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ABSTRACT

These 12 papers reflect the range of issues and perspectives discussed at a forum that addressed three main topics: what a feminist critical literacy pedagogy is; a gender perspective of policy, organizations, and teachers' work; and concepts and practices of equity and inclusivity. The papers are as follows: "Questioning 'Progressive' Pedagogies" (Alison Lee); "Towards a Feminist Critical Numeracy Pedagogy" (Betty Johnston); "A Letter to Conference Participants" (Tricia Bowen); "'Once Upon a Time...': An Examination of Some Picture Books in the Light of a Feminist Critical Literacy Pedagogy" (Terri Morley-Warner); "Policy, Organisation, and Teachers' Work" (Jill Sanguinetti); "The Struggle for Critical Literacy and Feminist Reform: Some Axioms and Observations" (Nicole Gliding); "The Reconstruction of Women's Work in Adult Education" (Jennifer Angwin); "Bilingual NESB [Non-English Speaking Background] Women: An Untapped Resource" (Marta Rado); "Concepts and Practices of Inclusivity: Centring White Ethnicity in Literacy Practice" (Sue Shore); "A Crisis of Identity: Developing Strategies for Gender Inclusive Literacy Practices" (Jeanne Solity); "Talking on the Outer Edge" (Merilyn Childs); and "Postscript: Notes for a Film" (Delia Bradshaw). The forum program is appended. (YLB)

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Foreword

In June 1993, before the conference dinner at the Critical Literacy Conference at Griffith University, Brisbane, we convened a meeting for women working in literacy. The purpose of the meeting was to begin a process for creating opportunities for women working in literacy across a range of institutional sites to network with each other. A range of concerns was expressed by the 20 or so women present. Among these were the need for a gathering of women working closely with theory to further feminist theorising of literacy, and the need to plan any gatherings carefully in terms of creating alternative structures to conventional conferences.

At the conclusion of that meeting, we undertook to organise a forum which would provide opportunities for participants to exchange information and further knowledge but also to have time to talk and to share expertise. The Women's Forum on Gender, Language and Critical Literacy held in Sydney in April 1994 was the result. Over 60 women from every State and Territory in Australia, some with specific interests in adult literacy and numeracy, others with more general interest in critical and feminist approaches to literacy and pedagogy, attended.

The need for a conference for women concerned with questions of gender, language and critical literacy emerged from the dramatic changes which have been occurring in literacy practice in Australia since the late 1980s. For example, the increasing emphasis on vocational education and training and the accompanying push for literacy in the workplace has coincided with a higher profile for adult literacy in the lead up to and post-International Literacy Year. Furthermore, substantial amounts of government funding have been available for literacy projects and there is increasing demand for improving the theorisation and professionalisation of the field.

This enhancement of the profile and 'respectability' of adult literacy has led, perhaps inevitably, to some masculinisation of the field. Historically, however, literacy has been a field in which women have played important roles at many levels: as practitioners, academics, policy makers as well as key representatives on professional associations. Some women working in literacy felt a need to reassess what the recent changes in policy directions and in structures mean for the field in general and especially for decision-making processes: who is involved in making decisions? by what processes and with what level of accountability? what effects would these decisions have?

The Forum at Manly was an instance of women deciding that they must create opportunities for themselves to discuss these issues. It provided the kind of opportunity for active participation often not available in mainstream conferences.

The Forum consisted of three main panel sessions on the topics:

- What is a feminist critical literacy pedagogy?
- Policy, organisations and teachers' work: A gender perspective
- Concepts and practices of equity and inclusivity

A range of workshops and discussions were also held over the two days (see Appendix - Forum program).

The Forum concluded with a session devoted to planning future activities and strategies. There was strong interest in using existing networks such as the Adult Literacy Research Networks and the Network of Women in Further Education and starting new informal networks to continue information exchange and discussion. An important outcome of the Forum has been the forging of new links between women working in a range of sites and sectors and in different professional roles. This nascent sense of collegiality and community has been especially important for women working in Academe, where language, literacy and numeracy are generally new and often under-resourced areas of research and teaching.

The papers in this volume reflect the range of issues and perspectives discussed at the Forum. Many are almost verbatim accounts of the presentations at the Forum; some, written after the event, are a reflection on the outcomes and processes of the Forum.

We would like to thank all participants, especially the workshop and panel presenters, for their time, energy and valuable contributions. From the feedback we received, the Forum was considered a great success and the beginning of an ongoing and expanding network of women interested in gender, language and critical literacy.

Those present at the April Forum expressed strong interest in participating in similar events in the future which would strengthen the research base on gender, language and critical literacy and enhance opportunities to learn more about and to use feminist theories and practices in literacy education. Specific suggestions included increasing the amount of research done by practitioners and setting up research pairs of 'experienced' and 'novice' researchers to support this. Other ideas included conducting a Summer School on feminist theories and practices and establishing small study groups.

We look forward to these and other future events.

Alison Lee **Patricia Ward** **Rosie Wickert**
Sydney, 1994

Acronyms

ACFED	Adult, Community and Further Education Division (Victoria)
ACTU	Australian Council of Trade Unions
AGPS	Australian Government Printing Service
ALLP	Australian Language and Literacy Policy
AMES	Adult Migrant English Service
ANTA	Australian National Training Authority
CAE	Council of Adult Education (Victoria)
CGEA	Certificate in General Education for Adults
DEET	Department of Employment, Education and Training
ESL	English as a Second Language
HSC	Higher School Certificate
LOTE	Languages Other Than English
MCEETYA	Ministerial Committee for Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs
MOVEET	Ministers of Vocational Employment, Education and Training
NBEET	National Board of Employment, Education and Training
NESB	Non-English Speaking Background
NLLIA	National Languages and Literacy Institute of Australia
NTB	National Training Board
NVETS	National Vocational Education and Training Systems
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
OLMA	Office of Labour Market Adjustments
SIP	Special Intervention Program
STB	State Training Board (Victoria)
TAFE	Technical and Further Education
TESOL	Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages
VALBEC	Victorian Adult Literacy and Basic Education Council
VETAB	Vocational Education and Training Accreditation Board

Questioning 'progressive' pedagogies

Alison Lee

The purpose of this article is to raise some questions, from a feminist perspective, concerning some of the fundamental concepts and principles of 'progressive' approaches to adult education. As a way in, I will first outline two classroom scenes which I observed last year while carrying out some research in adult basic education. Then, through a discussion of these scenes, I will consider ways in which 'progressivism', as a term which characterises many of the dearly held principles of adult education, needs to be problematised. I am referring here to principles concerning what is termed 'adult learning', with its implications for particular relationships between teachers and learners, principles of participatory learning, contextualised learning, learning for everyday life, principles of learner empowerment, the negotiated curriculum and the democratic classroom.

In particular, I will ask whether, from a feminist perspective, these principles which might claim in a general way to be 'liberatory' or 'empowering' are in fact free from the oppressive power relations of more traditional models of education. Through analysis of these classroom scenes, I will suggest that they are not and that, as teachers, we must continue to find ways to question our practice. I focus my discussion around the issue of 'pedagogy', using this term to refer to the relations and interactions among teacher, learner and knowledge. The term is useful since, as Roger Simon points out, it allows us to focus "not only what we as educators might actually do, but as well, the social visions such practices would support" (Simon 1988:2).

Scene 1

An adult basic education mathematics class in a TAFE college. The teacher is a woman and the class consists of ten women who are learning maths together in a collaborative and participatory environment. In this class, this means teacher and learners jointly construct the mathematical knowledge; the focus is on the learners articulating and elaborating the methods they have used to solve a mathematical problem. Typically learners work in pairs. In whole-class learning sessions, they take turns to demonstrate their work by writing it on a white board and explaining to the rest of the group their procedure and the principles behind their selection of methods. Not unusually in adult basic education, this teacher is also a literacy teacher and the pedagogy is self-consciously rich in occasions for elaborated speech and writing practices.

The teacher articulates her role as monitoring the accuracy and adequacy of the methods of construction of mathematical knowledge, supplying a commentary on the processes and drawing on a repertoire of methods of explanation of the students' workings. Additionally, she provides a meta-commentary to the group, both on mathematical theory and on the social uses and functions of the mathematics in the world beyond this classroom. Beyond this, though, when speaking to me about her practice, she articulates a pastoral role for her pedagogy, explaining classroom methods in terms of developing learner confidence in their abilities and a sense of collaborative enterprise. This is a very explicitly articulated 'progressive' pedagogy within the adult basic education context.

There are, however, also two male students in this class. They sit apart, from the group of women and from each other, on one side at the back. One, a migrant, says little or nothing. The other, an Anglo man of about thirty, let me call him Joe, leans back and supplies sporadic and frequently derisive commentary on the progression of the lesson, evaluating the words, actions and writings of both the teacher and the other students. His words and manner function to create a very specific gendering effect in this class. The teacher and the other learners in the class become 'marked' as women, their bodies gendered and sexualised as objects of his gaze and of his commentary in this classroom space.

The teacher's pastoral responsibility extends to this man also; he exhibits much of the alienation from formal learning characteristic of many recruits into adult basic education. So far, though, I am telling what must be quite a familiar story, translatable into every educational setting in which we have participated as teachers and learners. Of course I know Joe's name and not the names of the other women. He has impinged on the attention of all of us in the room and required that the teacher name him publicly, in order to carry out her responsibility of managing the class.

Let me add several small details, however. Typically, relationships between teachers and learners in adult settings are more informal than those of schooling; the boundaries between teachers and learners are neither sharply defined nor carefully maintained. At this TAFE college, Joe chooses to tread across these boundaries, able to take advantage of the pastoral consciences of the staff, committed as they are to principles of democracy and the valuing of the individual as adult. Rather than joining the other students for lunch, for example, he begins to take his lunch into the staff tea room, treading across a boundary the teachers (all women except one) will not police. He makes constant attempts to engage the teachers in conversation on a one-to-one basis. In class, his behaviour becomes more extreme and the teacher reports having to spend more and more time with him so as not to jeopardise the chances of the rest of the group achieving their educational goals. At a certain point the teacher decides Joe's behaviour constitutes sexual harassment. After counselling and other measures, Joe is removed from the class. However, he continues to turn up at the college on the days of the class, waiting at the entrances and calling out to the other participants of the maths group.

The teacher begins to express concern about her own well-being as a private citizen living in that small community.

Scene 2

This scene can be told more briefly. There are six students in a class which is teaching literacy and numeracy in an integrated curriculum. Five are men and one is a young woman. The teacher is also a young woman, working part-time and seeking permanent employment. On this occasion, the group is negotiating a program of work to occupy the next few weeks of class. One participant has brought in some materials from a small business he is starting from his home. The business involves selling additives to car engines. The group negotiates to work on this topic in order to better understand the claims being made by the promotional materials. There appears to be consensus, achieved within an atmosphere of considerable good humour and group solidarity. The ensuing weeks see a great deal of talk about cars, car engines and auto mechanics. The young woman is largely silent. Videotape evidence and perusal of the young woman's notebook show extensive doodling.

Discussion

I want to make several comments about these scenes because they raise important questions for a feminist analysis of adult education. These questions are integral, rather than ancillary, to prevalent and valued notions of 'progressive' pedagogy. In order to address these questions, I draw briefly on the work of the British sociologist of education, Basil Bernstein, and of feminist educators, Patti Lather and Valerie Walkerdine.

Education is frequently spoken of in terms of a pair of opposed concepts: 'traditionalism' and 'progressivism'. Of course, in actual daily educational practice, nothing is ever as clear-cut as these terms imply. However, the terms are useful as a starting place from which to ask questions about practice. Very briefly, 'traditional' approaches are strongly hierarchical and the relation of teacher to student is, in Bernstein's (1971) terms, "strongly framed". That is, boundaries between teacher and learner are clearly demarcated and maintained. The teacher is the one who knows and the learner is the one who wants (or alternatively doesn't want) to know. There is no confusion over the roles of the two participants in the educational contract. Pedagogy is commonly conceived as 'transmission' of a given content: sender -> message -> receiver. It is, in Bernstein's (1977) sense, "visible".

'Progressive' pedagogies are a little harder to encapsulate, partly because they are often defined simply as all that 'traditional' pedagogy is not. Here, I will focus on the various moves to democratise education that have developed since the 1960s These include moves to centre pedagogy around the learner, where the focus is on the learner's *construction* of knowledge. They include the breaking down of hierarchies and boundaries between teacher and learner,

particularly salient when both are adults. They include a focus on valuing the learner's knowledge, on making the curriculum relevant to the learner's life beyond the classroom, and on negotiating that curriculum. They include a commitment to student voice. More recently, in a complex relationship to 'progressivism', are pedagogies which work in the name of empowerment, transformation and liberation, most commonly influenced in the field of adult education in Australia by the Brazilian educator, Paolo Freire. In terms of pedagogical relationships, as a consequence of the break-down of the clear distinction between who knows and who doesn't, it often becomes unclear exactly what is involved in 'teaching'. Rather than overt transmission, 'progressive' teaching involves activities which are named in terms such as 'facilitating', 'enabling', 'listening', 'responding' and 'empowering'. In Bernstein's sense, teaching has become "invisible".

It would seem from this list that 'progressive' pedagogies work to break down those oppressive hierarchical power relations of formal education which have failed and alienated many clients of adult basic education. They appear to be principles to be highly valued and fought for. What I want to suggest here, however, is that these pedagogic principles are in urgent need of careful examination, in terms of the ways they work in practice. Referring to Roger Simon's note on pedagogy, what is important to ask is what social vision pedagogical practices might support. Let us briefly explore this with respect to the gendering of pedagogy.

'Traditional' pedagogies might be characterised as gendered masculine, in terms of the strongly policed and hierarchical boundaries between the teacher and the learner. Briefly, this implies that strong hierarchies are features of patriarchal institutions, a basic tenet of feminist social criticism. 'Progressive' pedagogies, on the other hand, have often been conceived as 'feminised' in the sense that attention is paid to questions of 'nurture', 'care', 'affect', and 'process'. Of course, this does not mean that only women practise such pedagogies, though it does imply that such qualities are not those customarily associated with dominant forms of masculinity, including teacher masculinity.

However, things are rarely so clear-cut. Patti Lather (1991) tells us that as feminist educators we must suspect all discourses, including our own, for their complicity in maintaining and reproducing oppressive social relations. Particularly dangerous in this respect are those discourses which work in the names of 'liberation' and 'empowerment'. What might this mean? Looking again at the two scenes, I would make these comments:

1. Weak framing of pedagogical relations can work to render vulnerable both the teacher and the learners to oppressive forms of social relations. This is because the very informality and fluidity of boundaries means that they can all the more easily be crossed. Power is not named in these relationships and its operation can thus go unmarked.

