

Chapter 1 Equilibrium

An “ideal” narrative begins with a stable situation which is disturbed by some power or force. There results a state of disequilibrium; by the action of a force directed in the opposite direction, the equilibrium is re-established; the second equilibrium is similar to the first but the two are never identical (Todorov, Tzvetan, 1977, p. 111).

Beginning

Narrative has never been merely entertainment for me. It is, I believe, one of the principal ways in which we absorb knowledge. I hope you will understand, then, why I begin these remarks with the opening phrase of what must be the oldest sentence in the world, and the earliest one we remember from childhood: “Once upon a time” (Morrison, Toni, 1994, p. 7).

A woman embarked on a journey seeking knowledge of her world and power to not only survive but thrive in that world, with a higher degree qualification. At first she was blithe; blissful in her almost-ignorance of what was entailed in such a quest. She knew where to begin: what she wanted to research, her interest. It all seemed relatively simple. She set forth carelessly, with gusto, sparing no thought for the terrain she would encounter, nor noticing the tiny seeds of success and failure nestled about her being, in the fabric of her travelling clothes.

This woman was what many people of her time would have described as a feminist; she was also an educator. For more than eight years as part of her work she had organised and taught on women’s courses in two country towns on the south-eastern coast of the huge island continent called Australia in the southern hemisphere of the world, in the geopolitical subdivision named the state of New South Wales.

The course was one of two special access programs offered fee-free to women by the Technical and Further Education Commission (TAFE) in diverse locations

across the state.¹ The Certificate in Career Education for Women (CEW) was the full-time course, running for eighteen weeks, usually timetabled for four days, within school hours.² At her campus, students spent this time updating and upgrading their general education in subjects such as Access to Careers, Women and Cultural Studies, Mathematical Discovery, Science Rediscovered and Language and Study Skills. The women were also introduced to computer operations for three hours per week and other work-related electives. As coordinator the woman had introduced Senior First Aid as a subject, which provided a qualification for numerous workplaces as well as useful knowledge for the women's everyday lives. The second vocational elective was chosen with student input and varied from Horticulture to Occupational Health and Safety, Transforming Conflict, Negotiation Skills and Basic Automotive Skills. Towards the end of the course the students chose an area of interest and completed a week's work placement. Most subjects in the course were graded as passes and much of the coursework was limited to that which could be completed during class times. Teaching staff were especially selected as suitable for respective subjects and their commitment to women as a student group. The course could be seen as women-centred, as outlined by Maggie Coats (1994, pp. 62-4), giving space for the experience of women, placing personal experience in a wider social context, encouraging exploration, participation and group support.

The aim of the Certificate in Career Education for Women was to meet the needs of mature-aged women seeking to re-enter the workforce or further education and training. Just like the woman undertaking her higher degree by research, the women who enrolled in the course were seeking knowledge and power to survive and thrive in the world, and the woman observed that the course seemed greatly successful in achieving that goal. At the end of each semester, she had noticed that there were remarkable changes visible in many of the women who

¹ The other course, called Work Opportunities of Women (WOW) is offered by TAFE Outreach part-time, usually for two days per week.

² The course has since been re-named the Certificate in Career Education and Employment for Women (CEEW) and re-structured to allow more subject choices.

completed CEW. The students seemed notably more positive about themselves and their future prospects.

Over time, she had begun to have chance encounters with some of the women one, two, three or more years later. Often, she would see them on a street, in a shopping centre, at a supermarket checkout, or recognize them at various workplaces, where they would exchange greetings, keen to describe how they had gained employment, or had successfully completed studies in a particular field. Sometimes they told of how they had adjusted and re-adjusted their goals to suit their circumstances. Frequently they seemed animated, proud. Sometimes she would also see them appearing as prizewinners at TAFE Award presentations, because they had excelled in their various choices of further study. Occasionally she did not recognize them immediately, for their outward appearance and manner had so altered.

Years passed and she pondered this. She realised that other students in other courses and subjects she taught on certainly achieved successes. Yet the changes in the confidence and approach to life chances of the students did not always appear as immediately dramatic or lasting, as those apparent in many of the women who completed this Certificate in Career Education for Women. She wondered if the starting points of the students in other courses she taught on were different, for this would explain the variance in the end points they reached. Yet when she reflected on this theory, it did not seem greatly supported by her observations: for every one of the students who entered the women's course came with a complex life story.

While each of the student's experience was individual, looked at overall, groups were representative of a common range of female disadvantage: the women had often experienced limited opportunities in education or work because of gender, class and race discrimination. They had frequently only had poorly paid, casual

or part-time jobs. They had often been out of paid work for some time, labouring in the unpaid 'domestic' sphere: raising children, caring for partners, parents or other family members.

Even in a small country location the twelve to fifteen women who enrolled each semester often represented the diversity of current Australian society. In some groups a small number of Koori women were present in the classroom; a large number of participants were from Anglo-Celtic backgrounds, smaller numbers had cultural backgrounds originating in various parts of Europe, South America and Asia. The women were often 'immigrants': some from other countries, including those learning English as their second language, and, most often, from other cities or towns. Many of the course participants were sole parents; others had de facto or marriage partners. All encountered varying degrees of isolation, support and resistance for their educational efforts from partners and children, family and friends. While the ages of most women who enrolled in the course ranged from the mid-twenties to the late forties, periodically a younger woman and more frequently older women joined the course.

In addition, many of the women who came to the course were at different stages of managing life changes, representative of the vast array of issues that affect people's lives in adulthood. Many women were negotiating transitions in their family, partnership or sexuality. Single mothers with teenagers faced the loss of their income and status as sole parent pensioners when their children neared the age of sixteen³. Widows and daughters who had nursed partners and parents faced the loss of their carers' pensions as well as the loss of their loved ones. Some women had experienced divorce unwillingly; others had chosen it in the face of relationship failure. Women had recently acknowledged their own sexual identities as lesbians; some were adjusting to the identification of their child as

³ The regulations regarding the re-named 'parenting payments' were changed in 2003 so that single mothers are encouraged then progressively pressured to return to work or training when their youngest child reaches the age of six and then thirteen.

homosexual and the discriminatory attitudes and pressures these changes involved.

Women enrolled who experienced physical, psychiatric, neurological or intellectual disabilities. Some women experienced pain from back or limb damage; others had memory loss and learning problems from brain injuries. Still other women's abilities to learn and work were affected by hearing impairments, bipolar disorder, chronic illness, eating disorders, and post-natal depression.

Women faced issues that originated in the realms of their childhood as well as issues that occurred in their present day lives. Some struggled with their own experiences of incest and child sexual assault, others with these experiences in the lives of their children; some with sexual assault in adulthood. Some had experienced childhood neglect, violence or emotional abuse; some were still threatened by violence and abuse. Some women had been raised by drug and alcohol addicted parents, some struggled with their own drug and alcohol addictions, or the addictions of partners or children.

Commonly women in the course were undergoing painful and protracted legal proceedings. Property settlements, conflicts over custody and access, worker's compensation claims, victim's compensation claims, accident compensation claims, intermittently demanded the time, physical and emotional energy of course participants.

As the woman reflected on the background issues, which affected so many of the students who took the course, their achievements seemed even more noteworthy, more interesting. Thus, excitedly, she set out, asking questions. What were the processes of learning experienced by women in this adult education program? What did the women perceive they learnt in the course and how did they value this? What did the women believe had helped or hindered

their learning and what did the women-only environment mean to participants? The woman was also interested to learn more about what experiences the women brought to the course and how these related to their learning.

She hoped that the women's stories would extend the very limited discussion of gender issues in the adult education publications that she had encountered in her previous studies. The woman wanted to add her own voice and the voices of her students to the academic discourse on adult education, so succinctly criticised by Lorraine Johnson-Riordan (1994, p.12):

adult educators have tended to engage in a universalizing masculinist discourse, speaking about (but not to or with) "adults", as though the conditions of "our" existence, "our" life experiences are the same for every body everywhere.

Confidently she believed her investigation might increase her understanding of the women's learning journeys and at the same time document their stories, which, like the course itself, seemed to her to receive little 'official' notice in her workplace, and little attention in TAFE or adult learning literature. Since the woman was a feminist educator concerned for the rights of women and all those groups and individuals who experienced oppression, and was already in an ethical working relationship with the women, she had simply assumed that her study would respect her students. She wanted her research to be empowering for both the women and herself. The woman also knew that since she coordinated and taught the students, and would research and represent their stories, her own story as a woman, as an adult educator and adult student, was an integral part of the research journey.

Eagerly she approached the group of twelve students she was working with in the course at the time, to explain her research and ask who might be willing to join her study, stressing that participation was optional and giving the students plenty of time to consider whether they wanted to be part of the project. The group responded by asking questions. The woman explained her research

interests and the group agreed to think about whether they wanted to be involved. Some of the students expressed reservations because of time, a number of them were encouraging. Some were interested at being included in something outside their usual experience; some expressed the feeling that they would be glad to give of themselves in return for the support they felt the teacher was giving them in their own education. A couple of women even felt that this was like being 'famous'. The woman briefly 'brainstormed' with her students ways of recording their learning experiences. Those who wanted to be involved said they would try to keep a diary with short entries about their learning during the time they attended the course. Some students suggested that the research might also involve group discussions as well as individual interviews.

Excerpt from Sharing Stories

Kath: (enthusiastically) Maybe we could video the interviews?

Deb: Wouldn't that be great? —(hesitates)

—but I don't know if that would be acceptable at the university —

Encouraged by the fact that some of the women were interested in participating, the woman organised her family to travel with her for the first time to a weekend workshop for postgraduate students at the University of New England, where she could discuss her research ideas. They packed into a small full car: a teenage girl with headphones, an eleven-year-old boy with endless energy, a partner to share supervision, driving, the pilgrimage.

They travelled through the changing landscapes from southern highlands, through semi-rural outskirts of western Sydney suburbs, beneath eucalypt and tree fern forests winding beside Old Putty Road. They crossed the wide dry river bed at the tiny township of Bulga, continued past quarries and industrial sprawl at Singleton, through the horse-breeding plains and rocky terrain surrounding Scone. On and on they journeyed into the night in the great land of distances to finally reach the highlands of Armidale, sprawling into their accommodation, the

young ones eager to test out the heated pool despite the dripping race through chill night air back to the family room.

This was a total luxury: to spend time fascinated by landscape, to stay in a motel with spa and pool, to have company and physical relaxation at the end of the day. The trip was one she spoke of briefly to her women students back home - a chosen stark contrast to her many previous schools as a post-graduate student.

She recalled how on her first visit when studying for a postgraduate diploma in education, she had hopped on a flight accompanied by her one year old as a single parent because it was the speediest option available. She had dragged the poor mite, who had come down with a virus, to the childcare centre and to and from residential accommodation. She had attended classes between caring for a toddler, dealing with the shock of being propositioned by a fellow male student, who responded to her surprised disgust by assuring her that he and his wife had an 'open' relationship.

On her second visit she had organised childcare at home and caught the more economical train alone. The woman had arrived lost and confused, struggling to find her way around campus and stay focussed during the full day sessions, disoriented from sleeping in sparse student cells, eating in cafeterias among the sea of unfamiliar faces, and wrestling afterwards with a stomach burdened by stodgy, bulk-catered foods. Finally she'd found a fellow traveller in a young Italian woman who was used to good home cooking. A mixed group of students had loosely formed around them to catch buses into the town for meals and talk over their daily workshops.

This time, the woman had been determined that the trip would be different; to reflect the changed conditions of her life: full-time paid employment, a stable relationship. While her partner took the younger family members sightseeing,

she shared research ideas and directions with fellow students and tutors, re-visited the library, enjoyed the much-improved lunchtime catering. So, although the program was busy and still required the stress of facing a room full of strangers, there was a cooperative atmosphere and she was able to spend the evenings comforted by the company of her 'own' people. For the first time she felt privileged, enjoying beautiful grounds and older buildings of this intimate, rural branch of 'the academy', set high above the town on an imposing hill amid spreading trees and gardens.

