

Re-Visioning Self and Society: Stories of Career Education for Women

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Certificate of Originality

I certify that the substance of this thesis has not already been submitted for any degree and is not being currently submitted for any other degrees.

I certify that to the best of my knowledge any help received in preparing this thesis, and all sources used, have been acknowledged in this thesis.



Debra Evelyn

Abstract

The author works in a special access program called the Certificate in Career Education for Women (CEW), run by the Technical and Further Education Commission of New South Wales throughout the state, as well as in her particular rural location on the south-eastern coast of Australia. Women come to the course from diverse backgrounds, seeking to increase their confidence, knowledge and power, and the woman has been fascinated by their often-remarkable successes in achieving their goals. Therefore the woman also sets out in search of knowledge and power in her world as woman and teacher, seeking higher education, becoming student and researcher, to gain understanding of the learning that occurs in the course, and if it is indeed, 'special'.

Seeking ways to write about her self and her students that are empowering, the woman finds feminist company to make space for their voices, knowing that the personal also speaks the political. She challenges traditional social science conventions, combining academic and literary genres to create a many-layered narrative. The woman's voice tells her own story of university learning through various social contexts. The voices of the women from the CEW course share their stories of learning together and as individual adult learners in a feminist program. The stories form a tapestry of tales about career education for women, which are in dialogue with each other and the audience, as well as in conversation with the writing and research of other authors, both academic and literary. Narrative theory frames the stories, constructing the text but simultaneously naming it as construct, conjuring more questions.

In this way the woman explores and examines major themes that are crucial to women's learning in a range of specific social contexts. Diverse voices and issues interweave: from methods to space, from writing to time, from work to family, from life to death, from globalisation to resistance, from social isolation to social contact, from separating to connecting people, power and knowledge. Insights are gained but complexities are not diminished with

overly simplistic solutions. The competing claims made for and against academic language that is clear and accessible, and the conflicting demands and values of industrial versus organic time for work, education, family, and community, are two such issues where one answer for all women in all contexts is neither possible nor appropriate, but where opening the issues for discussion is an impetus to new knowledge and change. One firm educational recommendation, however, is recognition of the shocking prevalence of violence and trauma affecting too many women's lives. In the Australian context the woman advocates addressing this through a range of actions, support systems, staff training and specific course offerings, including self-defense for women and girls.

Another finding is the strong need for recognition of women's historical contribution to adult education aimed at social justice. Feminist findings and concerns still sit on the fringes of the academic mainstream of adult education. Despite the massive and innovative contributions by women through research, teaching and learning practices over the past thirty years, these remain marginalised and ghostly, almost 'disappeared' from view. Like the terrible violence and trauma that oppresses women and underpins their educational struggles, the widespread and innovatory work of women in adult education, as they collectively re-vision themselves and their worlds, negotiating difference, conflict and change to survive and thrive against the odds, is too often written out of the official records. The liberating knowledge thus gained about adult education is sidelined and undervalued. This tapestry of tales is one attempt to tell the truths learnt from lives too often left out.

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