of procedures. There's no way around this.
2. The test will be multiple-choice and there will be four choices for every question, but only one will be correct.
3. When the test begins, spend a few minutes looking through and reading the instructions carefully.
4. Do not waste time over an answer you are unsure about. Answer all the questions you can, then go back and finish the unanswered questions. Don't leave any blanks.
5. Time yourself carefully so that you are able to complete the test in the time allowed.

The group discussed the above hints on exam techniques. For the remainder of the time, we talked in general about the highly specialised terminology associated with first aid. I considered the most challenging aspect of the Maritime Project would be Senior First Aid, but on reflection after the session, I decided the students were less anxious about their assessment than I was. They

were already ably coping with other parts of the course requirements. Everybody was on board and working enthusiastically and there was complete co-operation from the group. To my relief and delight all of the boys passed their Senior First Aid Course which gave them an additional qualification as part of the *Certificate 1 General Purpose Deck Hand*.

Graduation

Ten boys graduated from the course and were joined at the graduation ceremony by four girls who had completed the Senior First Aid Course at school. I have been present at a lot of TAFE graduations, some formal, others informal, but the graduation ceremony for the boys who took part in the Marine Project remains in my memory as one that was both unique and delightful. The ceremony was scheduled for early evening so that working parents could attend as well as various representatives from all those organisations which had contributed to the success of the program including schoolteachers, the City of Sydney Council, Pyrmont Progress Association, the Maritime Museum professional and volunteer staff and TAFE. Before their graduation, the boys were taken on a tour of the Harbour in "Boomerang", a former Edwardian gentleman's yacht magnificently restored on board donated by the Heritage Museum and given lunch. They returned late in the afternoon to go aboard another vessel undergoing restoration at Blackwattle Bay for the awards' ceremony. Volunteers from Maritime Museum had transformed the interior of the vessel with a fresh coat of paint and made it shipshape for its visitors. With everyone assembled, the ceremony began with the boys receiving their certificates from the Lord Mayor of Sydney, Clover Moore. She not only posed for a group photograph, after congratulating the students on their achievements, but she invited each participant to have an individual photograph taken with her. The occasion became one to be remembered for both its unique setting and its coming together of all those participating community organizations who had worked so diligently to make the Maritime Project the innovatory success it

undoubtedly was. The Project remains as one of the most enjoyable and satisfying of my Outreach teaching experience.

When the boys returned to school the following year, they were invited to address their peers at a school assembly about their experiences in the *Youth Maritime Project*, when I was told that the most informative and enthusiastic speaker was the boy whose mother had threatened to abandon him because he was unmanageable. He had been the first student to jump from a great height into the pool, and despite his small stature, he had demonstrated leadership and fearlessness in the lifeboat rescue in the simulated storm. His mother, who worked at one of the schools involved in the project later spoke to the career teacher saying that he was an altogether different person since he had graduated from the course. She used words like 'responsible,' 'co-operative' and 'respectful,' and said he had been changed for the better.

In the years remaining at school, the program was expanded to include not only the *Certificate 1 Deckhand General Purpose Course*, but also boat-building in an inner-Harbour boatshed, sailing on the Harbour, sail-training and work experiences. It was also planned to take graduates from the current project to the Certificate 2 level of the Marine Operations course. The number of schools involved grew and there were determined efforts made to bring in and involve youth-off-the-street to form a new group to undertake Certificate 1. The Project became more equally representative of both genders too, with more young women taking part in the follow-on program, largely as a result of favourable publicity by the boys themselves in their school assembly. Three students went on to the Deckhand course, one became an apprentice in maritime electronics, and two began working on Sydney Ferries. One Telstra White Pages telephone book even included a front-page picture of the follow-on course, working on boats at Blackwattle Bay, a site of historical importance .

Evaluation

While it is possible that the young people who took part in the *Youth Maritime Project* appreciated the cultural and historical significance of boat-building and restoration on Sydney's former working Harbour, they came both to understand and appreciate the vocational opportunities it afforded them. During the early stages, I was disappointed and frustrated with the boys' lack of response to the beautiful boats and sailing vessels comprising Sydney's Heritage Fleet, especially when they showed more enthusiasm for, and swarmed aboard, a former wartime submarine anchored close by the Maritime Museum and explored every inch of it with great enthusiasm! However, I had been teaching sufficient years to perceive that you cannot force learners to your point of view – you can convey your own enthusiasm, even passionate engagement with subjects you consider have relevance for their lives and learning, but there's little to be gained from propagandising or proselytising. It is possible that if this project had been planned for mature-age learners, the historical context would have been more widely appreciated. The boys had their heads in the here and now – in sport, television, mobile phones and weekend get-togethers – which were more real to them than any number of former sailing vessels, the stories around their sea journeys, or the skill and bravery of the men who sailed in them.

The *Youth Maritime Project* succeeded in rekindling an interest in the value of learning for the group of at-risk secondary school students and instilled confidence and self-esteem in their potential as learners. It promoted, although not always successfully, appreciation of the rich maritime culture and traditions of Sydney's working harbour. It strengthened community partnerships and the development of social capital between the City of Sydney, TAFE, progress associations, maritime institutions, Sydney ferries, and secondary school vocational education and training organisations. The course demonstrated high potential for helping to meet the needs of disadvantaged inner-city youth by creating dynamic, challenging learning experiences having impact on their development as adolescents. The practical aspects of the project gave students opportunities to develop skills in listening, leadership and team-building. It created a learning pathway in maritime studies and sustainable career and employment pathways. Most importantly, in my estimation, it 'turned on' once

again the boys' interest in the usefulness and potential of school education when aligned with dynamic, exciting risk-taking experiences which gave them a strong sense of self-identity and self-confidence. I cannot demonstrate that the project actually improved communication between parents and their sons, but parental feedback during the awards ceremony was affirmative and they told how proud they were of their children's achievements. Finally, but no less significantly in the present workplace-driven TAFE agenda, the project demonstrated a socially cohesive dynamic pedagogy which prized collaboration, over competition, the value of experience-based over passive learning and the potential of the classroom as a dynamic, life-enhancing environment.

I have throughout this case study stressed the need when dealing with Outreach groups of young people to align with them and seek to bring them 'on side.' My fear when I first came into contact with the group was two-fold. First of all I knew all of them had been labelled 'at-risk' in school just as I also knew this had more to do with inattention than learning difficulties. When young people leave school early most respond positively to the more relaxed atmosphere in a TAFE college and where autonomy is encouraged and it is entirely left to the students how they respond in matters of attendance and performance. Of course there are basic rules and regulations too, but these are premised on adult expectations of conduct on college campuses, in class and with respect for the rights of teachers and one's fellow students.

As the person holding the TAFE Outreach aspect of the course together in relation to teaching, I was able gradually to let go of my anxieties that the course would ultimately not succeed because there existed at its commencement too much chalk and talk like these at-risk students were exposed to in school classrooms. I appreciated that it was necessary for the boys to co-operate in the theoretical aspects of the learning process, but they were willing to submit because they could see the relevance for practical skills. Witnessing them perform accurately the difficult manoeuvres of water and fire safety, it was clear even though they were caught up fully in real-life experiences, they understood the importance of doing things correctly and in the right order which emanated

from their text-book learning. Practical experience linked to formal study provided not only authentic knowledge for learners but created strong motivation too, if the changed and enthusiastic responses of the boys over the duration of the maritime course is proof.

CHAPTER 10

Adult literacy: People who are never part of the story

Introduction

I begin this chapter with a brief history of the merging of the Adult Literacy Information Office, or ALIO as it was commonly known within the TAFE Division of Adult Basic Education. A detailed history of ALIO can be found in the NSW Adult Literacy Research Network's *History of Adult Literacy in Australia* (undated). ALIO began as an information and tutoring service for the public, separate from the TAFE system. It provided assistance and an information service for home and community-based tutors and volunteers in both literacy and numeracy. Only later did it finally and somewhat reluctantly merge with the Adult Basic Education section in TAFE.

Much of this chapter is underpinned by my critique of the emphasis on workplace literacy. I contend that this emphasis on human capital has been detrimental to sustaining educational strategies that strengthen social capital, and a commitment to experience-based methods of teaching and learning. Most importantly it has led to the sidelining of approaches to literacy teaching which conceive it as a tool for emancipatory and critical reflection as advocated by Paulo Freire in his literacy schemes for oppressed communities in Brazil and later Guinea Bissau.

Finally I offer two case histories which illustrate my own experience as a reading-and-writing teacher in a TAFE college. One shows the importance of literacy for social purposes and the other highlights the issue of the politics of literacy. The case histories concern two mature-age male immigrants, one Irish-

born and the other West African. Through a description of their needs and expectations, I demonstrate approaches to literacy acquisition which foster social relations and meet what Jane Thompson (1997) summarised as the plea from those 'who live in the blank white spaces on the edge of the print'.

I cannot read or write
 so how do you expect me
 to play an active role
 in the story of my life?
 I'm a bit player who
 knows well how I inhabit
 my human form-powerless,
 marginal, silent, existing
 in the shadows, trapped
 on the periphery of meaning.

I ask of you, my teacher
 teach me how to read and write,
 help me breach this oppressive
 silence, give sense and meaning
 to this world of words.
 Your gift will be wings
 to fly beyond my present limitations.
 Soar to new heights – spaces and places
 of infinite possibilities
 - a transformed life.

The profundity of this poem from Margaret Atwood's novel, *A Handmaid's Tale*, is aptly captured by Helena Kennedy, in her foreword to Jane Thompson's book, *Words in Edgeways* (1997) when she says: the poem 'is a haunting image of people at the margin, in the periphery, people who are never part of the story.' So, underpinning this chapter is a critique at the loss of the social justice and rights of the underprivileged in adult basic education in TAFE and the condemnation of narrowing of the focus to include only industry-orientated training modules and competency-based learning outcomes. In my view, and those of other critics including Stephen Black (2000), Allie Clemans and Terri Seddon (2000), Damon Anderson, Clemans, Lesley Farrell and Seddon (2001), an overly vocationalised approach to education and training has severely curtailed diversity, cultural perspectives and a rich history of literacy and numeracy provision. In their place it has privileged an Adult Basic Education (A.B.E.) curricula of national workplace skills acquisition based on a 'one size fits all' concept of learning. The tragedy which has resulted has not only adversely affected underprivileged

adult learners but just as significantly their teachers, who have witnessed their skills and talents diminish as they have had to focus their attention instead on a narrow workplace training agenda with its predominant human capital discourses and curriculum constraints. In the words of one TAFE A.B.E. Head Teacher:

Absolutely everything has changed, everything that made the job satisfying has been reduced and in most cases eliminated. Key performance indicators are driving our lives and ruining our quality of work, services, products and our capacity to assist students (Black 2000: 8).

NSW TAFE Adult Literacy and Adult Basic Education

The NSW TAFE Division of Adult Basic Education, commonly known as A.B.E., came into operation in 1978 and was listed under the School of General Studies. Its mission was to provide literacy and numeracy programs:

... to meet the students' needs with the highest quality of literacy and numeracy education, so that students achieve their goals for better life skills, employment and access to further study (A.B.E. handbook: Foundation studies. (Undated. Sydney Institute of Technology).

This mission reflects the philosophical underpinning of the Kangan Commission's enquiry which called for the system of technical and further education to adopt a more pro-active general education role and place less emphasis on narrow vocational preparation of apprentices for industry. *Reading and Writing for Adults* (R.A.W.F.A.) was the name given to the literacy classes in TAFE at that time and the courses were to be offered in technical colleges where there was sufficient demand. For a period of just over 20 years, NSW TAFE adult literacy and numeracy classes thrived with good student numbers and the employment of well-qualified specialist teachers. Their demise was death by a thousand cuts from the early 2000s onwards due to federal government policy changes that favoured vocationally-oriented as opposed to general adult literacy;

the introduction of case-management approaches which required unemployed people to receive compulsory tuition for literacy skills directly geared to applying for jobs; deregulation of the adult literacy sector and the expansion of private vocational education and training providers.

Two special features of the *Reading and Writing for Adults* courses included the appointment of two basic education specialists to be based in Western Sydney and Armidale and secondly, the use of volunteer tutors to be trained and supervised by the basic education specialists. At Sydney Institute of Technology an Individual Learning Centre was opened. The Centre was set up for the use of any college students needing literacy/numeracy support in any subject. Students pursued individually prescribed studies using self-instructional materials under the guidance of a tutor (NSW TAFE Annual Report 1979). The Individual Learning Centre still exists today in a number of TAFE colleges, depending on their location and size. At Sydney Institute, the largest college in TAFE, it is now called the Learning Centre and still provides individual support for students with an emphasis on vocational literacy (and numeracy) in a number of subject areas.

The Adult Basic Education Division continues to run literacy and numeracy classes at Sydney TAFE, but their emphasis is no longer on social or cultural literacy, but on human and vocational capacity building, where teachers are expected to adhere to a prescribed literacy and numeracy outcomes-based curriculum. Speaking with a former Senior Head Teacher of an A.B.E. division, she related how in spite of the narrowing of the focus, teachers still managed to 'slip in' some narrative structure to ensure a meaningful personal and socially cohesive slant to the learning process. Nevertheless, as Clemans and Seddon point out, the combination of competency-based pedagogy, work intensification and the resulting dilution of teachers' skills, plus lower teacher-training requirements and attrition, has resulted in reduced kinds of learning available to students within the new national and Australian qualifications skills framework (2000: 120).

In my first-hand experience, the teaching of adult literacy in NSW TAFE shifted from an approach encouraging the naming and empowering of individual experience through reading and writing to what Freire defined as banking education – ie. imposing on students pre-formulated modules of learning outcomes to be achieved – as opposed to collaborative negotiation between students and their teachers and to draw from the well-spring of their individual experiences. I will illustrate the differences between these two pedagogical approaches and their implications for both adult learners and their teachers by presenting analytical accounts of the two case studies from my teaching experiences in NSW TAFE adult literacy courses.

Reading and writing classes for mature-age students

Not charging tuition fees, NSW TAFE offered these classes to ‘illiterate’ or semi-literate adults. They were extremely popular so that large TAFE colleges like Sydney Ultimo, Randwick and Petersham offered classes on weekday mornings, afternoons and evenings. The classes were quickly filled and there were often waiting lists for late entry. **The classes attracted a wide range of people with varying literacy or numeracy needs; from those who had missed out on early schooling and so had not learned how to read or write, to others had moved on from the first level of English via the Adult Migrant Education Service (AMES). In this latter group there were many housebound women who were keen to build on their spoken language skills and improve their general literacy. Unemployed or casual workers also viewed R.A.W.F.A. classes as a useful tool to improve their vocational literacy and/or numeracy. Others enrolled because of a mild disability which had inhibited their literacy skills. Also, a few were ex-inmates from correctional centres.** Classes were mixed gender and usually limited to no more than fifteen students which allowed A.B.E. teachers to plan individual programs as well as whole group work. At the Sydney Institute, where I gained most experience as a R.A.W.F.A. teacher, classes were located in small classrooms and one large room, which also

served as a library and resource centre. They were always overflowing, and with different classes being conducted at the same time in different parts of the room. Accommodation at the time was barely able to cope with the numbers of adults requiring help. Older learners came because they were tired of hiding behind a subterfuge of 'illiteracy' in their personal and civic lives. Others wanted to be able to help their children with school work, while others wished to discover more about Australian culture and so needed to understand English, as did those who were required by Centrelink to fill in complex forms providing background information about their circumstances. Since many of the latter were dependent on Centrelink (social security pension) benefits, they sought help in seeking to both read and fill in complex forms correctly.

Reading for social capital

There were people who attended literacy classes for social, rather than vocational, purposes and who benefitted from the connections it created for them. Jo Balatti, Stephen Black & Ian Falk frame this through their research that asserts adult literacy classes have tangible benefits in building bridging and bonding social capital (2006). Examples include:

- A 17 year old boy has his mother's trust because she knows he spends his days at TAFE unlike previously when he was truanting from school (change in trust levels within his family network).
- A 50 year old woman originally from China can now make phone calls to institutions such as banks and the local council to lodge complaints or make enquiries (change in action to solve problems in one's life and also relates to bridging ties).

- A 47 year old Indigenous Australian man made new friends with people in the course and with whom he socialises out of class time (change in the number or nature of attachments to existing and new networks).
- A 15 year old boy is now prepared to help out at home in a reciprocal relationship with his parents whereas in the past, he resisted being told what to do and was hardly at home (change in the nature of memberships in family networks eg power differential).
- A 50 year old Indigenous Australian man no longer relies on others to read his mail for him (change in the support sought, received or given in networks).
- A 54 year old woman originally from Columbia is now able to be more effective at work because she can communicate and work in teams better (bonding ties).
- A 50 year old woman originally from China and who has been attending classes for two and a half years recently went on a cruise knowing that fellow passengers would not be Chinese. She would have previously lacked the confidence to do so earlier. (bridging ties).

In addition to the concept of social capital, one can also analyse the benefits of adult literacy classes through the lens of everyday citizenship. For example, I recall as an A.B.E. teacher the many times when I listened to and marvelled at the stories of perseverance told by immigrant women at home, trying to improve their spoken as well as reading capabilities. I recall a young immigrant mother who told how she regularly watched television programs with her children and used them to glean clues for her spoken English as well as learning the alphabet. Another student, in his early sixties, who is one of the two people I discuss in this chapter's first case study, built a vocabulary of words and phrases he he gradually recognized and remembered from billboards and street posters, items

on supermarket shelves, directly asking for help in post-offices and banks, and in his daily struggle to understand the local newspaper. As this man's teacher I neither pitied his lack of literacy, nor viewed him as somehow deficient, for he demonstrated in class wide general knowledge and interest in the world. He had a questioning mind and an admirable determination to become a more fluent reader. I had great respect for him,, for he had a vital interest and knowledge about world affairs, keen curiosity and above all determination to be able to read at a certain level of fluency.

The R.A.W.F.A. classes comprising small groups of adult learners with diverse needs, abilities and cultural backgrounds created the conditions for teaching and learning in which formal content and text resources were an adjunct to the lives and experiences of the students themselves as a rich and never-ending source of literacy, over and above technical command of textbook exercises. I agree with Wayne O' Neill's definition of literacy as more than technical expertise. He writes:

... being able to read means that you can follow words across a page, getting generally what's superficially there. Being literate means you can bring your knowledge and your experience to bear on what passes before you. Let us call the latter proper literacy: the former improper (1977: 74).

and concludes:

Proper literacy should extend a man's control over his life and environment and allow him [sic] to continue to deal rationally and in words with his life and decisions.(1977: 74).

Apart from the gender bias apparent in O'Neill's statement, I relate to his philosophical position.