On Sunday evening and Monday she returned with her family, re-visiting each landscape as they travelled through from the opposite direction. Armed with positive responses to her research ideas, the woman set about planning to search for relevant literature, investigate research methods, draft and edit her research proposal for comment and approval from her supervisor, complete the required research ethics form for the University and gain permission from the Dean of General Education in her TAFE Institute to conduct research. Arriving back to face her classes after a very 'long weekend', she was exhausted yet exhilarated by the sense that she had truly begun her research journey.

Equilibrium II

... an "ideal" narrative ... (Todorov, Tzvetan, 1977, p. 111)

Beginning over

We will not blame you if your reach exceeds your grasp;
if love so ignites your words that they go down in flames
and nothing is left but their scald. Or if, with the reticence of a
surgeon's hands, your words suture only the places where blood
might flow. We know you can never do it properly - once and for all
(Morrison, Toni, 1997, pp. 27-28).

The woman knows she has forgotten and even deliberately omitted parts of the story, for purposes of relevance, for purposes of interest, of brevity, for her audience, for herself, for privacy, for self-protection.

She has not mentioned, for example, the envy she feels at the beginning and end of each day in Armidale, as her family prepares for an outing, or describes an International Women's Day gathering they have encountered, a trip to a working blacksmith's shop, a bushranger museum they have visited. She stifles her resentment at how many times she has visited this town without indulging her love of local history or sense of surrounds.

The woman excludes how she questions her choice to continue her studies, taking on more work on top of her already busy to overloaded life, rather than seeking relaxation, fun. She leaves out how she wonders why she seeks more qualifications and does not see herself merely working out her life to retirement in the secure position she has managed to obtain. She does not tell of this tension between knowing that there is some pleasure for her, some luxury, in being able to take time for this trip, take time for her own research, her own writing, and knowing that she could perhaps find equal, if different, pleasure on an easier path.

She dismisses from her story the rushed drive through dark back streets, looking for the local hospital casualty department, which replaced the planned leisurely Saturday night dinner with her family, because her son had managed to swim, open-eyed, into a grain of undissolved pool chemical that ulcerated his cornea. Woven with concern and humour and frustration, this trip is redolent of so many holiday casualty mothering events, sitting in cold waiting rooms, dealing with variously friendly, neutral or supercilious doctors. Each time had been fear provoking, but thankfully not permanently damaging.

Excluded also are passing details, such as the fact that her 'partner' is a woman, not a man, that her 'family outing' does not necessarily 'fit' the image projected by those words. Implied by the choice of the word 'partner' but not stated, her language masks the fact that her step-daughter and son now have two 'mothers', that the motel owners in Armidale show slight signs of being taken aback when the group arrives to take up the booked family room, but manage to keep a hospitable face. She wonders about the weight that different readers might place on such detail.

The woman has left out the deep disjunction she encounters at the weekend residential workshop when she considers the projects of students from her own country, and those who have attended from overseas. She is humbled as she hears an African woman describing her frustrated research into educating unheeding teenagers as she tries to prevent the deadly spread of HIV/AIDS which is ravaging her people. Nor has she mentioned how she noticed that while her own research spoke of quality of life, the African woman's spoke quite literally of staying alive.

She has not told the story of how she has found this disjunction echoed time and time again in journals of adult education, in articles written about the 'third world' and the 'first world'. Nor does she mention the mental link she makes between the African women's stories, and the statistics she has seen on life expectancy and health for Aboriginal Australians from so many easily prevented diseases in her own country.

She censors the fact that during production of the last crucial assignment before her research began, she was drowning, swamped by repressed memories of violent torture and sexual abuse, which would creep into her subconscious, undermine her concentration, overtake her body with contorted tensions as she tried to hold them at bay. She expurgates the bloody bits of her story, the tears, the terror, the pain.

*Excerpt from Sharing Stories*

Ren: It was pretty scary actually, for a while — I'm not going to continue with that counselling group outside anymore for a while now. I'm dropping that for a while, it's just — because, see, while I had this to come to it was sort of at the back of my mind, so I had something to do during the week and everything, but — yeah, I'm just going to leave it for a while now.

She knows there are other important stories to tell, other versions of the same story. She knows that these other stories, other versions, would bring their own significances, in the telling, to her tale.

Equilibrium III

... narrative begins with ... (Todorov, Tzvetan, 1977, p. 111)

Speaking to you

“Old woman, I hold in my hand a bird. Tell me whether it is living or dead.”

She does not answer and the question is repeated ... Still she does not answer. She is blind and cannot see her visitors, let alone what is in their hands. She does not know their color, gender or homeland.
(Morrison, Toni, 1994, p. 11)

The woman cannot tell her story without thinking of you: her unknown, unknowable audience. Would her story begin without you, her reader, real yet imagined? She is tempted by literary asides.

Will you accept the woman's implicit claim that there is 'method in the madness' of this deliberately unconventional thesis? For she is impelled to create, experiment and push the boundaries of more familiar academic writing structures, believing that to do so will somehow bring forth knowledge and the empowerment that she seeks. How are you responding to this unorthodox style of thesis? For instance, do you welcome, accept or reject the excerpts from interviews and group discussions with her students, the voices of the researched inserted occasionally to intersperse and converse with the researcher's story?

Who are you, what will you bring to this academic text and who will you become? Do you, for example, dear reader, ask impertinent questions, like a journalist: “Why *does* she persist in writing as ‘the woman’, ‘she’, when it is obvious this is personal experience, why not ‘I’?” Perhaps instead, you mimic the media's impatient voice, crying out: “Where is the headline? Get to *the point!*” Or are you a sympathetic lover of narratives, drawn toward the story, willing to suspend your disbelief? As an academic reader, do you sigh with relief at the

'difference' of this narrative approach, or groan with disgust at the soapily operatic nature of multiple storylines?

Or is your case yet another alternative? Perhaps you are drawn and distanced in parts to this text in the ways that Stuart Hall (1997, pp. 28-34) suggests we interact as media audiences. Do you in turns accept, negotiate and resist the frameworks set for you by the 'omnipotent' narrator, who in this case, blindly begs you "Be patient, bear with me, all will be revealed."

Or are you, kind reader, a suspicious soul, a generic detective? How *authentic* is her story to you? How far, you might wonder, has the writer deliberately structured clues to build the narrative, like the fairytale lines of a character naïve, transporting the seeds of success and failure? Does life truly imitate art?

Excerpt from Sharing Stories

Kath: Let's see — that's right—will we be doing this research till the year 2001?
Deb: No — well, except—if you want to have a look and see what I'm writing — but 2001 is the time the university has given me. I would actually like to try and finish before then, but it's good that I have got that time, since I have to fit it around work and family. The process of writing up, it's like a book, you have to organise your information into chapters, and that actually has to be printed, and it ends up bound, bigger than *this* (holds up a book) — I'm not really sure how long because — I've never actually *done* this before — (laughs and the women join her).

Perhaps most threatening to the writer, what of the themes and omissions in her work which she herself fails to notice? What of the interpretations you will see and make, with all the possible ferocities and generousities of the literary critic – or equally – the academic marker? What if, in your powerful eyes, she *fails*?

Excerpt from Sharing Stories

Ren: She was really nervous, that first day.
Kath: (emphatically) Yeah
Group: (laughter)
Kathy: Wasn't I what? —

Yet after all, what options does the woman have? Be silent, speak, merely gesture? Pursuing hope with optimism, she can only continue to converse with you, her unknown visitors.

Chapter 2 Disequilibrium Complication I

... a stable situation which is disturbed ...
(Todorov, Tzvetan, 1977, p. 111).

Searching the Literature

... I was walking among ghosts, in company I felt so at home in.
Company. There's nobody there, and I'm at home.
(Brett, Lilly, 2000, p.65).

The woman has commenced her research journey with an equal mix of enthusiasm and naïveté, hoping to deepen her understanding of the changes she has witnessed in the students she teaches in the Certificate in Career Education for Women course. She has pondered a little on her audience and the context in which she writes, risking a non-conventional thesis to investigate the story of the women's learning as intrinsically linked to her own story of adult learning. Now she must search more specifically for literature that already exists on her topic and more broadly for literature that will inform her study, as part of her thesis task and to meet the course requirements of the Masters Honours degree in which she has initially enrolled. And as the woman searches for company in the academic literature, she is haunted by a curious yet familiar isolation.

The context of ghosts

According to Ralph Clark (1987, pp.37-38) all learning and teaching events take place in learning environments, which are influenced by contextual factors; yet in much adult education literature social context is barely discussed. In her journey as both adult student and adult educator, a major constraint of her context is social isolation. Her literature search occurs for the most part in social isolation from colleagues, peers and supervisors. She frequently feels isolated from the body of academic literature she encounters. She often feels that she sits on the very fringes of the academic world and its literature: personally, politically and

geographically. As the woman looks for literature to find if there is a place for her own study, and if there is literature to support her work, she is physically, mentally and emotionally alone. She is geographically isolated from the universities that offer courses in adult education, so chooses to continue her postgraduate studies externally, and suffers the lack of an immediate peer group of students with whom to share. Yet while her situation as an adult student has individual factors, the emphasis in many academic disciplines on individual action, thought and knowledge production in postgraduate research means that social isolation is a commonplace experience.

Also the process of searching for literature is frequently an unsettling and curiously lonely enterprise. The woman must move from familiar library catalogues to less familiar and constantly changing electronic databases and internet searches. She wrestles with four different library systems and stalks the shelves of various libraries over the period of her research, usually alone, looking through books and browsing the contents pages of journals. She struggles with various copy card systems and photocopiers, which never seem to capture pages at just the right size. The brief personal chats with local librarians are a pleasant relief, unlike the external ordering experience where she fills in forms online and receives books and articles in an efficient but highly impersonal process by mail. Much of the work of searching literature is pedestrian, yet there is also the private joy of discovery. The results of her searching vary: in turns mundane, puzzling, frustrating, fascinating and occasionally inspiring; however, throughout the process she sorely misses the opportunity to talk over her literary 'finds'.

Gaining a perspective on the new literature she encounters and gauging its value in relation to her own work and study takes time, and for the most part she lacks a social network to discuss her reading with anyone directly. She has supervision, but tossing ideas around verbally without committing them to paper

for feedback, is a different learning process entirely to sending written work for comment, and sometimes she sorely misses learning through discussion.

Excerpt from Sharing Stories

Lisa: ... it's better than writing reflections too
Kathy: It's easier to start talking ...
Ren: Yeah, I didn't even realise ... (laughs)
Lisa: It's easier to talk about than to write them down, because I sat and tried to write reflections for you and I couldn't write them, I just didn't know what to write ...

Her social isolation increases and decreases at times as her regular searches of the literature, and her contact with her supervisor and peers, occur in flourishes of time with spaces between. Her lack of company is lessened just a little when she obtains part-time tutoring work at the local university, and begins to have occasional contact with other researchers and postgraduate students.

Economically her tutoring work allows her to visit the Armidale campus more and meet with her supervisors. Her first visits entail nothing but solid and solitary work interspersed with productive meetings with her supervisors. Eventually their arrangements include a more social element: meeting over coffee on campus, at the airport, in Sydney between journeys. However, she does not have the luxury of a steady flow of reading until she finally applies for an upgrade from a Masters Honours thesis to a PhD and obtains a scholarship, which allows her a more continuous focus. In her final years she attends some postgraduate schools and meets some of her fellow students, sometimes finding instant rapport, particularly with other women students, and a rushed but wonderful sharing of ideas that 'feed her'. For most of her journey however, such contact is non-existent at worst and sporadic at best, and her peers and supervisors are like distant ghosts.