2. 'Traditional' pedagogies are typically content-driven. What is

wanted of both teacher and learner is limited to questions of that content: sender –> message –> receiver. In 'progressive' pedagogies, more of the teacher is engaged in her work. An ethic of care and nurture requires 'emotional labour'. Similarly, as Valerie Walkerdine has pointed out, more of the learner is engaged and available for observation and commentary by the teacher and others (Walkerdine 1984). Whereas there is a certain privacy to be maintained in the strongly framed 'traditional' pedagogical relationship, the interpersonal work done by teachers and learners in 'progressive' pedagogies crosses others boundary between public and private domains of life and between the 'inside' and the 'outside' of the learner and that which is learned.

3. As a consequence of the previous point, 'progressive' pedagogies allow for more obvious gendering and sexualising of both teachers and students. Participatory learning strategies, the call for student voice, freer movement in the classroom, all make more of the student visible. For example, the women in the maths class talked publicly and moved around the room. They were visible and available for Joe's scrutiny of their bodies and their words in an informal public space where he was free to observe and comment.

In a society where gender differences are marked in complex ways by power differences, this gendering and sexualising has differential effects on differently gendered participants. The question then has to be asked: how do we understand the position of the teacher who is also a woman? What of the student who is also a man? In weakly framed pedagogic discourses of adult learning, how does the abstraction of the 'adult' meet the gendered, sexed, embodied subjectivities of teachers and learners, who are also men and women, in the pedagogic encounter?

4. Finally, what of the negotiated curriculum, sacred object of 'progressive' pedagogies? What of the young woman in the group which 'negotiated' the program on car engine additives? What can feminist analysis teach us of such things as silence, of differential negotiating power, and of the stresses felt by minority or subordinated groups when asked to speak out? 'Negotiation' involves the speaking of a position. This is a profoundly gendered practice.

Conclusion

The two scenes raise many questions concerning the unforeseen effects of what happens in the name of 'progressive' pedagogies for student empowerment. What does this mean for us as educators? When Patti Lather tells us that we must be 'suspicious' of our own discourse, she clearly does not imply that we should simply retreat from our efforts to respect students as adults and to make the curriculum relevant to their concerns and interests. On the contrary, to be suspicious is not to reject but to continue to question. We need to continue to find better ways of questioning what we do and what is going on around us in the name of education. The kind of feminist analysis presented here is concerned with questioning the

operations of power. As such, it is not only of concern and value to women as teachers and learners. Power relations do not simply disappear in adult education is facing big shifts in focus

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Towards a feminist critical numeracy pedagogy

Betty Johnston

A wide view of literacy sees it as concerned with meaning-making systems in general. These obviously include language, and less obviously, mathematics. As people interested in literacy and language, why should you extend that interest to numeracy and mathematics? I am hoping that a view from the edge may show aspects of the centre in a different light. Certainly, working in a university department where the emphasis is language and I am the only mathematician, continually and often productively, problematises aspects of my taken-for-granted world.

Mathematics - we all know something about. But what is numeracy? Is it "basic" maths? Is literacy "basic" language?

Well, starting with what we know...what is maths? School maths has often been presented as a given, even god-given, body of knowledge, with little insight into how people actually make it in response to the needs and limits of their societies. Take counting for instance. Some societies count more than others - ours counts or measures almost everything. What features of a society call forth this desire to count? You count when you have lots of things the same, where the individual features are not of interest, as for example, when you manufacture huge numbers of cars for sale, rather than making a single canoe for your own use. And then, take the way we organise our numbers, our numeration systems, often based on fives or tens - our fingers - or on sixties - related to the number of days in a year. The way we write them also grows out of the way we live: the hand signs that are the basis of Roman numerals and some Hindu-Arabic ones, the Babylonian v or < shaped signs, stamped by a stick into clay tablets.

So, maths is a social construction. What about the issue of "girls and maths", sometimes known as "gender and maths:, never "boys and maths". Why has there been so much research on performance of girls? Presumably because girls have a problem with maths. But do they? What does the research say? It is full of what Valerie Walkerdine calls the "truths" about women: women lack ability, the cast of mind, motivation, high level thinking ...; if they are successful, then it's because they are plodders or succeeding at low level tasks; boys "break set", take risks, are "bad" and are therefore good at maths; girls like cooperation, support, they have essentially different "ways of knowing"; girls are given less attention. There are lots of explanations. But what actual evidence is there that there are differences in attitudes, performance, or participation? Very little. There seems to be some difference in

participation when maths is not compulsory, but until then differences in attitude and particularly performance are not striking. The difference in use and work is certainly much more so. At one university the female: male ratio of academic full-time staff ranged from 8:1 in Early Childhood Education, followed by 1:1 in Behavioural Sciences and on through the other Schools to the final 1:13 in Mathematics.

When I did a search in ERIC under the category of "gender/sex difference and [school subject]" over a 4 yr period up to 1992, mathematics elicited twice as many entries as its nearest competitor, science, and more than the total of all five other subjects put together, and almost none of them related at all to use and work. If the differences at school are in fact quite slight, then why this quite extraordinary emphasis?

I would like to argue that it is because gender is not natural; it is constructed and requires work, and posing questions about emphasis on girls and maths is part of the work. What is being constructed is maths as the epitome of Reason and Reason as male. As Cynthia Cockburn (1985), quoting Genevieve Lloyd, argues

> *Reason and rationality are gendered in that the "Man of Reason" was conceived of as precisely "transcending the feminine" with the consequence that women are excluded from rationality, and this exclusion is a constitution of femininity itself.*

Not only maths, but the practices of maths - who does it, what's counted as success, who says so - are socially constructed, and as Walkerdine (1990) says,

> *the question is not "are the arguments true"? but "how is this truth constituted, how is it possible and what effects does it have?*

Walkerdine does not see the "the problem" as early socialisation practices that cause "lack"; women are more active resisters than this gives them credit for. Nor is it that maths is a masculine domain that does not value feminine, intuitive and emotional ways of knowing; this sort of argument perpetuates the fiction of gender difference into fact. Neither does the "fault" lie simply with the teachers who are caught up in the process. Walkerdine's vision of maths is deeply embedded in an historical understanding of mathematics education as a training towards reason, and reason as inextricably tied up with considerations of gender. It is not just higher maths courses or particular jobs from which women are excluded but rationality itself. She, like Cockburn and Lloyd, claims that

> *knowledges and apparatuses define femininity as a perpetual exclusion from the qualities necessary to produce the rational subject, the rational man, and that below this lies a terror.*

What is it about maths that makes it the epitome of Reason? Perhaps it is its abstraction, its decontextualisation. Like any other body of

knowledge, maths is a progressive abstraction from material reality but it is even more abstracted than most, and the abstraction is more highly valued. There is an even greater disjunction between everyday experience and the discourse of maths than there is for most school or academic disciplines.

Abstraction, by its very nature, stresses some features of an object and ignores others. The abstractions of mathematics can be the powerful abstractions of engineering, they can be the thin abstractions of much school maths, they can be the beautiful abstractions of those who delight in playing with maths, they can be the violent abstractions that measure peoples' lives inappropriately. Abstraction is only one half of the process that we should be interested in. Walkerdine argues that abstract reasoning is not the pinnacle of human achievement, but a massive forgetting tied up with questions of power. Our society values quantification: we count and measure almost everything, and in this abstracting we forget or ignore the original object or subject. We reduce people to numbers, forests to dollars. We reduce Maths itself to a gatekeeper, limiting access to elite knowledge. Maths learning is all too often a training in ignoring or forgetting origins and consequences. How otherwise does it happen that more than half the mathematicians in the USA are working for the military?

But does it have to be like this? Does maths and its teaching have to be destructive? Returning to the idea of mathematics as a meaning-making system, like language, we need to look at how it can be taught for more meaning, less forgetting, greater awareness of power relations. I would like to suggest that in our teaching we can pay attention to at least five strands of meaning making:

- **meaning through ritual**
  a minimal strand where meaning is acquired through rote-learning of atomised content

- **meaning through use**
  where meaning is acquired through use in everyday contexts

- **meaning through conceptual engagement**
  where mathematical meaning is constructed through problem-solving, and conceptual provocation

- **meaning through historical and cultural understanding**
  where meaning is enhanced by an understanding of the genesis and cultural use of specific mathematics

- **meaning through critical engagement**
  where some or all of the above meanings are extended by asking in-whose-interest-type questions and also questions about the appropriateness and limits of the maths model in real situations

Meaning through ritual:

When I was a student at school I was taught about averages. To be more specific, I was taught how to find them: you find the average by adding all the numbers together and then dividing that total by however many numbers there are. I seem to remember that we mostly found the average age in the class, or the average speed in races, or the average profit over the last 17 months. They sound quite relevant and useful things to do, but as far as meaning was concerned, I probably would have been as unquestioning as if I had been asked to find the average of my weight, my mother's age and my sister's HSC score. Finding averages was just some sort of process which transformed a bunch of messy numbers into a single one - tidying things up, really. It wasn't that I was afraid of asking why - why do it that way? why would we want to know such a thing? - but that, as with so much of the maths I was taught, such questions never occurred to me.

Meaning through use:

For many of us, the meaning of the word average, like other words, grows out of its use in a variety of situations in our lives. We are told that we are just average at sport, less or better than average at spelling. Later we hear talk about average house prices, or the average wage. We probably acquire some understanding that average is not top or bottom, but somewhere - boringly? safely? - in between.

Meaning through conceptual engagement:

Later, when I was at university, doing a course about statistics, a lecturer said in a throwaway line - "Averages are a sort of middle measure, of course". As she talked about other middle measures - median, mode - I began to have a sense that when you had a whole collection of numbers it might be nice to have some way of condensing them into a single sort of representative number, particularly if, say, you wanted to compare them with another collection of numbers. It would help me to compare my marks in history with my chemistry marks, or my various part-time incomes with my expenditures, or with last year's income. When I came to teach about averages, I emphasised meaning and understanding, and we discussed what an average showed us.

Meaning through historical and cultural understanding:

I don't know when or in what situation averages began to be used. It is something that I would like to find out about. What I do know is that an average is a concept widely used in statistics, and that statistics is ... what? The word "statistics" derives from the word "statist",

which, according to the Macquarie dictionary, means something like "the policy of concentrating extensive controls in the state". Let us ask then what and who our statistics, our averages are for.

Meaning through critical engagement:

I eventually came to do this with the concept of averages by looking at its silences, at what it hid, at what it didn't mean and couldn't show us. The newspaper reported that the average wage had increased over the last few years. Our general unexamined feeling was how nice it was that people were getting more money. Was this the message that the papers - the reporters? the statisticians? the politicians? - wanted us to get? It took a while to start asking which people were getting more money and to start examining the figures more closely. For example, let's imagine that 10 TAFE part-time teachers earned $10,000 each last year. This year, on average, the same group earned $20,000. Still not among the wealthy, one feels, but at least they doubled their income. And certainly that is one explanation for the figures. But is it the only explanation or even the most likely one? Averages can be quite misleading. What if eight of them had stayed at $10,000, and the other two had earned $60,000 each? Or, just as likely, nine of them had had their time cut, and earned only $5,000 each, while the tenth was promoted to a senior position at $155,000 a year? We began to see quite clearly that the average wasn't the middle and that the vast majority of the population could be getting far less than the average wage if a very few were getting a lot more. Our deepening understanding of the meaning, use and limits of this idea of average was giving us a tool for questioning wage and other inequities.

If numeracy, like literacy, is to work towards a more just, humane and equitable society, then we must leave school maths, academic maths, these abstracted discourses, to the Man of Reason. We must claim for ourselves, not mere low level "basic" maths, but a weaving together of strands of meaning into a critical mathematics.

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A letter to conference participants

Tricia Bowen

I have decided to assemble some thoughts in a short letter. I'm feeling a little distrustful of writing which stands as being authoritative and knowing, and the lines between fact and fiction, the private and the public, are getting a little blurry for me at the moment.

I planned to begin the session at the Forum with an explanation of what I understood as feminist pedagogy, namely pedagogy that welcomes collaboration and collective decision-making, acknowledges the subjectivity and identity of the facilitator, aims to explore the uniqueness of students lives without resorting to the compartmentalisation of experience, and goes towards changing the powerlessness of students, by naming and disrupting the imbalance of power between learner and "learned". I also intended to ground these wordy sentiments by describing research and teaching in which I had been involved. In these case studies, I intended to elaborate upon literacy courses, which were informed by my developing understanding of post structuralist perspectives, and the process of deconstruction. I felt strongly that literacy education for women could involve unlocking the taken-for-granted assumptions about femininity woven through language, scrutinising clichés, looking closely at how the words we speak, the literacy we use, perpetuates our social positioning. I was eager in this session, to discuss the possibilities for using personal talk, recorded in transcribed conversations, as a basis for literacy education, in order to expose some of the daily training in normality we perpetuate with our words.

I was also anxious to consider the contradictions that were posed for me in working with curriculum materials, competency scales and authoritative documents, which continued to be written in a supposedly objective tone, using an objective literacy, when we all know that someone's agenda is becoming the prescribed agenda, they just don't use the "I". Finally, I also wished to explore the possibilities for using visual mediums and public performance as a means for creating a tangible record and description of this deconstruction, wanting to challenge the supremacy of the written word. Quite rightly, I should have realised I only had forty-five minutes.

For me, the debate which ensued was challenging, interesting, and at times overwhelming. In my memory, but remember I was only one in a room of over twenty, most discussion seemed to erupt when reading

some of the conversations recorded between myself and a group of women. These conversations were very intimate exchanges amongst a group I worked with for over three months, in a community based language and literacy course. These women were describing failed relationships, violence, poverty, and their resultant feelings of social marginalisation. Our talk centred upon memories of learning about femininity, mothering, romance, nurturing, and our place in the gender order. This was done with a view to exposing and naming some of the oppressive patterns that we had internalised as women, admittedly coming from different cultural and economic backgrounds, my contention being that language helped to perpetuate these patterns.

Some concerns were raised by participants in the session that these conversations were value-laden, and overstepped the teacher-student relationship. Other concerns centred upon the teacher's right to such intimate information about their students, as our role lay in education, not welfare work. Further discussion ensued, but I admit to leaving the session, with the words "values", "laden", and "highly personal" ringing in my ears, most probably because I remember becoming a little defensive at around that time in the discussion. Isn't everything value-laden, I thought. And difference to be valued, I thought later.

I see literacy education as a political act. It challenges an imbalance in power. Literacy education in its practice, in its organisation, in its implementation, in its representatives, in its documentation, in its very existence, is saturated in values. To be literate in the language of the dominant class is valued, to be illiterate is not. Fact as "truth" is valued over fiction, having it in writing is valued over what our language describes as hearsay. The binaries seem to go on and on, but I won't, with one side of the spectrum always more valued than the other. The recurring theme is the valuing, and whose values we're valuing anyway. I only hope we keep talking about it.

Thanks.

Tricia Bowen

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"Once upon a time ..."

An examination of some picture books in the light of a feminist critical literacy pedagogy

Terri Morley-Warner

The picture book can convey powerful messages to young children and is also being increasingly used with secondary students to engage with literary theory and analysis. The stereotypes of many traditional fairy tales are well-known, but what are not so obvious are the assumptions made about gender in more modern popular picture books.