As far as my own teaching approaches to R.A.W.F.A. classes, it was always a soft option to fill each three-hourly class with endless exercises in subjects like comprehension, vocabulary extension, crosswords, quizzes, writing creatively and filling in gap words from selected passages. In adopting these

mechanical aids, it is possible to dupe learners into thinking they are making progress and undoubtedly some are at a technical level. Nevertheless, this depends solely on the teacher's preconceptions about what the student needs to know. With this teacher-centred and textbook-driven approach, learners play little or no part in negotiating the learning agenda and thereby rarely gather the confidence in challenging the silences which keep them disempowered in work, home and social situations.

Finally, I wish to stress how important was the emphasis on general, as distinct from vocational, literacy in those first R.A.W.F.A. classes. I contend there was intrinsic value for learners in using their own life experiences and stories as the basis for literacy acquisition and motivation, particularly among marginal and disadvantaged adults. In my teaching I aimed to help students discover and bring into conscious awareness their growing abilities to deal rationally with decisions concerning their lives, as an outcome of the teaching process. O'Neill speaks of 'proper literacy' as developing in learners the ability to 'deal rationally with life and decisions as an outcome of literacy teaching' (1997: 74).

This emphasis on rationality does not, however, preclude either the affective or attitudinal aspects of literacy. In relating the events that create the subject matter of my teaching in the second case study that I present in this chapter, it will become clear how significant his emotions were in enabling my African student to make sense and meaning of his past and present contexts.

Here is a further example that illustrates the importance of emotions and attitudes in influencing literacy acquisition. A young man with a mild intellectual disability was passed on to me in a general R.A.W.F.A. class for two principal reasons, the first being that he benefited from the social contact with a small group, and the second because it was assumed that in time, even with limited literacy, he might be assisted to find work outside the sheltered workshop context. This student travelled long distances each time he came to class and, at the conclusion to the sessions, he did not return home but regularly rode trains as far away as Wollongong and Newcastle. He did so because he had

little else to fill his life and more importantly he was passionate about trains. He was from a Lebanese family where he was accepted and integrated despite his disability but he was not over-protected and was encouraged to come to TAFE. Two key events had greatly saddened and affected him before coming into my R.A.W.F.A. group. The first concerned the death of his mother to whom he was greatly attached and the second was the loss of his previous R.A.W.F.A. teacher with whom he had also established a strong connection. She had left TAFE to work with an Indigenous Australian community. This was a double blow to this student's sense of well-being and trust in his surroundings and I needed to work at establishing trust with him so as to continue the progress he was making with simple reading and writing tasks. He often talked about his former A.B.E. teacher and so I suggested that with my help he could write a letter to her and so maintain his contact with her. He was excited at the prospect and we spent many sessions preparing the letter and working out what he wanted to tell her. I could have introduced letter writing to this man's group as a technical skill, devoid of any emotional content or context, but in linking it with a real person he cared about and enabling him to maintain contact and communication, he was able to move beyond his distress and continue with the threads of his learning. We discussed the content and I wrote down his words to her, which he then copied carefully onto notepaper. I showed him how to set out a personal, as distinct from a business, letter and he practised writing his address correctly (a long process!). When at long last, together we achieved his goal, he painstakingly addressed the envelope and I provided a stamp. He posted his own letter and was overjoyed when he received a reply reinforcing his progress.

The uses of literacy inside the classroom for this student with intellectual disability had powerful connotations for his emotional wellbeing. Stories, too are another valuable source of emotion and affect which are an important teaching resource in learning how to read and write. Waterhouse reminds us that:

We tell stories for many reasons: to entertain, to gossip, as evidence for our arguments, to reveal who we are. Sometimes we tell stories, especially about experiences that are puzzling, powerful or upsetting, in order to render those

experiences more sensible. Telling stories offers one way to make sense of what has happened. We may even catch a level of meaning that we only partially grasped while living through something (2001: 49).

Frieran teachers often talk about the importance of using stories. But sometimes stories can verge on being therapeutic as opposed to pedagogical. Teachers of at-risk students sometimes do not recognise how stories cross over into therapy. When you teach with a Frieran approach you cannot prevent this going into deep waters. Affect is a significant part of breaking silence but teachers need to know how to handle these situations when these occur. The implications are that in an ideal world teachers should have some training in therapy. Furthermore, I think Freire had a masculinised world view which focused on poverty and cultural alienation. I recognised the value of a feminised view that paid attention to feelings and the relationships between teachers and learners matter when teaching. I consciously placed great effort in building a relationship of great trust with severely disadvantaged learners. All this suggests that there are limitations to what 'teaching' alone can achieve in terms of breaking silence. And it highlights the responsibility of teachers to use caution when focusing on emotional issues and stories, particularly with vulnerable and 'at risk' learners.

The new National Training Agenda and the audit culture

An important aid to motivating adult learners in basic education classes like R.A.W.F.A. was the mutuality that existed between students and their teachers. This was manifest through discussions students had with teachers about what they understood as the nature or source of their reading, writing or numeracy difficulties which gave them a stake in developing strategies for improvement as well as informing teachers planning appropriately and devising teaching strategies. However, with the introduction of the National Training Agenda in TAFE with its emphasis on human capital, workplace literacy and the audit culture, A.B.E. teachers increasingly found their professional autonomy severely curtailed. Their teaching emphasis changed from student-centred

learning to one which required them to work within what Black, in his critique of the audit culture that came into TAFE in the late 1990's, described as 'the tight curriculum parameters of workplace literacy' (Black 2010). As a result, literacy and numeracy teachers found themselves increasingly complicit with state and federal government policies which prioritised the workplace literacy needs of the unemployed and so subject to Centrelink (social security) requirements. Broad, general R.A.W.F.A. programs gave way to more tightly monitored and audited language, literacy and numeracy schemes commonly known by the acronym LL&N (Language, Literacy and Numeracy).

This introduction severely challenged and eroded curriculum discourses founded on notions of social justice and equality of educational opportunities. They were replaced with discourses of human capital building, leaving little if any room for teachers to actively engage with, or participate in, philosophical debates or decisions as to what constituted 'proper literacy.' Governments, business and employer groups would in future dictate the literacy agenda and what kind of literacy skills they wanted for improved workplace performance. Black (2010) makes for sombre and disquieting reading about the negative impacts of the above and the rise of an audit culture. Allie Clemans and Terri Seddon likewise present sombre accounts of the consequences the rise of a new National Training Agenda with an emphasis on competency-based learning outcomes had for A.B.E. teachers (2000). They contend that in 20 years 'the formation of TAFE as a solution to economic, social and educational disadvantage, fell apart' (2000: 18). In this new vocationally oriented climate, students became 'clients' or 'customers' and literacy teachers had to concentrate their efforts on developing nationally accredited and prescribed workplace skills and outcomes. Computer literacy was an essential component of this new approach.

As Black notes, many A.B.E. teachers found their newly imposed role as judges of workplace competency outcomes not only discomfiting but disquieting too, because their own teaching performance in the classroom became subject to scrutiny and accountability, plus they were faced with vastly increased

administrative duties and paperwork leaving reduced lesson-planning time. In the words of one A.B.E. head teacher who took part in Black's research:

Being an educator is not possible. We are trainers, assessors, RPL (recognition of prior learning) experts, workforce practitioners, Centrelink prison officers (Black 2010: 14).

Another important negative impact of workplace literacy agendas, is that adult basic education teachers have been required to enrol adults sent by Centrelink as a condition of their dole payments. As a consequence, in some cases, students fulfilling their obligations to obtain security security pension benefits (Centrelink) have been reluctant learners and poorly motivated. An A.B.E. TAFE teacher who took part in Black's research commented that her reaction to the audit culture left her feeling 'fragmented out of existence' (2010: 16).

Another teacher noted the loss of an epistemological emphasis on Freireian literacy. 'I feel that critical literacy kind of got lost along the way and there's nothing within the curriculum that promotes it and reinforces it (2000::15). Black describes A.B.E. teachers attempting to resist the demands and requirements of the audit system and finding various ways of teaching that try to build resistance even within an apparently overt accommodation of the workplace agenda. Words such as 'interstices,' 'edgeways,' 'cracks,' and 'margins' which both Stephen Black and Jane Thompson employ, follow the same lines of suggesting ways adult educators can infiltrate mainstream workplace literacy agendas. This is synonymous with Freire's concept of literacy as empowerment and attacking silences that arise as a result of passive, banking-style learning. Thompson's powerful words serve to remind educators under siege from neo-liberal ideology that:

The history of social movements is a history of people operating in the cracks of superstructures. Of using the energies generated at the margins of systems and organisations (1997: 146).

Black points out that despite A.B.E. teachers finding it difficult to teach as required within the regulatory mechanisms of the VET audit culture, they are

finding ways to practise what they perceive as 'good' A.B.E. pedagogical principles. Even so, this is not without cost and pressures on them which Clemans & Seddon make all too clear as they report the comment of one TAFE teacher as trying to do business with an educator's heart (2000)..

In the example I discuss in the second of two case studies which follow, I demonstrate the difficult choices I faced in conforming to, or resisting, an enforced workplace literacy agenda. In this account I describe the story of an African immigrant referred to my A.B.E. section by Centrelink and how conflicted I was between meeting the formal requirements that demanded he practise and develop certain generic employment skills and my own perceptions regarding the hopelessness and despair of this bewildered man going round in circles and jumping through endless hoops which were leading him nowhere in his search for paid work and a sense of identity.

Given his situation and mine, I needed to find ways to develop his resilience as well as motivation and hope which meant for me choosing to side with him and identify what would empower and help him rather than follow the script set by Centrelink at the behest of government. hooks wrote that education is a vocation 'rooted in hopefulness' (2003: xiv) and called for a progressive holistic approach to teaching as an 'engaged pedagogy.' She went on to declare that the classroom ought to be a place of radical possibility and provide an opportunity to transgress boundaries. I needed to remind myself of her words on this occasion. I had to consider whether to perpetuate his feelings of inadequacy by viewing his case as purely a technical deficiency, or trying to engage with him to problematise his situation at a broader political level and deal with his powerful feelings of rejection.

Training is for dogs

In a speech given to the Australian National Training Authority (ANTA) just over a decade ago, Peter Ellyard (2000), the Executive Director of Preferred

Futures International, deplored the continuing dominance of behaviourist perspectives on education and training. He argued this prevented innovative thinking about a future in which it is predicted 70% of job categories, products and services of the year 2020 have yet to be invented. Ellyard asked how in a post-modern era of plurality of discourses and values in which globalisation is creating ever-intensifying interdependence between countries, and in which society is so much better at picking up and considering so many different ideas, industry-training bodies (in which we can legitimately include TAFE since it has increasingly tied itself to industry training packages and policies as its main role) are stuck in the past and reliant on outmoded Fordist conveyor-style concepts of training workers. Ellyard declared: 'Living too much in the present can prevent you thinking about the future correctly' (2000, p. 1). Furthermore he went on to say that workplaces needed to create conditions where there was concern for both individual wellbeing and leadership, whereas the reality was that too many present-day work-places and -practices were akin to a sinking ship.

On the Titanic, there were too many people down in the engine room trying to get an extra few knots out of the motor. The problem was up on the bridge. We're working too hard in the engine room cutting costs, being productive, getting bottom-line outcomes, but we're not charting a voyage to the 21st century, going to a place we want to go. We actually haven't even decided where we want to go, except to stay in the world and be more competitive at doing the things we're currently doing, not ought to be doing, in order to get to the future first (2000, p. 6).

The allusion to the Titanic and TAFE sinking into educational oblivion is an apt comparison, in my assessment. Many TAFE A.B.E. teachers have jumped ship in the last decade as Clemans and Seddon (2000) have attested; because they are unhappy with the direction TAFE has taken, both its present role and future expectations in vocational education and training. These teachers, as Black revealed in his research, are extremely downhearted because their professional status, wide experience and expertise have been gradually eroded and downgraded by the influx of lower qualified vocational trainers, and the requirements of managers with little or no understanding of adult education pedagogy.

Absolutely everything has changed, everything that made the job satisfying has been reduced and in most cases eliminated. Key performance indicators are driving our lives and ruining our quality of work, services, products and our capacity to assist students. (Anonymous A.B.E. Head Teacher cited in Black 2010, p. 8).

The remainder of Black's paper paints a sorry picture of the lack of trust, resentment, anger and disillusionment amongst A.B.E. teachers in the TAFE system that has arisen as the result of the vocational climate eclipsing every aspect of A.B.E. teaching and learning.

A most serious criticism levelled at the audit culture and its emphasis on performativity and accountability, was by one A.B.E. teacher who pointed out that TAFE teachers are no longer required to undertake a degree qualification in adult education at a university. Instead a Certificate IV in Workplace Training and Assessment is all that was required. This became the new benchmark for a professional standard of an A.B.E. practitioner. One teacher who has watched vocational trainers in action has commented:

They are not teacher trained and they are very much teacher talk (they) stand in front of a room, pass out worksheets ... and that's what we are currently concerned about the *Certificate IV* people coming in, if they don't have a philosophy of education (Anonymous teacher cited in Black 2010, p. 11).

Thus, the professional standing of A.B.E. teachers is severely eroded as managers and auditors are increasingly privileged over them. Furthermore, they are increasingly isolated from their traditional role as teachers engaged with adult literacy as an emancipatory project.

With increasing moves towards privatisation and course fees, low-income and other disadvantaged student groups in TAFE – a major component of their former operations – disappeared from classrooms and colleges. A timely plea from Ellyard to his audience: 'Let's reserve learning for people, training is for dogs' (2000 p. 1). But this is a lesson the captains of industry influencing the

TAFE sector have chosen to ignore, which begs the question as to why the word 'education' is still included as part of TAFE's acronym. In these circumstances, perhaps a more fitting label for the institution would be Technical and Further Training (TAFT). Successive governments have betrayed TAFE's public education charter responsibilities.

I agree wholeheartedly with Peter Mayo 's assessment that in the last decade, the technical and rational in adult education have become privileged over all else; in other words, a concern with marketability and up-skilling for a global economy, at cost to social justice and equality. It is against these changes that literacy and numeracy policies and teaching practices in the TAFE sector have come under attack, and gains under the equality and access banners surrendered. However, I agree with Mayo when - although deploring government marginalisation of equity programs for the disadvantaged - he points out there has been too little attention paid to outcomes. A similar criticism has been made in relation to the TAFE Women's Return to Work and Study programs, exemplified by the New Opportunities for Women course - a criticism I will take up in a later chapter on women in TAFE. However, this all depends on your definition of what constitutes 'outcomes.'

Case study 1 – Reading for social communication

'R' was a man in his late sixties who enrolled in a daytime R.A.W.F.A. class for adults with reading and/or writing difficulties. He stood out from the rest of the group because he was extremely tall with a shock of white hair and a beard. His granddaughter's nickname for him was 'Hairy Pop'. This student had used up his allotted hours of tuition at another technical college but somehow had obtained a place in my class. R had but one goal for his A.B.E. program, which was to be able to read stories to his three year old grand-daughter fluently and without guessing the actual words on the page, using the books' illustrations as clues to content and context. Thus far, his subterfuge had worked, but R knew

as the child grew older, she would soon be able to detect his subterfuge and so he wished to make one last determined effort to attain reading ability.

I developed a great respect for R, the more I discovered the story of his background and life. Illegitimately born, he was raised in an Irish orphanage and received almost no schooling and was sent out to work and earn his own living at thirteen. Thus he went out into the world unable to read or write, but although his early life was a sad and tragic one, in no sense had R become a victim of circumstances. He told how he had managed to hide the fact of his illiteracy for most of his life and what strategies he had developed for dealing with the problems it caused. He practised building his word recognition from looking at public hoardings and advertisements along the road as he travelled on buses and trains or watched television. He also bought a daily tabloid newspaper which he struggled to make sense of. R had a wide knowledge of the world in general. He had also worked, married and had children.

When I spoke with his previous A.B.E. teacher she said he had made good progress, was highly motivated and was on the brink of following words sequentially in a simple format. He was an asset in class and always contributed to discussions, but it was clear from our discussions that his only purpose in coming to class was to improve his reading skills to save face with his granddaughter. So we devised a plan whereby R would still come to class and contribute, but at the end of each session, he would stay behind to read aloud to me from an adult reader in the resource collection in the A.B.E. library. I found that most adult reading books with adult themes were dull and un-interesting and had little or nothing to do with real lives or situations. However, in R's case such books sufficed for the task because they were limited to four or five short, simple sentences on one side of the page with drawings illustrating the meaning of the story on the other.

R struggled hard at first and I was reminded how when I became a teacher in my first infant school in Britain, my principal insisted that every single child in my class of over thirty children must practise reading aloud to me every

single day. It was a mammoth task and the entire school was like a giant reading factory in which before, during and after school you would find children queuing to read to their teacher and have the reward of yet another few pages ticked off on the bookmark every child possessed and looked after very carefully. Such methods were tedious, particularly when you looked at the long line of children all eagerly awaiting to read to you, but they paid off judging by the number of children who could read reasonably fluently by the time they moved on to the next level in schooling. In identical fashion I listened, as twice a week R haltingly practised his reading aloud, from left to right and up to down. When he began to progress and grow more confident, I encouraged him to try to guess ahead what lay on the page, using the picture on the opposite page as a clue. Gradually, the words began to come more readily as I concentrated solely on a whole-word approach with limited phonetic breakdown. I also suggested to R that he practise reading his book at home before each class. R's goal was that by the Christmas break he would be able to seat his small grand-daughter on his lap and confidently read her story-book to her. That became our joint goal and we both worked consistently to achieve it. When R. returned to the group after the break and I asked him how he had fared, he told how while he still became stuck in places, he had more confidence in attempting to read aloud and was no longer afraid of being caught cheating by his granddaughter.

Reading aloud to young children is not only deeply satisfying, especially when they listen with rapt attention, but it is an acquired skill and technique requiring lots of practice as I have observed in supervising students in both schools and childcare centres. Some students excel while others struggle to grasp that even holding the book where a group of children can see the pictures on a page is difficult for them to achieve.

Reading for social literacy is, in my view, just as important as reading for workplace effectiveness and efficiency. It is a sad loss, and in the long haul detrimental to cultural diversity and richness, that *general* literacy has forfeited its importance to *vocational* literacy in TAFE A.B.E. classes. Sadly too, acquiring literacy is no longer seen as a basic human right. It has to be purchased at market

rates. I am not denying the importance of economic literacy; rather, I am claiming that literacy for the workplace, as the dominant discourse of our times, is not the only story, nor should it be in a pluralist society. Fiction, biography, historical accounts, poetry, memoir, all give meaning to and enrich our lives and help provide us with a moral and imaginative compass. We need broad literacy as a civilising influence and tool to understand our world.

Those involved in literacy practices and literacy education are in effective positions for cultivating, telling and embodying stories. [...] The stories we choose to value and embody through our practice will determine our effectiveness. The stories are 'chosen' through ways we conceive of ourselves and our work (Waterhouse 2004: 59).