Her need to talk over her search is particularly strong when the literature looms like a spectre, reflecting little of her experience or background. She is female rather than male and a feminist so firmly placed on the fringes of mainstream academic literature. She is the first from her family to enter the academy rather than one from a tradition of higher education, she is a student of 'soft' humanities rather than 'hard' sciences, working and studying in adult education rather than the larger, more established traditions of school and higher education. She is a teacher working in general education rather than in the TAFE mainstream of vocational training or conversely, in the community education sector which is often more central to the academic literature of adult education. She is an external student and researcher, mostly on a part-time basis, rather than a full time face-to-face student or better still, academic. She lives rurally rather than in the city where the 'movers and shakers' congregate, she is a 'colonial', an antipodean, rather than a member of one of the earth's academic 'power centres'. The woman could, of course, feel even more isolated if she were 'black' not 'white' or from a language background other than English, as feminists such as bell hooks (1994) explore and illustrate.

The woman teaches and researches in a context that is geographically isolated from the majority of the academic literature on adult education. Her search moves from a relatively small body of work produced from around the large island continent on which she lives, to the majority of literature, which has been written in the global power centres of America and Europe.

Whether produced locally or globally, most of the authors are strangers to her, of unknown backgrounds and uncertain political persuasions. They are spectres, embodied only by their words. The context of her learning and the contexts of her teachers through literature, are not often made obvious. She must intuit and investigate these contexts where she can. Part of her feminist project in writing her thesis becomes an attempt to make the personal and social context of this knowledge more visible in the words with which she introduces academic works,

and in breaking with traditional referencing conventions, insistently including first names alongside last name patronymics, to emphasize that the authors are people of various genders and cultures. Kjell Rubenson (1982, pp. 59-62), Michael Collins (1991, pp. 33-34), John McIntyre, (1993, p. 94) and Lorraine Johnson-Riordan (1994, pp. 11-12) all point out that male scholars from the United States overwhelmingly dominate the literature of adult education, using quantitative social science methods and psychological perspectives.

Thus, although the woman is equipped with diverse readings from a postgraduate diploma in adult education and training, many of these relate only marginally to her work both as teacher and learner. The woman started to develop her practice as teacher in a variety of settings before she formally trained in adult education. When she studied in the field as external student, working at TAFE and parenting, there was little opportunity to discuss the influences and the limitations of the so-called 'keynote' theories in adult education that she learnt. She has drawn from various adult education works but in general they never seem to quite 'fit' with her own social context or personal orientation as an adult educator. For example, she has seen merits in using student experience as part of her teaching practice in response to Malcolm Knowles' theory of 'andragogy' (a term which is ironically androcentric, derived from the Greek work 'andros', literally meaning 'man' – rather than 'adult'). Yet, the realities of her students' previous experiences of life and education are a far cry from those with which Knowles (1990, p. 60) illustrates and justifies his theory:

To children, experience is something that happens to them; to adults, their experience is who they are. For example, when I was 10, if I had been asked who I am, I probably would have replied, "My name is Malcolm Knowles; my father is Dr. A.D. Knowles, a veterinarian; I live at 415 Fourth Street, Missoula, Montana; I attend Roosevelt Grammar School on Sixth Street; and I am a member of the Sunday School at the Presbyterian Church on Fifth Street.

If someone had asked me at age 30 who I was I would have replied, "My name is Malcolm Knowles; I was a delegate to the World Boy Scout Jamboree in Birkenhead, England in 1929; I studied international law at Harvard College, graduating in 1934; I was director of training for the National Youth Administration of Massachusetts from 1935 to 1940," and so on. I derived my self-identity from my experiences. The implication of this fact for adult education is that in any situation in which adults' experience is ignored or devalued, they perceive this as not rejecting just their experience, but rejecting them as persons.

Apart from huge assumptions about the vastly different nature of children and adults here, there seems to be a complete blind spot around the differences in power *between* individuals and social groups *across* age brackets, and how this impacts on what people experience and so bring to their learning.

Similarly, other 'canons' of adult education literature have limited relevance to her teaching and research. Carl Rogers' (1983) humanistic theory of learning is attractively people-centred with personal growth as a key goal, but for the most part the almost therapeutic basis of his approach is impractical when she is working with groups of 15 to 20 or more students in a classroom, in an increasingly competency-based system of adult education, with emphasis on learning outcomes and competencies to be achieved. Conversely, competency-based training (CBT), evolved from the work of behaviourist psychologists such as J.B. Watson and B.F. Skinner (Elias, John & Merriam, Sharan, 2005, pp. 83-110), is an inadequate model for much of the teaching and learning work that actually occurs in her classrooms. So while the woman can see some advantages for students in competency-based training's practical emphasis on clearly outlining skills and the steps to achieve them, on the other hand she strongly disputes the narrow behaviourist basis of CBT, which denies so many of the complex levels of human experience involved in learning, including motivation, choice, attitude, values and thought processes, as well as moral and political questions about who has the power to control learning (Black, Max, 1973, pp. 125-134; Perelman, Chaim, 1973, pp. 121-124; Malcolm, Janice & Zukas, Miriam, 2001, p. 35;). For example, Ann Reich (1999) highlights one

such issue of power and control, documenting the difficulties of addressing gender bias in developing competency standards.

Other major adult education texts seem to have similarly shadowy relevance to her work and research context. Jack Mezirow's (1991) theory of perspective transformation through learning seems to offer interesting insight into the possibility of personal change which many adult learners seek and gain through their education, yet somehow the theory seems too broad to describe the vast differences in the kinds of changes diverse students experience in diverse courses. For example, some of her students in the Tertiary Preparation Certificate achieve enormous external success, but maintain high levels of personal stress to the end of their course and afterwards in their further studies, unlike many of the women in the CEW course, who often seem to 'bloom' with their successes. On the other hand Paulo Freire's (1970) collective approach to adult education through problem solving would seem to hold more promise in relation to the women's course, but his teaching practice again seems distant, with its emphasis always on collective action, sometimes of a violent revolutionary nature. Even in the women's course where the group often share similar problems and interests, the concept of change that most of the women would subscribe to seems quite distinct from what Freire sees as necessary in his own teaching contexts (see for example, Hall, Budd & Kidd, Roby, 1978).

Overall her experiences as a teacher are barely reflected in the work of these high-profile writers in adult education, and their relevance remains ghostly, slightly removed from her context as both adult educator and adult student. So with this literature held in her luggage, the woman sets off to search for more specific company in relation to her study.

Seeking and Finding Company

The relative sparsity of work produced by search terms such as: 'gender' 'wom*n' 'female' plus 'adult education' when she commences her literature search creates and reinforces her sense of isolation. Deborah Davison and Helen Gribble (1991, pp. 133-135) characterise women as the 'invisible owners' of adult and community education in Australia, pointing out that while women overwhelmingly predominate in the sector as both students and staff, much discussion of adult education ignores gender altogether as a factor. In her teaching work in access education at TAFE the woman realises that she similarly walks among ghosts: offering 'adults', the vast majority of whom are women, 'second chances'. The gendered lives of both sides of the teaching/learning transaction remain largely invisible, except in the women's course and in brief moments of sharing over rushed coffees or lunch. In the literature of adult education, women similarly remain ghostly, almost invisible at times, so that she must continually search for more solid company.

Excerpt from Sharing Stories

Kath: How long has the CEW course actually been running at TAFE?

Deb: Many years ...

Kath: So has this sort of thing ever been researched before?

Deb: I think quite a few women who have been involved with TAFE courses have done Masters level research, but they've never published it, so I have to find out where those Masters degrees are, they are held at the universities. I found one project that was done on a similar course in 1987, and I just got a copy of that yesterday ... It was more an evaluation of the course, it wasn't exactly the same as my project. That's part of what I have to look at. I guess I've been teaching on the course a long time, and I don't really get to follow up with the women, it fascinates me where the different women from the courses have got to, what they have learnt...

Gai: Yeah that would be interesting ...

While various forms of women's special access programs have been offered in TAFE NSW and around Australia for many years, the visibility of these in academic literature remains extremely limited. The woman initially finds only one study on current women's access programs in TAFE NSW by Cath Scott, Ailsa Burns and Annette Birdsall (1995), as well as a small number of studies on women's access programs previously offered in New South Wales or in other parts of Australia (Jenkins, Dorothy, 1984; Rawsthorne, Margot, 1988; Richards, Wendy 1987; Binns, Jennifer, 1989; Nixon, Shirley, 1999). Most of these studies focussed on program evaluation, and many were outdated due to course changes.

In addition, the most recent relevant study of the course in NSW used methods and analytical frameworks that differed distinctly from her feminist concerns. Cath Scott et al (1995, p. 6.) provided a quantitative study aimed at gaining information on the women who participated in CEW and WOW courses in New South Wales, including their socio-economic and educational backgrounds, reasons for participation, experience of participation and after study outcomes, in order to produce policy recommendations. In contrast to her concern with using empowering research methods and providing public space for women's voices, the participants were very much the 'objects' of study. The analytical frameworks were also quite contrary to her sense of social justice for women. For example, some of the analytical tools chosen were an 'Attitudes to Women scale' developed in 1978 which provoked a comment by a participant that 'These are kindergarten questions!' and a General Health questionnaire that was a "widely used screening text for psychopathology" (Scott, Cath et al, 1995, pp. 7, 26).

The other studies most relevant to women's courses in TAFE New South Wales discussed the progenitor of the Career Education for Women course, called the New Opportunities for Women (NOW) program. Shirley Nixon (1999) provided a useful discussion of the history of NOW at Illawarra TAFE from a practitioner

perspective, giving insight into its feminist underpinnings, while Wendy Richards (1987) evaluated the NOW course, using participant observation and in-depth interviews with students during and after the course, while briefly outlining the feminist theoretical background to the course. Both works had limitations in relation to her study since they were based on a different version of the program.

Over the years as she re-searches yet again, the woman finds that there is still little officially published about the CEW course in academic literature, with only two further studies emerging. Karen Ritchie (1998), a fellow student at the University of New England, provides a site-specific, sensitive evaluation of CEW and WOW programs at Parkes TAFE campus New South Wales, from the viewpoints of twenty-nine participants over time, using a variety of means to collect data including whole group discussions, journal writing, short answer questionnaires and some individual interviews from 1996-1998. Her unpublished thesis included background and some parallels to the woman's study. However, the study was again strongly focussed on evaluating the program and making specific, action-research recommendations, in contrast to her own concerns. Finally, the woman also finds that Pauline Lysaght (2002) has included students from a local regional CEW course in her research on women's changing self-assessments of their abilities using intelligence profiles.

These fairly sparse literature findings on the Certificate in Career Education for Women, despite the course's widespread and long-term presence in adult education in New South Wales, are mirrored by the limited visibility of women in the literature of adult education more generally. Successive content surveys by Peggy Sissel (1993) and Elizabeth Hayes and Letitia Smith (1994) outline both a lack of attention to women and gender issues in adult education publications, as well as limitations on the ways women are discussed when they do appear in the literature. Jane Hugo (1990) presents a fascinating paper describing how women have been marginalised in the history of adult education in the American

context despite their significant contribution. In 1996 Joyce Stalker in New Zealand expresses her continuing frustration with the situation:

This paper is the result of personal frustrations which have arisen while reading article after article, book after book within the field of adult education. For the most part, these academic publications, both classic and contemporary, are incongruent with my feminist views. Their androcentric approaches limit their relevance to me and to my research. I am perplexed by this unchanging situation (Stalker, Joyce, 1996, p. 98).