The workshop invited participants to explore some texts to examine ideologies both in the language and the illustration. We discussed our range of interests that had motivated the choice of this workshop - some women were already studying children's literature and post-structuralism and were intrigued to see where picture books fitted in, some expressed an interest in investigating the grammar of illustrations, some were interested in the issue of gender and text in relation to policies in education and there were some who enjoyed reading picture books to their children and liked the notion of exploring them further.

We began with a reading of Mem Fox's *Feathers and Fools*, illustrated by Lorraine Ellis. This text offers an opportunity to examine how illustrations may be read using Kress and van Leeuwen's analysis of the image (see framework below) and how in fact the illustration can be seen to subvert the message of the text. There was lively discussion of the assumptions about gender implicit in this text and in other picture books that I had provided.

From the variety in the collection, it was evident that some writers and illustrators are successfully challenging stereotypes and subverting the traditional fairytale images of a woman as the beautiful but passive princess/maiden awaiting her prince/rescuer (eg *The Paperbag Princess* and *Princess Smartypants* versus *The Highwayman* and *The Frog Prince*).

Of concern, however, are those more 'modern' picture books where a first reading might indicate an enlightened view of women and their roles, but where a critical analysis, especially of the illustrations, reveals instead a continuation of the stereotyping, or worse, a rendering of the woman as silent and invisible, figuring only as a provider of domestic comforts (eg *Counting on Frank*), and where feminism is reduced to an exchange of roles (eg *Piggybook*).

We discussed the sort of questions and activities that help to reveal a text's ideology, such as

- Read the story from another character's point of view. Would it change things if the 'he' became a 'she' or vice versa ? How might it change ? Why ?
- Is anyone missing ? Who is it ? Why isn't he/she there ?
- Compare this text to one with a similar theme or character. Are there significant differences? Why/why not?
- If someone from another culture or from another time in history were to read/view this text, what might he/she notice ?
- What might logically come next in this story if you were to write the next chapter ? What choices do you have about how this story might continue ? Where do these choices come from ?

These questions can contribute to an understanding of the constructedness of the texts, which, by referring to Kress and van Leeuwen's analysis, certainly includes the illustrations.

Framework for deconstructing illustrations

(From: Kress, G. & T. van Leeuwen (1990). *Reading Images.* Burwood, Victoria: Deakin University Press.)

1. Framing provides a particular focus. Unframed is generalised, unspecific. Perspective creates subjective images - like a window - a division between reader and image. No perspective makes the images movable, detached, impersonal.

Also metaphorical effect - eg framing of the highwayman only when he is entering the inn, suggesting the trap.

2. The gaze of the characters directly to the reader is an appeal / demand - eg the gaze of the small girl in *The Frog Prince*. An offer is made when the character does not look directly at the reader, but invites contemplation.

3. The use of vectors (diagonal lines) direct the reader - eg strong straight lines of weapons in *The Highwayman* and peacocks. Contrast the downturned lines of swan, Bess.

4. Left - right positioning represents old/ given/ dominant/ first to new - eg peacock to swan, Mr Piggott to Mrs Piggott

5. Size, placement, contrast and expression of characters indicates importance - eg throughout *Piggybook*

6. The distance from the reader creates/prevents involvement (eg

close-ups). The angle of viewing may enhance or reduce status of the image eg looking up at a character may give it more power/importance (eg, in *Piggybook*). There may be contradictions between text and image - eg Wilfrid looks up at old people who loom large, but the text gives him power of mobility and choices.

7. **Modality** is the viewer's degree of certainty about what is depicted - the absence of a setting makes an image less specific (eg a suggested or stylised background, out of focus, modulated colours, shadows) and reduces modality. ('The more that is taken away, the lower the modality' (op. cit.: 51)). Used for emphasis or contrast or to omit elements which might contradict the dominant message. Combinations of techniques achieve a highly complex effect, eg *Feathers and Fools*. Naturalism increases modality - settings of a particular time and place.

8. **Colours and focussing** - naturalism or impressionism. Colour conventions or coding for emotions (eg, red for anger) are cultural, historical. Overly rich colours create surrealism - 'the hyper-real' (op. cit.: 52)- eg in *Piggybook*.

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Picture books used in the workshop

Feathers and Fools, Mem Fox, illust. Lorraine Ellis

Piggybook, Anthony Browne

The Highwayman, Alfred Noyes, illust. Charles Keeping

The Frog Prince, Jan Ormerod

The Paperbag Princess, Robert N. Munsch, illust. Michael Martchenko

Princess Smartypants, Babette Cole

Counting on Frank, Rod Clement

Wilfrid Gordon McDonald Partridge, Mem Fox

Policy, organisation and teachers' work

Jill Sanguinetti

In this paper I shall talk about ways in which current economic and educational policies are affecting the work of ALBE teachers in Victoria and how teachers are responding to these policies. In particular, I shall explore the usefulness of discourse theory to help us to describe more clearly what is happening around us and to help us to be more reflexive, more self-aware, in developing our own responses.

I am speaking from many years of experience as a teacher of ESL and literacy and more recently as an educational administrator and a regional ALBE officer in Melbourne. I have also had the opportunity of undertaking post-graduate study in recent times and shall be drawing on some of the theoretical perspectives I have found useful in this context.

From a neglected and marginalised field ten years ago, adult literacy is now the focus of a great deal of political and bureaucratic attention from the NLLIA, ANTA, NBEET, the NTB, DEET and state bodies such as ACFED (in Victoria) to name a few. We are constantly learning about new policies, new sets of funding arrangements, new guidelines, emanating from different bureaucracies. The National Collaborative Adult English Language and Literacy Strategy and the various State versions are attempting to plot the complete picture with a view to coherent planning, whilst the National Reporting Project on Adult Language and Literacy is working to develop a common language and national reporting system. In the mean time, State and national literacy curriculum and accreditation frameworks compete for our attention. Ten or even five years ago we were crying out for adult literacy to be recognised and funded; this has now been achieved to a large extent, at both State and federal levels. However, teachers like myself are struggling to keep track of the complexities of competitive tendering, service agreements, greatly increased accountability arrangements and a constantly changing policy environment.

On the one hand, as a result of the Training Agenda and DEET involvement in programs for the unemployed such as OLMA[1] and SIP, there has been an increase in funding for literacy and ESL programs overall. On the other hand, there has been a loss of control by the profession over issues of educational management and over the discourses through which our work is described and organised. (The

[1] Courses organised under the Office of Labour Market Adjustments; negotiated with the Vehicle Builders' and Textile, Clothing and Footwear unions to retrain workers who had lost their jobs.

collapsing together of ESL and adult literacy in the ALLP and the loss of control over how class groups are constituted in DEET-funded programs are two examples.) Despite the overall increase, there has been a big decrease in funding for community-based literacy programs (ie, for people who are not job-seekers), with the shift to DEET of two thirds of what was Commonwealth Adult Literacy Programs (CALP) money for labour market programs. This has devastated community programs in country areas in particular.

The focus on literacy and language at state and national levels has boosted new activity, new energy and new debates. However, some of the changes are having serious effects on teachers' conditions and morale and hence are threatening the quality of provision. There are currently two main issues that have changed the scene considerably: the contracting out of courses through DEET in the 'competitive training market'; and the introduction of the Certificate of General Education for Adults (CGEA) within the Victorian Adult English Language, Literacy and Numeracy Accreditation Framework.

The contracting out of courses through DEET to private and community-based providers makes use of the historical fact that teachers in community-based settings have traditionally had lowly-paid sessional jobs (in courses that may have been just a few hours a week) which were always at the behest of changeable funding arrangements. Now with the provision of SIP and other labour market courses, there are full-time programs established in community houses and small private providers as well as in larger institutions such as TAFE. But this expansion has resulted in full-time teachers (who are responsible for running accredited programs with detailed accountability requirements) working sessionally in short-term contracts. Teachers teaching in DEET programs are usually employed on twenty-week sessional contracts (or else working part-time in full-time programs) paid at about $23 to $27 per hour (sometimes less) with no security or certainty of employment beyond the life of the current course they are teaching: there is still no award wage, no sick pay, and little sense of professional cohesion or of having a career. The competitive training market continues to drive downward on teachers' terms and conditions. We are about 90% women, still seen within a tradition of community service and voluntarism ('women's work') that belonged to an earlier period of adult literacy provision. The loss of over 8,000 teachers' jobs in schools in Victoria over the last two years is very intimidating and has encouraged the acceptance of sessional work as the norm in our sector. This in turn puts further pressure on TAFE college programs which obviously have higher infrastructure costs with permanent and long-term contract teachers.

How does the promise of high quality outcomes in the National Collaborative Strategy fit with destabilising and proletarianising of the adult literacy teaching force in this way? Clearly, competitive tendering entails a sessional and shifting work force, a new competition for jobs every semester, competition between providers and an undermining of networks and the culture of collaboration that until now has been an important strength of the field.

The CGEA is also changing the scene significantly. Many teachers welcomed the coming of an accredited ALBE certificate. As a teacher, I, like others, initially appreciated the challenge of working in a different way, for example, in devising new curriculum to meet its requirements and planning more systematically for outcomes. I also appreciated the opportunities it creates to work with other teachers in paid moderation sessions and collaborative planning activities.

However, I (and others) feel that pedagogical best practice is being seriously jeopardised by having to work to an assessment framework cast as a highly prescriptive framework of elements of competencies that must be seen to be performed. To continue to develop best practice whilst fulfilling the obsessive requirements of assessment is difficult, if not impossible. One illustration is the demand to devise tasks that test 'elements' of language 'competency', which is defined in terms of the display of a number of performance criteria (with range and conditions), all (or most) of which should be fulfilled in the course of performing a particular task. Task setting and testing is extremely irksome and time-consuming: creativity is channelled away from developing curriculum and resources that will stimulate learning in ways that are appropriate for the particular context. In order to fairly gauge individual competence, many tasks need to be performed under 'exam conditions'! Because of the number of discrete elements of competence to be assessed, the tendency is for a six month full-time course (which aims to offer the Foundation CGEA certificate, for example) to be driven by the requirements of assessment, rather than the curriculum. The performance criteria have an air of objectivity but are mostly ill-defined, wide open to interpretation, and lacking a clear basis as to why those particular criteria have been devised and not others.

Another problem is having to teach to the students the language of competencies and assessment so that they know what you are doing. If students are to be assessed according to a set of performance criteria, this in itself entails an enormous amount of abstract teacher talk so that they can know what is going on and what is required. The degree of explanation required of the performance criteria detracts from other processes teachers use to enthuse and prepare students to do the task in the first place.

Whilst some aspects of the Victorian framework may contribute to sound planning and curriculum practice (in particular the descriptions of levels of competence under the four domains of Self-Expression, Practical Purposes, Knowledge and Public Debate) the complicated requirements of the assessment of each element in each domain does tend to undermine, in my view, the development of collaborative learning processes and practices of holistic or critical pedagogy. Because it tends to atomise learning into discrete segments, this form of assessment encourages an instrumental approach of teaching skills *in order to pass the assessment.* This cuts across the positive aspects of the framework, such as the potential for innovative curriculum design across the streams (reading, writing and oracy, numeracy and general curriculum option) and the four domains.

Other States are also developing competency-based frameworks in literacy and it would be interesting to have some cross-referencing on these issues.

This forum invites us to share our understandings of the issues and leads us to ask, where do we go from here? As feminists, how can we individually and collectively respond and feed into policy change when the official discourses and policy processes are so complex and so pervasive? How can feminist theorising help?

I want to go back to Delia Bradshaw's keynote address at last year's VALBEC conference in Melbourne. Delia put out a call for the ALBE field to maintain an awareness of our practice and our identity within a political context shaped by contesting discourses and to develop our own literacy in order to read not only print-based texts but texts and discourses of the changing face of contemporary society, in the workplace, at home, in the local community, nationally and internationally. She pointed out that the old sign posts, the old discourses have lost their power, and in their place, there are new sign posts, such as performance criteria, productivity and free market forces. Delia challenged us to read very carefully these new signs that are pushing us to redefine and restructure our work, and to ask ourselves questions such as "Where do these signs occur? What do they mean for us as ALBE workers, and for our students? Where are they taking us? Do we want to go there? Are some of them dangerous and to be resisted? Do we need to construct or reconstruct alternatives?" Delia reminded us to utilise the critical literacy that we prize in our teaching, in critiquing the 'signs of the times' and to remember the power we share with our students to read and re-script the world.

Delia's address, which had a big impact at the VALBEC conference in Melbourne last year, drew on post structural and post modern theory. I too have found a lot of good ideas in post structuralist thinking, especially feminist versions of it. I am aware that much of it is in obscure jargon which puts off a lot of people who are into practice rather than theory. However, like Delia, I believe the insights of post structuralism are useful in considering the situation we are now in and what we can do.

In the rest of this paper, I will explore the usefulness of discourse theory as a way of describing what is going on around us and as a way of helping us to be more reflexive about the political significance of how we talk and how we describe what we do.

Chris Weedon, for example, in *Feminist Practice and Post structuralist Theory*, is one of a number of feminist authors who talk about discursive resistance as a feminist strategy for challenging meaning systems and power and subverting the 'truth effects' of the dominant discourses sustaining them. She explains that

> ...*Meanings do not exist prior to their articulation in language and language is not an abstract system, but is always socially and historically located in discourses. Discourses represent political interests and in consequence are constantly vying for status and power. The site of this battle for power is the subjectivity of the individual and it is a battle in which the individual is an active but not a sovereign protagonist.* (Weedon 1987: 41)

Anna Yeatman in *Bureaucrats, Technocrats and Femocrats* suggests embracing 'the politics of discourse' or 'language politics' which is about contestation over meaning; not simply to deconstruct the inscriptions of power, but to construct alternative meanings and to develop new discourses. This necessitates engaging with complexity and using multiple discourses to dethrone dominant discourses and to open up space for new meanings.

In fact we engage in some form of discursive resistance every time we question or critique an idea or action. As a loose collective, ALBE practitioners, who are mainly women and who share many common understandings and commitments, can and do collectively develop discourses with which to challenge the dominant discourses of competitiveness and instrumentalism, as they affect our work.

Discourse theory has two specific uses in our context. One is about *understanding* the context around us: the ability to discern, describe, name, objectify and relativise contending and interweaving discourses and to relate the world view reflected in those discourses to the social practices, institutions and power relations which that particular world view reinforces. The other is about *actively shaping our own practice*, including the way we speak, around a more conscious awareness of the politics of discourse. In other words, by continuing to speak of 'holistic pedagogy' for example, we reproduce that concept as part of our real world. By being willing to talk as if narrow, performative 'competencies' are real, we make them real and implicitly discount the more complex and interactive pictures of language skill.

I want to finish by giving two examples of discursive resistance in the struggles around the role of competency-based training in literacy.