I taught this class and this student in the mid-1980s. At this stage competency-based training and national qualification standards were in their infancy. R.A.W.F.A. classes were mixed and collective, but small groups so teachers could plan individual programs to suit different levels of literacy attainment and interest. Within some general skills' teaching at the beginning of each class, I would then divert each student in the group to work on their individual program. I think this was a matter of personal preference for teachers of Adult Basic Education, who back in the late seventies and eighties were free and encouraged to deploy their preferred teaching methods and approaches.

R, the man who is the subject of my first case study stood out for his advanced knowledge of life, the manner in which he had not become a victim of his lack of literacy but had learned to negotiate civic life competently and optimistically. He stood out in the group at the time because the rest of the students were much less skilled or confident than he was. He had used up his quota of A.B.E. hours in TAFE at Petersham and had not been allowed to re-enrol although his former A.B.E. teacher there told me he was well on his way to making a breakthrough. So, legally he should not have been allowed to enrol at Sydney TAFE (full marks for his tenacity). He was allotted to my class and I quickly realised he would be wasting his time doing basic exercises and at one level, he knew a whole lot more about the real world than I did. Consequently, he joined in the group activities

and had his share of support in the group at his level, but I kept him back (with his consent) and gave him reading practice each week after class because I recognized he just needed to learn how to negotiate print, use illustrations as a guide to guessing the correct words and become more familiar with the rhythms of reading line after line. Phonic building words were useful but he did not rely on this form of acquisition and I wanted confidence in using his voice and eyes to guess ahead story lines and words. Also, he needed to stop making up for his lack of reading ability by guessing the story from pictures when pretending to read to his grand-daughter. His guessing habit was, I think, useful, but he had come to rely on it and it was blocking other useful and necessary strategies.

Case study 2 – Literacy for human capital

Here I describe a case study that took place in the late 1990s. At this stage, competency standards and national qualification frameworks were well developed and TAFE curricula directly aligned to them. Funding for A.B.E. classes was no longer to be directed towards general literacy, but instead was earmarked for low-level unemployed adults on the books of Centrelink, who identified a lack of generic reading and writing skills in their clients and contracted with TAFE A.B.E. providers to upskill them in workplace literacy. So in my case, a TAFE College would have been awarded a contract of so many hours paid for by Centrelink to work with those clients most in need and least likely to obtain work. I had just returned for a few hours' teaching each week after a road accident and all the classes already had teaching staff, so the Head of A.B.E. at the local College asked me to come in late afternoons when M, a newly arrived migrant from Africa, could come for tuition to assist with this job searching.

During the 1990s, the federal government's tertiary education agenda and funding was predicated on a need to lift workplace skills and performativity to make Australia more competitive in the global context. This resulted in a

paradigm shift in how literacy acquisition came to be perceived in society and more particularly in the TAFE system. No longer was the emphasis to be on general reading and writing for adults who wanted to overcome difficulties or improve their social skills. R.A.W.F.A. teachers in A.B.E. classrooms found they were no longer free to negotiate and plan lesson content to match the different experiences, needs and wishes of students. Instead funding was contingent upon their working within what Black defined as 'the tight curriculum parameters of workplace literacy education era of the late 1990s' (2001, p. 1).

My second case study deals with the constraints imposed on both my student and me, in trying to adhere to a workplace literacy requirement prescribed by Centrelink (federal government social security agency), in which my professional autonomy was severely curtailed and the individual needs and wishes of my student were forfeit to Centrelink's stringent requirements. The questions for me at the time became: Would my teaching in a prescribed fashion be at cost to my belief in literacy as an emancipatory project (in Freire's definition) for the marginalised? If not, what would be the likely impact on my interactions with the student in question? How authentic could I be? Also, in being restricted to one aspect of this man's life; namely his workplace-self, what other significant aspects of his cultural- and autobiographical- self would be discounted as unimportant – those experiences of life described by Bruner as 'drenched in affect' (cited in Waterhouse 2004, p. 50). These issues reared their heads very quickly once I began my twice-weekly, two-hourly tutorials with M in which he was required to prepare a resume, write a job application, hone his interview techniques, and attend regular interviews with his case manager at Centrelink to continue obtaining his social security pension.

M's Story

M had been referred to the Adult Basic Education section by his Centrelink case manager under the Language, Literacy and Numeracy program.

This was funded by the federal government to get people off the dole and into work as quickly as possible. To receive dole or social security payments, clients were obliged to develop and improve their employment opportunities by attending basic adult vocational tuition in TAFE. I did not interview M prior to his meeting me at his first tutorial which took place one early evening. During the daytime he was expected to keep regular scheduled appointments at Centrelink and do job searches. He had been their 'client' for some time and his dole payments were contingent on his obeying Centrelink rules to the letter of the law.

M had come to Australia from West Africa, but was separated from his wife, with whom he shared limited access to their primary-school aged daughter. The girl was a cause of anxiety because M could not financially maintain her various school expenses – for example, stationery, uniform, excursions - nor could he afford to give her the things he wanted to like gifts and treats. He also felt a deep sense of shame that he was only semi-literate in his own language too.

So, even before M began his formal tuition with me he was not only carrying a heavy burden of responsibility, but also worrying about his daughter and felt she did not respect him as a father. M had a rudimentary education in the village school closest to his home, and lacked any form of secondary education. Even so, he spoke English well and we were able to communicate without much difficulty.

When I asked him why Centrelink had sent him to TAFE he reported that no matter how many job interviews his case manager had arranged for him, M was never successful. Often, he explained, when he went to the place of interview, the job had already been given to someone else. He lived alone, had few outside contacts and almost no money except his welfare benefits. He rode a bicycle to class to save on fares. I quickly intuited that he did not want to come to class, regarding this as having to jump through just another hoop. An added complication to the situation was that this tutorial was my introduction to the workplace literacy curriculum and teaching requirements. I was returning to

casual teaching after being on leave as a result of an accident, and I did not yet grasp how different the expectations would be from R.A.W.F.A. teaching. I, therefore, made an effort to avail myself of NSW TAFE's specialist library collection for resources in the field of adult and basic education (A.B.E.). As I recall the collection included reading and writing resources of a general nature (ie. non-workplace specific) and those specifically aimed at developing workplace-related skills – writing job applications, preparing a curriculum vitae, job interview techniques, where and how to identify reliable (as opposed to rip-off) employment opportunities in national and local newspapers. I began tutoring M, teaching him how to prepare a curriculum vitae and for job interviews.

A few weeks into the tutorials I began to have serious misgivings about complying and I realised that M, too, shared them. In the first place, jobs for the least skilled workers were virtually non-existent and more and more were disappearing offshore as Australia became part of an increasingly competitive global market. Secondly - and here I based my evidence on my experiences with Vietnamese immigrants and refugees in which they were constantly discriminated against in seeking work - the number of times M had presented for interviews and been turned down, made me intuit racism was again rearing its ugly head. I felt distinctly uneasy that underneath the overt agenda of preparing M for even low-skilled, menial jobs, that there was an unspoken agenda. The number of times Centrelink had sent M for an interview, it nearly always transpired that there was no longer a vacancy or the position happened to have been filled just before he arrived and the preference given to an Australian-born worker. Neither of us believed that the competencies in which M was supposed to become proficient would finally lead him anywhere. But to his credit, he brought the situation to a head, when one evening he arrived very late at the tutorial in a distressed state and told me that he was not going to attend any more tutorials no matter the consequences for his future. In short, M had had enough.

What he needed was to be helped to find a way 'out from under,' which would give him new strength, courage and perhaps, most importantly of all, resilience in acting on his own behalf rather than continuing to be acted upon. In other words, he needed less 'functional' empowerment as society demanded, and more genuine personal empowerment and control over his affairs and life (Waterhouse 2004: 57). M's decision in refusing to continue with the tutorials helped me to resolve that I too, was no longer going to participate in a domesticating pedagogy where M was implicitly blamed for his predicament and positioned as deficient. There was not anything he nor I were willing to accept as causing his failure to get work.

Actions taken and outcomes achieved

Having agreed with M's assessment of his situation and affirmed him; together we negotiated a plan of action as follows:

- He would no longer attend my tutorials and we could communicate by telephone when required.
- M would no longer rely on his Centrelink case-manager to secure potential job interviews for him and would spend more time looking for employment in his local neighbourhood
- I would report that he was making progress in his contractual obligations to Centrelink and being proactive on his own behalf, thereby ensuring his benefits would legitimately continue.
- If and when M found a position I would stay in contact with him and assist him in any way I could with information or on-the-job help.

Not much later, a call came from M in which he sounded very different from the despairing man I had encountered during tutorials. He had done as we agreed and used his bicycle to tour his local area seeking an opening, as well as staying on the Centrelink register and it was in fact his case handler who finally was able to place him in a glass manufacturing warehouse. He did not have to go through an interview process, but was required to report for work immediately and

would be given on-the-job training. In terms of improving this man's opportunity to improve his workplace literacy, it could not have been a more propitious circumstance, for he was placed under the supervision and guidance of an older, highly experienced worker who taught him all he needed to know about work as a storeman. Thus, M was not only able to commence learning both generic and specific work skills, but most significantly he would be earning a regular wage to support his daughter and be able to take her out, as well as contribute costs towards her schooling. This alone boosted his morale and enhanced his self-esteem and dignity as a father. His spoken language quickly developed and improved too; for his workmates included him in their lunchtime breaks and showed interest in his background. They were aiming to improve his understanding and use of the vernacular too!

Conclusion

I agree with Peter Waterhouse that the field of adult basic education needs more stories around literacy acquisition other than the human capital one which allow for the full gamut of human experience in myriads of class, gendered and racial contexts and in which A.B.E. teachers could resurrect their identity and true purpose. Between the interstices of a dominant human capital discourse, with its narrow curriculum confines, lies a rich vein of creative, critical literacy. The problems that beset our world and society in this the 21st century are not limited to the need for a more literate and highly skilled workforce alone as governments would have us believe. There are equally pressing and urgent social and civil issues relevant for adult teaching and learning which are important stories too. Wealth disparity, global conflict, environmental degradation and, of specific concern to Australian society, people in detention, indigenous issues around health, landownership, public education, freedom of information as a democratic right, global warming, mineral exploration, and gay rights are all stories that can be used as appropriate subject matter for talking, reading and writing about in our literacy teaching. The context of literacy is never neutral, (whatever we may have been led to believe) but instead is political and often dissenting from mainstream opinion. What M taught me in the process

of teaching him was that his limited literacy was but one part of his life-story even though it had an adverse impact on his hopes, fears, and human dignity. His was a brave act of risk, but by questioning the efficacy of conforming to Centrelink imposed notions of literacy, he finally empowered himself and me to act in his best interests rather than comply with a band-aid solution.

CHAPTER 11

Feminist Infiltrators and Agitators

Campaigning for representation in Government and the Public Service

The New South Wales TAFE Women's Co-ordination Unit commenced operations in 1981, headed by a feminist, Jenni Neary. Its mandate was to promote and monitor access and participation rates in TAFE for targeted groups, including working class, immigrant and Indigenous Australian women who were traditionally excluded from technical and vocational education. The Unit also developed policies and staff training programs to advance the career prospects of women in the NSW public service. One of its greatest achievements was the establishment of childcare centres both on and off college campuses to assist women returning to study.

The setting up of the TAFE NSW Women's Co-ordination Unit (WCU) to oversee policy and program development was made possible by a special grant allocated by the Whitlam federal Labor Government. This had come about partly in response to pressure from politically proactive feminist groups wishing to improve women's representation in state and federal government bureaucracies, the most prominent being the Women's Electoral Lobby (WEL). Prior to the 1972 federal election, WEL canvassed every aspiring party candidate concerning their values and attitudes on six targeted key issues for women including:

- equal educational opportunity
- equal employment opportunity
- equal pay
- free contraception services

- abortion on demand
- free 24-hour childcare services (Eisenstein 1996: 224).

In her seminal research on the history of Australian feminist public policy, Hester Eisenstein tells the stories of a highly visible group of mostly Anglo-women openly committed to the feminist cause (1986). She called them 'femocrats' and 'inside agitators.' The majority were public servants, and their feminist critique attacked patriarchal power and control at every level of the public service. They argued that male privilege was exercised not only through preferential employment of men, but also through masculinist values and assumptions made in public policy in taxation, education, welfare and employment. Eisenstein tells how, through the efforts and highly visible campaigns of groups such as WEL and Women in Education; female bureaucrats, or femocrats as they became known were able to infiltrate senior management positions in the public service and agitate for a better deal and representation of women's interests and needs. They were aided in their goals by two sympathetic Labor governments, both at Federal and state levels.

Eisenstein describes these women as second-wave feminists, highly educated, articulate radicals with close links to Labor. These close links of feminists with Labor were to have catastrophic consequences for the NSW TAFE Women's Co-ordination Unit when the Greiner Liberal State government came to power in 1988. Eisenstein describes their efforts in organizing campaigns leading up to the election of Federal Labor and who, during the Whitlam years, became an established, essential feature of a socialist, reformist government after the previous twelve years of Liberal/National male-dominated government rule. During the seventies and eighties, TAFE femocrats instigated and carried through many policies and services which benefitted working-class women and young women, as well as challenging a patriarchal and paternalistic culture throughout the public service including technical colleges (Pocock 1988).

It's time!

The slogan 'The personal is political' was one of the most oft quoted political slogans of second-wave women liberationists during the 1960s. Joan Mandle (2012) argued that the true cause of women's personal and political problems lay in the unequal and unjust structural nature of society which made women subservient and undervalued at every level of their lives. Mandle points to a number of barriers and obstacles constraining and limiting the equality of women both in the domestic sphere and the wider sphere, including economic dependence, limited reproductive options, educational and occupational barriers, absence of legal rights within marriage and in general, and the much higher rates of poverty and dependence on welfare. Gender inequality and sexist discrimination kept women down and under, in their place and powerless. Mandle insisted the struggle for women's improved status in the home was strategic to their battle for equal status in society.

In the following chapter of my thesis I describe a TAFE women's program whose chief objective was to critically explore and examine how the personal and domestic situations of participants in the program influenced how they viewed their vocational aspirations. It was a belief in the close links between undervalued women's domestic status and their less than equal position in society which drove women to infiltrate and embed themselves in the public service machinery.

Whitlam's catch-cry during the lead-up to the election 'It's time!' resonated with feminists who worked tirelessly to get Labor elected and were rewarded for these women's efforts when, on his electoral success Whitlam kept a promise he made before the election to create a Federal Women's Advisor. According to Eisenstein, he did so on the advice of his principal parliamentary advisor, Peter Wilenski who was married to Gail Radford, who happened to be the convenor of the Women's Electoral Lobby (WEL) in the Australian Capital Territory. As Eisenstein tells it, it was Radford who first mooted the idea to Wilenski. He was in agreement because he had become a convert to the women's liberation

movement, when sharing a house with a group of female activists during his time at Harvard University. However, Wilenski has argued that despite any personal influence he may have had in the matter, the appointment of a Women's Advisor would ultimately have occurred anyway:

Perhaps it happened a little bit early because I was there and married to a feminist [...] But it still would have happened [...] This was the mood of the times [...] There had to be somebody inside the system who would become the vehicle before women themselves entered the system (Wilenski transcript cited in Eisenstein, 1996: 19).

Hester Eisenstein's account of how after Labor took office, feminists gradually infiltrated both federal and state public service departments makes fascinating reading because of the way she includes in her account the word-of-mouth stories and observations of femocrats who served in government departments, some of them at senior levels of management. Sometimes funny, other times angry and bitter, they add up to a slice of women's history in Australia that is rarely acknowledged outside the sisterhood. For example, in a feature article about a high-profile female Minister for Foreign Affairs in the Australian Parliament in 2015, it was reported that she refused to label herself as a feminist, arguing that gender had nothing to do with her success and that she had risen to her present heights entirely through her own talent, ambition and hard work. This denies or displays ignorance about the efforts of previous female politicians and public servants who pioneered women's entry into the system and made it possible for them to break the glass ceiling (Wallace 2015).

Judith Dwyer, a former femocrat, highlights the important efforts made by Australian feminists to improve the lives of women by setting up new community services and taking on male-dominated enclaves of power and decision making. She writes:

In England feminists write books [...] in America they set up businesses and have campaigns about laws, and in Australia they set up services and attempt to change [...] the apparatus of the state (Eisenstein 1996: 1).

Examples of these new services included: Women's Health and Welfare Centres, Rape Crisis Centres, Community Childcare Centres, and Women's Refuges. For example, Elsie Women's Refuge was the first centre to be established for women escaping domestic violence. It was co-founded by Anne Summers, who was later appointed as Head of the Office of the Status of Women (OSW) in the federal government. She was sharply criticised by the more radical elements of the women's liberation movement when she agreed to work within government circles. They felt feminists should operate from a position outside of the system so as not to be beholden to it. They labelled Summers as a bourgeois sell-out. Subsequent history and events in the women's movement have suggested that Summers showed herself to be a tireless and committed feminist and advocate for working women's rights. She backed Julia Gillard in her brief tenure as Prime Minister when Gillard made her now famous speech concerning the frequent misogynist attacks on her by the then Leader of the Opposition, Tony Abbott.

Since the newly elected Federal Coalition Government in September 2013, there has been little if any serious attempts to address the needs of women by the Liberal Government. The Prime Minister, Tony Abbott appointed himself as Minister of Women's Affairs, but subsequent severe budget cuts to services dedicated to women, have raised serious doubts about how committed he really was. By the way, he was Prime Minister for just almost two years after being deposed by his own political party. However, in spite of the continuing dismal prospects of women under the Liberal/National Coalition at this time of writing, the history of feminist efforts inside the bureaucracies and beyond in the community beginning in the 1960s, is both inspiring and impressive for students of history, particularly feminists. Women like Kaye Schofield, Eva Cox, Wendy McCarthy, Anne Summers, Marie Coleman, Carole Deagan, Helen L'Orange, Jenni Neary, Jozefa Sobski and Anne Sherry, are but a few of the dedicated many who worked tirelessly in public policy positions to end discrimination against women beginning in the sixties decade. They were boosted in their efforts by legislation including the passing of the Commonwealth Sex Discrimination Act

(1984), the Affirmative Action Act (1986) and they helped ensure the sustained operation of many health, legal, protection and welfare services for women. During the Whitlam and Keating tenures, the Office of the Status of Women as a functionary of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, was able to monitor policies and devise strategies and pilot schemes of benefit to women, and through the grass-roots efforts of organisations such as the Women's Electoral Lobby.

Miriam Dixon analysed the concept of masculinity and what it meant in colonial Australia (1976). She defined 'mateship' as a deeply entrenched and pervasive set of beliefs and behaviours in men which excluded women and involved close male bonding, giving rise to a view of Australian women as 'the doormats of the western world' (Eisenstein 1996: 10). I believe Dixon's analysis to be correct insofar as it verifies my own experience in relation to my teaching experience both in the NSW Department of Education as a probationary teacher in Sydney and secondly when I became a lecturer in education at Sydney Teachers College in the mid-seventies and was subject to masculinist attitudes and patriarchal preference and privilege. Eisenstein contends:

Despite a strong tradition of women writers, philanthropists and political organisers, women's traditional role in Australian society was nonetheless sharply circumscribed by a series of male-dominated institutions from trade unions and political parties to universities (1996: 10.).