Excerpt from Lisa's Learning Story

Had a list
male on one side
female on the other
and different careers

For some of them
there was no women
we couldn't think of
any who'd succeeded

Over time the woman does find that more women's voices are appearing in the literature of adult education, but as Joyce Stalker so eloquently expresses, the inclusion remains slow and tentative. Mal Leicester (2001) from the University of Nottingham in the UK reflects on feminist achievements in adult education over the past two decades, noting several significant contributions:

Simply putting gender firmly on the agenda was an achievement, and research on women students and academics has yielded knowledge about women and education. At a more abstract level, feminist theorizing has added to our understanding of adult education... for me, one of the most interesting developments has been the recognition of distinctive female ways of knowing – 'alternative' valid forms of thinking and judging (Leicester, Mal, 2001, p. 61).

One of the works to which Mal Leicester refers is a detailed US study of women's 'ways of knowing' from a psychological perspective by Mary Belenky, Blythe Clinchy, Nancy Goldberger and Jill Tarule (1986). The woman also locates two informative British studies of women returning to education by Rosalind Edwards (1993) and Janet Parr (2000) which provide points of comparison with her own study, although in all of these cases the women are involved in a range of learning contexts, rather than a specific women's program. During the course of her research other relevant works are also published, such as that by Jenny Horsman (2000) on the links between women, violence and adult education and by Wendy Luttrell (1997), on the effects of women's school experiences on attitudes to learning.

While there is an increase in the literature that may directly inform the woman's study, the works are still relatively few and the relationship to the social context of her teaching and research are not always immediately apparent. For example, she looks at works by Maggie Coats (1994), JaneThompson (1995; 2000) and Roseanne Benn, Jane Elliott and Pat Whaley (1998), set explicitly in the British context, and while there are parallels between political trends and feminist courses in Australia, it is difficult to trace these in detail. Similarly she finds some of the analysis of women's work and learning from a more global perspective by Mechthild Hart (1992) valuable but cannot foresee exactly how it will inform her own teaching or research, except in the broadest sense. She reads bell hooks (1994) work on teaching to transgress in American higher education with equal fascination. During her literature searches and re-searches, the woman finds that while women are adding considerably to the discourse of adult education in a variety of publications, like most researchers she is not absolutely certain about which of these works will contribute to her own understandings and how they will do so until she nears completion of her journey.

Overall, the company the woman finds and keeps remains ghostly in the literature until the very end of her search. Thus Edwards Taylor (2001, p. 19) finds in a ten-year content analysis of the US journal *Adult Education Quarterly* (AEQ), that the growing submission rate by women exceeds the rate by men in the latter part of the decade, but that, consistent with other academic journals “the increase in submissions is not resulting in an equivalent increase in publications” (Taylor, Edwards, 2001, p. 19). Taylor finds:

Much consistency with the previous analyses of AEQ such that submissions of single authorship from men of academic profession, from the United States, conducting quantitative research about subjects of adult learning and participation, have dominated the submissions over the past decade (Taylor, 2001, p. 18).

There is a paucity of published research by adult education practitioners generally (Rose, Amy, 2000), alongside women and feminists in particular.

Feminist literature in adult education, including that which examines crucial issues of race, culture or class, remains under-represented and marginalised. For example, bell hooks (1994, pp. 124-125) discusses the ‘double jeopardy’ in the struggle for recognition of her own academic work and that of other black feminist scholars in the United States and questions how much genuine attention issues of class receive within university classrooms, feminist scholarship and wider scholarship on education (hooks, bell, 1994, pp. 183-184). In Australia there are also serious questions about how representative much adult education literature has been of the experiences of diverse adult learners and teachers in terms of gender, race, class and culture. An early analysis of the Australian Journal of Adult Education by Peter Long found few entries on Aboriginal adult education, women did not appear as a category at all, and concluded, “there was little in the journal which reflected the major pre-occupations of the nation” (Long, Peter, 1983, p. 14). Eleven years on an entire volume of the *Australian Journal of Adult and Community Education* (1994) was devoted to the learning and

teaching experiences of diverse groups of women, yet only four years later Sue Shore describes how by 1998 social justice issues were again losing visibility:

These contemporary discourses of lifelong learning and market-place education are not dissimilar. They tend to work in unison to support the notion of learning as a tool for skilling up the country. At the same time they ignore the long histories of workers' education, community education and feminist and indigenous activism aimed at social change ... (Shore, Sue, 1998, p. 90).

Similarly, Elaine Butler, writing of both Australia and wider global contexts in 2001, describes the power of these discourses through which:

... education has been commodified and repackaged as a tradable positional good (Butler, Elaine, 2001, p. 72).

Questions of haunting

The woman is tempted to take you aside and have a quiet chat again dear reader, for she is troubled by the multitude of other presences which may haunt her story. She has read so much academic literature over the years, and there are many articles about women's education in contexts quite different to that in which she works, that may be unconscious undercurrents in her thought, even though they are about divergent sites or adopt different analytical approaches. At times she looks hurriedly over notes she has taken from works on women as learners to double-check if ideas from relevant sources are ghost-writers in her study, raising the ugly spectre of plagiarism. She also wonders about subtler haunting. What of the many social influences which have shaped and formed her thinking and thirst for social justice, from Sunday school readings of Christian ethics, to innovative lessons with her high school history teacher Shirley Wakeman, to watching Emma Peel kick butt on *The Avengers*, to reading Toni Morrison's inspirational acceptance speech for the Nobel prize for literature? How can the woman keep track of all the literary and non-literary influences on her work, from her love at first reading of Gerard Manley Hopkins' poem *The*

Windhover at sixteen, to the detailed feminist pamphlets she read at the Women's Health Centre when she was twenty-two? She swears to her women students that her aversion to housework was worsened by watching years of Samantha in *Bewitched* wiggle her nose to get it 'done' instantly. In post-industrial contexts we live and learn in an environment where a multitude of diverse communications compete for our attention and embed themselves in our memories. The woman can only try to represent with fairness and honesty the influences that inform her work.

The woman's search is also not confined to adult education as an area of study. She scouts and uses work eclectically from a range of disciplines to try and make sense of her research journey along the way: from school and higher education to critiques of anthropological methods; from linguistic analyses to the economics of globalisation; from creative writing methods to conversation analysis. This too is a familiar loneliness, part of the context of her learning as both undergraduate and postgraduate student, where she struggled to unearth and create knowledge related to her life and interests, first as a woman and feminist, then as a feminist adult educator. Such loneliness is part of the traditional context of feminist research, which of necessity crossed disciplinary boundaries to make connections with women's experiences of the world (Callaway, Helen, 1981).

This chapter on searching the literature, rather than a literature review, starts with that particular academic convention and becomes instead a story of adult education as experience. There is no tying together of every loose end, tidily re-writing the living. Instead, there is continued uncertainty in the woman's journey: often alone, lacking company in the literature which speaks immediately to the education of women and her context in particular; not knowing exactly what company she will keep as her research and writing unfold. She sets out on her journey and travels for much of it accompanied only by ghosts; a situation both frightening and reassuring in its familiarity, as a woman and as a feminist studying at university, and as a student and teacher in adult education.

Perturbed by the spectre of social isolation, marginalisation and the narrow focus in adult education literature; yet encouraged that there is a place for her own study, and some feminist tradition on which she can draw, the woman's zeal is curiously re-affirmed by the familiarity of ghosts in her learning and teaching context. She still wants to add the diverse voices of one small group of women, and her own voice as adult educator and learner, as living, breathing entities in visible contexts, to the published discussion of adult education. She stands ready to face the next challenge in her journey, where she must find a methodological framework and methods to guide her. The woman thus begins another immersion in literature, this time more specifically focussed on the ways she might conduct her study, respecting her students, her concerns and herself.

Chapter 3. Disequilibrium Complication II

... a stable situation which is disturbed by some power...
(Todorov, Tzvetan, 1977, p. 111).

Locking up with Method

My gentle prison closes round
As quick to anchor me
Above these stairs as pride
Inside this room
I gather up my store
And like a grizzly bear go underground
Feeding on myths and winter berries
(Hewett, Dorothy, 1995, p. 370)

The woman has completed a lonely search of adult education literature looking for relevant content that plays a ghostly game of hide and seek in relation to her study. Now she must examine other academic literature, for in addition to content, she needs to consider methodology and method: the logic and practice of how she will pursue her research, in ways that are compatible with her teaching and learning context. Here, by comparison, the woman finds there is an abundance of company, but as she locks herself up with readings on research methods in adult education and training, she also realises that the 'way' she will take in her journey is far from simple. She must decipher competing claims for research approaches and methods in the social sciences generally, as well as adult education in particular. She must once again make coherent the social contexts of the material from which she learns, where her teachers are embodied only in bodies of literature. So while the other people in her household buzz on and around her in social activity, the woman holes up in her study, at times a little grizzly at this self-imposed isolation, at times happy with her meditative hibernation, hoping to find methods to guide her.

Locked up method-o-logically

The woman spends long autumn and wintry days locked up with her considerable store of readings on research in adult education and training. She begins with a booklet for postgraduate students compiled and edited by her supervisor Margaret Somerville (1998) and supplements this by ordering books and journal articles online. The resources on research methods are plentiful and diverse, so she need only make brief forays to local and Sydney libraries.

Her methodological exploration has a fairly encouraging start. She reads about the relative value of qualitative as opposed to quantitative research (Rubenson, Kjell, 1982; Boud, David, 1982; McIntyre, John, 1993) and realizes quickly that the impetus and inclination of her own study are largely qualitative. She has embarked on the project envisaging that she will work with only a small group of women rather than large numbers, to delve in depth into their experiences of learning, since her observations over time have given her background knowledge. In discussion with her students she has planned to look at journals that the women might keep, record one or two group discussions, and to interview each woman using very broad, open-ended questions about their learning, to allow the women's own emphases to emerge in the research.

Despite this encouraging start the woman soon becomes daunted by a variety of new terms and competing claims, with sometimes overlapping concepts, for what is seen as appropriate 'methodology' or 'philosophy' or 'politics' for research in adult education. She spends hours trying to understand and trace the logic, history and context of these claims in relation to her own project. She quarrels her way through frequently wordy writing on methodologies, with implied references to background knowledge that she does not seem to possess, and bibliographic references to other works she has not read. She flags the latter for follow up, even though she can't immediately determine their relevance to the ways she will proceed in her own research.

At times her patience is tried, her confidence shaken as she reads and struggles to analyse source after source in order to understand just one research approach, in the few 'days off' she has available for study. Sometimes, only the frustration this process breeds feeds her pride, pushing her to persist, to not 'pull out' of the entire enterprise. In defense she builds a resistant intellectual arrogance, assuring herself that she *can* make sense of these competing claims to find a logic of method relevant to her research aims and context.

Excerpt from Jo's Learning Story

that stage

really don't want to
just tired couldn't be bothered

thought "If I give up now I'm silly
I've gone so far why give up now?"

She slogs away at understanding 'participatory research', brought into the literature by Budd Hall and associates from the International Council for Adult Education Toronto in the early 1980s, as an alternative model emerging from 'third world' countries where 'first world' researchers could be seen as 'colonizing' (Boud, David, 1982, p. 47; Hall, Budd, 1981; Field, John, 1991, p. 71). Hall describes participatory research as focussing on community problems, aiming at structural transformation and improvement of the lives of those involved in the problem, incorporating them as researchers in the process alongside external researchers, who should also be committed participants and learners (Hall, 1981, pp. 7- 8). The woman realizes that her own research project, motivated by her personal and political concerns as feminist teacher and learner, is far more self-directed than this approach. She also cannot expect students in her course to make the substantial commitment of time and energy required by participatory research.