The first is an exchange that took place at a moderation meeting at a community centre in Melbourne recently. A disagreement arose over whether or not the six performance criteria for one of the competencies could be tested separately or whether it had to be demonstrated in fulfilling the one task. On the one hand there was a discourse of compliance to authority "the rule is that assessment tasks must include all criteria simultaneously" and on the other hand, a discourse of professional responsibility to the learner and pedagogical authenticity. One teacher argued strongly that to devise a task in which all criteria needed to be performed would be to 'rig' an artificial learning task, that this was training, not education, and that it would be setting up students who had very low levels of

confidence, to fail. This teacher (who had initially taken on the CGEA with enthusiasm) refused to comply when this conflicted with her idea of best practice and argued her case forcefully. The conflict was resolved temporarily by the facilitator suggesting that for now, we go by our professional judgement, but that we take the difficulty back to those responsible for further discussion. In this case, 'discursive resistance' on the part of the teacher will feed into collective feedback to the system. Seeing this exchange in post structuralist terms (by objectifying and naming the contention of discourses around adult literacy, seeing how we as teachers are both constituted by *and* constitute the discourses) means using a set of analytic tools to think about what is going on. It encourages us to reflect on *our* role in the struggle over the meanings and values of literacy teaching and to join in the process of discursive contention (to speak up, to name, to analyse) as a political act.

The second example comes from a comparison between the Victorian CGEA document and the National Framework of Adult English Language, Literacy and Numeracy Competence draft document. The writers of the Victorian framework have, in line with the requirements of VETAB, developed it in accordance with the definition of competency of the NTB (a definition that arose in an industrial training context). This constructs 'competence' as able to be judged by the performance of discrete tasks, so as to display pre-defined performance criteria.

On the other hand, writers of the National Framework have chosen to use the term 'competence' as meaning "a connection of performance with knowledge and skills so as to achieve social goals in particular contexts". 'Competence', as constructed in the national document, is seen as a product of life experience, shaped by the diversities of culture. It is defined as competence in social activity, communication and work which is context specific and expressed in culturally diverse ways. The competence statements were written, as Mary Kalantzis said in her keynote address at the VALBEC conference in Melbourne last year, "in order to try to bend the competency movement away from again viewing literacy as separate from issues of social activity".

This "bending" of the competency movement, by using multiple, powerful discourses such as post modernism, multiculturalism and systemic linguistics (as seen in the National Framework of Adult English Language, Literacy and Numeracy Competence) is another example of the possibility of discursive resistance - of actively shaping our own practice by intervening, shaping meanings and steering the language used towards a different world view than the dominant one shaping policy at the moment. The National Framework is a most interesting (but once again, an extremely complex) document which will most likely defy any attempt to translate it into a framework of performative assessment as in the Victorian model. The document also reveals the creative possibilities opened up by engaging with rather than simply denouncing dominant discourses and top-down policy directives.

I see myself as one of many teachers who are struggling with the

complexities of implementing the competency-based framework at the same time as trying to identify and to challenge the discourses it reflects, trying to change and reconstruct it in line with my own (partial) understandings. In post structuralist jargon, we are carrying out micro resistances which have the effect of reframing official discourses into more useful forms. Doing both things at once (both implementing and critiquing, complying and resisting) is personally stressful and full of practical dilemmas. Perhaps our best choice is to do what we can with tendering and with competencies whilst they remain the flavour of the month and at the same time to develop our practice and our collective voices as practitioners: to develop strong, alternative discourses that arise from our educational know-how and our rich experience of engaging with students and facilitating *their* (many and varied) processes of gaining literacy in its many and varied forms.

The 'signs' that Delia recommended at the VALBEC conference give us some sound direction in doing this: "Reading and Reflection", "Robust Literacies", "Collective Action" and "Courage"!

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The struggle for critical literacy and feminist reform: Some axioms and observations

Nicole Gilding

The following notes are an attempt to set out some of the territory and questions I want to explore with regard to the policy and politics of vocational education and training, and the context for struggle for critical literacy and feminist reform.[1] The propositions are necessarily crudely put, but will serve to illustrate the point I wish to make initially, that the Vocational Education and Training System is being developed in an intensely doctrinaire and pervasively ideological context of public policy.

Linking educational and economic policy

Policy for the National Vocational Education and Training Systems (NVETS) and the Vocational Training Reform Agenda reflect an international move to link educational policy and economic policy.

> *It is only natural that social partners and public authorities turn to further education and training of the labour force as one means of dealing with the challenge [of improved economic performance]. It offers a means of adapting to these forces in such a way as to enhance economic performance while preserving and improving social progress. (OECD 1991)*

It is this apparently uncontested rightness and naturalness of the dominant discourse of economic rationalism which makes it so important that adult literacy not simply be appropriated as an uncritical vocational competence and that a feminist perspective be maintained. Without the tools of critique provided by critical and feminist literacy, the domination of the 'master discourse' (Jane Kenway's term) would be even more complete.

Reform?

The NVETS is an essentially masculine system. It employs the rhetoric of collaboration in workplace reform while encouraging competition in the formation of the 'competitive training market'. By labelling change consistent with the National Training Reform Agenda

as 'reform', all criticism can be dismissed as 'reactionary', 'bureaucratic' or an example of 'vested interest'.

Features of this new system are:

- adoption of industry standards of competence;
- integration of on-the-job and off-the-job training;
- accreditation, articulation and portability (preferably packaged and modular) training; and
- an emphasis on increased accessibility of training for disadvantaged groups.

The needs of the state are equated with the needs of industry. Consider that industry is essentially owned, controlled and serving men (rich men) and that NVETS is to become more responsive ('client-driven') and to service industry in a direct, explicit and controlled way as never before.

The lure of competency

Competency-based curriculum can be a means of liberalising the most mechanistic and instrumental forms of vocational education traditionally offered by TAFE. It could be a basis for empowerment but only if it is a vehicle for genuine inquiry, for developing critical literacy, the capacity to debate and to contribute. However, in application, it sometimes appears essentially reductionist and anti-intellectual. The concept of a competency as a constellation of skills, knowledge and understanding can be reduced to 'what can be observed in performance'.

Market talk

The concept of the *marketplace* applied to NVETS is dominant but inappropriate. Market forces imply choices made by individual consumers; what is being made available, however, is a 'choice' which comes after the pre-selection between providers made by funding agencies. An unintended effect of this process can be to make public education look unresponsive, costly, inefficient and self-serving. There is much evidence that:

> *[a]s market notions become more pervasive, they provide everyday tacit evidence that can be mobilised to support the apparent rightness of economic rationalist policies that are said to be based on and embody market rationality.* (Muetzelfeldt 1992: 188)

Other features of the system are expressed through the language of the 'rationalist' discourse. The student or learner becomes the client, although the dominant client is industry. Curriculum

becomes a product, and to enter the training market the provider purchases a curriculum 'under licence'.

The marketplace and the 'margin'

The emphasis on the 'rationality' of the marketplace and consequent competitiveness seems particularly unhelpful to the feminist project of labour market gender de-segmentation. Women, Aboriginal people and people from non-English speaking backgrounds are likely to enhance their participation in training in a climate of collaboration between providers, fostering of learner pathways involving 'pastoral care' and recognition of the complexities in the lives of 'the disadvantaged'.

More inclusive pedagogical practices in TAFE involve reduced class size; and student support services such as enclaves, learning support, open access learning centres as well as libraries. Such arrangements are costly and unlikely to attract emerging private providers seeking profits from their training activities. Even though these things are on the agenda in the draft Australian National Training Authority (ANTA) National Strategic Plan, one would have to say that the continuing pressure on reform to reduce the costs of training will continue to make them vulnerable 'add-ons'.

Industry will now *drive* the systems and industry has a poor record of comprehension and action in pursuit of gender equity. However, ANTA has identified participation by and outcomes for women as one of its key result areas for the National Strategic Plan for NVETS. This opportunity must be made a vehicle for a continuing critique of the emerging system.

Work in public policy in the competitive training market involves finding some balance between these competing pressures so that one has both competition and a system that continues to foster the sorts of affirmative action and relationships between providers in which equity outcomes are facilitated and demonstrable changes achieved.

Women's place in adult literacy

I would now like to offer you some propositions about the place of women in adult literacy as it is developing within the vocational education and training context.

As literacy moves (ie. is repositioned in order to maintain government priority and funding) from a social or equity to a vocational or economic rationale, it will become an area for male career expansion.

It is noticeable that men now work in workplace literacy in larger numbers than in traditional areas of provision and that more now occupy visible or management positions, although the vast bulk of the workforce is female. It is worth drawing an analogy with the

feminised field of nursing once it became an acceptable field for men to take over. My impression is that men now occupy a disproportionate number of management positions in that field.

Now that there are research careers to be made from the study (as opposed to the delivery) of adult literacy, the field will be colonised by male academics. Many of these will have acquired their postgraduate qualifications while being supported by their female partners in the dual role of worker as well as homeworker. While this could seem to be 'sour grapes', it is certainly a structural issue which should be addressed through scholarship programs and other initiatives which would ensure that the rest of the long-serving women practitioners had priority of access to this area of career progression.

The place of feminism

The talent and energy that has driven adult literacy has traditionally been that of women but not necessarily feminist women. I have been critical in the past about the limp, 'welfarish' mode adopted by many in the field and crystallised for me in the description 'caring and sharing'. This mode has made the field very vulnerable to the current government pressures to demonstrate outcomes. Poor documentation, poorly defined pathways, and inadequate data which have characterised the area are clearly an outcome of inadequate funding and marginalisation but they are also a product of an operation which was often apolitical, anti-bureaucratic and self-marginalised.

Although the rhetoric for critical literacy has always carried the rationale of empowerment, the absence of a well-developed, feminist analysis has meant that in some adult literacy programs it remains just that — rhetoric. To me, any study which purports to be developing critical literacy must be about the politics of discourse and will essentially confront the sexist and racist construction of the world which is encountered in the world as well as in the text. I confess myself unable to understand how engagement in a goal of critical literacy can be pursued without a conscious feminist perspective. Nonetheless, many women teaching in the field would not describe themselves as feminists.

A critical loss of tradition

Policy is increasingly administered by men and women with no allegiance to the traditions of adult literacy. Now that there are careers to be made, mobility and pragmatism are more likely to characterise managers. Nor can one rely upon a feminist predisposition among women managers. This is not likely to strengthen as adult literacy moves into the mainstream of vocational education and training. Delivery by non-'expert' professionals in adult literacy as it is 'integrated' into 'mainstream' training, could see a feminised workforce de-professionalised as 'handmaidens' to a

vocational training force that continues to be dominated by men.

Slumming it

As the profile for adult literacy has changed, it has become more difficult for policy workers to maintain detailed involvement with 'grassroots' activity. For example, at one time virtually all of the Executive of the Australian Council for Adult Literacy occupied key *structural* positions of influence and access to information in their various States. This is no longer the case. Advocates for the profession are not necessarily the senior policy makers or managers of the profession. In my own case, continuing involvement with the field is sometimes regarded as aberrant and 'career limiting', evidence that I might not be 'the right stuff' for the mainstream of policy work.

In the period 1990 to 1994, policy in literacy and language has seen some of its most complex issues dealt with by the Ministerial Council (MOVEET/MCEETYA). This involves huge expenditure. The stakes are high and the risks of failure great. The loss of control of the literacy agenda has been demonstrated by:

- the withdrawal of the Commonwealth from the spirit as well as the letter of the Australian Language and Literacy Policy commitment to States;
- the establishment of a huge labour market program where the subtext of the program's implementation is the deconstruction of the TAFE 'monolith' as an outcome of competitive processes applied to a very uneven playing field; and
- the encouragement of alternative providers — preferably of quality but even without it.

Those of us still trying to exercise some control in terms of adult literacy's traditional values must walk a tightrope not to appear to compromise the national ministerial commitments (eg. to a training market) while trying to defend what is best about the sort of adult literacy provision that has been developed with a different rationale in the public systems.

A two-edged sword

Literacy is at the 'sharp end' of the National Training Reform Agenda and has borne the brunt of pressures and policies to deregulate provision while at the same time being under pressure to operate as a system across policy and territorial gulfs between Commonwealth and State and to describe outcomes as minutely as possible in order to ascertain 'value for money'. There are strong pressures towards compliance and uniformity while whole systems are devolved.

It has been an achievement to get adult literacy on the national agenda but it is still a struggle to maintain a concept of critical literacy. I hear adult literacy workers talk about the link between literacy and productivity in a way that frightens me — they are sometimes unaware that it is a problematic and certainly not direct relationship. In adopting the language of the discourse of vocational education, some literacy practitioners appear to have suspended their own capacities for critical literacy. I continue to be concerned at the apolitical stance of many in the field and at a lack of recognition that literacy is a site and context for struggle — ideological and pedagogical.

We need to use the discourse at the same time as we see it for the construct that it is. Can one in fact use it and remain unco-opted? Only, I think, by engaging with various and critical colleagues.

Hope from engagement

The situation is not entirely negative — neither for adult literacy nor for the women in it. There have been dramatic improvements:

- more money for student places — lots of it!
- professional development opportunities;
- pioneering work in curriculum which offers great opportunities for intellectual challenge and provides a more complex understanding of competence than previously available (eg. the *National Framework of Adult English Language Literacy and Numeracy Competence* (ACTRAC 1993);
- growth in research efforts;
- growth in post-graduate training opportunities;
- challenging relationships to explore, eg. Literacy/ESL; Literacy and Aboriginal Education; and
- explicit policy rather than policy neglect.

There is some impressive work going on!

One of the challenges we face is actually uncovering new possibilities for progress in critical literacy and on issues of gender reform. Many of us are working in a context in which the degree of closure, of inevitability, and pressures towards our co-option for the mutual reinforcement of a view of the world with which we disagree, is so strong as to make options unimaginable.

Anna Yeatman (1990: 160) poses the challenge to policy makers 'to deploy the conventions of the policy genre in ways which are conducive to dialogue and debate'. Some of the most important work

happening today involves working on strategies which will support (in her terms) 'the politics of discourse (a politics of contested meaning)'.

Some crucial questions for strategy development:

- How do we turn more women in adult literacy to feminism so they are more politically able to defend their values, pedagogy and careers?

- How do we bring two areas of struggle into a sustainable, mutually supportive relationship?

- How do we gain enough support to enable policy makers/program managers to be pro-active in the repositioning to exploit opportunities as well as keep the faith — ie. how to maintain or gain trust as a bureaucrat so that more radical, long-term pre-emptive policy formation might be possible and we could get off the 'back foot'?

I continue to be challenged as a policy maker and as a feminist by the field of adult literacy. What I need more than anything else in order to meet that challenge is a continuing opportunity to explore issues within a framework which is explicitly feminist and critical, and a context which provides both rigour and safety.

Notes

1. This paper was prepared by Nicole Gilding for the 'Women's Forum: Gender, Language and Critical Literacy' and presented by Rosie Wickert on her behalf. It appeared under its present title in *Open Letter: Australian Journal for Adult Literacy Research and Practice*, 4(2), 3-11.

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The reconstruction of women's work in adult education

Jennifer Angwin

Community or cut price education?