I will relate this now to my own experience as a teacher and adult educator. In my own long march through educational institutions, be they schools, colleges of advanced education, universities, or technical and further education colleges; I have witnessed the prevailing power and authority of men over women in academic life. An example which is indelibly burned on my memory, relates to my first teaching appointment in the NSW public education system. Both the Principal of the school to which I was assigned, as well as two senior class teachers were men who were ex-servicemen from the second world war who did not undertake full-term teacher training because of the emergency provisions then. These two teachers behaved in the classroom like they were still in the army and they influenced the Principal of the school who was himself a returned serviceman. My every effort in the school to innovate or promote the confidence

and experience of my class of ten-year old girls was met with accusations of non-compliance with the rules and non-conformity in my behaviour. During one memorable interview in the Principal's office I was chastised and told the school did not need teachers like me telling him what to do as if they were colonials!! I experienced similar discriminatory mateship attitudes also when I began work in a teacher-training college where the head the education department was also an emergency-trained returned serviceman. Some of his senior staff were women who had higher academic qualifications than either him or some of his senior colleagues, but they invariably occupied jobs of lesser rank and importance. Eisenstein's book is full of stories of women's experiences similar to mine involving the efforts of women teachers and public servants trying to make inroads into bastions of male power and authority and who had to contend with chauvinistic and even childish responses and attitudes. Even where pioneering femocrats on rare occasions made a small dent in the system it would be at a relatively junior level and tokenistic. Where femocrats did reach senior levels alongside men or above them, they were known to be operating within affirmative action policy giving rise to suspicion and even hostility in some of their male colleagues who did not believe they had obtained their advanced status on merit.

A frisson of hostility

Women in authority were an anomaly in the 1960s and not easily accepted as equals. Colleen Chesterman, was a former director of the New South Wales Council of Social Services (NCOSS). She describes her reception by men in various bureaucracies, when she was required to negotiate with them on equal terms and her efforts to mitigate attitudes of animosity in meetings with senior male public service bureaucrats:

There was a response when I raised things, 'Here she goes again'. I always did go (to the meetings) [...] dressed absolutely appropriately, was always absolutely

charming[...] to mitigate what [...] I experienced as a frisson of hostility.
(Chesterman cited in Eisenstein, 1996: 134-35).

'A frisson of hostility' is what many a female public servant suffered at the hands of her male counterparts in meetings, committees and as representatives on boards where men governed the rules and procedures. Chris Ronalds, for instance, describes the harassment she experienced in her capacity as an outside consultant to a federal government department, because she refused to compromise on the strength of her recommendations, despite pressure from male bureaucrats from within the same department. The result as she relayed it to Eisenstein was to become the butt of a serious slur containing accusations of madness, irrationality and incompetence. In Ronalds's view this kind of targeted attack was a typical reaction from 'the sort of senior bureaucrats in various government departments in Canberra who can't deal with senior women' (Ronalds in Eisenstein 1996: 144.) Femocrats in the bureaucracy had to be tough and devise strategies for survival. It is to their everlasting credit that so many of them did so and flourished without compromising their beliefs or objectives. They became skilled at manoeuvring in and around patriarchal hierarchies to achieve positive outcomes for women. Jenni Neary, one time Head of the TAFENSW Women's Coordination Unit tells about men who raged at her because 'they couldn't cope with a woman disagreeing with them' (Eisenstein 1996:,144). Anne Sherry, a former Head of the Federal Office of the Status of Women, who moved from the public into the private sector, and is the CEO of the P & O shipping line, made an important observation about women's management styles when working with male colleagues. She believes it is important to work collaboratively, but emphasises the necessity for women in leadership roles to have a firm political framework and grounding, otherwise they tend to adopt a management style similar to men (Sherry in Eisenstein 1996: 144).

Sherry's two basic rules of operation for women in management; collaborative practices and political conviction were essential for my role as a Women's Access Coordinator in the NSW system of technical and further education. There I was constantly negotiating with and persuading male head teachers to admit women to courses they historically had rarely participated in, such as car maintenance, engineering, carpentry or basic computing. The affirmative action legislation was a useful tool, but it did not register in the minds of some that they needed to comply. Of much greater benefit was to align oneself with male head of units who were not only willing to give women a go in non-traditional occupational training but also able to collaborate in devising strategies to make this happen smoothly. As a feminist bureaucrat in the TAFE system, while you did not flaunt your feminist credentials you needed to be certain of your convictions, stand by them at all times, ensure women students received fair and equal treatment by staff and students alike; in my experience not always easy.

Barriers and boundaries facing the NSW Women's Access Coordinators

Throughout my time and efforts to advance equal access and opportunity for women in TAFE, I acted as a principled feminist. In the face of a TAFE system geared towards men and boys this was hard-going at times, and so the solidarity of feminist colleagues doing the same or similar politically motivated work in other TAFE colleges throughout the state was important. For instance, I valued the support of Kaye Schofield, Head of the NSW TAFE Women's Coordination Unit who had both strong feminist convictions and the administrative and bureaucratic skills to advance the cause of women in the TAFE system. I recall her visiting the TAFE college where I was in my first year as Women's Access Coordinator, (WAC) and she challenged the local college principal and bursar by directly asking why they were being obstructive and preventing me from doing my job? In this case, I was excluded from senior staff meetings, had difficulty in obtaining allocated classroom space for targeted women's access

programs, and was constantly challenged on budget allocations. Schofield left my Principal in no doubt that she expected support and cooperation for me and my position or, she warned she would remove and place me in a more congenial working environment, which in time she did when the obstructive tactics continued.

There was, however, some compensation to senior management's discriminatory attitudes and practices through the support of some younger and less experienced male trade and technical teachers. They were willing to work with and encourage women and girls to enter their classrooms on an equal basis with men and boys and made certain they were not harassed. These teachers welcomed female apprentices and older women into their classrooms and workshop areas. They made sure the learning environment was conducive by removing offensive girlie posters, preventing harassment and discriminatory behaviour or attitudes, and generally giving women who lacked confidence and experience in the trades positive encouragement and support.

However, any who doubt the scale of gendered discrimination prevailing in TAFE prior to the introduction of policies aimed at women's progress in education, should read Barbara Pocock's *Demanding skill: Women and technical education in Australia (1988a)*. At a more grass-roots level, is Shirley Nixon's account of the hurdles she faced as a Women's Access Co-ordinator in a TAFE college in the Shoalhaven region of NSW. She describes how sections of the male-dominated trade schools stood resolute in their opposition to women's access, which they branded as dangerous, feminist nonsense and refused to have 'any truck with them' (Shirley Nixon in Davos 1999: 11-18). Such frontline opposition prevailed despite the introduction of pro-government and anti-discrimination legislation to support equal access and participation to all sections of TAFE, highlighting it was as much a political as an educational struggle. Well might Gough Whitlam have decreed 'It's time!'

CHAPTER 12

The New Opportunities for Women Program (N.O.W.)

Background

In preparing this chapter I have learned heavily on the accounts of the TAFE *New Opportunities for Women* program (N.O.W.) by both Shirley Nixon (1999) and more particularly, Wendy Richards (1987). Richards' research and her comprehensive analysis of N.O.W. students' responses to their experiences and views of the program, provided invaluable insights into the achievements of the program and its objectives. I am indebted to both authors in refreshing my memories as I re-visited the scenes of my own co-ordination and teaching of several N.O.W. courses, which in my view, were, and still remain, an important account and historical record of women's vocational education in the NSW system of technical and further education. Comments from two former N.O.W. students in Richards' study illustrate the high regard working class women had for this TAFE course. After all, it was especially designed to meet their needs. 'I am the N.O.W. woman, I am the woman this course is for' (Richards 1987: 4.). The second is a reminder by a student who thought women should get recognition by society for the long hours of unpaid and largely unacknowledged domestic work they did as wives and mothers. She told Richards:

I haven't been vegetating at home. I've been working. And, if I put you in the home with three kids, you would feel differently to everybody else too. (Richards 1987: 36).

Few participants in the program evaluations of Nixon and Richards remained neutral in their reactions to N.O.W., and for every participant who embraced its ideology and opportunities, there were others opposed to its feminist

underpinning girded by their conviction that the most important occupation for a woman was that of wife and mother for their bread-winning husbands.

In 1997 Jozefa Sobski was commissioned by the Open Training and Education Network to write a brief history and achievements of women in NSW TAFE since the establishment of the first technical college: the Sydney Mechanics' School of Arts in 1878. At the time of writing, Sobski was an Institute Director and Director responsible for women's policies and programs. She noted that:

real progress [in women's access to TAFE - my comment] occurred only after the appointment of Jenni Neary, the first Co-ordinator of Women's Programs; and Cathie Sharpe, the first Co-ordinator of Equal Opportunity Training Programs, Hunter region in 1981. The following year saw the establishment of the Women's Co-ordination Unit and the Women's Educational Programs Advisory Committee, the appointment of more college-based Co-ordinators of Equal Opportunity Training Programs, and the introduction of a re-entry program known as New Opportunities for Women (N.O.W.) at four colleges (Sobski 1997).

N.O.W. was regarded as a flagship initiative in the NSW TAFE Women's Co-ordination Unit. Under the dynamic leadership of Kaye Schofield, who was appointed in 1982 as Head of the NSW TAFE Women's Co-ordination Unit, women's programs rapidly expanded including the introduction of a shortened form of N.O.W. for part-time students, Work Opportunities for Women (W.O.W.). By 1986 the Women's Co-ordination Unit comprised 19 staff in Head Office and 94 in colleges (full-time and part-time inclusive). 48 of these were child-care staff. There was rapid expansion during first half of 1980s but further development of women's access initiatives ended with a decision by Terry Metherell, NSW Minister of Education, to mainstream all women's access courses in 1989. The implication of this was to close all special women's units in colleges and leave only a skeleton staff in the Women's Unit at Head Office, making the whole operation untenable. Figures in the TAFE NSW Annual Report of 1987 record a total of 72 N.O.W. courses operating throughout the State, evidence of its high popularity among women. When the TAFE Women's Access Unit was

disbanded by the Greiner Liberal Party in NSW which was elected in 1988, there was a waiting list in Granville TAFE College, for example, with well over a hundred women hoping to gain one of just thirty places in two future courses.

N.O.W. was not a narrowly defined academic program. Its purpose was practical and pragmatic, namely to offer under-educated, under-skilled women between the ages of 25-55+ opportunities to improve their knowledge and skills for work re-entry, and/or further vocational studies in mainstream TAFE courses and workshops. I will elaborate on the nature of 'knowledge' taught because it is central to understanding the N.O.W. curriculum. The courses were not designed to give the women abstract knowledge (that is what I mean by narrowly defined academic), but rather they were predicated on providing women with pre-vocational skills which were both general and vocational. When the course was completed the aim was that the students would have sufficient knowledge so as to make a choice between applying for entry into TAFE trade and technical courses or go into TAFE General Studies courses to do further preparation for entry (eventually) into university. A third choice some women chose, was to apply - straight after completing the N.O.W. course - for jobs because they had gained enough confidence to do so. A fourth choice was to take no action but to simply return to their homes and do no further study.

I think it is true to point out that some Women's Access co-ordinators and N.O.W. course co-ordinators placed a heavy emphasis in the course on building self-esteem of women through personal development activities. But others, like myself, felt the most desirable, as well as effective, way to promote the confidence of the women was to expose them to useful and relevant issues concerning traditional and non-traditional roles of women in society as well as provide a variety of trade and technical skills. Thus N.O.W. curricula was both broadly academic and skills-oriented: ie. it made the women think critically and analytically about stereotyped views of, and accepted truths about, women in society. Through a combination of these two, the covert outcome was to make the women begin to challenge others' expectations of them and to risk the discomfiting results of deciding for themselves their future directions in life. It

was transgressive education.

In Granville College in southwestern Sydney, an amended version of N.O.W. was successfully negotiated with the Department of Correctional Services and implemented in two nearby women's prisons in the area, including a women's maximum security facility. Lindy Cassidy was the Senior Education Officer at Mulawa Correctional Centre who conducted the negotiations with the prison Governor to allow the program to go ahead, while I, as the Women's Access Co-ordinator at Granville College liaised with Lindy on organizational and teaching matters. Lindy Cassidy later served as a highly dedicated and effective Head of the TAFE NSW Outreach and Equity Unit.

My thesis is limited to an examination of my experience as a Women's Access Co-ordinator in west and south-west Sydney, but my colleagues were situated throughout NSW in regional, country and isolated communities where they initiated many innovative policies and programs to give women greater access and opportunities, for Anglo, migrant, and Indigenous Australian women.

I was the first Women's Access Co-ordinator to take up the position in 1984 at Bankstown College. In 1985 I was transferred in the same position to Granville College. As a Women's Access Co-ordinator in two TAFE colleges, I worked on a total of nine N.O.W. courses, each one lasting one semester or 18 weeks. The N.O.W. courses included a 'mainstream' version for Anglo-Australian women and an adapted version for women from non-English speaking backgrounds. The courses were very popular in Granville and Bankstown colleges – located in southwestern Sydney - where there was high unemployment among women, especially immigrant women who often endured poor working conditions, low pay and occupational health and safety risks. As the Women's Access Co-ordinator at each college I was responsible for promoting the course to the community, selecting teaching staff and interviewing and selecting students, planning timetables, managing budgets, reporting to the college hierarchy and to the Women's Co-ordination Unit in Head Office.

All Women's Access Co-ordinators had regional responsibilities. In my first appointment at Bankstown I was responsible for women's programs at Macquarie Fields and Penrith TAFE colleges, although each had their own N.O.W. course co-ordinators who I was responsible for and I also answered to Principals in those colleges. When I moved to Granville; because it had well-established policies and programs for women owing to the previous Women's Access Co-ordinators before me, both outstanding officers; I had enough to contend with in the college and the women's prisons, so the one regional responsibility I had was a very small TAFE college at Katoomba in the Blue Mountains. While I had regional and course co-ordination duties, I also had a substantial teaching load. I both instigated and taught on these courses. In addition, there were other smaller, but equally important initiatives for women and young women, including an *Introduction to Trades* course, staff developments for college staff in Equal Employment Opportunity policies, and at Granville in particular, a huge amount of work involving the child-care centre. Granville was the pioneering college for on-campus child-care. I worked closely with the Child-Care Director. I also had Mulawa and Silverwater women's correctional centres in my remit where we ran a couple of adaptations of N.O.W. I think it is true to say that the Women's Access Co-ordinators varied in what they emphasized within their required duties but I always prioritised the N.O.W. courses because of their implication for community involvement in TAFE and their potential for getting mature-age women back into education.

The personal is invariably political

The stated purpose of the N.O.W. course was to assist mature-age women to gain entry or re-entry to paid work and/or further vocational study. It targeted under-educated and under-skilled women and those who had quit school without certificates. The course was grounded in feminist ideology which was reflected in its curriculum design and subject matter, though its purpose was educational. It encouraged women to consider and critically analyse gender

inequality and the historical and structural reasons for this. Stephen Brookfield defined hegemonic control as a process by which humans embraced ideas and practices that kept them enslaved (2005: 5). 'Enslaved' is too strong a word to describe the condition of the women who entered the N.O.W. course. Even so, women did, in many cases, enrol in it to escape their house-bound lives and to seek a new freedom and direction in life. The course content encouraged women to think about and question their lives in the domestic sphere and within their particular community. As the contents of this chapter will demonstrate; some welcomed the opportunities it provide for them to critically examine their lives at both personal and political levels. However, others were discomfited by this process, feeling threatened and uneasy in being asked to critically examine their treatment and position in both the family and in society.

The clipped wing syndrome

The aim of N.O.W. was to emphasise women's worth and women's esteem. Simone de Beauvoir once described house-bound women as having a 'clipped wing syndrome' (de Beauvoir in Gollop 1992: 13) which seems a fair description of some participants in the course who felt trapped at home and wanted to change their lives, but were unable to do so because they felt constrained by the demands of marriage and parenthood. Guilt was a strong factor in these women's lives and while they yearned for a richer and more personally fulfilling life outside of the home, they appeared to be unable to take the necessary steps and so reacted defensively in class when the issue of women's rights or feminism was raised. An even harsher view of women in marital relationships was that of Britta Haug, a German Marxist feminist academic, who argued that women who married, colluded in their own oppression:

My thesis is that they want motherhood and marriage, at least secretly, and in their efforts to achieve it they collude in their own oppression. Every activity involves consent, even the sacrifice of one's life is an activity and not a fate (Haug 1985: 15).

This is a harsh judgement, considering the financial circumstances and family expectations of the women in N.O.W., the majority of whom quit school when they were fourteen or fifteen years old, either because school did not interest them, or they wanted to find short-term jobs to fill in the time until they married and started a family. Even so, Richards' research (1987) clearly evidences the bitterness of some women, who on looking back on their younger selves understood more clearly that they had played an active role in deciding their fate and were to a large extent responsible for limiting their options earlier in life compared with their brothers and male peers.

My situation had been different as a young woman, because although my family had exerted pressure on me to conform to traditional expectations and my stepfather made every effort to 'clip my academic wings,' somehow I intuited the importance of education. Here my experience was useful and self-disclosure appropriate in discussing with N.O.W. students the different expectations society places on women and girls compared to their male counterparts. I also discussed with the students the importance of positive role models and mentors in encouraging females to be ambitious and succeed academically. Richards describes how the women in her study told how their families' attitudes were closely tied to beliefs about men's and women's 'natural' roles in life. Like their fathers before them, sons were destined to become the primary breadwinners in their own families, and like their mothers before them, they as daughters would be expected to work for a few short years before marrying and beginning their own families and assuming the main role of child-rearing.

This 'anatomy is destiny' viewpoint was pervasive for many women I encountered during the years I worked on N.O.W. It called for teachers like me, to be cautious before making ambit claims for feminism. For instance, on one occasion when a new teacher I observed wrote the word 'feminism' on the blackboard in her introduction to her subject, there was an instant reaction and

concern by her students who told her they were not there to endure proselytising, but to learn job-finding skills! Even so, there were many opportunities for teachers to engage the N.O.W. women in critical enquiry about their own personal and circumstances at home, which they were willing to disclose and discuss in a supportive and confidential atmosphere of an identified women's learning space or classroom. The kinds of issues raised included:

- women's role and status in the domestic sphere;
- work / family imbalance;
- poverty which women suffered disproportionately to men;
- discrimination and workplace harassment;
- child-care.

A skilled N.O.W. teacher had to know how and when to shift the women's perceptions by helping them locate their personal problems and issues into the wider context of gender inequality, but without appearing to convert them to the feminist cause which only antagonised them.