Excerpt from Sharing Stories

- Deb: ... That's why I've outlined at the beginning that you can have input into how much involvement you have, and perhaps a part of what I have to record in my write-up, is, how much input you *do* have — like we talked about journals, but the realities of life were that it was too hard for most of you to actually manage to keep a journal — So, I think I will talk about those issues, the method — how we did the research, as well as what we found out — because it's an important point that most of us don't have the time to —
- Gai: Yes, your mind sort of goes "Oh, I've got to do that project today, and then you forget all about it, and later "Oh gee, I didn't write that journal" —

While the woman can certainly see the dilemmas of research 'on' people, which participatory research seeks to overcome, she also questions whether academic research *with* and *for* members of oppressed groups is colonizing in all contexts, given the often pressing needs of people who experience oppression. As Joyce Stalker writes from New Zealand:

In reality, Nora is a Maori woman who works five shifts: for her family, the University, her iwi, her whanau¹ and the wider Maori community. Her energy and health are stretched by her commitments and, given a choice, her responsibilities to her people are more important than academic publications (Rameka, Nora & Stalker, Joyce, 1996, p. 159).

The article co-produced by Nora Rameka and Joyce Stalker represents a collaborative division of labour that facilitates Nora's voicing of experience and knowledge in an academic context, while at the same time respects her other needs and priorities as a Maori woman. It is this kind of pragmatic feminist power sharing to which the woman aspires in her research, by offering the women input into their participation and representation in the research process.

The woman turns to an investigation of 'action research', which seems to hold more promise for her project than participatory research, since it is conducted by educational practitioners (Usher, Robin and Bryant, Ian, 1989). According to

¹ In the article 'iwi' and 'whanau' are noted as meaning 'tribe' and 'extended family' respectively.

Wilfred Kemmis and Stephen Carr (1986, pp. 166-167), the resurgence of interest in action research emerged through the 1973-76 Ford Teaching Project in Britain for a number of reasons, including dissatisfaction with the relevance of existing educational research; an impetus which was later echoed in adult education (Quigley, Allan & Watkins, Karen, 2000). She finds that educational action research can describe a range of projects: from curriculum, professional and policy development to school program and systems improvement; where actions are planned, implemented, observed, reflected upon and adjusted (Kemmis, Wilfred & Carr, Stephen, 1986, pp. 164-165). The main goal of action research seems to be evaluation and monitoring of change for improvement in education. So while the woman shares the practitioner perspective of action research, the overall goal differs from her own context, where the research springs from broader questions about the women's learning.

Thinking that she finally has a firm hold on the methodologies of both 'participatory research' and 'action research', the woman also discovers confusion in the literature since terms and concepts sometimes overlap. For example, Leonie Jennings (1985) uses the term 'emancipatory action research' with a slightly different emphasis to that of Stephen Kemmis and Wilfred Carr (1986), although she draws on their work. Other papers combine the terms of what in some works are treated as distinct methodological frameworks, using 'participatory action research' (for example, Guevara, Jose, 1996). Similarly, when the woman first encounters 'transformative research' as outlined by Gary Conti, Janice Counter and Lynn Paul (1991, p. 31), they define it as the process of generating knowledge to address social problems with the goals of self-determination, social change and individual and community empowerment, which seems confusingly close to participatory research. In contrast, David Deshler and Daniel Selener (1991, p.10) define transformative research without emphasis on collectivity.

The woman struggles in isolation to trace the logic in all these research methodologies, losing passion at times but working methodically to glimpse their distinctions and the ways in which they converge or complement each other, and most importantly, whether they 'fit' with her own concerns and context.

Determinedly she traces bibliographical references, seeking writings that will enlighten her, discarding those that do not. Many a Saturday or Sunday she has to organize for her family to be quiet or go out for the day in order to have uninterrupted thesis time, and too often she feels torn, suddenly longing for people rather than being stuck in this room: silent, alone. Meanwhile her family sit around chatting, relaxing or watching a movie or go out to a sister's house to make pita breads, enjoying a bake-up full of shared activity: laughter, food, life.

Excerpt from Jo's Learning Story

Getting up early getting son off to school
then "ohhh I've got to go in today
I'd rather be doing this or this"

For months between work and other commitments the woman stays buried with her books and papers whenever she can, wishing that her reading would open up for her not only a logic of method, but some creativity that aligns with her initial zeal for research. Gradually through her immersion, inspiration buds and furls.

Finding fruit

By anchoring herself to desk and study, the woman eventually locates a variety of thoughtfood on the logic of research methods. She discovers the concept of 'grounded theory', where theory is generated from data and therefore inductive in character in Kjell Rubenson (1982, p. 67), and pursues the theory to its origins with Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss (1967). This seems to reflect the approach she had envisaged when talking to her students, of using written journals, discussions and interviews with them based on very broad questions,

with analysis emerging from the research, rather than starting with a theory that the research then 'tested'.

Excerpt from Sharing Stories

- Deb: It's a slightly different kind of method—a lot of people go into research with a theory—ok I want to find out if this theory, these ideas I have are correct. What I'm trying to do is actually allow you, the participants, to have more of an imprint on it, because my ideas might not be what was important to you—the things that come out from you could be quite different so—it's called—there's all these names for the process—ethnomethodology—grounded theory—where you actually research—you spend time with participants and then you—draw out your theory from what people have said rather than say, "ok, this is my theory, now I'm going to survey these people—to test my theory". Do you know what I mean?——— So that's the whole idea, that you're forming the theory by sharing your information with me—'cause then I look at it and think, how does this fit with all the other things that I've read or does it fit at all, maybe it doesn't, maybe this is quite new,—that sort of thing— Does that make sense?
- Group: Laughter
- Gai: It's pretty involved— is this just a part of this Honours degree?
- Deb: Yes, it's a Masters Honours degree, so that means that you do a thesis, which is what this research is. It's the kind of degree where you get to do your own research project and you get to write it up ...

Along with 'grounded theory' the woman was interested by approaches loosely called "objectively subjective", emerging from a network of researchers in the UK known as the New Paradigm Research Group (Boud, David, 1982, pp. 49-50). As a feminist she is immediately attracted by this approach that bridges the false divide between objectivity and subjectivity, as outlined by Peter Reason and John Rowan (1981) from the New Paradigm Research group. She had assumed that qualitative discussions and interviews with her students would constitute research that provided depth and learner perceptions and had also believed that her own 'subjective' perceptions as teacher, learner and researcher would inform her study, but that she would apply 'objectively subjective' analysis to her research as well. At the same time she had always expected that quantitative research based on so-called more 'scientific' and 'objective' methods of surveys and statistics might also inform her findings, in the tradition of the demographic

research that had so usefully 'mapped' women's social discrimination since the resurgence of feminism from the 1970s onwards (Oakley, Ann, 1998, p.713).

Building on the notion of methodology spanning both subjective and objective, an article by Helen Callaway (1981) reproduced in the new paradigm research book appears like a feast of ripe berries. The woman enjoys the provocative, lyrical writing in this article that speaks creatively, forming another bridge, between research as social science and research as social art. She takes pleasure in the concepts of 'research as re-vision', inspired by Adrienne Rich (1972, p.18):

Re-vision - the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction - is for us more than a chapter in cultural history: it is an act of survival. Until we can understand the assumptions in which we are drenched we cannot know ourselves. And this drive to self-knowledge, for woman, is more than a search for identity: it is part of her refusal of the self-destructiveness of the male-dominated society

extended by Helen Callaway (1981, p. 457):

I am taking up and continuing the poet's play on meanings: 'revision' in the standard sense of correcting or completing the record; then, 're-vision' as looking again, a deliberate critical act to see through the stereotypes of our society as these are taken for granted in daily life and deeply embedded in academic tradition; and, finally, 're-vision' in its extended sense as the imaginative power of sighting possibilities and thus helping to bring about what is not (or not yet) visible, a new ordering of human relations.

At last the woman can relate to a methodology for her own research context. The women's course, women's lives and careers were an old text for her, but one that she wanted to 're-vision' in all the senses suggested by this poetic understanding of the word as feminist methodology.

Following a feminist research rationale that places knowledge and knowledge production in social contexts, Helen Callaway (1981) provided an overview of

how feminist research emerged from the women's movement in the 1970s, seeking to break silences about women's lives and create social justice. As a young undergraduate student in her mid-twenties the woman had believed and lived Callaway's claim that looking at human experience from the point of view of women would begin to shift the power base of knowledge itself (Callaway, Helen, 1981, pp. 460 - 461). The woman identifies with the notion that feminist research came to challenge the very content, methods and forms used in academic writing based on male-dominated constructions of 'objectivism' in 'science' and 'social science' and the contention that by removing the social 'subject' from research, these constructions operated as a form of oppressive silencing and misrepresentation of human experience (Callaway, Helen, 1981, pp.461-471).

The woman searches for more works on feminist research and is inspired by the innovative form in the introductory dialogue 'One Sunday afternoon ... And its consequences' by Liz Stanley and Sue Wise (1983), which places the two authors' discussion of methodology firmly in an everyday personal and social context, incorporating colloquial language into academic text:

- A: What we ought to do is to write down something about how we felt when we decided to write the book.
- B: Well, why did we decide to write it?
- A: Because I was fed up with being told I wasn't a proper feminist.
- B: Yes, and we were both pissed off because we'd been bound up in feminist politics as they affected gay people for a long time, but we'd grown completely alienated ...
- A: Yeah, it's the split between structures and everyday life. Structures are somewhere above and beyond the everyday, and the revolution...
- B: ... structures are where it's at. Structures are where the revolution will happen and so there's no point in actually changing.
- A: No point in changing your relationship with your husband, or your children, or your anyone else.

B: But there were some other considerations as well weren't there? ...
(Stanley, Liz & Wise, Sue, 1983, pp. 1-2).

The woman wonders about the space this transgressive style might make in her own writing for her students' voices to be heard, speaking in their own language.

Encouraged, the woman continues to feed on stories of feminist research for inspiration. Vinitha Joyappa and Lois Self (1996, pp.16-22) provide an updated overview of feminist research and the woman is keen to incorporate the qualities they present: that feminist research collects material from lived experience and examines it from varied perspectives, takes into account the complexity and diversity of women's experiences, includes the researcher as a person and tries to honour the voices of women in recounting their own realities. The woman sees strong connections to her previously unquestioned approach and the statement by Vinitha Joyappa and Lois Self (1996, p. 20) that "eliciting facts can leave participants feeling violated; the process itself must become one of collective self-discovery and empowerment". Their assurance that feminist research does not embrace a monolithic method liberates the woman to experiment and adopt methods as they became relevant and appropriate throughout the research process, rather than confine herself rigidly to a pre-defined schedule no matter what context emerges.

Finally the woman's underground store of academic literature nurtures her, unlocking an expanded sense of her own past experience: in the women's movement, as an undergraduate and postgraduate student in academia, and as an educator in a program underpinned by feminist practice. She feels renewed drive to look at the lived experiences of the women in the course, honouring their voices and diversity, allowing her own voice to be heard and finding methods

along the way that will enable her presumptions about a respectful research process to become a reality.

At the same time, the woman begins to glimpse the complexities of being feminist, doing research, within a patriarchal academic tradition. As Liz Stanley and Sue Wise (1983, p. 188) point out:

.... These two styles of approach, 'sitting inside the circle' and 'breaking out' as we have called them, illustrate clearly for us the limitations of sitting inside the circle of the world as constructed by sexism while also thumbing our noses at it. They also clearly demonstrate the complications and the trials of trying to break through and out of the circle. If we stop within it then we may never see the circle, never see it for the snare and cage that it is, nor for the charade that it is too. If we try to break out of it, and especially if we succeed, we risk ... almost certain alienation and rejection.

Patricia Gumpert (1997, pp. 572 –573) also warns of the complexities for women in academia who choose feminist research approaches. In a two-year study where she interviewed forty faculty members and 35 administrators from Colleges and Universities in the United States, Gumpert found that the work of feminist scholars often struggled for legitimacy and recognition because it was cross-disciplinary, drew from several disciplines to generate research questions and theoretical interpretations, and was oppositional in nature, due to an explicit agenda for disciplinary as well as societal change (Gumpert, Patricia, 1997, pp. 577-579). While feminist scholars expanded the boundaries of the disciplines, contributed new work, taught women's studies programs and integrated feminist research into departmental curricula throughout the American academy, they lived out the 'personal tension' of being both insiders and outsiders. The woman knows that to some extent the choice of feminist research for her own project will likewise place her as insider/outsider, entailing both limitation and freedom.