As a result of the implementation of the ALLP and the concurrent restructuring of education as a labour market, women in the post-compulsory sector of education are finding their work is being continually redefined by those outside, whose agendas barely represent the field of education. The field has been redefined as deficient, as lacking, in order for a centralised bureaucracy to take charge. The teachers' understandings of their work as language teachers, their autonomy as language assessors and curriculum developers, and their opportunities to develop a career are being increasingly limited to the extent that the very nature of their work, whilst coherent to the economic rationalists in Canberra, no longer represents the field that these women have worked to establish.

But how have these moves to create a new regime of truth come about? Are women's subjugated knowledges able to be heard within this new discourse? The new discourses represent not only the transformation of our understandings of curriculum practices in adult education, but also the transformation of our forms of organisation, the ways in which the adult literacy agenda is now being seen to fit into the government's economic employment and training policies. There is also a transformation of the language of the discourses which structure the field itself. This reconstruction of women's work by those outside the field, has led to a number of contradictions for the women working within the field.

Since 1987, when the ACTU adopted a competency-based approach for the re-skilling of workers in a changing industrial climate, as presented in *Australia Reconstructed*, the competency movement gained ascendancy with DEET and a competency-based approach to curriculum was to become the guiding light for all adult education. The Australian Language and Literacy Policy brought further changes such as placing adult literacy students of English-speaking background with students of non-English-speaking background in the same classes, bringing together the fields of TESOL and adult literacy for the first time in the Australian context. As well there have been moves to introduce both state and national frameworks for accreditation of the range of certificates available to students. A further change has been the introduction of tendering processes, with many new providers now being funded for program delivery. As a

result of tendering, there have been further changes to the employment conditions of teachers.

I argue here that the competency-based curriculum approach, as those in Canberra wish to construct it for us, offers a step backwards for much of adult education where for the past 15 years teachers have had control over their own curriculum development. Teachers have been responsible for negotiating learner-centred, needs-based curriculum in response to the incredible differences which students of different educational and linguistic and cultural backgrounds bring to the learning situation. They have learnt to work with cultural diversity and difference and have become some of the most skilled intercultural communicators in the community. This is the very competence which is to be added to the Mayer seven generic competencies that are going to drive school education. In contrast to the multi dimensional approach that adult literacy has developed to curriculum and pedagogy, we are now moving to a new age with a one-dimensional, monocultural view of the world or to be more precise, a view of the good worker, the good citizen. All notions of individual aspirations and purposes, of cultural diversity, are liable to be lost in this approach without careful debate, negotiation and local level interpretation of what is actually going on in our own field.

The way ahead: Feminist research in adult literacy

Although this field of education has always been seen as "women's work" and as such for many years was largely ignored by the bureaucrats, there has been remarkably little feminist research in the field as represented in relevant journals. There is some dealing with feminist pedagogy in the field of adult literacy, specifically work on questions of empowerment. However, in the field of adult TESOL, feminist, postmodern research approaches are almost unheard. The idea of a unitary, rational and male subject remains central to these discourses, so that it is extremely difficult for women to get their feminist views heard.

So what can feminist and poststructural perspectives on educational research offer to women working in this field?

From feminist perspectives, it is possible to examine different ways of viewing the same issues, respecting different perspectives without valorising difference for its own sake. There is a constant questioning of previously established modes of practice, claiming that most of the paradigms which have informed educational debate are framed from a patriarchal world-view which places women and other "minority groups'" ways of seeing the world as outside those of the dominant male environment. A poststructuralist perspective on educational research provides ways of examining the discourses, the texts, which are now constructing our work. Whether these texts are government policy, curriculum frameworks or employment contracts, a poststructuralist approach will enable new ways of seeing the

power/knowledge relationships embedded in these texts. Whose interests are being served in these texts? How can women make their voices heard?

Both feminist and poststructural discourses try to come to terms with questions of subjectivity and objectivity in educational debate. It is all too easy for researchers to stand outside the lived reality of the students and see these students as the objects of their research, rather than the subjects. These approaches try to establish the centrality of the individual's subjectivity in research. Much of the research which is dominating this field is based on technocist views of educational research, which in other fields of education has been shown to be of limited use in explaining the complex worlds of education today. A technocist approach to educational research allows for education to be viewed only from the perspective of instrumental rationality.

The only way for the field to survive and move forward in these difficult times is for the teachers in the centres, the administrators, the researchers and the ever-increasing number of casually-employed teachers working on the margins to look beyond the boundaries of our own field, to situate ourselves more broadly within education in Australia and internationally, to try to gain better understandings of the forces at work, and by this better understanding, to be able to find ways to resist the discourses of others and have our, perhaps now silent, voices heard.

Bilingual NESB women: An untapped resource

Marta Rado

In my talk I propose to concentrate on the positive attributes of NESB women. Their positive linguistic attributes which, if not explored, are a loss to society at large, and not simply to the women themselves. I am prompted to do this, because discussions about equity in education, employment and so forth tend to be couched in negative terms. In other words, I shall focus on the women's knowledge and skills and how their abilities can be exploited to benefit themselves, other women, their families and friends, and the Australian community at large.

The empirical data I am using for illustrative purposes are based on research I have carried out in collaboration with my colleague Dr Lois Foster, spanning almost two decades.

Negative attributes

One of the issues Dr Foster and I have been concerned with is why relatively more women miss out on their ESL tuition entitlement when compared with male immigrants. If you would now pause and make a list of women who are likely to miss out on English language and literacy tuition, you might find it interesting to compare your list with mine.

Women who are likely to miss out on English language and literacy provision are (Foster and Rado 1991):

- new arrivals who are housebound because of young children;
- women with longer than three years residence;
- women whose husbands are unsympathetic to their educational and/or employment aspirations;
- new and older arrivals who are afraid to venture away from their immediate environment;
- older residents with high oracy and low literacy skills;
- women in the country; and
- refugee women.

Another list with which you could make a comparison is that of the Women's Ethnic Network (1990) which reports the following attributes:

- married with children;
- substantial family commitments;
- low education level;
- poor English;
- lack of transport;
- loss of identity;
- role confusion;
- isolation from family and community;
- cultural focus on others;
- low self esteem;
- alienation of Australian culture and bureaucracy;
- non-participation;
- low motivation; and
- apolitical stance.

A third list also gives food for thought. Categories of women in or preparing for the workforce likely to miss out on English language and literacy tuition are those who (Foster and Rado 1991:78):

- seek promotion;
- work in enterprises which do not provide on-the-job literacy tuition;
- are not informed about literacy tuition opportunities;
- cannot be regularly released from work to attend classes;
- are afraid to admit that they are illiterate;
- are outworkers;
- are retrenched and want to retrain in their own industry;
- want to have their qualifications recognised;

- want to pursue part-time study; and
- have exceeded their pre-employment literacy tuition entitlement.

The role of bilingual NESB women

Basically what many of these women have in common is that they are not fully informed about their literacy tuition opportunities and so do not come forward to claim them. Clearly strategies are needed for finding such women. We have found that the participation of those NESB women who in speech and in writing have a good command of their mother tongue can be effective in this area. These women have a role to play in supporting those who are shy and lack self esteem or cannot access tuition for any other reason.

We need to recognise that there are several groups who need information. The tuition providers: administrators, teachers and bilingual workers, for example, are one group. The prospective learners are another. The question is how to reach the women who need English tuition given difficulties such as those below:

1 **Problem:**
Reliance of information by word of mouth is widespread.

Criticism:
This method may not reach those in greatest need to be informed.

2 **Problem:**
Information in print is mostly available in English.

Criticism:
The relevant information is given in a language the women probably do not understand. Some providers make bilingual brochures available but not all prospective learners are literate in their mother tongue.

The solution lies with bilingual teachers, bilingual aides or bilingual workers because such individuals can make personal contact with the prospective learners, such as NESB women who should have access to a variety of language programs in English and in their mother tongue. An example of how this can be done is the 'access and equity' model developed and tested by the Women's Ethnic Network of Victoria (1990). This model is of particular interest because it gives women the opportunity to participate in decision making about classes/courses to be offered.

Access and equity model

(Based on Women's Ethnic Network 1990:2-6)

- Set up a Steering Committee;
- Identify the theoretical and practical aspects of the task;
- Choose the location;
- Locate the ethno-specific groups to be involved;
- Make preliminary contact with NESB women workers and group members;
- Solve problems encountered;
- Establish contact with target groups;
- Consult target groups for choice of options for action;
- Arrange information days;
- Form a cross-cultural group with a representative from each women's group to accomplish one of the chosen options; and
- Arrange meetings and seminars for bilingual workers.

The project summarises the consultation task as follows (Women's Ethnic Network 1990:7):

1. Locate and consult with key workers;
2. Locate and consult with bilingual workers;
3. Locate and consult with ethno-specific women's groups;
4. Collate findings;
5. Establish a list of options; ascertain their feasibility;
6. Present options to groups and re-consult;
7. Plan strategies according to feedback.

The model is economical because it is canvassing groups rather than individuals. It draws attention to bilingual workers and the need to train and support them and can be used by providers to identify what form the English tuition should take. Examples of the range of options include:

- exclusive focus on literacy;
- exclusive focus on one of the sub-skills of reading and writing;

- integrated literacy and oracy development;
- literacy tuition focussing on intercultural communication;
- literacy tuition incidental to acquisition of skills of personal interest; and
- literacy tuition incidental to the acquisition of vocational skills.

Other models

1. A group which started because of a particular interest in folk art, changed into an English literacy class funded by Adult, Community and Further Education Division Victoria. This model is relevant to city councils, community/ethnic organisations and libraries that play host to interest/social groups. Bilingual workers have an important role to play in helping to establish such groups.

2. Another technique for contacting NESB women has been developed by AMES Victoria. Staff members service pregnant women in hospital waiting rooms. These teachers, preferably bilingual, disseminate information and teach about child birth.

3. A viable technique is to contact a highly respected woman in an ethnic group, arrange a social gathering in her home and with her help pass on the necessary information. This technique has been used successfully by the Migrant Women's Learning Centre, Northern Metropolitan College of TAFE, Melbourne, without the help of a bilingual worker, although the services of the latter would be a great advantage.

4. One model that can be used in advertising literacy classes at the workplace is that developed by a Migrant Women's Organisation project 'Women in Industry: Contraception and Health' (WICH). This organisation obtains permission to visit an enterprise several times. They talk to the women in their own language and in English, individually or in groups, in the canteen during meal breaks, giving information on health. They distribute multilingual materials, use visual aids, and invite discussion. A multilingual dissemination counselling group of this kind clearly benefits the women and might help them to overcome difficulties in their personal lives so that their learning and working capacity is enhanced. Solving women's personal problems would also benefit the employer in the form of a more settled workforce which in turn can satisfy better the demands of functional flexibility in production. It should be noted that this model relies on the participation of bilingual workers.

5. Finally, I would like to draw attention to the Women's

Information and Referral Exchange (WIRE) funded by the Department of Community Services, Victoria. This Telephone Information Service is available to any woman anywhere in Victoria for the price of a local call. It advertises its way of operating in eight languages: English, Greek, Italian, Polish, Romanian, Serbo-Croat, Spanish, Turkish and Vietnamese. The information it can give is wide ranging, from pensions to publishing, from clinics to self-help groups. (For further details see Foster and Rado 1991.)

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To sum up, these examples should suffice to demonstrate the merit of paying attention to the dissemination of information with the help of bilingual staff. Such people have to be trained for the sensitive role of cross-cultural mediator. It may also be the case that their language skills, particularly their literacy skills in one or in both languages need to be developed further if they are to act as literacy facilitators.

The role of bilingual workers as literacy/biliteracy facilitators

Apart from helping with the dissemination of information, NESB women, if literate in their mother tongue and interested in expanding their knowledge and language skills and share them with others, can be trained to assume the role of facilitators in cross cultural and cross lingual situations. This is particularly the case if the aim of the exercise is biliteracy.

Bilingualism, which a few decades ago was considered to be a cognitive disadvantage for early first language acquirers, is now considered by most linguists to be an asset for any age group. One finding of interest in connection with NESB women is that higher order literacy strategies transfer across languages. Consequently, the upgrading of reading skills in the mother tongue improves reading skills in the second language, in this case English (see Rado and D'Cruz forthcoming, Chapter 3). There is also some research evidence that early bilingualism leads to positive physiological changes in the brain (Jacobs 1988).

Today the Federal Government strongly supports the view that it is in Australia's interest to encourage LOTE learning in schools and tertiary institutions. The drive for second language learning in TAFE is less strong. The number of hours available for teaching English and LOTE is contentious. At a time of economic constraint it is unlikely to be increased. The situation could be improved by providing informal language practice with the help of literate NESB women. They would have to be trained in group leadership skills but there is precedence for such training which is not too difficult to organise. I am referring to reading circle leaders in English and in LOTE.

Study circles are a much used form in adult education. In Sweden (Rubenson 1989), for example, it is the predominant form used. These groups are led by volunteers who are not trained teachers. They learn to become discussion leaders through participating in a group. Study circles are of special interest because they have been developed spontaneously by mother tongue speakers. Thus they offer opportunities for authentic language use.

In Victoria, the Council of Adult Education (CAE) has a Discussion Program which has been in operation for nearly half a century. It provides books and discussion guidelines for interested groups of readers of intermediate or higher literacy levels. The emphasis is on sharing the reading experience with other group members, thereby adding a social dimension to reading. Other advantages are the spontaneous formation of groups and the self-directing and non-tutored mode of operating them. This model could be adapted to 'reading circles' for NESB women of different levels of literacy proficiency. In their case, the social component of this type of activity is particularly important. Lee Dow (1989) reports that participation in a group is voluntary and 95 per cent of the membership are women.

Intergenerational literacy/biliteracy

In North America, the UK, New Zealand and Australia, there is a growing interest in intergenerational learning. Such learning has a positive effect on both the learner and the informal tutor who can be regarded as a spontaneous teacher.

Sticht and McDonald (1989:10) explain the transfer process of knowledge and skills not as unidirectional but as reciprocal:

> *The cognitive abilities of a new generation are formed in social interaction first with the preceding generation and later with contemporaries and younger generations. Parents, elder brothers and sisters, and others such as doctors, nurses, aunts, uncles, neighbours, etc. interact with and teach the new born infant; children in the neighbourhood and at school learn from each other and older children as well as from teachers; and youth and adults learn much of their "practical" knowledge, such as keeping up the house, caring for one's possessions, and learning work skills through informal "cognitive" partnerships with parents, friends and other associates.*

The authors also comment on the wisdom to utilise the existing bilingual and multicultural knowledge of the population of the United States to produce specialists who can operate on the international scene. They point out that it is wasteful to start from scratch with monolinguals when there are bilingual individuals available who could be trained in a much shorter time to engage in international commerce and political activity. The same can be said about some

members of the Australian population whose bilingual skills could be used and/or upgraded to serve our local and international LOTE needs.

In Australia some intergenerational literacy programs already exist. They involve pre-school and primary school children, their families (mostly their mothers) and teachers. Toomey (forthcoming), who carried out a reading program with four year olds whose families were interested to read with their children, reports that:

> *the project positively affected the children's literacy learning, with respect to both print knowledge, extracting meaning from being read to and showing more written language oriented behaviour in dealing with books.*

The Crawford Report (DEET 1992) identifies three types of school based literacy programs. They are listed here in rank order from the least to the greatest effort they demand from parents. The greater the challenge, the greater advantage accrues to the parents' literacy skills.