There is no doubt that N.O.W.'s classrooms were not simply spaces where women learned about new job opportunities, but they also operated as radical spaces for women to cross the boundaries of traditional gendered views of knowledge as well as raising expectations. hooks made a case for educators to create learning environments and to be catalysts which enabled learners to transgress barriers of received knowledge (1994). Consider the yearning words of Rhonda, one of Wendy Richards' N.O.W. interviewees, as she declares:

You know I am the N.O.W. woman, I am the woman this course is for. I am the average housewife. I've been at home for the last fifteen years and it's like I've been asleep, like Rip Van Winkle... You know how they ask you what you want to do with your life? Well, I don't know. What do I want to do between NOW and the pension. And last week my Lotto numbers didn't come up. So here I am (Richards, 1987: 45).

I see Rhonda's words embodying an example of what hooks called 'transgressive education.' Another example of transgressive education is illustrated by the case of a N.O.W. student Bridie.

Bridie was a N.O.W. student in the first intake of women at Bankstown where I was the first Women's Access Co-ordinator to take up the position in 1983. When a vacancy occurred at Granville TAFE College in the second half of 1984, I was offered the position and accepted the offer. My time at Bankstown had been fraught with difficulty and there was no real commitment to women's access from senior management so after 15 months I was able to transfer to Granville TAFE where senior management supported women's initiatives in both the college and community. However, the first intake of mature-age women at Bankstown was notable for the calibre of most students and amongst the most enlightened was Bridie who rose to every challenge and opportunity for participation the N.O.W. program offered. When she first applied to join the course and I interviewed her, she made no bones about her motives for joining the group and told how she was isolated and lonely in her home and could not cope with the constant reminder of her son's death. She did not need to work because she and her husband were financially secure, so if I had applied strict guidelines set down by the Women's Co-ordination Unit, I would have rejected her because she was not in difficult financial circumstances and undertaking training or re-training to secure a job was not as crucial for her as some others.

At the time, however, we did not have a full quota of students to begin a base N.O.W. course and I was impressed by Bridie's honesty and her articulateness as she discussed her situation. So I accepted her into the course and I was very glad I had done so because she had both a keen mind and also was never a victim of her circumstances. Whatever the subject or the amount of difficulty, Bridie was up for the challenge and she often helped smooth over conflicts in the group. I valued her support because this was my first time in the role of Women's Access Co-ordinator and N.O.W. Course Co-ordinator and the college environment was not a positive one. But invariably Bridie would take a positive view and she recognized, as well as valued, the opportunities it

presented. I lost touch with the first intake of N.O.W. women in time, but I was told later that having completed her work experience in a local community health centre while in the N.O.W. course, Bridie had returned there to do paid work, developed a deep interest in community health and welfare, and after a time, had been appointed as an area health co-ordinator. This did not in the least surprise me for beneath her grieving exterior, Bridie was an extremely intelligent and capable woman who utilised what she learned in the N.O.W. course both to recover and move on from her grief to discover new work opportunities for herself as well as developing an informed consciousness about the less than equal position of women in society in general. I recognized then that she had leadership qualities.

In this chapter I will describe and discuss in detail the nature of the N.O.W. curriculum and the approach to teaching and learning. It is my contention that the N.O.W. courses created the learning conditions to bring about transformative learning and enabled students to gain transgressive knowledge. Mezirow (1978) asserted that a pre-condition for changing direction in life was that first a person had to experience 'a disorienting dilemma,' meaning an event or happening which disturbed their equilibrium or balance in life and which leads them to re-evaluate and change direction, as Bridie did when her son died (1987). It is, Mezirow contends, when we are least certain of ourselves and life throws up a crisis that we are most likely to leave our comfort zone and embark on a new direction in life. Rhonda is someone who suffered from a 'disorienting dilemma.' She no longer felt satisfied with her former life at home. Enrolling in the N.O.W. course unsettled her. She sought a new direction, but at the time of the course could not yet articulate what it might be.

Many women I taught during N.O.W. courses experienced 'disorienting dilemmas' in wanting to change direction in their lives, but were unsure how, or in what direction. In addition it was very difficult to radically alter one's life with the added complication of family responsibilities. However, one of the program's greatest strengths was that it encouraged women to think more clearly about what the future might hold for them and how to clarify and articulate what it

was they wanted to change using education as the fulcrum. I will elaborate on the nature of the pedagogies deployed in the N.O.W. curriculum to achieve this. Kaye, a former nurse and a student in one of the N.O.W. courses told how she wished to return to nursing in a bridging course designed to recruit older women with life experience to re-train. Kaye really wanted to become a doctor which had been a lifelong ambition, but her lack of education, then marriage, and rearing her children had prevented this, but now her sons were ready to leave home and earn their own living and she was at last free to follow her own path. She planned to follow on from the N.O.W. program to enrol in an introductory science course at TAFE as a beginning on a very long road to entering medicine.

hooks reminds us that it is the responsibility of teachers to create classroom environments which become catalysts for students to step beyond known boundaries and I believe the N.O.W. course did exactly that in many cases. There were a few women who, after experiencing the first few weeks of the course, withdrew when their divided loyalties to family and study became too much to handle. Sue Gollop (1992: 130-143) tells the sad story about one of her mature-age students, Rita, who struggled hard to cope with the conflicting demands of family, coursework and preparation for her first teaching practice, and who also felt guilty and so finally withdrew. Gollop, her teacher, empathises with Rita's dilemma, but at the same time wonders about what seems like 'collusion in her own defeat' (1992: 135). This collusion can be partly understood when considering that she was the wife of a missionary husband and she was open about sharing his religiously informed view that women should take primary responsibility to care for the family.

The 'clipped wing' syndrome would often appear in the early stages of N.O.W. as the excitement of the course's novelty wore off and women began to understand the implications of committing to a course of events that would challenge their assumptions as well as make demands on their families. Kaye, the student I have previously alluded to, realised she would have to call upon her sons to be more responsible in helping with the chores around the house if she was to find time for assignments and coursework. Instead, she encountered

opposition and ridicule by these young men now that she was a student like them and to make it worse, she was enrolled in the same TAFE college where they were apprentices. However, unlike Rita, Kaye dug her heels in and made it clear that from now on her role as a student was to take precedence in her life over and above her role as a mother. She took pre-emptive action, refusing any longer to include in her shopping list any requests from her sons for grocery items which were additional to the basics. She also demanded that from now on her sons help around the house.

The women in the group who listened to Kaye tell about the resistance she encountered from her sons understood her dilemmas and empathised with her. Like Kaye, they did not find it at all easy to put themselves first in their new roles as students. They told of having to burn the midnight oil in order to complete their TAFE assignments when the rest of their households had gone to bed, all the chores were finished, the house was at last quiet and they could at last work undisturbed. Stories relating to N.O.W. women making the courageous decision to allow themselves to follow their own path and achieve greater independence and autonomy beyond their traditional roles as wives and mothers, were common among many of those I worked with and taught in the N.O.W. courses. They were the subject of intense and sometimes painful discussions for the students.

Experience-based teaching and learning

Writing on the subject of the impact of psychotherapy in adult education, Michael Newman dates its popularity back to the sixties in America and how interest grew in Australia (1999: 45-52). Therapists here and overseas were experimenting with group techniques and new styles of counselling. The concept of a 'group facilitator' rather than 'group leader' with its nuanced difference emerged and the techniques used in therapy began to be adopted and adapted by adult educators and some school counsellors. Personal growth and the human

potential movement reflected the more permissive 1960s and a stress on individual choice and freedom through the impact of the civil rights movement.

Adult educators found the emphasis on human potential helpful when working with groups of disadvantaged adult learners lacking self-confidence. These educators regarded themselves as 'helpers' or facilitators of learning and some, including teachers who taught the subject 'Confidence Building.' Curricula on N.O.W. courses drew heavily on the ideas of transactional analysis, group sensitivity and individual guidance and therapy in building self-esteem and self-confidence in women. Newman notes that for some adult educators this human potential movement was adult education in its purest form because it was concerned with developing the individual, enabling them to grow and helping them to understand their potential, their goal being to help people to achieve 'self-actualisation.' The thinking of therapists and therapy influenced educators such as Carl Rogers (1969), John Dewey (1938, 1958) and Erik Erikson (1963). Of particular influence on my own educational philosophy and pedagogy was Erik Erikson, a Freudian psychoanalyst whose work was centred on personality development, and was rich in insights into individual development and ego-identity stages of development.

Erikson's theories had implications for the concept of experiential learning with their emphasis on ego development and fulfilment of the self in all its potential. Assertiveness training, which was also a part of the N.O.W. curricula, aimed to encourage women to be more assertive and outspoken about their own needs as well as in workplace contexts where they were more likely than their male counterparts to suffer discriminatory behaviour and attitudes. Newman's criticism of adult education and training which drew heavily on the psychotherapy tradition, is that it could result in self-indulgence and self-centredness. Nonetheless, he noted, psychotherapy did have a positive influence on adult teaching and learning methods. To some extent I am in agreement with Newman's point of view and have in the past been uneasy where assertiveness training has been emphasised in some N.O.W. courses, without ever linking it to the wider social and political context. However, I believe the emphasis on the

primacy of experiential teaching and learning was essential to the success of N.O.W. courses. This belief dates back to my years as a primary school teacher when I found the most effective way to engage children in the classroom was to discover what they most enjoyed and were interested in, utilised story-telling to better help children understand meaning and context. Neither did I have formal classroom arrangements with rows of desks and a large, imposing one at the front of the room as a symbol of my authority. I liked to group children so they could sit in circles, interact and share ideas and resources. Contrary to received notions of what and how children learn most effectively, instead I set about creating the sort of environment which I felt would best encourage interest and motivation.

Similarly, in considering the best ways to encourage mature women to engage in the pursuit of knowledge-making and -building I mined the rich sources of the women's own lives and experiences as an important teaching source and resource, encouraging them to make connections between their own situations and women in general, thus extending the private and personal into the public, political arena.

Often women came into N.O.W. with pre-conceptions of the course and its teachers and assuming it would be the same as, or similar to, their school experiences. Some would be uncomfortable at first when they discovered they were expected to contribute to lessons and were their own subjects of study, but I aimed to avoid banking-style education which Freire maintained, simulated the contradictions mirrored in society regarding power, authority and conditions of oppression. Nixon points out how the pedagogical foundation on which the N.O.W. program rested, was aligned with Freire's ideals of teachers as learners, and learners as teachers in shared enquiry (1999: 13). hooks too, as a black, feminist professor and teacher, believed that education must embody radical themes of liberation for the powerless and oppressed. Both roundly condemned authoritarian teaching as creating passivity and perpetuating oppression.

A careful examination of the N.O.W. curriculum makes it clear that an analysis of the personal, alongside the underlying structural and political conditions in society was an essential part of its pedagogical underpinning, in which experience-based teaching and learning allowed students time and space to overcome their initial fears and doubts in entering the program. Equally in telling and sharing experiences from their own lives and situations, the women were able to critically reflect at a deeper level on the lives and issues women faced in society. To this end N.O.W. teachers had to establish feelings of trust and mutuality in their classrooms, and create safe spaces where women were not afraid to share their thoughts and feelings. Richards notes this in her appraisal of the N.O.W. program when she commented:

The informality of their relationship with the teachers and the arrangements and activities in the classroom, made them ... 'more relaxed, like a gathering rather than a teacher-student relationship which you don't really need' (1987: 82).

Mainstream trade and technical teachers, engaged to teach on the N.O.W. courses, also had to be able to create a positive attitude and confidence in their mature-age students and not condescend or belittle their efforts. This was crucial to the success or failure of students to engage with unfamiliar technical subjects and skills. So, for example, Kathy, a student in the Richards' study found that her fear about maths, common to many women, was able to diminish with the understanding and encouragement of her teacher:

I'm sort of getting those negative feelings I had back then at school out of my system ... I always had this negative attitude, 'I can't do it', and now she's telling me that, 'You can do it and drumming it into you all the time, and I'm finding that I can do things that I wouldn't manager to do ... or were out of my reach (Richards 1987:58).

Studying problems collectively in groups had the benefit of teaching women to spark ideas off each other enabling them to appreciate collaborative and collective learning and developing knowledge and skills which were not dependent on teachers as the sole arbiters of knowledge and expertise. Richards has a delightful, telling example of a N.O.W. student who in class told a story

about learning to assert herself when a railway ticket collector was rude to her on her way to Gilmour college:

... so I said to the guy at the railway station, 'Half fare to Gilmour please' and he looked at me and said, 'Oh yeah, and where are you going?' 'I'm going to Tech', I said. 'Oh yeah', he said, let's see your pass'. So I showed him my student pass and he gave me my half fare. And I'm going to have to do this every morning until he gets the message. And what's more, behind me there was this Tech student who walked straight up to the window after me and got a half fare just like that, while I had to grovel to get mine (1987: 51).

What I love about this anecdote is the attitude of defiance her experience engendered in this woman resigned to having to steel herself to do daily battle to obtain a concession fare - 'and I am going to have to do this every morning until he gets the message' - demonstrating that she has already gleaned sufficient from the course to drive her determination not to give in. She is aware of her rights and intends to continue to demand them.

Stories like this did much more than capture the attention or raise a smile in N.O.W. participants for they illustrate familiar treatment and attitudes that women in the courses had often encountered in their daily lives and routines. However, talking about them in class allowed for a more critical and reflective awareness, taking them beyond the merely individual and personal to a deeper level of understanding of how women in general in society and culture are denied equal treatment. This student's problem obtaining a concession fare was a common problem when N.O.W. first began in TAFE colleges and it took quite a long time for some college managers and transport authorities to accept that mature age women had a right to transport concessions – another form of discrimination based on an assumption that women were not serious, full-time students.

Teachers can provide dictionary definitions of words like 'discrimination,' 'inequality,' and 'harassment' but how much more attention-grabbing and meaningful to define them through examples given by the women themselves from their own experiences thus adding context and relevance to otherwise arid

abstractions. A student in the first N.O.W. program I organised at Bankstown had everyone's sympathetic attention when she told the story of how her husband had reacted on hearing that she was to spend a week of the course in a library as part of her chosen work experience. For years this man had for years tolerated a minor medical problem with his nose requiring day surgery, but when she explained that for one week she would not be home but working in a library he arranged surgery on her first day at work. She told how it took all her strength on that first day not to go back into the house and go with him to hospital rather than allow him to go alone. She told how she stood outside the front entrance to their house racked with guilt, but finally went to the library. Others in the group related similar stories of partners and children laying guilt trips on them as if punishing these wives and mothers for daring to place their own needs ahead of their families for once and trying out their fledging wings in the classroom and workplace. Personal accounts such as the above were the lifeblood of N.O.W. programs and crucial to enabling women to uncover and bring into the open seemingly innocuous events and circumstances which had covert implications.

However, not every story was for public sharing, particularly those which indicated domestic violence or emotional abuse because wives or partners had dared to 'step out of line' to seek an education. This was incredibly threatening to some men and resulted in their partners withdrawing from the course rather than suffer, particularly if the women were mothers of small children. Such was the case with an immigrant woman I taught, who was highly intelligent and ambitious but could do little to prevent her husband from forbidding her to continue her studies into the mainstream and who had threatened violence. This person had taught herself basic English by watching 'Play School' and 'Sesame Street' with her children every morning on the television and regarded the N.O.W. course as her opportunity to obtain the education she had longed dreamed of but had been denied in her own country. But as the intimidation and threats of violence became too much, though the woman managed to complete N.O.W., she was unable to enrol in a further English program at TAFE. At our last meeting together she declared that when her children were old enough, she

would leave her husband, take the children and somehow continue her education. Her dream was to go to university, but the barriers she would have to overcome to achieve her ambition were enormous. N.O.W. had given her a taste into a future possibility, but at great cost. It was imperative to make certain that a component of the N.O.W. course always provided students with information about counselling and welfare services both inside colleges and in the community and teachers needed not to overstep the boundaries in seeking to help women in dire situations, but to refer them on.

N.O.W. – Aims and design

I turn now to the design and curriculum content of N.O.W. which still stands as a benchmark vocational and educational program for women which enabled them to make the connections both between their personal and domestic situations and the broader condition of women in an unequal society. N.O.W. had as its main aim:

to broaden and give direction to the personal, educational and vocational options of mature-age women, beyond traditional notions of what is appropriate for women generally, and facilitate their re-entry into education, training and, within employment, into those areas with prospects of secure and satisfying work.
(N.O.W. Syllabus 1987: 11).

'Mature-age women' were defined as between the ages of twenty five and fifty five years. This was the norm and sometimes women enrolled who were under twenty five, but over twenty, while I have had women closer to sixty than fifty five who were highly motivated.

Overall the aims and rationale of N.O.W. should be understood against a labour market background in New South Wales during the 1980s in which there were:

- high levels of unemployment amongst unskilled and semi-skilled women, particularly migrant women;
- reductions in banking and secretarial jobs that traditionally had been for women, brought about by the advent of digital technology which automated roles previously carried out by women;
- continuing barriers for mature-aged women to get jobs in technical trades, let alone opportunities to obtain trade qualifications.

Richards outlined the program's aims and objectives. They were to:

- develop an understanding of women's social, political and economic position in society to assist them in making informed choices from the full range of educational and employment options;
- develop skills in communications, mathematics and scientific and technical processes not traditionally part of women's experience;
- recognise and apply their own skills, and develop self-confidence and an increased capacity to determine their own lives; and
- make progress towards further education, training and employment within a supportive learning environment (1987: 1).

Women who applied to join the N.O.W. program needed to be educationally disadvantaged as a condition of entry. Usually, most had quit school at fifteen. When they married and had children they typically could only find employment in retail outlets, factories, offices or at home doing piecework. This was a common type of work for immigrant women who earned a pittance from assembling garment pieces in their own homes delivered to them in bundles by often unscrupulous backyard manufacturers. They had to work at all hours to complete the bundles. They usually worked on special sewing machines they had to buy or hire at their own expense. Women doing piecework at home were underpaid, often not paid on time and sometimes even not paid at all. Furthermore, they did this while looking after kids. They were isolated, non-unionised and liable to get repetitive strain injury. Indeed, I prepared an

illustrated visual case study in a teaching resource I prepared and which was published by NSW TAFE with the title: *Migrant Women and Work* (Bee 1992).

Of the women I taught in N.O.W. programs including both English and non-English speaking students, most were married, or in de facto relationships. There were, of course, exceptions where women were divorced, deserted, widowed or escaping from violence and temporarily living in a women's shelter. Some were financially dependent on their husbands' incomes while others received welfare payments. The majority were not engaged in paid work and were under-skilled. Amongst the group at Gilmour College which formed the basis of Richards' study she pointed out the strong link between the low socio-economic status of these women and their roles as wives and mothers, commenting:

Their chances of re-entering vocational training to update their qualifications and thus their job prospects are [also] influenced in particular by the link between their socio-economic status and their work as caregivers of children.(1987: 107).

Few women were educated in ways which would allow them entry to a professional occupations – although some of the students born overseas were tertiary educated and used the course mainly as a way to gain information about advanced tertiary possibilities.