Of course, not all appears absolutely rosy to her in the feminist academic tradition. She sometimes finds the language shifts in poststructuralist feminist research more than a little mystifying. She wonders where the innovatory and creative forms of feminist academic writing have wandered to as she puzzles over discourses that she finds as dense and opaque as any she has previously encountered in her academic studies. Although she knows that many feminists do not share her disposition, she knows that others are similarly soured by surprisingly inaccessible paragraphs in feminist academic work.

Yet so much has fed the woman in the feminist tradition that she is not deterred, and she also finds feminist poststructuralist works that inspire her. One instance is an Australian article by Jane Drurie (1996), who in exploring classroom power dynamics includes a narrative that speaks to the woman's daily experience as an adult educator more than all four years of reading she has done on adult education theories of learning, teaching, philosophy, program planning, program evaluation or research. The story excerpts convey both a particular context and one set of experiences, yet elicit shared aspects of the lived realities of teaching:

It is mid afternoon. Outside the sun shines warm, almost languid, and through the windows come the occasional voices of students outside on the grass. This afternoon at least we are not to be disturbed by the sounds from the building site across the road...

... I certainly don't like this cluster on top of each other with a small group to one side as has occurred today. I also don't like the students all sitting as far as possible away from me, almost hanging out the windows, as often happens ...

... And now I am in the midst of the class, it is happening all around me, I am making it happen, comfortable in my role but always alert to the students; ease and challenge woven together, sometimes battling, sometimes at rest and no time to contemplate ...

... Once again the Pandora's box has been opened – 'facts', hurt feelings, fears, class resentments, values and beliefs are clanging around us but there seems no space for calling attention to such complexity, no space in the curriculum for such reality, no time. There are only frustrations, good intentions, the occasional laugh to break the unspoken, the often unknown, tensions ... (Drurie, Jane, 1996, pp. 137-139).

This feminist narrative of teaching and learning, like the article 'Nora's voice' (Rameka, Nora & Stalker, Joyce, 1996), nourishes the woman with possibilities for herself as researcher writing, luring her to another part of her story.

Gentle prisons

For most of her time considering issues of method the woman is enfolded in her study, a room of such significance to her journey that she wants to share descriptions of it with you, her readers. Her gentle prison is an entirely pleasant retreat she has created with her partner for her academic endeavours. She is surrounded by the freshness of creamy lemon-white walls, where window ledge and cornices edged Greek island blue frame a high view of gum trees. They have lovingly painted and polished her desk to a soft sheen of delicate bluish eggshell. Attached is a computer table that shelves the institutional grey of PC, curving to form a corner workbench in smoky glass. Against the wall a single bed divan sits snugly heaped with cushions where her partner, her son, her partner's daughters periodically flop, to quietly support or noisily interrupt her. On the wall is a gift of seven surfing dolphins framed aqua in a wave of breaking foam.

This 'room of her own', so important to her learning, is a pride: long awaited and hard earned, reminding her of the power of social space in the contexts of women's learning. She remembers how as an undergraduate she was unable to feel comfortable on campus, until alongside other young women she had lobbied the student union for a women's room. They had created a space for solitude, chat, and information resources, along with tea, coffee, a settee, hot water bottle and painkillers for headachy or menstruating bodies. While her inability to feel at ease at university could only ever be partially tempered by the establishment of a women's room on campus, since this itself caused a reactionary backlash and harassment, the room was nonetheless an incredibly empowering space. For her previous discomfort was shared by many women in higher education: she

remembers two mature-age mums who spent their break times in the women's room, confessing that they had eaten lunch in their cars before this, because they felt so 'out of place' on campus. Women used this as a space for both refuge and social time, 'down time' as well as discussion. Patricia Gumpert (1997, pp. 573-574) contends that such spaces contributed to the emergence of feminist scholarship in the United States in the 1960s and 1970s:

Participation in a 'women's group' or 'women's caucus' ... was commonplace ... the initial motivation was often to talk about their experiences of the immediate campus environment. Some women experienced it as alienating and hostile: 'There's no room for the likes of me!' or they joined 'to overcome anomie basically' and 'to share horror stories over lunch.' Others saw the campus as discriminatory ... they used the informal meetings to determine how to survive in an inhospitable context. Such collegueship on campus was essential, not just for social support and validation, but for collaborating and searching for intellectual openings in the canons of their disciplines.

In Australian higher education Aboriginal women often faced worse isolation than most until specific support programs were introduced. Lillian Holt (2000, pp. 10-11) recounts:

Enter 1968 and enrolment at University. Enter culture shock, enter more *nameless discontent*, enter tarnishment of this not-so-naïve – by now – little black pearl. It was not what I had anticipated and I found university life strange and alienating.

In the United States context Juanita Johnson-Bailey (2001, pp. 126-144) examines the educational stories of Black women re-entering higher education, where racism and sexism combined to create terrible marginalisation, including being ignored, interrupted, disregarded, misadvised and intentionally excluded from networks. Despite such discrimination, she recounts how the women in her study struggled to survive and eventually excel in academia. Australian Larissa Behrendt (2000, p. 67) also pays tribute to indigenous forerunners who paved her way at university, fighting for the right to education and surviving despite their

isolation in the system. Now holding a doctorate of law from Harvard University, Larissa validates the need for culturally appropriate, supportive spaces for Aboriginal learners when starting out:

I don't think I would have made it through university if it hadn't have been for the support I received from my family and the UNSW Aboriginal Students' Centre. It was vital to have that safe place during the first year in the very alienating university environment. It is important to know and be able to talk to other Aboriginal people at university going through the same emotions and experiencing the same things (Behrendt, Larissa, p. 69).

At the woman's TAFE workplace the Aboriginal Cottage provides a similar space for indigenous students until they feel confident or motivated to join 'mainstream' courses such as the women's program.

The Certificate in Career Education for Women at TAFE similarly had a dedicated homeroom with tea and coffee making facilities close by, following feminist education principles as outlined by Erica Kates (1999, pp. 332-333). Frequently in cold weather the women eat their lunches there, despite official rules to the contrary. As coordinator she often jokes with them to keep these rule breaking lunchtimes 'under wraps'. The women agree that they deserve this special dispensation because, unlike some student groups, they never leave a mess, knowing what it takes to clean one up! The women have had their own 'room' since she first began teaching the program, but it has not always been so comfortable: one group nicknamed a prior incarnation in demountable buildings 'the cupboard'. Teachers and students literally tripped over each other, books and bags to move around this room. At the time of her research project the women's course had been temporarily housed in a new building with a spacious top-floor view, conveniently above administration, counselling and just a corridor away from the library. When the course had once again re-located into re-built accommodation, classes were quite squashed for a semester. However, with

expectations uplifted by a brief sojourn in comfort, the woman had requested and gained a larger classroom on a permanent basis.

For it is not just having a place for women that is important, but also the nature of that space and having some control over it to ensure that the context is actually conducive to learning. Having control over learning space can allow feminists to 'practice what we preach' as Ellen Kimmel (1999) points out. One aspect of control over space that emerged through feminist activism in the 1960's and 70's in education was the apparently straightforward moving of furniture:

Perhaps the simplest yet most powerful metaphorical act – the pedagogical shot heard 'round the world' – was to place the chairs in a circle. What is more incongruous than students lined neatly in rows like silent soldiers, taking notes on the evils of not speaking out or being active participants in their own destiny? The medium *is* the message. Many early feminist pedagogues sensed this truth and began quietly to shift classroom power relations – along with its content – to begin what has evolved into the many feminist pedagogies (Kimmel, Ellen, 1999, p. 62).

In the woman's experience of teaching at TAFE in 1990s rural Australia, as no doubt still occurs in many other parts of world, this metaphorical act was not achieved without a struggle for power. For many of the courses on which the woman taught, including the Certificate in General Education, Tertiary Preparation Certificate and Communication classes in the trade sections, moving the furniture into a horseshoe caused complaints and was at times completely overruled by head teachers. In her first five years she would suggest that the students move the furniture at the beginning of each class, and at the end of the lesson return it to position. The activity often understandably raised a chorus of groans from the students.

The women's course was the first class where she found the power to move the furniture more permanently when she became coordinator, although the space was so crowded that they'd had a horseshoe with rows in the middle to fit the number of students into the room in a very tight squeeze. At Nowra there were also complaints about the women's course making too much noise with discussions, group activities and worst of all - laughter. The power to fill a space visibly with *enjoyment* of learning was seen as somehow suspect. According to bell hooks (1994, p. 7) this attitude to teaching and learning was pervasive:

Excitement in higher education was viewed as potentially disruptive of the atmosphere of seriousness assumed to be essential to the learning process. To enter classroom settings in colleges and universities with the will to share the desire to encourage excitement, was to transgress. Not only did it require movement beyond accepted boundaries, but excitement could not be generated without a full recognition of the fact that there could never be an absolute set agenda governing teaching practices. Agendas had to be flexible, had to allow for spontaneous shifts in direction.

The logic of feminist teaching and learning practices paralleled the logic of feminist research methods to encourage freedom, individuality and flexibility. Bell hooks notes how the feminist classroom was "the one space where students could raise critical questions about pedagogical process", whether such critiques were well received or not. The woman metaphorically takes up this same space in choosing feminist methodologies for her thesis.

By adopting a feminist framework for research that uses imagination to sight possibilities, she can perhaps be part of a new ordering of human relations as Helen Callaway (1981) suggests, just as has occurred with the moving of the furniture. For eventually after years of frustration and persistence other staff had followed suit, expressing a preference for a horseshoe arrangement or clusters of tables, so that the whole teaching section was now set up in various ways other than traditional straight rows. In the women's course, housed in their new, spacious room, they have an open horseshoe with the teacher at front or to the

side near whiteboards, to allow more open collaborative discussion and reflect co-participation in learning between students and teachers. The arrangement allows for students and teachers to join together in pairs or small groups easily, as the middle section of the horseshoe accommodates chairs.

Of course, the moving of furniture is just one contextual component of feminist learning and teaching practices, which are embodied in the interactions that take place in the Certificate in Career Education for Women. Ellen Kimmel (1999, pp. 57- 76) outlines a number of principles and behaviours involved in feminist teaching practices that are reflected in the course, designed to create a context which encourages holistic, empowering learning for women aimed at personal growth and social change. Crucially many of these practices and strategies essentially re-examine and re-distribute the power relations between teacher and student, between teacher and learning materials, between women and society. In many ways feminist teaching practices parallel the developments in feminist research as outlined by Helen Callaway (1981), for like her research, they are about creating new knowledge and new ways of being in education and beyond. The woman thus expects her research, like her classroom, to be empowering. Each semester the woman is reminded pleasantly of how effective these feminist strategies are, when women who enter the course with extreme apprehension and nerves transform into assertive people who are not only asking for what they want, but powerfully telling her what they *don't* want.

The importance of power over space and place in the context of adult learning operates at a number of different levels: incorporating the material elements of cost, convenience and physical comfort with the mental, emotional and spiritual ease conducive to acquiring and producing knowledge. For example, Erika Kates (1999, pp. 332 -333) proposes a framework for supportive education environments for women on low incomes, in addition to a home room. A number of these are implemented by the Career Education for Women course: it is a special program with staff specifically chosen for the course; student selection is

based on need and recognizes women's informal learning rather than restricting entry to those with prior qualifications; staff are kept up-to-date about student circumstances that may affect their learning; careers and personal counselling, disability support and tutorial assistance are available; the coordinator maintains links with public and community welfare agencies; peer support is encouraged in the program; and financial restraints are lowered by providing a fee-free course. There are of course numerous omissions as well, both in the women's course and women's wider participation in education provided by New South Wales Technical and Further Education Commission (NSW TAFE), including a complete lack of on-site childcare.