The three types of programs are:

- awareness raising campaigns;
- simple programs for use in the home to assist parents when their children commence school; and
- more complex training of parents as tutors for use in the home and in the classroom.

Among the programs cited by the Crawford Report, the 'Talk to a Literacy Learner' (TTALL) in NSW is the most ambitious, as it trains parents not only to help their own children but also to work with other parents and children. Significantly, some participating parents have returned to study.

Biliteracy reading programs

None of the programs reviewed by the Crawford Report were concerned with biliteracy, yet they could have been. Parents by themselves or with the help of a literate volunteer could transfer the strategies suggested to them for reading with their children in English to reading with them in their first language. In fact it may well be that reading in their first language is the only literacy help they can offer their children. The value of this help should not be underestimated in terms of their children's bilingual development and in terms of their own self-esteem and possible progress in first language critical literacy which could facilitate critical literacy in English.

The role of librarians

Bilingual NESB women: An untapped resource

Marta Rado

Australian librarians have been aware for some time of the consequences of serving a multicultural/multilingual readership. The Australian Library and Information Association's Policy Statement on Libraries and Multiculturalism (1990: 97) reflects this. It calls for services which meet the needs of all members of the Australian community regardless of language, cultural background or country of origin. In order to deliver such a service, libraries need to employ salaried bilingual workers and bilingual volunteers. The point is that the educated and interested members of our various ethnolinguistic minorities should be encouraged to help in satisfying the language needs of their group. In perusing a number of library brochures we collected some useful suggestions as to what can be done. The activities include lobbying for funds to provide more space for library classes hosted by the library in English and in various LOTE, taking courses to become volunteer tutors in English and in LOTE, conducting seminars/workshops to train other suitable members of their ethnic community as volunteer tutors, preparing literacy kits for new mothers to be distributed in hospitals in the relevant LOTE using the English kit as a model, inviting families to story reading sessions in their LOTE, organising poster competitions, read-a-thons and reading circles in their LOTE, encouraging their readers to perform entertaining skits for LOTE speaking/learning children and adults. Such collaborative activities between the libraries and the ethnic readership they serve point to an effort of presenting libraries not only as a place for learning but also for fun.

The role of volunteers

Teachers of language and literacy are suspicious of volunteers because they are untrained and so threaten the professionalism and livelihood of trained teachers. The mainstream sector providers, with the exception of Home Tutors who work with clients on a one-to-one basis, make little use of volunteer staff. Not so the community sector which consists of spontaneously formed associations such as community learning centres, neighbourhood houses, and ethnic and religious associations. This group of providers could not operate without teaching and non-teaching volunteers.

It is significant that community sector language and literacy providers advertise for volunteers. In many instances, although not all, the providers train the volunteer tutors and ensure that they are suitable for the task. The tutors are usually expected to be members of the local community and be literate. They come from all walks of life, they are not just teachers. They could be housewives, policemen, hairdressers, shopkeepers, nurses, lawyers, to name just a few.

On the model of English language tuition, LOTE tuition could be organised inviting literate bilingual individuals to volunteer as

tutors for their own children and for other children and adults. It seems that they need not be highly educated. In the course of investigating the language needs of NESB immigrant families, it appeared that many of the primary educated parents have taught their children to read and write in their home language. Prerequisites are a training course and teaching materials for first and second language learners, children and adults. (For further details on intergenerational literacy programs and the role of librarians and volunteers, see Rado and D'Cruz (forthcoming).)

Conclusion

To conclude I would suggest that we should start thinking of what practical measures we can take in ensuring the support and participation of the many talented but invisible bilingual NESB women who could help to boost the number of competent bilinguals in our society. It is my contention that it is an aim worth pursuing in the name of equity and inclusivity.

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Concepts and practices of inclusivity: Centring white ethnicity in literacy practice

Sue Shore

Much of my thinking for today has been influenced by my involvement in a Department of Employment, Education and Training (DEET) project, entitled *Positively Different: Guidelines for Developing Inclusive Adult Literacy Language and Numeracy Curricula*. During this project, the guidance offered was directly related to what was happening in the adult literacy field at the time. Provision was being driven by economic imperatives and the promises inherent in the discourses of adult literacy and second chance education. At times, the factors shaping provision are compatible; however, at other times, the language of economic imperatives seems in conflict with promises of improved productivity for industry and improved quality of life in general for disenfranchised groups.

Given the limited time I've got this morning, I'd like to talk about two main ideas that came from the project and then discuss how I think they relate to literacy - particularly adult literacy. The project was not designed to offer empirical evidence of "inclusive" strategies and their outcomes. Rather it was a guidance document offering advice on policy and practice. One of the most significant pieces of advice we could offer was that curriculum was something more than what happened between teachers and learners in the classroom. For example, although learners may be enrolled in a course of study, unsatisfactory experiences with administrators, other educators, employers in the workplace or other employees may make them feel alienated; as though the organisation is hostile to their presence. This may happen in the corridors or the canteen or in the lack of spaces available for daily prayer.

This idea of hostility brings me to talk of one of the other key features which emerged from the project for me. Implicit in the notion of inclusivity is the idea of including "others" in a system which is responsible for positioning them as "other", as "different" and usually as "deficit" in the first place. By the same token, it's taken for granted that first, they want to be included in that system and second, that essentially the "system" won't have to do much changing to draw them in and "include" their needs. For example, women have to make do with white, male, North American modes of communication styles which don't in the main deal with the politics of gendered power in "modules" on assertiveness. Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students alike are still exposed to readers which perpetuate the myth of peaceful settlement in Australia rather than an act of invasion and on going colonisation.

In the work place, essentially masculinist bureaucracies, or rather people working within them, believe that some kind of affirmative action agenda will enable them to employ one woman or one Torres Strait Islander and that this will overcome any problems of representation and consultation. At times, there is no well developed understanding of what's involved in hearing and actually acting on that voice, or the multiple and contradictory voices with which people from those groups might speak.

At a broad level, within this DEET project, I came into conflict with inclusive practices which invite participation in a hostile system and the notion of a critical, feminist transformative curriculum which acknowledges the misogynist/racist world in which we live. As an example I have a sense of rage at the information that we received yesterday about the question on notice in the South Australian Parliament which questions the legitimacy of TAFE "funding women to go to a lesbian conference in Sydney". This is exactly the kind of question which shapes what counts as proper conferences, proper behaviour, proper knowledge. I think we reflect this type of question in our work in more subtle, equally discriminatory ways when questions of race, class, gender and sexuality *don't* get raised as part of the content of the curriculum. This isn't about being inclusive !

On a day to day level this kind of practice erodes any notion of an "inclusive" world where we are all equal, where we can be treated the same. And these in fact are some of the claims of the adult literacy field. We treat all students the same, and we also treat them equally and as individuals. But they are not all the same. Socially, politically, historically they are different. And it is not a level playing field.

In all of this I have to ask where am I as a white woman academic/practitioner. Without becoming paralysed by the enormity of the question, this is a very important place for me to start.

Peggy McIntosh (1988: 1) says in her powerful paper *White Privilege and Male Privilege: A Personal Account of Coming to See Correspondences through Work in Women's Studies*:

> *Whites are carefully taught not to recognise white privilege as males are taught not to recognise male privilege.*

My whiteness gives me an "invisible package of unearned assets which I can count on cashing in every day"(ibid.).

Our schooling - our adult literacy training I believe - has not given us training in seeing ourselves simultaneously as oppressor and oppressed, polarities which in themselves are too simplistic to describe complex power relations in every day life.

For example McIntosh (1988: 6-8) notes

> *When I am told about our national heritage or about "civilisation" I am shown that people of my colour made it what*

it is [p.6]

I can speak in public to a powerful male group without putting my race on trial. [p.7]

My culture gives me little fear about ignoring the perspectives and powers of people of other races. [p.8]

In current educational settings, it's quite possible for me to sit in curriculum meetings and not comment when erroneous things are said about Aborigines or when white ethnicity is accepted as natural and unproblematic.

In the latter part of her paper McIntosh (1988: 16) adds as a white heterosexual woman:

My children do not have to answer questions about why I live with my partner (my husband).

I can travel alone [most places I would add] or with my husband without expecting embarrassment.

While these statements can well be connected to the kinds of knowledge and processes we develop in classrooms, my interest is in looking at how these points shape in very particular ways the what, when, where and how of curricular decision making.

In recent years, adult literacy curriculum documentation has increased. This process has had its limitations but many practitioners believe it has also caused them to confront the slippage between the rhetoric of a curriculum which meets students' needs and the vast range of political, historical and social factors merging to shape those needs.

In gatherings like this Forum, we can begin to understand the complexity of "difference" and the new thinking required to work through those differences, particularly for those of us who are not used to seeing ourselves as "racially" different or as having a "white ethnicity".

I am left with a whole string of considerations about my own practice as an academic who believes it is important to begin to publicly name the dilemmas inherent in literacy work for social justice.

I may have to accept that my intention of "doing good" as a genuine form of working with others may not be welcome. That my offers of collaboration at any point in time may be refused and that there are legitimate political and historical reasons for this.

I have to consider how my actions actually change things - that is not just to get more different types of books or resources into courses but actually *do* things in different ways. For example, how will the growing trend to professionalise the adult literacy field ensure for teachers the same kind of culturally gendered diversity as exists in student populations. And how will professional courses build on this

diversity given the powerful sifting effects of University selection processes.

What kinds of strategies will ensure that we aren't blinded to the discriminating ways in which we operate - just because it seems "natural" and obvious that that's the way things should be? My best intentions may not be inclusive - they may be controlling and limiting. And, what's worse, sometimes I may not know this.

Rather than looking to the "other" and asking her to tell stories about her life so I can understand her world, stories which are sometimes painful and render her more vulnerable in a hostile system, I am suggesting that women like myself begin to understand better our own ethnicities in the process of teaching and learning.

Postscript

The workshop session following this talk raised a number of issues which I was unable to explore during the panel. However, they are worth flagging here should my talk seem too simplistic.

First, the kinds of categories I have employed (white woman, other, non-white experience) are problematic but my main thrust has been that many adult literacy workers slip more readily into social groups which have not been disenfranchised in social, political and economic life. On the other hand, much literacy work is done by women. Second, literacy training focuses predominantly on what we (educators) can do for them (learners). While practitioners are encouraged to "learn from your students" and to negotiate the curriculum, the focus of much funding channels literacy practice along routes which help learners participate in economic and educational systems as they currently exist. This creates a number of tensions for teachers aiming to meet short term pragmatic needs in addition to long term changes learners might identify.

In terms of feminist work, writers (Jeffreys 1991; Lorde 1984, Amos & Parmar 1984) have suggested that white feminist explorations of experience may reproduce yet another pattern of silencing non-white women's experience. They suggest this is another form of consciousness raising which seeks to alleviate feelings of guilt. I agree, this is possible. My own approach struggles to be more useful and practical than this and to examine strategies which actually change the way I might operate - to begin to look at how I might shift some of the administrative practices which prevent diverse representation in decision making. I can only begin with the institutional climate over which I have some control and shift any centring which may act against work which can positively value the difference between us (and at the same time recognise that this is not an easy task).

Finally there are lively debates over the whole concept of "difference" and "other". What seems other to me may not be

reflected in that 'other' person's experience. So my challenge is to be constantly aware of the personal and the individual ways in which we experience and act on the world. By the same token, I am not yet able to let go of my view that some possibilities for employment, educatic n, social interaction, economic development and political life are based on one's positioning along a 'mythical norm' (Lorde 1984:116).

This norm defines more powerful individuals as "white, thin, male, young, heterosexual, Christian and financially secure".

Lorde says it's not possible to pick out one aspect of this norm as the facet which shapes identity. However, the more we resemble features of the 'mythical norm', the more able we are to 'cash in' (McIntosh 1988) on unearned privileges which are associated with these features.

In the adult literacy field, I believe that we have to begin to reveal some of the gaps and silences of a practice which doesn't acknowledge the white ethnicity and power of educators involved in literacy programs.

Lorde (1984: 123) has a powerful message for those of us who seek to use literacy work as a vehicle for empowerment. Citing Freire, she suggests "the true focus of revolutionary change is never merely the oppressive situations which we seek to escape, but the piece of the oppressor which is planted deep within each of us, and which knows only the oppressors' tactics, the oppressors' relationships".

During the next few years, I believe these are issues we will have to grapple with as literacy practice is incorporated into mainstream provision, as it inserts itself and gets inserted into vocational agendas which leave little room for talk of feminism(s) or oppression. Furthermore, the evolving bureaucracy of the literacy field is beginning to discover its own differences and will need to learn how to use them as strengths rather than be constrained by the rules of patriarchy. As Lorde (1984: 112) notes, these rules are powerful and work to separate rather than unite; "divide and conquer must become define and empower." This requires that we begin to think and relate in ways which may not even be clear in our own heads yet, but a women's forum seems to me to be the place to start.

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A crisis of identity: Developing strategies for gender inclusive literacy practices

Jeanne Solity

Developing from the more theoretical issues associated with the debates and discussions that took place in the earlier parts of the Women's Forum, this session focused on the more practical question of what types of literacy provision existed for women in Australia at the present time. In this workshop, I also wanted to explore practical problems associated with developing and sustaining women's literacy programs. I sought to refer to participants' own practice and my practical experience of working with women's literacy groups in Britain and Australia since the 1980s to develop strategies for implementing women's literacy programs.

Participants in this workshop expressed their concerns about the serious erosion of women's literacy programs set up by feminists through equal opportunity and social justice initiatives during the 1980s and 1990s. It was felt that women's literacy programs had been eroded by the current economic rationalist policies. These policies are primarily focused on skills-based testing and a limited theoretical focus which stresses assessing students in a limited range of linguistic competencies.

By focusing on the certification of skills and courses and the expectations on teachers for the grading of students, little time, it was suggested, was left for tutors to develop student-centred curriculum that allowed the students to negotiate their own learning. Governments are targeting economic motivation as the primary incentive to literacy in Australia but there is currently little funding available to implement women's literacy programs (eg, no full time coordinator exists in Australia despite the fact that 50% of students are women). The provision that does exist is piecemeal and often the one or two women's literacy programs that may have been implemented are one-off initiatives under equal opportunity or social justice initiatives. Funding is often curtailed after a year or so and these groups have to fold .

Juliet Millicent (1992) describes similar problems in England and describes the conflict of interest women face. the women she describes frequently cite personal fulfilment and self realisation as being as amongst their priorities for literacy education. The emphasis prescribed by existing government instrumentalities on vocational training and demand-led functional or linguistic skills-

based literacy, Millicent argues, does not allow 'literacy for change'. She describes the enthusiasm expressed by women in women only groups where they have access to fuller possibilities of knowledge, power and self identity.