Course outline

Until the advent of the N.O.W. course, TAFE had not offered much other than stereotypically gendered courses for women, reinforcing their traditional status in home and society and including fashion, secretarial studies, child-care and cake decorating. N.O.W. and a special initiative called *Introduction to Trades and Technical Skills for Women* (I.N.T.O.) offered a second chance at education for women with an emphasis on non-traditional fields of training or further study in line with technological advances. I.N.T.O. was a big success in colleges in the

Hunter region where it was given a lot of publicity and effort. This improved learning climate for women in TAFE was strengthened by the introduction of the NSW Anti-Discrimination Act of 1977, which made it illegal to discriminate against women in both education and employment. However, some of the group Richards interviewed for her evaluation, argued that parts of N.O.W. were not relevant to their immediate priorities of securing a job, but rather as Richards pointed out,

for those women who enrolled in the course with a view to further education N.O.W. was less problematic in terms of relevance for their needs (1987: 109).

From my own experiences in teaching and co-ordinating N.O.W. courses, I also found that the financial constraints in some participants' lives drove their decision to join the course and they hoped it would immediately lead to paid work. This attitude is summed up in the following comment made to Richards by a N.O.W. student at Gilmour College:

I want a job, I don't want to study because I haven't too many years left to put into study, which is a problem. I feel like I can't waste time and years by getting qualifications, yet I know I need qualifications to get a job. All I want is a short course of no more than a year, then I want a job and that's it (Richards 1987: 48).

However, not every participant was driven to seek work outside of her home. For example, a most capable woman in the first N.O.W. course I ran at Bankstown could easily have gone on to mainstream studies, but when we discussed this towards the end of the program she said she had decided that she would return to her former occupation of making school uniforms at home. She made them at cost-price. It was a form of self-employment which supplemented the family income but which gave her control both over her working hours and family management - a happy alignment. She explained that she did not in any way regret her enrolment in N.O.W., but reflected on how it had enabled her to make new friends and connections outside her home life, deepened her understanding of gender issues for women like herself and how some women, particularly immigrants suffered exploitation through piece-work at home.

Core subjects

The N.O.W. syllabus was divided into three separate strands but with an integrated structure overall, and emphasis on the personal and educational needs of marginalised and disadvantaged women. These strands were:

- core skills – maths, science, computing;
- communication subjects – especially language and literacy for employment, such as, job applications, resume writing, interview techniques, confidence building and, what was at the centre of the communications stand, a subject called, ‘Women, Work and Society;’
- vocational subjects, technical drawing, trade and technical workshops;
- one week’s work experience in a workplace of the women’s own choice.

The type and variety of workshops offered in respective colleges differed and the bigger the college, the greater range of choices that were offered. Small colleges, or TAFE annexes in rural and isolated areas were likely to offer skills training for occupations like farm management, animal husbandry, veterinary skills, accountancy, wool classing, viticulture and horticulture. In larger metropolitan TAFE colleges like Sydney or Granville, the choice of trade and technical workshops was much broader and included subjects such as painting and decorating, butchery, bricklaying, carpentry and joinery, tiling, mechanical engineering and car maintenance.

Given the highly gendered nature of trades where deeply entrenched masculinised cultures of teaching prevailed, it is remarkable that the N.O.W. courses offered opportunities for women, and moreover, mature-aged women to study, albeit an introductory level, in these fields. Trade-skills workshops were usually taught by male teachers who had worked their way up through the ranks to become technical instructors. Those male teachers selected to teach on N.O.W. were not simply chosen for their prowess, but also because they accepted the

premise of N.O.W. and were positive in their attitudes to the women they taught and mindful of their lack of confidence. Examples of those male teaching staff who showed solidarity with the N.O.W. courses, were a carpentry teacher, an automotive teacher (Bankstown) a tiling teacher (Randwick) and, in particular, a Head Teacher in Painting and Decorating teacher, (Sydney) who taught in a special N.O.W. course at a women's maximum security correctional centre. This Painting and Decorating Head Teacher was an important influence in the lives of women inmates. He prepared many of them for post-release by helping them to learn skills and techniques in the painting and wallpaper trades. Such skills would likely be useful to broaden their future employment prospects beyond traditional job-destinations for female inmates such as laundries or restaurant kitchens. He was hesitant when I first asked him to consider teaching a trade workshop in the special program for women in prison but once he made the leap, he never looked back and taught at the same maximum security correctional facility for over a decade where he was held in high regard by the inmates and correctional staff alike. For some of the inmates he was the first positive male role model they had encountered in their lives.

My view of those men who taught in N.O.W. courses and understood its underlying purpose and philosophy, is that not only did they impart non – traditional skills to women lacking them, but they were bridge-builders and mentors between the mainstream and special programs. They welcomed both young female apprentices and mature women into their classrooms and workshops as equals with young male apprentices and they made certain they were treated with respect and not harassed.

Conversely, my view of the deeply entrenched sexist and discriminatory attitudes and behaviours I also experienced in some male departmental heads and head teachers, was that they were excluding women and girls from the full range of TAFE options, irrespective of TAFE anti-discrimination policies. I chose only to engage with those heads of schools who were positive and inclusive in their treatment of women. The remainder I avoided, because my workload was heavy and it was better to expend my energies where I knew I could bring about

positive change for women's opportunities and outcomes in the TAFE system. Also, mature women students were quick to complain about patronising, paternalistic teaching attitudes by voting with their feet and boycotting classes. As already previously referred to, Pocock undertook research that revealed a TAFE system rife with patriarchal power, privilege and patronage (1988a).

Computing and technical drawing

With the growing importance of computers in industry and business, it was mandatory to foster skills and familiarity in their use through such subjects as technical drawing, drafting, and computing skills. Computer-aided drafting was popular at Granville, first because the teacher displayed outstanding teaching and communication skills and second, because he demonstrated its relevance to designing more efficient and effective kitchens and bathrooms with which the women readily identified. Introductory courses in basic computer literacy were also very popular with N.O.W. participants who understood their importance in the workplace dominated by new technology.

Communication

N.O.W. was sufficiently flexible in timetabling to allow women needing additional help with reading, writing and/or numeracy to obtain it through tutorial help and support from the Adult Basic Education Units in colleges. A special N.O.W. course was developed in 1984 to cater for women from non-English speaking backgrounds (known as NESBNOW). From 1983, N.O.W. courses targeting Aboriginal women were introduced. Apart from learning to acquire formal skills in workplace language and literacy through activities like learning to prepare a job application, practice interview techniques and undertake job searches, the real strength and success of the Communication strand in N.O.W., was how it improved the confidence of women to exchange

their ideas with peers, tolerate difference and diversity, and negotiate conflict. As Richards has pointed out, the different levels of competence and confidence, as well as different levels of self-esteem in N.O.W. participants presented challenges for teachers when seeking to build group cohesiveness (1987). But these efforts were centrally important. For example, when asked, should confidence-building exercises be taken out of the course, would women still gain confidence simply from being with each other, one student answered:

Not as much, because the class has made us aware, it's painting everything in detail. If we were just doing a course, right, {with no Confidence Building} we will gain confidence but we won't notice it, you know. Like {what we do that's not good for our self- confidence} is staring us in the eye now, because it's being brought out into the open... We're continually being told that by our friends that we've made {in the course} and it's helping us. {Because} we're identifying with each other, we're able to take these constructive criticisms and work on them (1987: 57).

Women, Work and Society

The subject *Women, Work and Society* was the heart and soul of the N.O.W. curriculum. Its feminist pedagogy was built on Freire's philosophy; namely, to provoke in women a critical consciousness of gendered oppression and discrimination at home and in the workplace. A principal objective was to demonstrate how much of what women construed as their personal responsibilities and problems and for which they blamed themselves and suffered guilt, in reality had their root cause in society where women as a whole lacked equality and social justice. *Women, Work and Society* was usually taught by experienced, feminist teachers skilled in raising women's awareness about the negative patterns and behaviours in their lives, and how society reinforced their inferiority through the denial of equal opportunities in life and employment. Its emphasis on Freire's construct of 'conscientization' raised the women's awareness and understanding of the roots of oppression and discrimination in society by reference to examples from their own lives and contexts. *Women, Work*

and Society was a contentious subject for many women in N.O.W. courses. Some felt threatened and intimidated by its explicit feminism. I will return to this issue in greater detail later when I discuss the relationship between N.O.W. teachers and their students and its impact on teaching and learning strategies.

Work Experience

N.O.W. students were provided with one week's experience working in an occupation of their own choice. It was usually planned to take place towards the end of the course which, in my view, was too late in the course because it left too little time to discuss and analyse the students' experiences. Another more difficult problem was that the majority of women chose to do their work practice in areas where they had had prior experience. It was difficult persuading them to try something less traditional and unfamiliar, where they could observe and learn new skills. Most opted for placements in areas like office work, retail, or child-care and only very few opted to try the unknown and unfamiliar. Their choices were mostly pragmatic and practical. They were looking for the best and quickest routes back into paid work after the course finished.

N.O.W. students were, however, critical that the courses were not sufficiently geared at preparing women for work re-entry, but were more a general introduction - heavy in theory but light on the acquisition of practical skills useful for securing paid work on course completion. In other words, there was a discrepancy or conflict between the course planners' concept of N.O.W. and students' perceptions and expectations. While students were critical, they nonetheless, valued the work experience. One student said:

The course wasn't really into work, you know, it was mainly for us to work out what we wanted to do ... it's not back into the workforce, it sort of gets you out of the house and gets you thinking, get out there and see what's out there. And that's better in a way because it gives you more confidence (Richards 1987: 100).

I suspect some of this misunderstanding and disappointment arose because of the way the courses were advertised in leaflets. They included the phrase 'back into the workforce' which was, of course, the first thing to catch the eyes of women looking for a way back into the workforce.

In defending the timetabling of work experience at the end of the course, it was assumed the women would have acquired sufficient background knowledge and understanding about women's position and status in the labour market to be able to apply at least some of their new 'theoretical' knowledge in the workplace. While I do not dispute this, I think that somewhere in the course design there could have been provision made for a variation, both in timing and duration, even if it meant extending the course beyond its allotted eighteen weeks. According to the women I taught, some of the most important lessons they learned and appreciated during work experience (and they should not be minimized) were that they had to plan ahead to encompass routine household tasks and the extra hours spent at work practice. Some needed to arrange extra child-care for the week and all of them had to arrive at work on time and stay for the requisite number of hours. Most found this difficult as well as having to stem the feelings of guilt at being absent from their homes all day, every day for a week. This, in my view, was one of the most valuable outcomes from work experience and very useful in encouraging the women to reflect on their coping mechanisms and ambivalent feelings (as well as those of their husbands and children) about having a working identity even if only for one week. Rhonda, one of Wendy Richard's students, captured this ambivalence and her method of handling the extra time constraints :

I remember that first day when I came home I still had washing all over the place and I thought, oh bloody hell! look at all this ... But then after that first week or so it got really easy. The same thing with work experience, you know. I thought, how am I going to do this. I can't go to work ... and after a couple of days everything was fine you know. I had everything down pat. Things that I didn't do, I didn't worry about. I thought, gee I can fit all this stuff in (Richards 1987: 101).

Work experience challenged the women's comfort zones and expectations about what juggling the roles of a full-time working woman, along with that of wife, partner.

Course promotion

Advertising a N.O.W. course was a simple matter during the era when devolution of responsibility rested with individual College principals as to which courses they gave priority to and funded. A large metropolitan college like Granville in a multi-ethnic community, promoted N.O.W. via leaflets. In addition; all the community, employment, Centrelink and welfare agencies in the immediate neighbourhood were contacted and, in some cases visited. The course was also advertised on local community radio stations in different languages. Notices were also posted on community boards in local shopping centres. Of course, recruitment for N.O.W. courses relied on reputation and word-of-mouth. At Granville College I was the third person to fill the role of Women's Access Co-ordinator. Before me, Pia Keski and Sally Gray (Sayer), both outstanding officers, my two predecessors had built a favourable reputation both within the college management and outside in the local region. This made my job easier. The result of their diligence was that by the time I was appointed, very little extra publicity about N.O.W. was required. Consequently the Women's Unit was inundated with applications and we could have conducted many more courses than funding permitted.

Selecting those disadvantaged women who would likely benefit most from the N.O.W. course was arduous. Those of us who interviewed were overwhelmed with applicants who met the guidelines for entry. Applicants needed to be over 25 years old or over, marginalised, and able to justify their inclusion in the course on grounds of economic and educational need. Fifteen women were chosen for baseline N.O.W. and fifteen for N.E.S.B.N.O.W. We always selected a number of students over and above the recommended

guidelines to allow for attrition rates and we always had a long waiting list. In other words, we had too many candidates for too few places!

When the NSW Liberal Government came into power in 1988 under Nick Greiner one of the earliest funding cuts by his administration was to the TAFENSW women's access programs. When I lost my permanent position in 1989 as the Women's Access Co-ordinator at Granville College, I had compiled a waiting list of over 140 names for N.O.W. placements. Of particular disappointment to me personally was a cancelled proposal by the College Principal to include the creation of separate women's unit in the new building extension, which in light of events never materialised. Administration of any future initiatives for women was to become the responsibility of the TAFE Outreach Unit. Although this meant the end of a designated women's access unit, the Outreach section could take on some of its programs.

Interviewing methods

The first necessity was always to put women at their ease. TAFE colleges are often imposing and frighten those who feel they do not belong in an educational institution. Some mature-age students, both female and male, have told me how daunted they felt when they first went to enrol at a TAFE college especially when they saw queues of younger students waiting to enrol. They described how they could not find their enrolment centre, or were so afraid of the complex enrolment forms, they gave up and returned home because they felt intimidated.

With this in mind, N.O.W. information days were conducted in classrooms set aside for women's-only courses. The occasion would always begin with a friendly introduction and general information by staff about the N.O.W. program, followed by a question and answer session. In attendance would be the Women's Access Co-ordinator, course co-ordinators and teachers, college information officers and counsellors. Then there were individual interviews with

each candidate. They were part of a long drawn-out process, lasting over several days which were designed to obtain the following information:

- background history including any previous education here or overseas;
- work experience (if any);
- purpose in joining the course;
- goals – defined clearly, or anticipated;
- time constraints;
- family support.

Child-care was an important issue for planning the conditions that would make prospective students welcome. All interviewees were given information about on- and off-campus child-care amenities. As the first technical college to have its own purpose-built child-care centre at Granville, its Director always attended enrolment events where she spoke about the hours of operation and conditions. She was key to helping women feel at ease about leaving their children at the centre. The TAFE Women's Co-ordination Unit managed to get 16 hours a week (4 hours each day for 4 days) which we could classify as full-time thereby making the women eligible for a bus/train pass too. But it took some doing at the time and there was opposition from some quarters, but it increased an applicant's chances if were able to get on the priority list for child-care. Unfortunately, there were never sufficient places.

The issue of child-care was as much a political as a practical matter. I know in some interviews students were asked if they were offered a place in the N.O.W. course what child-care arrangements they had made to ensure they could attend for 16 hours per week. Underpinning this question was an assumption that it was the women's responsibility to make sure their kids were being looked after. But I didn't pose this question because when blokes were interviewed for TAFE courses they were never asked what child-care arrangements they had in place. I know it sounds petty now, but one has to

remember this was the height of a halcyon climate in which women's educational opportunities were at the forefront of government agendas.

Not every college had a child-care centre. At Bankstown it was a cottage far away from where the women studied, but in Granville there was a fully functional and staffed child-care centre just across from the main college building and when N.O.W. classes were taking place it was a common sight (and very personally pleasing for me) to see women wheeling or carrying their children across the car park to the child-care centre. Furthermore, it was a reminder to the young men who were playing footie, or longing in the forecourt, that mature-age women and mothers were students too. In one case, the college Principal had his child at the centre full-time.. Possibly this was one reason the service had his support, generous college funding and his conscientious attendance at child-care committee meetings. The bursar came too; rare because child-care wasn't high on the management agendas of most TAFE colleges, being relegated as women's business.

Towards the end of their interview when women were more at ease they would be asked on their interview form to write just a few lines about themselves, or anything they would like the teaching staff to know about them. The women wrote their responses on the back of their application form which also contained their full name, address, telephone number, date and country of birth and years of formal education (if any). Teachers and co-ordinators were on hand to help women who sometimes had difficulty with providing answers to questions on the forms or could only proffer a few words about themselves due to lack of formal literacy skills. These interviewees were referred on to Adult Basic Education units, or special English programs for students whose first language was not English. A general rule in the N.O.W. course interviews at Granville was that if you knew a woman applicant was unlikely to make the grade, you had to make certain she was referred on to another service or person in the college to assist her. You never sent an applicant away without a viable option, or you might lose her from adult second chance learning opportunities forever. When the interviews were concluded and the application forms collated,

my two N.O.W. course co-ordinators, both themselves mature-age women and invaluable colleagues, met with me to sift through the applications. This was never an easy process, because there were many more suitable applicants than we had places for. Finally, the successful applicants were informed by telephone and offered a place and a waiting list compiled which was always a long one. Selecting the right candidates for N.O.W. was a protracted procedure, but I considered it essential if we were to select students who would stay with the course through to its conclusion. Given the barriers and constraints in the lives of many of the women, you needed to be sure those chosen had the stamina and fortitude to survive and not drop out part way through, although there were always a few casualties usually about five or six weeks into the program usually when the women realised they were finding it too difficult to continue, for any number of reasons, be they domestic or because they realised the course did not suit them after all. All TAFE students at that time were required to fill in a TAFE application form and the NOW women were no exception. However, the form was so complex and complicated that N.O.W. course co-ordinators would delay its completion until the first session of the program when it could be undertaken as a class task. Though complex these forms were useful statistics in for measuring the rising enrolments of females in both traditional and non-traditional TAFE courses and subjects.

Teaching and learning in a supportive environment.

Before I discuss teaching strategies and methods in the N.O.W. course, I want to allude to the support that the Women's Access Co-ordinators received from the TAFE Women's Co-ordination Unit in Head Office. This support and connection between grassroots teachers and those officers who planned policies and administered programs in their particular unit, is no longer a fixture in TAFE. In recent restructuring we have seen the rise and proliferation of a managerial bureaucracy that is more focused on enforcing compliance with new detailed standards – or 'quality-managing' – rather than supporting staff in the

field. Compared to the 1980s, TAFE is now more hierarchical and the gulf between teachers and management is wider.