A collaborative paper produced by her peers and supervisors at the University of New England further illustrates the powerful physical, mental, emotional and spiritual elements of place in women's learning. Ironically, by remaining an external student in order to support herself and her family throughout her postgraduate study, the woman is isolated from this collective space:

Voice 1

... It is a house so we have a kitchen, shower and offices, a lounge where we have our meetings and it feels homely rather than office-like. It is not only the physical space, but the emotional and creative space that we have made here that works. The first and most fundamental shared understanding about how we work and learn is about being supportive and constructive. So much of university life is based on a dynamic of opposition where one has to learn to attack and be attacked before even developing an academic voice. My observation of the PhD (or any) learning process is that this does not facilitate learning, certainly not for women ...

Voice 2

...The centre of the cottage exists in many places. In the corridor with the whiteboard that reminds us who is locking up, or sometimes instead reflects the mood that someone is in. In the seminar room, the lounge room, where we collect to give papers from chairs arranged in a circle around the edges of the room. This room is sometimes softened by the

sharing of food, by flowers and a handmade pottery nicknack over the fireplace. My “methodology chapter”, a huge piece of artwork is still in this space waiting for me to frame it, long after I have submitted my written thesis. And the kitchen, in which we meet, momentarily over the boiling kettle or around the old laminex table ...

Voice 3

... From the quiet of the Cottage at the extremity of the University grounds, I observe and absorb the calming effect of the spring blossoms bouncing in anticipation, choreographed by the cool wind outside the French doors. Most of the flowers are still dormant in their buds awaiting a signal, a revelation that would enable them to emerge from their elegant protection to release their full potential ...

Voice 4

... The cottage is encircled by an eclectic blend of weeds alongside majestic Pines and Eucalypts. Within this circle is an old stone terrace, which has inspired women to delve into the soil and make the garden space an extension of the interior’s sense of belonging. Herbs, weeds, trees, annuals and perennials: eclectic plants/woman thriving ...

(de Carteret, Phoenix, Edwards, Helen, Mackay, Frances, McConnell-Imbriotis, Alison, Nye, Adele, Somerville, Margaret & Swain, Jennifer, 2004, pp. 2-6).

In different contexts the benefits of space and place for adult learning, like the room in which the women meet during the course, the cottage shared by her peers and supervisors, and the room in which the woman reads about method in adult education research, can also be seen as a privilege. Her ‘room of her own’ reflects in a different form the ‘study’ or ‘den’ portrayed in popular culture as a male retreat in the homes of well-heeled English or North American men. For the woman this is a long-awaited and wonderful advantage, both in relation to her past study conditions and those of so many women in her region, the country, and the world.

Excerpt Kath's Learning Story

had to learn how
to find my own space
time at home
has been difficult
to put into practice
impossible actually

The woman is at times troubled that she grumbles about being 'holed up' instead of free to enjoy her spare time, when for so many people around the globe academic study remains an unthinkable privilege, let alone postgraduate study and a physical space with desk, computer, ink, paper and books, along with the mental peace in which to pursue writing and thought. A. Suresh Canagarajah (1999, pp. 10-11) presents an evocative scenario of the material conditions which even those with the benefit of attending university may endure in many parts of the world, quoted below in part, but worth reading in full for the range of complex issues raised. In Suresh's story the university students are learning English through a British textbook read to them by their tutor:

Mrs K. began the first passage: 'Peter is in his final year at the University of Reading, where he is studying Chemistry. He hopes to obtain first class honors in his final examinations so that he can continue with postgraduate work in photochemistry.'

These words set Ravi thinking about his own situation... The civil war meant that some graduates had taken up to eight years to complete what was supposed to be a three-year course. Even if he managed to get his degree, he didn't know what he would do after that. The fighting had left more than half the local people without jobs; many had lost their homes as well. Worst of all, Ravi's father and several other local farmers had been arrested earlier in the year, on suspicion of helping the rebel forces, and no one had any idea when they might be freed. If Ravi was to have any hope of finding paid work to support his family, he would almost certainly have to leave his mother with his younger brother and sister, and move to the capital, or even to another country.

'Peter is very well organized, and usually manages a reasonable balance between work and study. Since he has exams this term, he tends to spend about two hours reading in the library after school, and another hour or so at home ...'

At the sound of a small explosion, Mrs K. paused momentarily in her reading. There was a scream from outside, and several students took cover beside their desks, but the blast had been some distance away. Mrs K decided that this was hardly sufficient cause for dismissing the class, and carried on with the narration. She didn't consider this distraction to be life threatening – not yet (Canagarajah, A. Suresh, 1999, p. 10).

As Lorraine Johnson-Riordan (1994, p.12) reminds us, the conditions of 'our' existence, 'our' life experiences" are not the same for every adult learner everywhere. Nor are our experiences as teachers or researchers, so the logic of methods about research in adult education surely needs to allow flexibility in response to different contexts.

Griff Foley (1993, pp. 77-78) points out that adult education research is a form of production, calling for adult education researchers to discuss and make the conditions of their production transparent. The power we have over context, the places and spaces in which we produce knowledge, as students, teachers and researchers, remains crucial to what is produced, as Liz Stanley (1990, pp. 3-19) explains, somewhat prior to Foley's call. Stanley provides a feminist analysis of academic production in the social sciences to demonstrate the connections between the contexts of production and what is produced. Speaking of the commodity 'knowledge', she points out that by constructing 'what is known' conceptually and categorically in universal terms, then *how* these are known is rendered invisible and the result is '*alienated knowledge*':

... a product apparently complete, bearing no apparent trace of the conditions of its production and the social relations that gave rise to this
Stanley, Liz, 1990, pp. 10-11).

Liz Stanley outlines how feminists refuse such divisions, insisting "that the known are also knowers, research objects are their own subjects; objectivity is a set of intellectual practices for separating people from knowledge of their own

subjectivity” (Stanley, Liz, 1990, p. 11). Feminist research thus views the researcher/theorist as an actual person in a concrete setting, who participates in a material activity of understanding and theorising rather than some superior process removed from ordinary people, and these acts of knowing are crucial in determining what is known (Stanley, Liz, 1990, p. 12). The goal of this approach to academic research is unalienated knowledge:

... which concretely and analytically locates the product of the academic feminist labour process within a concrete analysis of the process of production itself (Stanley, Liz, 1990, p. 12).

Through her reflection on her room, on power and place for women, on her haunted search for literature and other parts of her research journey through time and space, the woman therefore adopts a logic and method of research that opens up for observation and discussion the intertwined and changing contexts of her production as adult learner and teacher. Using this logical craft of method she seeks a form of knowledge that integrates what is known with knowers, the woman and the women, in various and shifting contexts.

Locking down methodical myths

As the woman emerges from theory to start on her practical research path with a strong sense of feminist traditions, some of the myths of conventional methods become apparent, and she is searching for creative, rather than methodical solutions. The initial discussions she had held with the women about keeping journals, then meeting for group discussions and individual interviews, are threatened by the end of semester. Given the conflicting demands on their time, only one woman has managed to keep a journal for the study. In addition, a number of women have unexpectedly left the course for personal reasons and one who completed the course is leaving the district. Only seven women remain. Thankfully all remain happy to participate in the venture. This is unexpected: the course had a consistently excellent student retention rate, yet by coincidence this

semester more women withdrew than from any of the women's courses on which she had taught previously or subsequently.

Nonetheless the woman proceeds. She drafts and edits her research proposal. She drafts and re-drafts open-ended interview questions: What did you learn? How did you learn? What helped your learning? What hindered your learning? What did the women only environment mean to you? What brought you to the course? How do you feel about participating in this interview? The woman checks and completes ethics forms, gains approval from TAFE Managers and the University. She books a library room and arranges a group discussion with the women about their learning. She acquires tapes, a recorder, morning tea and begins recording their shared stories, despite the fact that at the last minute one of the women can't attend due to a sick child.

From this group discussion onwards, the woman feels her way as she goes. And in the process, she finds that nothing is absolutely straightforward, but that her qualitative research, like her teaching, has her thinking on her feet. For example, the woman has a prior relationship with her students through feminist teaching practices, which allows them comfort to question the methods of research openly from the outset.

Excerpt from Sharing Stories - Opening

Kath: Why does it say this about complaints? It sounds a bit scary ...

The group response to complaints forms based on research ethics does not meet some mythical standard of social science method and nor do the later individual interviews with each of the women. The interviews are arranged at a variety of times and in different settings to suit each of the seven students, in response to their individuality, rather than being strictly rote repetitions of questions in order to

promote uniformity. Some women want to meet at the library where they joined together for the group discussion; some want to meet at the woman's home, one chooses to meet at her own mother's house. The questions are not delivered in entirely the same manner, for each interview evolves to create comfort in a human social interaction: some women want to see the questions first, one woman answers excitedly using the question sheet as a guide but choosing her own question order; others want to be prompted and guided throughout. Three of the women do not want to look at the questions at all beforehand, feeling that this will make them nervous, and choose to answer without prior consideration of the content.

This research process is in direct contrast with methods texts that often use pseudo-scientific models to promote an ideal of 'reliable' data:

When there is only one interviewer who interviews a small number of respondents in depth, reliability hinges on that interviewer's consistency and the compatibility of the relevant factors in each interview (Keats, Daphne, 1993, p. 133).

In these strict frameworks even her use of open-ended questions to allow the women's own emphases to emerge can be considered somehow suspect:

Open-ended questions are more difficult to score than questions with a closed format. A content analysis approach can be used. Difficulty arises when the response is unique, that is it does not fit into a coding category, and when the response is compounded, that is it fits into more than one of the coding categories. Decisions to resolve these anomalies must be made (Keats, Daphne, 1993, p. 132).

In such approaches to research methods difference and connection within and between people's meanings are quickly hidden or erased, and the woman is mystified as to how this creates reliability. Many academics may question the validity of the woman's qualitative feminist approaches, yet at a 2005 academic research conference the woman attends, a nurse educator from Hawaii, who has

administered questionnaires for medical professors for years, tells her that when patients comment “But you’re not asking me the right questions” about their pain, or symptoms, or treatment experience, the research method employed is to either ignore the comment completely or note the comment on the form and *then* ignore it. The woman wonders how such a method can possibly be considered reliable, no matter how formally the ‘data’ is coded and tested. Fred Massarik (1981, pp. 201-206) classifies interviews into six different categories, and examines how each is based on a particular form of relationship, none of which is value-free, claiming for example, that the interactions in limited survey interviews may elicit mechanical responses. Elizabeth Adams St Pierre (1997, pp. 175-189) further troubles the notion of human research producing ‘data’. Similarly, the woman does not see the words, time and spaces she has shared with the students as ‘data’ at all, but as stories of lived experience.

The woman thus finds that her research methods are a continuation of her teaching practices: that they have as much in common with creative art as with science, since both are planned yet responsive, subject to change, allowing for sharing, individuality, mutual problem solving, replication but also variation. For example, in the group discussion and at interview many of the women find talking with the tape visibly recording their words off-putting at first, and each interview varies in depth, length and order. There are pauses, uncertainties, thinking about things, winding around a topic or idea and coming back to it. The interviews and group discussion are based on a relationship of six months standing and at times both the woman and the students fall back into aspects of this prior relationship in the midst of research roles.

Excerpt from Sharing Stories

Gai: Do you think that's a good idea?
Deb: I thought you were going to be studying?
Ren: Oh yeah I am, but I'm doing it at home and —
Deb: You're not doing any of it here then?

The women are interacting humans and in part the pre-existing relationships established in the course facilitate rather than hinder the research. For example, the women share personal information and feel comfortable and safe to express disagreement with her and each other, to question and make suggestions, including about research methods.