The question Millicent raises is whether gender specific classes should form the basis of women's literacy programs. The answer lies in what Rob McCormack (1994) criticises as the limited range of disciplines that inform the newly implemented Certificate of Adult General Education in Victoria and adult literacy provision more generally in Australia. One of the most serious omissions is the failure to substantially include and incorporate feminist pedagogy and practices into mainstream literacy practices. Women only groups have always been an option within women's studies programs.

One of the reasons for titling this workshop 'The Identity Crisis' is my belief that women's identity is misconstructed in dominant literacy discourses and that women student's educational needs are misrepresented (Solity 1994). Referring to women's literacy in Canada, Jennifer Horsman (1989) is critical of literacy constructs that position women in familial and sociological stereotypes of character and identity. Brian Street (1992) describes literacy practices as reflecting social and cultural practises and how they are never 'psychologically innocent.' Kirkpatrick (1983) suggests that 'personhood is best viewed as a field that is ideologically structured in any society' and that 'the person constructs retain a core of values and meaning for social participants'. Street (1992) describes these judgements of people and events as 'moral' and frequently focused on notions of personhood: what is proper behaviour? what is human/not human? how are 'we' and 'they' classified in some universal world order which makes use of the concept of 'person'?

Kathleen Rockhill's (1987) research in Mexico confirms this by illustrating how uneducated Hispanic women endeavoured to dissociate themselves from their domestic identity and how 'domestic literacy' reinforces the very roles they seek to overcome by attending literacy classes. Women's constructed personhood within given sociological and psychological frames of identity were what women in literacy classes had sought to change.

My own experiences of a successful women's literacy program in Britain which ran from 1980 until 1988 are recorded in an MA Thesis entitled 'Working Class Women's Writing and Publishing' .I wanted to offer successful examples of women creating their own literacy curriculum and texts around their personal experiences. The stories within these texts were decoded from middle class feminist theoretical texts on these issues and the recorded writings were of women's individual experiences. The women's writing was critical of the existing frames of personhood, self identity and knowledge that they had rejected.

The women in the Eden Grove Women's Literacy and Publishing Cooperative produced 5,000 copies of three books that analysed and decoded middle class feminist texts and analysed their experiences in the areas of language, health and work. These texts were produced and

published by this group and sold to many other women's and mixed literacy groups in Britain and other countries. The group produced its own television documentary that illustrated how other women could discuss and write their own literacy texts and literature. Consciousness raising discussions in the group formed the basis of the writings.

Sadly, although successful in setting up a centre for women's literacy and learning, these classes and programs were replaced by new certified courses in Britain that replaced the individuality and difference of women's experience and learning with functional and competency based graded literacy programs. The new ideological stance in these courses reiterated dominant discourses that placed women in the oppressed sociological, psychological and epistemological position the women in the Eden Grove Women's Literacy programs had sought to redress.

Jane Mace, a leading writer on literacy in Britain, at a 1992 British conference of Women's Literacy for Development records her own disillusionment.

> *For the last two years, the twenty years of advance in women's education in London, where we are now sitting, has been disintegrating. Women literacy educators, many now in senior positions in local authorities, are having to act as agents of the cuts in the very programs they have made their own. These programs have been deliberately designed to attract women, recognise their experience and knowledge, and have been taught and organised by women.*

She refers to the more profound critique she believes must now happen, as voiced by Canadian educators in the same field, of the ideological assumptions underlying concepts of 'literacy' and 'illiteracy'. She sees literacy provision currently in Britain as only offering literacy skills and training in the dominant discourses of the western patriarchal society. The drive she sees in British literacy programs towards vocational and employment based literacy, is not unlike the current emphasis in Australia. She warns us to delineate between 'economic productivity for women or promotion'. Women's literacy is about economic productivity *and* about personal development and about collective change. Before the mould is set, I believe Australian adult literacy educators should take heed of the British literacy education experience to avoid losing the gains women have worked so hard to achieve.

In my research toward a PhD in this field, I have advocated a women's study module within adult literacy to offer women a critique of their own oppression. This would include, as Rob McCormack (1994) advises, a wider range of critical access to the broader disciplines within such certificates as the Certificate of Adult General Education. This would also include feminist pedagogy and practice, which has substantially documented women's oppression under the given constructs of knowledge and identity. Feminist research that places the experiences of women as central also needs to be substantially funded to fully address what women's educational needs are and how

they can best be met.

Women theorists in this field were given a valuable opportunity in this forum to enter into the dominant literacy pedagogy and practices. Meaghan Morris (1990) reminds feminist theorists and educators of their strategic lack of access within dominant discourses. She advocated that we return to the historical and documented findings of feminism to record and show the history and lineage of our own achievements. Women writers must form their own platform and acknowledge and reference other female writers and educators to overcome their lack of perceived continuity of thought. It is important that we are critical of any writings on literacy that do not represent women's experience and include feminist theory and pedagogy as central to any questions relating to literacy.

The one token article on women in literacy in collections of papers or pedagogical texts is not enough to redress the current discrimination operative against women in the majority of literacy programs in Australia. Women theorists and educators must enter into the dominant discourses of adult literacy and remind the policy makers that they are misrepresenting women's identities under the current non-gendered misrepresentation of literacy students and hence misinterpreting women students' educational needs.

In this workshop, I also wanted to highlight the current philosophical critique of moral identity as shown in Elizabeth Porter's (1991) recent appraisal of the way philosophy has dualistically constructed moral identity to the disadvantage of women. Porter shows how by not taking into account the sexual identity of individuals, males are construed as 'the norm' and are attributed positive character qualities, while women are attributed negative traits as the 'other' or 'deviant' of the norm. Women become relegated to marginal sociological, political, psychological and political positions.

Women become therefore trapped within the private sector and men within the public sector. An either/or duality of moral identities is attributed to males and females, separating and dividing the sexes. Porter sees that in philosophy there is no incorporation of sexual identity into the constructs of moral identity. In the majority of literacy discourses, students are accorded a non-gendered identity and hence misrepresented. Feminist pedagogy and practices over the last 40 years have recorded extensively how women have been structurally and systemically oppressed within other fields of knowledge. The critiques of the constructs of personhood allow theorists and educators to argue for literacy programs that reflect these critiques to women students so that they can represent and be represented in a way that accords them their individual identity and fuller selfhood.

Porter (1991) also describes how women's knowledge within these constructs has been negated. The prominence of male thought as 'logical, rational and objective' also attributes in these dualistically constructed philosophical notions of moral identity an either/or situation where women are attributed with 'irrational, illogical, emotional, passionate' thought, underplaying their intellectual

potential and representation.

Erica Hart's (1992) recent reappraisal of Descartes' seventeenth century scientific rationalism records women's exclusion from these scientific, rationalist, objective discourses.

> *Viewed in the longue durée of discursive history, however, the Cartesian legacy contributed heavily to a totalising rational discourse of abstract universality and objectivity from which women by the historical contingencies of their gender became excluded.*

These arguments are useful theoretical tools to argue for change from the rationalist reasons that drive literacy provision at the present time. Porter (1991) advocates that we reappraise these concepts of moral identity and accord women the possibility of rational passionate knowledge and depict women in such a way that it becomes possible for them to obtain a fuller moral and intellectual status. I am arguing for the new general education certificate for literacy not to reflect a 'modernistic' type of ideology that limits the moral and intellectual development of both sexes but to be critical of the given constructs of the patriarchal and modernistic order.

I am arguing for a return to the 'literacy subject' in their multitude of differences and with a recognition of their diverse literacies and knowledges. The true identity of students can evolve through their own self representation, negotiation of their own curriculum and educational needs. This would allow men and women within adult literacy an adult general education that makes accessible the greater possibilities of fuller selfhood and a broader range of access to all knowledge.

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Talking on the outer edge

Merilyn Childs

I have met brave women who are exploring the outer edge of human possibility, with no history to guide them and with the courage to make themselves vulnerable that I find moving beyond words.
Francine Klagsbrun (date unknown)

In April 1994 in Sydney, I went to the Women's Forum on Gender, Language and Critical Literacy. A lot of good things happened at that Forum, and it was the first opportunity that we have had as feminists working in this field in Australia to get together and talk to each other. It was well worth giving up a few days of my holidays to attend.

The Forum also called into being (once more) within me a range of conflicts that I believe are worth looking at, both in a personal sense so that I can continue to make greater meaning for myself as a feminist in the 1990s, but also publicly because I believe that it is important to ask questions about what happens for women in public forums. One of the conference speakers said "We need to learn to live with the tensions", yet I believe the tensions we live with can never be assumed to be the same, and that assumptions about class, race and privilege run the risk of making women's diverse experiences falsely homogenous.

I went to the Forum having completed some university study on Cultural Studies, having written before from a post-modernist perspective, and therefore attended from the privileged perspective of someone who "knew" the language being used at the forum. I went with friends who identify and try to live as feminists. Thoughtful intelligent women, with deep and evolving understandings of themselves as contemporary women, making meaning for themselves in what Gee (1994) has called the "lifeworld". But they did not have the language of post-modernist or post-structuralist theory.

In the plenary session on the first day, a range of academic women spoke from varying perspectives about the Forum's topic. Most speakers spoke usec' the language of post-modernism. One woman in particular spoke so quickly that it was impossible to take notes. Her arguments were complex and couched in high academic language. Although only one of a panel, she spoke for over half an hour.

Not one woman (including me) asked her to slow down, or interrupted her to seek clarification, definitions or examples. Not one woman stood up and said "What is post modernism? I don't know what you mean." Not one woman interrupted at any time to question post-modernism as a concept per se at any time during the Forum.

I watched myself and my female colleagues with puzzlement and interest. Why did we (and I think using "we" might be problematic) not interrupt? Why did we apparently as one person accept the given without negotiation? How were we making meaning of the experience and what were we producing between us as a result of that meaning?

Did we collectively accept academic voices as the truth challengers/holders? Did we accept that the language of post-modernist feminist theory is essential to feminist understandings of self, voice or mind? Why didn't I speak up? I can't say that I am unvoiced, nor that I am afraid to speak in public forums, for I am neither of these things. I had problems with some of what I perceived as happening, and yet I did not speak publicly. Why? What was happening at the Forum, and what could I learn from those dynamics, as I saw them, to help me move forward to greater understandings when it was over?

Gendered voices: White tablecloth talk

Over dinner, some answers to my questions emerged. I joined in a discussion with some of my female colleagues. My subjective view of that discussion is that the day's proceedings were discussed using the language of victims - within that language my colleagues had assumed, for the moment, the role of victim. They felt powerless and alienated. They saw themselves as lacking - they couldn't understand the language of the Forum, and therefore, they were failures. They had personalised and internalised their difficulty with the language as being their fault, and that they somehow were not smart enough, or sophisticated enough, or well-enough read, to understand what was being said, and therefore, in one way or another, they could not truly understand the concepts presented, become actively engaged, or synthesise or critique them.

At the beginning of the discussion, when we were each unsure of the collective experience of the group, (was there an internal question of shame: "Am I the only one who doesn't understand?"), some adopted a deficit understanding of themselves. At that time, some commented that they regretted coming. Somewhere during the discussion, notes summarising what each woman said were taken on a tablecloth. Slowly the women as a group adopted a voiced non-victim position. A collective understanding emerged about common issues that concerned us. We decided we would give feedback to the Forum organisers about our feelings, and I believe that this was a crucial step. Because it was a feminist Forum, this was seen as possible, and indeed, the organisers welcomed and acted creatively on the feedback they were given by this informal group.

As a result, the morning session next day began with an opportunity for all the women present to discuss the sessions thus far. The women did so in small groups, and the opportunity was used with much appreciation and engagement. I found it interesting that in the group I joined comments were made like "I thought I was the only one who

didn't understand". As a result of this discussion, subsequent speakers made changes, and a session was organised for the afternoon to explain post-modernist theory to those women who did not know what it was. (Though I do not know if they were invited to engage critically with it.)

Within/against: The politics of being women

I felt that these were great and responsive outcomes that drew women back from a position of alienation, and demonstrated the flexibility of the organisers. Yet questions remained with me. The Forum itself was dealing with gender, language and literacy, and it seemed to me interesting that our perception of the issues of gender, language and literacy was as something that our students 'out there' deal with, whereas the Forum clearly demonstrated to me the importance of inclusive practices at all times between the academy and practitioners.

As we all know, inclusivity takes time, and a determination to question language, cultural practices and the assumptions we all make. I suspect that as women we generally continue to create meaning for ourselves within a world view that means we are socially caring, nurturing and supportive. (This is a generalisation, and how we construct ourselves as "female" and whatever life-experiences we might have impact on this generalisation) Perhaps we did not interrupt because we rarely choose social options that might place us as non-nurturers - as what would be seen in women as rude, uncaring, unfeminine, unsupportive. As feminists we want to support each other in our attempts to find voice, to tell our stories, to be political. Does a dilemma arise here when being a "good feminist" colludes with those qualities that might also make us "good girls"? If we are "good girls" how can we also be heard if "good children [read girls] are defined as meek, considerate, unselfish and perfectly law-abiding." (Bradshaw: 67: 1988). Does the "ethic of care and nurture" (Lee 1994: 16) at the basis of progressive pedagogy, in practice lead to limitations in our perception of ourselves as actors who cannot, for example, create chaos or "misbehave"?

If this is the case, what questions do we need to ask of ourselves about the social options open to us, and of our understandings of what "being heard" might be? Did we remain silent because it was not nice to interrupt? Do nice feminists behave in certain ways, even if those ways might be to our detriment? More than this, do nice professional women behave in certain ways? If that is true, were we, in our own ways, sacrificing self for community or other? If we were, what implications does this self-sacrifice have for our understandings of ourselves as women that make us different to our mothers and their mothers before them? Was it that personally I was not prepared to sacrifice comfort and feeling OK for community, when I knew the

community was struggling with what was going on? What is the balance between action/passivity, personal/community, caring/caretaking?

Do we choose to be "considerate, unselfish and perfectly law-abiding" (in our public behaviour) because we do not want to behave like men, who we may identify as behaving in ways that are anathema to feminism's understanding of itself? How do we resolve the dilemma of finding voice as females, and what ways are open to women to engage in debate that resolve these dilemmas?

Or did it have nothing to do with being nice? Did it have to do with power and class? Did we choose the sacrifice, or did some women - the non-academic women or the women not 'in-the-know' - initially perceive that they had no choice and no voice? Why does this perception remain? What is it that stops women from speaking, interrupting, disagreeing or putting forward alternative perspectives? How did the language of the Forum reinforce the difficulties some women have to be heard? How did it help women "validate women's sensitivity to and perceptions about the world and understand and explore our commonalities and differences" (Bell 1993: 110)?

Gendered spaces: Beyond white tablecloths

As a statement of solidarity amongst difference and division between women, Barbara Deming (1984) wrote some time ago: "Our movement is composed of all kinds of groups and all kinds of individuals ... We will need every one of us. We are all part of one another". Perhaps what happened at the Forum was that we wanted to find sameness rather than commonality; we wanted to find resolution and a place of speaking rather than conflict.