The process of placing more emphasis in TAFE on managerial, rather than educational, structures intensified with the Scott Review. Brian Scott was a private management consultant appointed by the Greiner Government to examine operational structures and administrative structures in the NSW Public Service. A former TAFE Director-General, Dr Allan Pattison commented that Scott's recommendations including a change of name into TAFECOM to reflect its changed purpose aimed to make TAFE into a 'leaner and more efficient' statutory authority. How this equated with his recommendation of a 70% increase in the number of senior managers in TAFE is hard to fathom (Totaro 1990). When this radical re-structure began to happen it had a disastrous effect on teachers and heads of units, particularly those in the TAFE Special Programs Units. A director of TAFE's educational computing unit at the time resigned his position in protest because, 'I saw no point in staying on in an organisation where morale had dived so far, its provision of services was damaged.' His view was by no means an isolated one, for in the opinion of Ronald Watts the Scott Report had 'sounded the death knell for TAFE' (Luscombe & Briger 1990).

The situation and general climate and morale in TAFE had been reasonably positive during the time Allan Pattison was Director-General even though he was regarded as an outsider when first appointed to head of TAFE in NSW. Pattison strongly believed in the underlying philosophy of the Special Programs and gave them his full support. This was very evident in his dealings with Kaye Schofield, the Head of the Women's Co-ordination Unit; when the issue of child-care provision and funding appeared on the agenda, he supported the proposal. Back in the late 1960s and throughout the 1970s, managers in the Special Units were in regular contact with teachers delivering programs. I think it also true to say that for the most part the communication and liaison between administrators of courses and teachers in them was positive and mutually beneficial. For example, in my role as a college-based Women's Access Coordinator, I had direct contact with the Women's Co-ordination Unit in NSW

Head Office. I was free to ring the Unit any time I had an issue to discuss or needed clarification on any matter. The Women's Unit regularly organised workshops and staff development activities to keep grassroots teachers abreast of new policies or changes in administering courses, as well as to maintain regular contact with one's colleagues in technical colleges throughout NSW. An important means for communicating and sharing new ideas amongst the Women's Access Co-ordinators and their staff were the twice-yearly residential conferences. TAFE staff involved in Women's Programs throughout NSW attended. These were important occasions for the Women's Access Co-ordinators to report progress and outcomes, exchange information and ideas, find out about new policy directions, and build rapport with each other. In my experience at the end of these residential activities we all returned to our workplaces renewed and energised.

I want to highlight the importance of these activities and their positive impact on the morale of teachers who were the beneficiaries of these and other workshops dedicated to educational matters. They were strategic in building positive working relationships between managers and teachers. The 'them and us' mentality that pervades and poisons the contemporary work environment in the TAFE system reflects badly on those who govern and manage it and who value efficiency and cost-cutting above positive leadership. It is tragic that so much good-will has been gradually forfeited and lost and that teacher morale is at an all-time low. Proof of this sad decline is to be found in a research paper by Allie Clemans and Terri Seddon (2000) in what I consider is one of the most insightful but saddening analyses of the decline in TAFE's reputation as a champion of equal opportunity education.

NOW teaching strengths

As a former Women's Access Co-ordinator, as well as being a highly experienced teacher in the tertiary system, I believe the pedagogical methods and strategies in the N.O.W. program exemplify best-practice adult teaching and learning. N.O.W.'s pedagogy was rooted in the real world and life experiences of

learners, but also a commitment to equality of opportunity and social justice. Its many achievements included:

- improved TAFE access and opportunities for mature-age women across the state irrespective of barriers;
- built knowledge relevant and useful to women's needs and occupational interests;
- introduced women to skills necessary for a changed and changing technological workforce;
- encouraged women to value themselves and their ways of knowing, thinking and feeling;
- engendered a feminist consciousness linking the personal to the political;
- provided an integrated curriculum where each subject was referenced to the main aims of N.O.W.;
- engaged teachers with empathy for mature-age, under- confident women and marginal learners;
- was a bridge into mainstream TAFE;
- taught women critical and reflective skills and attitudes;
- promoted and emphasised student-centred teaching and learning;
- used narrative histories and life experiences to enable women to understand and appreciate their contribution to the sum of knowledge and understanding;
- created safe and supportive learning places and spaces for women in TAFE colleges;
- honoured the past achievements of women in their struggle for equality and justice;
- fostered a cross-cultural awareness and understanding;
- encouraged women to value emotional intelligence;
- created strong social, community and support networks for women throughout TAFE, including their teachers.

Backlash politics

To this day I continue to hold the view that the dismantling of the NSW TAFE Women's Co-ordination Unit, the redeployment of its administrative and teaching staff and the end of its unique adult vocational/ educational programs for women; was a calculated, political act of revenge by misogynist politicians and TAFE bureaucrats. It was payback for the Whitlam years when femocrats infiltrated all levels of both Federal and state government departments to get

women's issues and concerns firmly on the political agenda. Whether I am correct or not in my supposition, disadvantaged and marginal women throughout NSW became once again disadvantaged and marginalised by the high-handed actions of the Greiner administration. When I first encountered Jane Thompson's inspirational book on working-class women and education and the connections she made between the women's liberation movement in Britain and the declining state of adult education, I felt a strong affinity with both her anger and frustration (1997). Her words in the passage following have remained with me as I have witnessed the long march of neo-liberalism through TAFE and its damaging impact on humane and democratic adult education. Thompson's rallying cry is that radical social and educational movements have always struggled for survival at the edges of mainstream life and that it will require effort to organise and take back control of the humanistic agenda - a plea not lost on TAFE teachers like me who have witnessed with dismay the institution's demise and vested interests. She argues:

The history of social movements is a history of people operating in the cracks of superstructures. Of using the energies generated at the margins of systems and organisations.. Taking back control and joining with others in collective action to achieve change is at the root of concepts like participation and democracy. It finds its impetus in human agency and can transform people's lives (Thompson 1997: 146).

In the sixties and seventies it was the impetus started by feminist women which helped bring inspirational programs like N.O.W. into being, even if it only ever operated on the fringes of mainstream TAFE. It became a certificate course in the 1990s and was re-badged as Career Opportunities for Women (C.E.W.) – implying a shift in emphasis from broad vocational preparation to targeted professional career preparation. Thus, for a few short halcyon years in the 1980s, the N.O.W. program provided a rare and important educational and economic pathway for under-educated and under-confident women. It helped women to understand the nature of, and so destabilise and deconstruct, oppressive relationships at both domestic and broader political levels. For instance, Angela, one of the women interviewed in Wendy Richards' account of the N.O.W.

program, was left in no doubt of what she owed it in terms of her self-identity and independence:

When we wrote down 'What was your biggest achievement' I thought, coming to this course, because everything else, like, I got married [but] I wasn't the only person involved in that, you know what I mean? When I moved from country to country ... I've always had somebody there, it wasn't just me ... I wasn't independent enough to do that. This [the N.O.W. course] was something I did on my own, you know. Me, I felt, you've got off your backside and did something. And when Darryl [Angela's husband] said, 'No, no, you didn't do all that on your own', I said, 'Don't you try to take this one from me' (1987: 103).

From dependence to independence, from clipped-wing syndrome to flying high; N.O.W. remains in my estimation an outstanding example and narrative of liberatory, consciousness-raising adult education and a benchmark model of humanistic teaching and learning. In similar vein, Richards paid homage to the program's teachers, highlighting their unique pool of specialist skills and expertise within the TAFE system and recommending that their teaching methods and strategies be widely disseminated throughout TAFE:

A valuable contribution to the quality of TAFE's educational provision would be a review of the teaching skills and experiences of NOW teachers and coordinators in a form which would make these accessible to others within the TAFE system (1987: 111).

Tragically N.O.W. did not survive sufficiently long for it to influence the mainstream teaching schools.

CHAPTER 13

Conclusion

Tensions arising from the audit-culture

Stephen Black, a former TAFE Head Teacher in Adult Basic Education, and an academic in the field of social and critical literacy, has been highly critical of what he described as 'the tight curriculum parameters' of not only workplace literacy programs, but of general literacy teaching as well (2010). He studied a group of Adult Basic Education Head Teachers in TAFE and the challenges they face to comply with accountability demands and undertake auditing of students (2010). He documented the resulting disruption to their actual teaching work in the classroom. Black's study reveals their frustration. One Head Teacher complained:

I was always passionate about working in TAFE because of the opportunities it gave me and what it did. Now I am increasingly disillusioned (2010: 18).

If the Clemans and Seddon's corresponding research is anything to go by, this TAFE Head Teacher is not alone in his disillusionment (2000). A further cause for teachers' alarm is how their professional status is being downgraded. Previously teachers were required to have a Graduate Diploma in Adult Education to teach literacy and/or numeracy in TAFE. However, this is no longer mandatory and has been replaced with a qualification lower than a Bachelor degree, which can be obtained by enrolling in any number of private training agencies. It replaces the academically more stringent university course with a shorter Certificate qualification in Workplace Training and Assessment. Its emphasis is on training not teaching.

In his critique of present trends in Adult Basic Education teaching, Black describes TAFE literacy teachers as having to make time when they can do the actual work they were employed and paid to do - namely teach; for it is no longer a given. Instead teachers spend a considerable amount of their time engaged in administrative tasks and paperwork associated with assessments and accountability reporting. Having to meet such managerial requirements reduces the amount of time available for teaching. Black tells how head teachers had to find time to look for spaces and suitable gaps in the day when they could engage with learners - something akin to Jane Thompson's description of people and social movements as 'having to operate in the cracks of superstructures' (Thompson 1997: 146). I think this image applies to TAFE which has become, over the decades, something of an edifice and a superstructure in its bureaucratic top-heaviness.

Since I first read Jane Thompson and her passion for emancipatory forms of adult teaching and learning, particularly among women, I have long admired her commitment to the dispossessed in society and am deeply impressed not only by the power of her ideas, but their eloquent and poetic resonance (1980, 1983, 1997). Her insights had a profound influence on my own understanding of political oppression and unequal power in society and how adult education has suffered as a result. I regard her open letter to 'whoever's left' as one of the most passionate and eloquent laments I have been fortunate to read (1993). Thompson mourns the demise of the radical education agenda in Britain due to Thatcherite policies as well as the lack of resistance by the Left. Similarly here in Australian society, we have witnessed a decline in the radical emphasis on adult education as a transformational project. This has come about as a result of neo-liberal ideology and economic rationalist policies. I empathise with her frustration and anger when I see the change in TAFE from an organisation whose reputation was founded on providing free education for the disadvantaged and marginalised in society, women included, and what it has become in a more de-regulated market, user-pays economy where the poorest and most in need of developing vocational skills have been unceremoniously pushed off the access and opportunity ladder.

Thompson blamed the Conservative government under Margaret Thatcher for attacks on the egalitarian ideal and the triumph of powerful vested interests in which there are obvious parallels with government attacks on radical movements here in Australia. One glaring instance will give proof of this. During 1989, a Liberal state government under Nick Greiner changed TAFE into TAFECOM, giving it a new corporate identity, sacking hundreds of its teachers, many of them part-time, creating more management positions and curtailing Special Programs targeting the disadvantaged. This was undertaken with the intention of cutting costs and making the TAFE system leaner. Economic rationalist policies took precedence over access and equal opportunity policies. In the first of, what transpired as, many TAFE system restructures, I lost my Women's Access Co-ordinator position along with all eighteen of my colleagues around New South Wales. I recall how at the time, I happened upon Thompson's open letter and identified with her frustration, anger and despair at the turn of events in British adult education. At the beginning of her appeal, she apologises for what she describes as her 'usual lack of scholarly rigour,' but her incandescent rage at what has been lost and forfeited, burns through every line as she pleads:

But I need to know if there's anyone out there who cares any more about the radical tradition in adult education (1997: 107) ?

While Jane Thompson as a radical left educator, railed against English conservative policies, here in Australia another critic railed against Australian progressive education policies. Kevin Donnelly is an academic and writer on education who works in the NSW Catholic education system, who, contrary to Jane Thompson deplores what he believes are the pernicious influences of radical education in both schools and tertiary institutions and which he believes have led to a decline in moral standards (2007). Donnelly advocates a return to traditional forms of classroom teaching and learning. He deplores student-centred methods and longs for a return to the days when teachers had untrammelled authority and where some in society are born to succeed on merit and others to fail. Donnelly deplores what he regards as falling standards throughout education. He contends that much of the supposed moral decline in

education is the result of Marxism and its 'long march' through the universities and colleges back in the 1960s and 1970s (Donnelly 2007: 9). In his view, progressive educators have equated identity politics with political correctness. Donnelly is critical of this and pleads for more concern with notions of universal truth and morals. He accuses school and university teachers of vandalising the grand tradition of liberal education and propagating the counter culture of moral relativism. For him the Enlightenment and the Western canon of Judeo-Christian principles are still the high points of civilisation. Donnelly quotes T.S. Eliot, a doyen of English traditionalism and something of a high cultural snob to drive home his arguments.

More than ever, we look to education today to preserve us from the error of pure contemporaneity. We look to institutions of education to maintain knowledge and understanding of the past (T.S. Eliot 1965, in Donnelly 2007: 11).

Unlike Donnelly's anachronistic views, (although I find myself in agreement with his condemnation of outcome-based teaching, albeit for different reasons), Jane Thompson's arguments concerning pedagogy in post-modern society carry more weight and influence in what I believe and have experienced at all levels of education than Donnelly's traditional but outmoded models of classroom practice. As a former school teacher, teacher-educator, TAFE teacher and academic, I consider Donnelly's views on education and schooling old fashioned, and his accusation of dumbing down, reactionary, paternalistic nostalgia. He finds certainty and assurance through conformity and sameness and refuses to cross the boundaries of received knowledge and traditions in to a future we cannot know or predict. Donnelly cannot connect with critics such as Jane Thompson or her African-American academic counterpart, bell hooks in their conviction that education is essentially a transgressive, risk-taking project aimed at breaking boundaries.

In my long experience as pupil, school teacher, adult educator and academic, I know which of the above are the best advocates and guides for promoting critical thinking, useful knowledge, challenging unfair and unjust policies, and creating inclusive and participatory teaching and learning

environments. Kevin Donnelly's message of dumbing down did nothing to change my beliefs and despite the popularity of his views in some quarters, I judge his critiques to be exercises in nostalgia and outmoded.

Doubts and Dilemmas

I doubt if TAFE NSW will ever regain its reputation and identity as a third viable level of tertiary education for socially disadvantaged people. In my preparation for this thesis, I spoke to many TAFE teachers, former colleagues and present employees in the organization who still pine for the days when their teaching work was respected and honoured by both their students and governments. Their grief (and it is not too strong a word for the way many of them express their feelings), is not simply an expression of nostalgia for 'the good old days,' but more regret and a strong sense of alienation from present workplace-dominated training agendas dictated by business and industry.

Teachers like me came into TAFE because they wished to help and foster talent amongst individuals and minorities who desired a first or second chance at further education, and where they experienced harmonious working relationships with their departmental heads and colleagues. With the notable exception of a few deeply entrenched and conservative teachers, the working environment in the TAFE colleges where I taught was positive with teachers and administrative staff united in a common goal to provide the best technical and vocational education and training. This is no longer the case. TAFE teachers are dissatisfied with their teaching conditions, constant changes thrust upon them in the form of edicts and without consultation and the shift in emphasis from public provider to privatised training provider on a user-pays basis. Over the last decade, in particular, teachers feel they have been dragooned into supporting and implementing policies which have little or nothing to do with educating and everything to do with business. They resent the lack of support from senior management, and are particularly critical of the way they have allowed

government and employer agendas to dictate policy. Older and more experienced TAFE teachers remaining in the system feel betrayed and not least by those in authority over them.

It can be argued that it was easy for the new mandarins beginning in the Scott era to target and cut funding to the Special Programs because they were only ever 'bolted on' to mainstream TAFE and were expendable, more so than mainstream courses of long standing. Only TAFE Outreach survived, and did so perhaps because of possible recriminations from elected politicians in rural and remote areas finding themselves facing a backlash in their electorates if Outreach programs ceased. I interviewed a former senior officer in TAFE who had visited every technical college throughout NSW country areas and was often present at graduation ceremonies in both regional and country TAFE colleges. She commented on the importance, as well as the popularity, of TAFE courses, not simply because they were often the only providers of relevant skills in a local area, but also because they were the cement which held local communities together and were part of their social fabric. She thought the label 'special' attached to access and opportunity courses was inappropriate because although these particular programs were called 'Special' they were part of TAFE provision overall. Indeed these programs, although begun from a different philosophical standpoint, were a function of the general purpose and aim, namely the provision of technical education and training different from the universities and colleges of advanced education.

The end of Outreach

At the time of editing my thesis, March 2015, it seems the axe is finally about to fall on the longest surviving 'Special Program' from the Myer-Kangan era, namely Outreach. Staffing budgets are being cut as TAFE moves inexorably along the pathway of privatized training. With its demise goes the last remnant of general adult education and basic literacy. It has been superseded by

vocational literacy and workplace training skills. This has changed the kind of people eligible to enrol and it also drastically changed the curriculum and curtailed the freedom of teachers to plan their programs. With great tenacity and risks to their jobs some Outreach staff have kept up their efforts to retain the program. At one stage they conducted a spirited and principled campaign against pressure to make its curriculum conform to a one-size-fits-all, outcomes-based model - the antithesis of its original purpose. Outreach was the first program to be launched under the special access and entry banner. It may well be the last to fall.

Where to from here?

In abandoning its commitment to general education and focusing instead solely on vocational training in competition with private providers, TAFE has lost not only its primary role but its reputation too. When Kangan expanded TAFE's role it created a new middle-level educational option, providing for an entirely new cohort of adults lacking basic education and by inference employment prospects. It is this which gave TAFE its unique identity and separated it from the other two levels of post-school choices. The Special Programs which developed out of that focus and brought forth innovative policies allied to equally innovative programs and the development of benchmark adult teaching and learning strategies. Their contribution to the history and development of adult education in Australia should neither be unacknowledged nor be forgotten.

The life span of innovations

Max Weber (1971) wrote about the way charismatic leadership and inspiration over time are trumped by familiarity, bureaucracy and conformity (1971). He contended, over a period of time, what begins in missionary zeal and

prophetic urgency, is slowly watered down to be fixed and fixated in laws designed to cement authority and power so to prevent new ways of knowing. Rigid orthodoxy reigns and maintains power and authority in the hands of those in whose interest it is to keep it. Kevin Donnelly springs to mind as an example of someone holding on to traditional forms of education and resisting change and innovation as threatening to some supposed Grand Narrative and absolute morality. So, according to Weber, over time, educational innovations lose their creative edge and it becomes impossible to keep up their momentum. Thus, the spirit which characterised those first Special Programs for marginal groups in our society whether Outreach, the women's N.O.W. course or the first general literacy and numeracy courses to appear in A.B.E., gradually lost their spontaneity and missionary attitude when they were constantly required to adjust their aims and methods to comply with bureaucratic procedures and frequent restructuring of the TAFE system to suit vested interests of both government and industry bodies. There is not the slightest doubt in my mind that TAFE NSW women's programs like N.O.W. were not only innovatory and creative, but they gave rise to uniquely skilled teachers and teaching strategies. Whether given time and familiarity beyond its brief four years N.O.W. may have become formulaic, is open to question. Sadly it did not survive its political hijacking long enough find out.