Recently at the 6th International Feminist Book Fair, feminist poet Chrystos reportedly said that her (American Indian) people "had never stopped being warrior women and we cannot be reduced by feminist theories" and Somer Brodribb said "we cannot require women of colour to soften or sublimate their anger". Within/against feminism, there is still much to talk about, including how we do that talking.

Politically, we need to be honest and acknowledge that power relationships exist between women. The academy continues to be given, and claims for itself, power of voice and privilege. Practitioners collude with this allocation of power to academic voice, and often fail to recognise the different but valuable contribution they can make to Forums of this kind. Perhaps it was for this reason that no papers or workshops were given by non-studying teachers in the field? To be honest, that reluctance was in the back of my mind. Was it in others? Who do we imagine ourselves to be as practising ALBE teachers when we do not take the risk and speak to/with/against

what we perceive to be "the academy"? What does this say for the idea of grass roots feminism? Or teenager feminism? Or the "feminists of the suburbs" as my friend Liz and I laughingly referred to ourselves in the past? Or for aged feminists living in Aged Care Units? Or for ALBE teacher feminists reluctant to speak at Feminist Forums?

Jane Cafarella (in Scutt 1992:20) writes "women must learn to be risk takers".

The organisers of this Forum took the excellent creative step of bringing together a diverse group of women to talk. I hope that we continue to look not only at the subject of language, literacy and gender, but also to be political in the sense that we continue to explore inclusive practices for ourselves (by "ourselves", I mean the diverse cultural mix of ALBE teachers that may not have been represented at the Forum) as well as the adults we work with. Ways that encourage more women to experiment as question-askers, option-explorers and answer-finders and above all, to take risks and for those risks to be invited and validated. Ways that do not re-marginalise women who may well be prepared to speak and risk, but did not see the Forum as a space that spoke to or for them.

I look forward to the next Forum and the "good talk" (Wilson 1984) that I feel sure will come out of it. As Alison Lee (1994: 17) argues, "what we can learn from feminist critique of gendered power relations is that power operates to construct all social relations. It does not disappear when it is rendered invisible within liberal and progressive practices".

I would add to her analysis the comment that power does not disappear even when it might appear invisible between women because of the ways we see and talk about our practices.

Each one, pull one

(Thinking of Lorraine Hansberry)

We must say it all, and as clearly
as we can. For, even when we are dead,
they are busy
trying to bury us.

Were we black? Were we women? Were we gay?
Were we the wrong shade of black? Were we yellow?
Did we, God forbid, love the wrong person, country
or politics?.....

But, most of all, did we write exactly what we saw,
as clearly as we could? Were we unsophisticated
enough to cry and scream?.....

Alice Walker (1991)

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Postscript: Notes for a film
(based on the text: 'Women's Forum: Gender, Language and Critical Literacy')

Delia Bradshaw

TITLE: ***Spaces for Resistance***

Themes

commonality
critical perspectives
difference
totalising narratives
domination
sites of power
silence
words of power

Metaphors

Reclaiming a site
Rewriting regulations

Site / location

Manly Quarantine Station Convention Centre, Sydney, Australia
Reasons for this choice:

- good for getting close-ups
- good for seeing 'the big picture'
- its signage gives prominence to the concepts "reclamation" and "reconstruction"

Characters

A polyphony of women's voices, tones, positions, perspectives
Women of all ages, simultaneously students and scholars, from all around Australia

Opening shot

Zoom in on the following sentence from the information brochure for the Quarantine Station:

> ***"This site is undergoing conservation work so it may be open to wider public usage."***

Quite a good motto for the Forum? For all education endeavours?

Postscript: Notes for a film

Delia Bradshaw

INTRODUCTORY VOICEOVER

"Between 1908 and 1924, the dominant discourses for the Manly Quarantine Station were Containment, Isolation and Domination. In 1994, the dominant discourses on this same site are Openness and Access. How does Education and Training in 1994 compare as a site? Is it more or less like the Quarantine Station in 1908 or in 1994?

What happens if we substitute "education and training" for "quarantine" in the following regulations known as the Quarantine Act 1908-24?

(a) No person performing quarantine (education and training) at a quarantine (education and training) station, and no person in a quarantine (education and training) station during quarantine (education and training), shall go beyond the bounds of the quarantine (education and training) station;

(b) No person or class of persons in quarantine (education and training) whose movements are by the officer in charge restricted to a certain area within the quarantine (education and training) station shall go outside of the area fixed;

(c) All persons in quarantine (education and training) shall submit to inspection and ... examination at such times as the officer in charge requires;

(d) All persons in quarantine (education and training) shall duly observe the notices signed by the officer in charge and posted on the recognised noticeboard.

The Quarantine Station is being reclaimed, the regulations revised and reconstruction is underway. Isn't that what all of us at the Forum are about? about reclaiming endangered educational sites, reconstructing sites at risk and rewriting "the rules"?

SNIPPETS OF SCRIPT

Voice 1:

"I must remember the power of "s", to talk of feminisms not feminism, critical pedagogies not critical pedagogy, literacies not literacy. It's a matter of moving from "mono" to "multi". I'd never realised how powerful one letter - "s" - could be."

Voice 2:

"I must be wary of being mesmerised by certain forms of alliteration. It's so tempting to tune out when the latest jargon muscles in. We all need to resist becoming

deregulated	*profitable*	*competitive*
deinstitutionalised	*portable*	*commodified*
deprofessionalised	*performance-proven*	*competent*
DEET-driven	*packaged*	*certified*
DELIVERERS pushing	*PRODUCTS to produce*	*CLIENTS."*

Voice 3:
"Whose voice is that? Whose definitions? Whose stories? Whose knowledge?"

Voice 4:
"Who's taking over this show? Who's dominating? Who's been silenced? Has anyone been abused?"

Voice 5:
"What questions have I not asked today? What haven't I interrogated?"

Voice 6:
"While I certainly don't want to play Atlas, carrying the whole world on my shoulders, can I honestly say that at least once a day I practise what I preach ?

POSTSCRIPT
Still shot of the question: "How can I create a space for resistance in the next 24 hours?"

CREDITS
Organisers
Caterers
Park rangers
Manly Quarantine Station Convention Centre, Sydney Harbour National Park
Weather
All participants

Women's Forum:
Gender, Language and Critical Literacy

Program

Manly Quarantine Station Convention Centre
Sydney, Australia
7-9 April 1994

What is a feminist critical literacy pedagogy?

What is the impact of current policies from a gender perspective?

Where are we with equity and inclusivity?

An opportunity to examine
teachers' work
pedagogy
policy

The Program

Thursday 7th April

5:30 - 7:00 pm **Arrival at Forum Venue** (Welcome drinks from 6:30)

7:30 **Dinner with Prologue by *Cate Poynton* and Entertainment**

Friday 8th April

9:15 am **Introduction**
Rosie Wickert, Alison Lee, Patricia Ward

9:30 - 11:00 **Panel: What is a feminist critical literacy pedagogy?**
Betty Johnston, Alison Lee, Parlo Singh

11:00 - 11:30 **Morning Tea**

11:30 - 12:30 **Workshops**

Panel Speakers An opportunity to continue the discussions of the preceding panel presentations.

Tricia Bowen

A feminist approach to critical literacy pedagogy: A view from the edge

In this workshop, I would like to describe my understanding and involvement in feminist literacy pedagogy, incorporating post structuralist perspectives, collective memory work, writing, and visual and performing arts. I would also like to discuss tensions which inevitably arise while working within masculinist paradigms which dictate funding, policy and curriculum directions. In discussing a range of issues, I will draw on my work on two community-based projects: one in country NSW, the other in inner-city Melbourne.

Geri Pancini

Reading the academic essay as a site of resistance

There is no such thing as frictionless learning: resistance is both a resistance *against* and simultaneously *the means by which* a student engages with knowledge. In this session, we will consider an essay written by a mature-aged woman studying first year Arts which transgresses the boundaries of the academic essay genre. We will consider resistance on the student's part and suggest the implications and possible pedagogic consequences that might be produced through such an analysis. As teachers, and more specifically as feminist teachers, how should we interpret and respond to such an essay? And to what extent are the transgressions in her essay instances of the fundamental aporias confronting contemporary feminist intellectuals?

Terri Morley-Warner

"Once upon a time...": An examination of some picture books in the light of feminist critical literacy pedagogy

The picture book can convey powerful messages to young children and is also being increasingly used with secondary students to engage with literary theory and analysis. While the stereotypes of many traditional fairy tales are well known, the assumptions made about gender in more modern popular picture books are not so obvious. Participants will be invited to explore some texts to examine ideologies both in the language and the illustration; strategies that enable the reader (child, parent, teacher) to uncover and question these assumptions will be suggested.

12:30 - 2:00 pm **Lunch**

2:00 - 3:30 **Panel: Policy, organizations and teachers' work: A gender perspective**
Nicole Gilding, Jill Sanguinetti, Hermine Scheeres

3:30 - 4:00	**Afternoon tea**
4:00 - 5:00	**Workshops**
Panel Speakers	An opportunity to continue the discussions of the preceding panel presentations.
Jennifer Angwin	**The reconstruction of women's work in adult education** As a result of the implementation of the ALLP and the concurrent reconstructing of education as a labour market, women in the post-compulsory sector of education are finding that their work is being continually redefined by those outside, whose agendas barely represent the field of education. Teachers' understandings of their work as language teachers, their autonomy as language assessors and curriculum developers, and their opportunities to develop a career are being increasingly limited. The very nature of their work, whilst coherent to the economic rationalists in Canberra, no longer represents the field that these women have worked to establish. This paper will discuss research (some in progress and some completed) which has revealed a number of the contradictions that we are now facing. The research is now being continued with Jill Blackmore and Sally Leavold which is looking not only in ALBE but also in higher education. It is informed by feminist post modern research, in attempting to examine the gendered identity of women in this sector of education.
Carmel Darling	**'How come *you* work in vocational education and training?'** Carmel Darling, from the Northern Territory Employment and Training Authority, would like to invite participants to a workshop where they can share thoughts and experiences on the dual marginalisation of women and the language/literacy/communication field in Vocational Education and Training. Carmel would like to hear how other women manage the fight towards the centre. She will offer her reflections on her own experiences as a starting point for the discussion of questions such as: To what extent is the adult language and literacy field marginalised in VET because women (in education) are perceived as owning it? How gender inclusive are the masculinist assumptions underpinning NFROT's notions of 'competency', 'performance' and 'outcomes'? Do they serve to devalue or make invisible linguistic competencies? To what extent do the politics of gender and literacy affect the career paths available to women in VET?
Sally Leavold	**Reconstructing gender roles in workplace education** As a result of policy development following Australia Reconstructed, the Australian Language and Literacy Policy and Workplace Education Language and Literacy, there has been a rapid growth in the number and type of programs being taught by women in workplace settings. With the parallel development of a range of industry specific certificates, the work of a language and literacy teacher has changed dramatically. Recent research has shown certain contradictions in these programs for the teachers, most of whom are women, and students, who are being reconstructed as deficient workers, measured by their ability to answer written questions about their work practices. What are the issues facing women being positioned in these male dominated workplaces? This study of language and gender raises a number of questions for the future of the labour market and WELL programs and their implementation.
Patricia Ward	**Doing government-funded research in adult literacy from a feminist perspective: Is it possible?** Drawing on the work of Lather, and other feminist theorists, I want to ask whether feminist approaches to research can be incorporated into adult literacy and numeracy projects bound by government funding and reporting criteria. In the first part of the session, I will look at the methodologies, theoretical underpinnings and recommendations cited in the reports of some of the major research projects conducted in Australia in adult literacy in the last six years. Case studies will illustrate major themes or questions. The main part of the session will then be a discussion of ensuing issues, eg, where are the spaces to do research according to feminist principles or goals? Does academic and/or postgraduate research afford (different) opportunities for feminist research? More specific questions, directions and outcomes of the session will depend on the participants; my hope is that a range of research experiences, expertise and perspectives will be represented.
5:00 - 5:30 pm	**Summary of Day 1: *Anna Yeatman***
7:30 pm	**Dinner**

Saturday 9th April

9:30 -11:00 am	**Panel: Concepts and Practices of Equity and Inclusivity** *Elaine Butler, Marta Rado, Sue Shore and Josefa Sobski*
11:00 -11:30	**Morning tea**
11:30 -12:30	**Workshops**
Panel Speakers	An opportunity to continue the discussions of the preceding panel presentations.
Sue Shore	In addition to the workshop mentioned above, Sue Shore will lead a session which will follow on from the panel discussion but with particular reference to the field of adult literacy and basic education. She will draw on her experiences in working on a recent project and its report entitled *Positively Different: Guidance for Developing Inclusive Adult Literacy, Language and Numeracy Curricula.*
Jeannie Solity	**'Women's il/literacy - a crisis of identity: Developing strategies for gender inclusive adult literacy practices'** In this session I will address the practical problems associated with developing gender inclusive women's literacy programs, practices, methodology and resources. I will focus on my M.A. and Ph. D research into women's literacy which will address the pedagogical problems arising from my empirical research, discussing possible stratelies for change. Drawing on my five years' experience in London with 'The Eden Grove Women's Literacy and Publishing Co-operative', I will show a video of a women's literacy group in operation preparing their own literacy curriculum and texts. In the second half of the workshop, I will invite participants to draw on their own experience of working with women literacy students and invite them to collectively devise strategies and recommendations for the conference so that implementation of gender inclusive adult literacy pedagogy and practises become operational.
Wendy Waring	**Getting the words out** This workshop will concentrate on the practical issues and political implications of women publishing research in the adult literacy field. The first part of the workshop will address practical questions: How do I get started? How do I stay motivated? How do I make my case study into a research project? my conference talk into a scholarly article? How do I connect with readers? For the second half, we will spend some time addressing issues relevant to women publishing in an increasingly 'professionalised' field: What is the context for women writing and publishing? What is/should/could be the impact of women writing in the field of adult literacy and numeracy? Writing networks: who are you writing for?
Alison Lee & Cate Poynton	**Gender and Language** This workshop focuses on three important ways in which language practices are gendered. One purpose of the workshop is to trial a teaching resource currently being developed for use in Adult Literacy and Basic Education. However, the language issues apply to pedagogic situations across a broad range of sites. The overall aim of the session is to develop skills in analysis of gender and language with a view to developing i) an understanding of gender relations in pedogogic interactions and ii) a range of activities which promote gender-critical reading practices.
12:30 - 2:00 pm	**BBQ**
2:00 - 4:00 pm	**Final Session** The structure of this final session will be negotiated during the course of the Forum. Our hope is that it will include reflection on the previous days' discussions as part of an ongoing process to develop agendas and networks and to plan projects and activities.
4:00 pm	**Close of Forum**

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TAFE NSW

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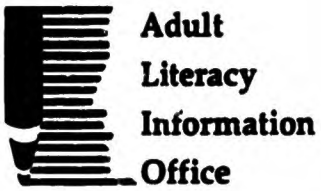

END

U.S. Dept. of Education

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Date Filmed
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U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI)
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