As regards the special literacy and numeracy programs provided by the Adult and Basic Education section, they were able to survive and adapt from their original form of providing literacy and numeracy support for general members of the public to providing tutorial support for the trade sections in TAFE, but the department has not been exempt from cuts to its staff and funding either. I don't imagine my former student, who was the grandfather discussed in my case study and who wanted literacy for a social purpose, would find a place in Adult and Basic Education today, neither would he be able to afford the enrolment fee! In Adult and Basic Education, as in the general studies sections of TAFE, the human capital agenda has replaced social capital at an escalating pace and has dominance.

Max Weber's analysis of the limited life-span of innovations applies in spades to the NSW TAFE system. How many TAFE teachers, once passionately loyal to the organization because it sparked their enthusiasm for dynamic teaching and interaction with both individuals and communities, have altogether lost their fervour and dedication because the system has become mired in what Jane Thompson has characterised as 'the moralistic posturing of corporate politics' (Thompson 2007: 107).

When I first began teaching in TAFE Outreach in the mid -seventies I couldn't curb my enthusiasm because there existed such a dynamic atmosphere of creativity and dedication amongst my colleagues who were coming into the arena of Special Programs teaching for the first time, as was I. All of us were both collegial and collaborative across departments and colleges. Innovations were encouraged and shared in regular staff meetings and state conferences throughout the TAFE year. It's hard now to recall the earnestness and sense of purpose of those former years without regret for what has been sacrificed and lost. Little if anything distinguishes it from the myriad of other private vocational training organizations it has to compete with for the training dollar.

For us there is only the trying

Henry Giroux once referred to the political context of a particular era as an 'emerging time,' in which the public is easily manipulated through fear and anxiety to accept government action and policy that it would otherwise reject (Giroux cited Hyslop-Margison and Sears 2008: 305). His definition fits our era all too readily. He asserts that Karl Marx's base or superstructure model, arguably the foundation for critical theory, applies to demonstrate how: 'those individuals who control the economic base of society also control the dissemination of prevailing ideas and values' (2008: 307). From the above perspective we can see how the human capital model of education has influenced the emergence of the vocational and workplace training climate in the TAFE system. Conversely we

witness the steep decline of epistemologies and pedagogies which emphasise intellectual development, critical thinking, experienced-based pedagogy and the loss of social capital. In what Jill Coleman has labelled 'aggressive' vocationalism, she describes how courses are governed by work-related packages:

which 'are plucked off the shelf of industry training bodies ... and adult educators become at worst mere technicians and gatekeepers of required competencies' (Coleman 1993: 18).

Thus does TAFE no longer educate, but rather services clients / customers who pay for the shortest possible vocational packages as if education is a commodity, rather than foundation of a democratic civil society. Unfortunately for the poor and unemployed, those who cannot buy knowledge and skills, or find the means to purchase an education the future appears increasingly bleak with little support from governments and even more draconian conditions for welfare support and likely to be blamed for their supposed failure to thrive in society, or get a job.

Resistance and rebellion

Even so and in the face of so much that is antithetical to education in the TAFE system, there has been resistance in some quarters. Notably Outreach staff have held out for a long period in resisting changes to make its curriculum uniform and outcomes based. At one of the last Outreach conferences I attended in the Sydney region, this was a key concern for staff, anxious to preserve their independence in responding to local community needs and negotiation. Officers from TAFE's Curriculum Unit were on hand to explain how the new Outreach model would work. Teachers and co-ordinators from all around the state had been particularly outspoken and active in their opposition to the introduction of this imposed new model. They believed it to be in direct contradiction to everything Outreach stood for and its philosophical underpinnings. The

atmosphere in the room was tense and several teachers were ready with questions to ask the representatives from the Curriculum Unit. The Head of the Equity Unit in TAFE who was responsible for administering the Outreach Unit understood all too clearly this attempt to force Outreach to adopt a one-size-fits-all curriculum. She was to chair the session and after she had introduced the members of the Curriculum Unit, she announced that she had been instructed to inform the meeting that no questions would be taken or responded to by the panel concerning the new focus and if this warning was ignored they would leave the session. All further discussion was gagged.

However, some enterprising teachers have continued to find ways around the new audit and compliance regime. In other words they looked for the cracks in the superstructure to apply their own brand of teaching in accordance with Outreach principles. One such teacher was working with a group of juvenile offenders to improve their reading and writing skills for vocational purposes. This was a condition of their parole by the local magistrate. Their teacher had been successful in gaining the group's attention and co-operation in direct contrast with their more normal contempt for authority and when I asked her how she had managed this she explained how she had searched for a way to both fulfil the learning outcomes and competency requirements for the literacy module, but at the same time engage the interest of the students. So she devised a literacy project similar to that described by Ken Worpole (1977). She suggested they write their own individual accounts of how they had broken the law and what impact it had had on their lives and those of their families. However, this was not simply an exercise in creative writing, but rather the books were intended as resources in youth centres and other organizations for young people at-risk. The project served many purposes for it developed not only literacy skills but group cohesiveness and co-operation. The competency requirements were met for the particular module, but over and above these, the project changed attitudes and was culturally relevant. Had this teacher kept solely to the prescribed vocational learning outcomes, she would not have kept her group motivated, but in looking for ways to create a meaningful link between the official curriculum requirements and the young people's experiences, she turned

the situation both to her advantage and theirs. She found the interstices, spaces, or cracks in the curriculum where she was able insert meaningful learning experiences for the group and join dots of competency assessments.

When I first planned and wrote three teaching resource packages for teachers working with disadvantaged women, I did so based entirely on what I had learned from the life experiences of the first class of women I taught in an Outreach program. I tried to link Freire's ways of working with oppressed people to my own situation with the women. I looked to find and create spaces or cracks in traditional language and literacy schemes which I could fill with useful and relevant knowledge for the women I was teaching, which in time, also brought into being powerful emotions and feelings concerning the women's situations. However, I had to search and seek out opportunities for the women to break their silence and begin to find their voices which were which were not represented in text book exercises. The latter included only which only emphasised language techniques and formal exercises.

Back in a more progressive TAFE system, teachers were freer to try innovatory teaching strategies in the classroom and to tailor subject matter within broad curriculum and syllabus requirements to the needs and interests of their students and subjects. Useful knowledge for the women I was engaged to teach happened to be located in their ordinary daily lives within close social and cultural boundaries, and these provided rich pickings when I mined them. I was hampered neither by dominant discourses of workplace literacy, nor outcomes-driven language schemes based on deficit models of learning.

Shortly before I ceased teaching in TAFE I was subject to an external audit, which of course I was in danger of failing because I did not have the approved format for demonstrating on which dates and how often I had assessed my students on the competencies of the course. Fortunately for me, a colleague who was practised in producing the needed format completed it for me. I recall my anger and frustration at being made to comply with what I believed were procedures antithetical to meaningful education but I submitted the required

document the next morning hoping that was the end of it. However, a second request arrived later that day in which the auditors asked to see my lesson plans. Throughout my professional career I have always conscientiously planned and prepared my lessons, commencing with broad plans for the whole semester, followed by more precise plans for each individual session. Of course these were never fully realised or completed because the students' own needs and responses constantly got in the way of idealised plans. They asked questions, raised objections, offered alternative views and diverted from the main agenda which I believed were the real evidence of authentic learning and teaching. No so for the auditors who wanted a pro-forma response that I had faithfully fulfilled course requirements. Fortunately, I never received their request however because the Assistant Outreach Co-ordinator in the Outreach section at the time, decided enough was enough, and informed the auditors that if they wanted to inspect my teaching records they should leave their office, walk across the college grounds and come into her office to check them! She had no intention of carrying across the yard the contents of a filing cabinet filled with lesson plans, resources and teaching reports I had compiled over the years. In addition she informed the auditors that I was a highly experienced and competent Outreach teacher. The auditors never appeared and if there were negative outcomes or feedback, I did not receive them. It was gratifying to to have the unqualified support of my manager. How could outside training assessors, appointed by government having little knowledge or regard for local conditions, reliably judge a teacher's performance and accountability by only examining paperwork? In such farcical situations defiance and subversion are legitimate responses.

I hope my experiences in the *Special Programs* I have presented and analysed in my thesis, have demonstrated, in the time-honoured words of bell hooks and Paulo Freire, my conviction that the classroom should be a radical space of possibility and the antithesis of banking-style learning. Teachers and adult educators have to consider to what extent they are willing to act as pawns for neo-liberal and neo-conservative ideologies. And how willing are they to be 'players' when governments use education as a political football. In false and misleading declarations about the economic prosperity of the country these

same politicians take away from those at the bottom of society the right to a free and equal education, as is, and should be, the basic right of every person irrespective of their status or place in society. How else do we guarantee a democratic civil society? This means that educators including teachers have to decide on which side they stand in the equality debate, which some believe is already dead in the water, given the direction TAFE has taken. One is reminded of the words of Rosen: 'It is becoming increasingly difficult to refuse to take sides' (1977: 169).

Here I stand

I set out to write the story of my teaching experiences with targeted marginal groups in TAFE NSW because I wanted to bring into focus the achievements of an innovative period of time and pedagogy in the history of adult education which have received too little attention or recognition. In the programs I have presented and critically analysed - which were introduced under a policy of equalising educational opportunity for economically, socially and educationally disadvantaged women and men - the purposes of teaching were clear and unequivocal. You were there to teach, educate and hopefully change lives for the better and where teachers were trusted and valued allies in the drive to create a more just, equal, and democratic civil society.

Had the *Special Programs* discussed in my thesis not been phased out in their original conception and the TAFE Women's Unit obliterated by political misogyny and disdain, they would in all probability stand as benchmarks in the history of educational opportunity and access in TAFE as a foundational provider of second-chance, and in some cases, first-chance adult education. For at least a few short years post-Whitlam, adult education linked to vocational skills was seen as real possibility and viable for marginal groups in society, despite opposition from a TAFE old guard in the system determined to keep things as they were in their own vested interests. In a previous examination of

TAFE's expanded role into general education, Robert Mackie (in McKenzie & Wilkins 1979) wrote about TAFE's alliance with industry. He commented how, as a result of Myer-Kangan, TAFE seemed to be hovering between two worlds 'one dead and the other powerless to be born' (1979: 60-61). He further explained that the one dead 'if not prepared to lie down' was TAFE as the servant of industry, while the one 'powerless to be born,' was the introduction of open access or lifelong education at the post-secondary level. However, he predicted the latter would not live for long because it would quickly become subject to an economic and industrial milieu rooted in exploitation and alienation. In hindsight, Mackie's pessimistic prophecy has proven correct. However, for a few short years the *Special Programs* succeeded in breathing new life and purpose into the TAFE system with new, exciting and challenging teaching and learning methods, very different from its former narrow emphasis on technical and apprenticeship training. The *Special Programs* opened the doors of TAFE to a much broader cross-section of the population for whom adult learning suddenly became possible and many people's lives were changed for the better as a result of investing in a TAFE experience of teaching and learning. In addition, the provision of Outreach programs reached out to regional, rural and isolated locations in NSW and brought with them teachers highly attuned to local conditions and able to exploit their educational and vocational potential.

My passion for teaching and adult education grew out of my years teaching in the TAFE system, where I witnessed first-hand and in many and various situations, the difference education and teaching can make to both individual lives and the maintenance of a healthy, vibrant democracy. A justifiable criticism of my thesis is that I might have written more about what I think should be a viable future for TAFE, but I have to confess I have throughout the writing of it, felt more pessimism than optimism at the way it is being driven by political and workplace agendas geared to human capital. However, just before I commenced putting the final touches to the edited version, I opened an e-mail from a group of TAFE teachers and others who had organised a petition to the NSW State government protesting any further privatization of the system

and advocating its continuing role as a significant player and provider of public education. Hope lives on, however small.

I hope that what is written here will clearly demonstrate the importance of TAFE in shaping and defining key experiences and convictions in my own development as a teacher and adult educator. Indeed, I began the laborious task of undertaking doctoral studies less for academic prestige, than because I could no longer remain silent about the story and the events which have contributed to its present demoralised state. This thesis is my witness. Just as significantly, I wrote because I wished to highlight and honour the many fine and dedicated colleagues it has been my good fortune to work with during my tenure as a TAFE teacher. It still grieves and angers me that so many of them have finally decided to call it quits and have resigned, or taken early retirement, having suffered more than enough of bureaucratic ineptitude, managerial oppression, downgrading of their professional status and endless re-structures to justify funding cut-backs and staff redundancies. In retrospect, TAFE afforded me the best and most rewarding times of my entire teaching career, as did the achievements of so many mature-age students whom I was privileged to know and teach. Above all else, teaching in the Special Programs enabled me to witness first-hand the transforming and transformative potential and power of adult education to change lives and sustain communities. These experiences have enriched my professional life beyond measure.

Here I stand. I can none other.

APPENDIX

The letter which appears below was written by a student in an adult learning and teaching class who was asked to write about what she had learned and most valued during this university bridging course. This was her response.

To the Local Member
Ms Tanya Plibersek

1 December 2007

Dear Ms Plibersek

I am writing to you in the hope that you may be able to assert a positive influence upon what I consider to be an almost certain catastrophe to the future of education for women such as myself.

It may help you if I give you some information about myself to outline where I am coming from and where I am hoping to go with this, as I feel it is relevant and I am sure there are many women with backgrounds and circumstances similar to my own that have already, or could yet benefit from the programs I am about to outline further on in my letter.

I am a 47-year-old woman with a very limited formal education, a victim of domestic violence and sexual assault, both as a child growing up and as an adult.

Until just over seventeen years ago, I had spent a significant period of my life in women's correctional institutions as an inmate.

I have also had years of substance addiction, and although I have been abstinent from all drugs and alcohol for over five years, there is the inevitable collateral damage that I still deal with on a daily basis, which is not only related to my addiction but also to other dysfunctional behaviours, of which I am acutely aware, these stem from my negative life experiences.

This damage manifests in a variety of emotional, psychological, physical and financial problems for myself and my children, of whom there are three boys, their ages are sixteen, fourteen and seven.

The father of my children passed away when our youngest child was only seven months old and the older boys were seven and nine years of age. He was just thirty-one years old.

Although our relationship had been over for about six months, and had been a tumultuous and unpredictable relationship, fraught with all types of abuse, his passing had a detrimental effect on our children and myself and I was left alone in extreme financial difficulty. I suffered ongoing depression for about eighteen months during which I struggled to cope and to care for our children.

I finally pulled myself together and after a few months of rehabilitation, my children were returned to my care. But that itself was yet another challenge as I had relocated to Sydney from the South Coast and had not yet been re-housed. We endured a year of temporary accommodation paying exorbitant rents with a little help from the Department of Community Services, much to their credit, they helped to have us re-housed with the Department of Housing

in the Waterloo area. We have been here for over three years now and although it is not an ideal situation for the children, it is not without its merits.

My eldest son has a rather severe learning, emotional and behavioural disability which was exacerbated by the death of his father. This has caused many ongoing difficulties and as such he has been placed into various specialist schools that have tried to deal with his problems albeit not always with success.

I have had many trials and only a few tribulations with being successful at getting this child's needs met. He is now in a private school where I pay reduced fees, which are still a strain on our household financially.

My heart breaks for this child as I see how traumatized he is by his unstable emotional state and sometimes, more often than not, I feel like I am failing him.

In the past I could not even plan further than the coming day as his behaviour was so unpredictable and aggressive that I often had to (and sometimes still do have to) drop everything in order to be available to deal with whatever issues arise.

I am somewhat concerned about having opened up to this degree and feel very exposed, however I am not afraid to put myself on the line as I do so with the hope that other people, particularly women, may benefit from my doing so.

Needless to say there has been, and still are, issues that are still being addressed today. I am not naïve enough to believe that it can all be 'fixed'. Although I do have hope and faith that eventually with consistent effort our lives will improve dramatically and that my children and myself will be able to live full and productive lives to the best of our abilities.

About eighteen months ago I embarked on an educational program at the Sydney Institute of TAFE. The first course that I did was a Work Opportunities for Women. This course encompassed a variety of learning experiences, such as basic computer skills, learning how to use the internet, word document, excel, formatting, letter writing, composing a resume, how to look for work and apply for jobs. Probably the most important aspect of this course for myself and for the women in general was the building of self-confidence, for me it also gave me a taste of another life and I liked it!

I repeated this course in the first semester of this year as I had missed the first few weeks last year and the course ended three weeks early due to some of the women leaving for personal reasons, some having found jobs.

I also went on to do another level of computer training to improve my skills, which also incorporated database, mail merge and the like. I found these courses had increased my confidence and self-esteem and had brought out a desire to go further with re-educating myself.

However the most valuable course I undertook was the ALT (Adult Learning and Teaching).

I was encouraged by my teacher, Maria, from the Work Opportunities for Women course, the Outreach Coordinator, Camilla Couch, and the teacher of the ALT class, Barbara Bee, to consider joining this course.

It was with some trepidation that I decided to follow their urgings and to 'have a go'. I didn't yet believe in myself enough to think that I could successfully undertake the work in this course let alone complete the whole semester. I also had concerns that my life, as unpredictable as it is, would prevent me from achieving this goal that I had so tentatively set for myself.

This course was challenging. I still had to provide for, and nurture my children and life did not pause to suit my needs, but I was encouraged and guided through difficult times by Barbara, Camilla and the other students, as well as other Outreach staff members.

I found that as I progressed through the course things that I had often felt and thought were validated and that my thoughts and opinions were valued. Those years of oppression and abuse had only served to quell my spirit; but the course renewed my zest for life, my belief in myself, and my desire to learn and to better myself. It brought out the wealth of knowledge that I had acquired throughout my life, which had lain dormant for so long.

There have been times during my adult years that I have considered further education but due to many unexpected turns of events, I had not been in a position to pursue my ambitions. My past history, my lack of self-esteem, drug problems, depression and my duties as a single mother have for too long impeded upon my hopes of making something of myself.

If not for the support and encouragement that I have received over the past year, I would probably still be wondering if I had any options left other than to wait on tables or to go back to working in low-paid jobs.

Another gratifying aspect of doing this course is that not only have I renewed confidence and drive, but that my children, particularly the two older ones, now have a new level of respect for me and often voice how proud they are of me. I have long been telling them about the importance of a good education, now I am setting the example. Somehow my words don't seem so hollow now.

I have just applied to go to University to follow up on the ALT course by doing the Bachelor of Adult Education course, my intention being to one day teach other adults and hopefully, pass on to others that which was so freely given to me.

I have since been informed that the ALT course and others are at-risk of becoming, if not already have become, like so many things, impersonalised. This would be a travesty of justice.

The education system indeed desperately needs an overhaul, but it is of my opinion that all the wrong strategies have been put in place. I may not know much about politics and such, but I do know what works, what has worked, the Outreach programs have worked for me. I believe that the restructuring of many of the Outreach courses are doomed to fail, fail people like myself that is.

Yours faithfully,
Joanne Mulway

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