Excerpt from Sharing Stories

- Deb: — I've been thinking about how can we get into this, how should we start, because most of you didn't have time to write journals — and Isobel's been teaching you about writing reflections and saying you got right into it —
- Gai: OHHH
- Lisa: NOO
- Gai: Only cause we HAD to (laughs)
- Lisa: We didn't like it
- Deb: So you didn't like it? Maria said to me you were right into it, she was lying to me was she? (laughs)
- Gai: Maria would do anything to make us work (laughs)
- Deb: Alright, well I won't make you write anything, OK that's — I just thought because she said that to me, but if that's not the case, well, we won't.
- Gai: Oh well — no —but, well I don't know about the rest of them, but every portfolio I did I wrote a reflection on it —
- Group: Yes
- Gai: So couldn't you read them?
- Deb: Yes, I could.

Finally the woman feels that her research does not precisely follow any textbook prescription of method, but is instead as complex an activity as learning and teaching, rich with human complications, requiring pragmatic and creative approaches. In the end, for instance, the woman doesn't have time to include some of the information she collected in her research, such as the quizzes suggested by the women, although their discussion of them certainly influenced her analysis. Most of the women have input into their final representation as she planned and respond positively, but not all, since some have moved and the woman cannot track them down. Even the seemingly simple matter of offering false names is not without some human complexity.

Excerpt from Sharing Stories

Deb: What about naming —because I've actually put in there individual names will not be used without permission, usually that's how you do it, individual names will not be used, but I don't know whether you might want to use your names, you might want to be 'famous'?

Group: Laughter and silence

Deb: I'll just leave the options open?

Kate: It doesn't worry me

Various: It doesn't worry me either (murmurs of assent)

Deb: Probably when it gets to that stage of writing up you'll have a stronger idea about how you'd like to be represented, whether you'd like to use a pseudonym. The last project I did they picked the name that they'd always wanted to be, and that's what they called themselves - that was fun!

Group: Laughter

Ren: Yeah, I might nickname mine —cause are you going into the personal side as well?

Deb: If that comes up —

The woman would argue that research method in the humanities is as much creative art as science, and that her adult education research will never be completely replicable in another context, given the richness and subtlety of human experience and interaction. Many months have passed when she completes her implementation of research with the women, logically inspired to proceed in the hope of producing grounded theory, using a feminist framework that is subjectively objective, content to live with the human complexities of research in practice, and to try to make visible the contexts of her experience and the women's experiences.

And as the woman emerges from her den she begins to ponder more about writing, what structure she will use. She wants to break free of the constraints of 'traditional' academic style, to reflect the nature of the women and her study, to continue the feminist tradition of questioning both academic form and content. Her supervisor assures her that she *can* and *should* do so. However, in straying from the impersonal strictures of academic writing, the traditional styles she has learnt, what will she find to replace them? How will she write, 'sitting inside the circle, not risking rejection, but breaking out of the circle at the same time'? What forms, what words can she discover to express the women's stories, her story?

Chapter 4. Disequilibrium Conflict I

... situation which is disturbed by some power or force ...
(Todorov, Tzvetan, 1977, p. 111).

Writing through Academic Block

Oppressive language does more than represent violence; it is violence; does more than represent the limits of knowledge; it limits knowledge. Whether it is obscuring state language or the faux language of mindless media; whether it is the proud but calcified language of the academy or the commodity-driven language of science; whether it is the malign language of law-without-ethics, or language designed for the estrangement of minorities, hiding its racist plunder in its literary cheek - it must be rejected, altered and exposed ... the policing languages of mastery ... cannot, do not, permit new knowledge or encourage the mutual exchange of ideas (Morrison, Toni, 1997, pp. 16 -17).

Like distractions doubt flew in, blew her way, her willpower to the wind. Her head was on the block, the chopping board of academic life: writer's block. Or was it language block?

Naming: the impenetrable block

As the woman proceeds, she worries about the language she will use to pursue and record her research. She has strong reservations about writing in an academic context that often seems to privilege stifling writing structures and mystifying writing styles; a tradition of 'proud but calcified language'. Her reservations are shared by many feminist researchers, concerned with:

... the question of language, at once the most problematic and pervasive, since it encodes and expresses all other dimensions of our understanding. The academic frameworks of our disciplines, the categories of our research, the distinctions and nuances, have evolved within a male tradition of language and intellectual style. As has been pointed out in recent years, much of this language shows both overt and subtle forms of sexism. How then do we find the

authentic forms of expression for female consciousness and experience? We are concerned not only with the discoveries and results of our research inquiry, but with the linguistic modes which shape our investigation (Callaway, Helen, 1981, p.42).

The question of language is crucial, but also fraught with complex issues. Even the seemingly straightforward choice to use the word 'women' rather than the term 'gender' is hotly contested. Miriam Zukas (1998, p. 32), for example, rightly warns of the dangers of "essentialising and privileging women", as well as the ways that this can become associated with celebrating so-called 'female' qualities of caring and community, and lock women into further oppression. At the same time, to use the term 'gender' is to completely distance herself from the everyday world of the participants in her research, who live their social lives as 'women', culturally perceived as the 'other' to men. She therefore chooses to use the term 'woman', without diminishing the complexities of gendered experience, recognizing that there are always differences that interplay with other aspects of identity such as race, culture and class. Her use of the term includes both commiseration for and celebration of the gendered experiences which impact on women's identities, recognizing oppression but also human abilities to choose, act and resist.

The woman's concerns are interwoven with worry about writing to satisfy both herself and her academic readers. As the woman walks among the spectres of literature and locks herself up with readings on the logic of research methods, these issues of academic language, structure and audience become further complicated. Enter post-structuralism and post-modernism to centre stage of the social sciences, with highly theoretical philosophical concepts embodied in a range of new terms, and the woman becomes even less confident, less certain. All the preparation she has done dissolves. She is consumed by uncertainty: blocked.

When first she finds the tentative courage to consult her supervisor about issues of writing structure and style she is assured there are many possibilities, she does not have to produce a completely 'conventional' thesis; there are academic markers who will be sympathetic to non-traditional styles, indeed some who will even expect them. Slightly relieved, the woman nonetheless continues to sweat.

Excerpt from Sharing Stories

- Lisa: It's easier to talk about than to write them down, because I sat and tried to write reflections for you and I couldn't write them, I just didn't know what to write ...
- Kate: Some I found okay ... the women one for Isobel I found hard, and yet I wrote the Aboriginal one ...
- Lisa: Yeah, I really enjoyed that class and I couldn't write reflections on it ...
- Kath: Yeah, we all found that it was hard to write a reflection on her class
- Gai: Yet that was the class that we didn't like earlier ...
- Kathy: I had trouble writing reflections for **all** the classes (laughs)

Questions of language are tied to questions of power. In the back of her mind she holds the memory of a close friend whose beautifully crafted Masters thesis was severely penalized by one marker because of its unconventional style. The woman herself has not completed a 'traditional' thesis yet holds fast to a heartfelt wish not to write in this way. At the same time she is aware that this position is risky and tenuous. She has no confidence since she has no definite vision of an alternative structure or style, or her ability to achieve it; only a vague sensing of possibilities.

Like the enormity of an old fallen tree, the language of the academy blocks her path, challenging her to cut a way through. She is wary of sharp blades, does not like wielding axes. They can slice through fingers, feet and limbs as easily as they do wood - more easily in fact. She stands transfixed by the block. She looks at the axe, which she is too afraid to pick up. For far too long she remains thus, motionless.

Silencing: fear of the block

The woman is immobilized; silenced by fear. She cannot find the way that she wishes to write academically, and she cannot write about academic writing. As is frequently the way of fear, she holds it in every cell of her being before she becomes fully conscious of it, can name it, and act. It seems an age before she summons sufficient bravery to talk again to her supervisor about the issue, and another age before she turns to face you, her audience, and commit these thoughts to the semi-permanence of ink.

Will you dear reader, as one adept at reading and writing in the academic tradition, respond to the quote by Toni Morrison at the opening of this chapter as an insult? Will you take it personally? Are you, on the other hand, someone who has at times struggled with reading and writing academic prose? If not, will the issues be open for discussion?

The fear that questions of academic writing should definitely not be mentioned has stopped her and fuelled self-doubt. Who is she to make such audacious claims within the very context that she criticizes? Will she alienate you, her markers, at the outset? Yet how will she find a way through this block if she cannot explore its nature; cannot write about it? Debbie Horsfall (2001, p. 6) describes the conflict involved in such narratives of stuckness:

The tension then, is in being true to myself and being accessible to others while at the same time being able to connect with, be understood and validated by those in authority. I experience this tension as a never-ending compromise. I have to be accepted, if I am to get heard, from both within and without – so I end up rarely saying what I really want to, the sharp, adversarial edges have by necessity been rubbed smooth. How do I write what I want to write, and still be heard? How do I hold these tensions and not disappear into a blank empty space of non-action?

Is she already smoothing over the blade she might need to cut through the block?

Speaking: around the block

Indeed the woman has commenced with self-censorship, choosing the least confrontational part of Toni Morrison's claims about the violence of language. Instead of the current introductory quote she wanted to begin with words closer to her fearful, angry passion:

There is and will be more seductive, mutant language designed to throttle women, to pack their throats like pâté-producing geese with their own unsayable, transgressive words; there will be more of the language of surveillance disguised as research; of politics and history calculated to render the suffering of millions mute; language glamorized to thrill the dissatisfied and bereft into assaulting their neighbors; arrogant pseudo-empirical language crafted to lock creative people into cages of inferiority and hopelessness (Morrison, Toni, 1994, pp. 17-18).

The woman feels less like a person armed with an axe and more like this plumped and quivering goose, her neck exposed on the wooden block, waiting for the fall of the blade. Stuck in her throat are the sounds she might make if she could find a way to utter her truths: because the imaginary axe is held not in her own hands, but in the hands of those with more power than herself, her audience. Fear is fuelled by the fact that her words, like those of so many women, may be unpalatable and invite repercussions from those in authority.

Excerpt from Kate's Learning Story

over my life
whenever expressed
negative feelings
cut off denied

The woman will not risk the self-harm of an axe held in inexperienced hands. Maybe she needs to find a different cutting tool, one that is less fearsome. Perhaps a slightly blunt tomahawk will do? It might cause chips to fly, to hit her in the vulnerable eye, but she is less afraid of such an event.

Facing: the dangers of the block

Questions of power and audience are frequently an issue for writers. Canadian author Margaret Atwood (2002, pp.127-131) chooses a section of George Orwell's novel *Nineteen Eighty-four* to explore aspects of the relationship between writer and potential readers. The hero Winston Smith has bought a smooth-leaved blank book: a forbidden object in a totalitarian regime. Winston's situation is a telling example of the dangers for writers who break social taboos in front of an audience with unlimited power, for the eventual reader of Winston's beautiful creamy pages is of course O'Brien, terrifying member of the thought police. During interrogation he uses Winston's writing as a tool for torture and evidence of sedition:

'Do you remember writing in your diary,' he said, 'that it did not matter whether I was a friend or an enemy, since I was at least a person who understood you and could be talked to? You were right. I enjoy talking to you. Your mind appeals to me. It resembles my own mind except that you happen to be insane.'(Orwell, 2000, p.271).

Like Winston in the novel, the woman is foolhardy, must write about the block of academic language, partly in the hope of finding understanding, but primarily in the hope of understanding herself. If her thesis does not produce knowledge useful to her then how will it be useful to others, and to what end does she work? How will she break any of the silences about women in adult education if she does not find space for her own voice as a woman and the voices of the women who have shared with her? She must be brave and ignore the dangers.

Excerpt from Kathy's Learning Story

kept it bottled
since I was seven
finally able open up

The woman reasons with herself to defuse the fear. While she is subject to power, she reminds herself that this is not a totalitarian regime. She remembers benevolence from previous academic audiences in spite of differences of opinion. Indeed, respecting difference is meant to be part of the nature of academia, although she knows it can be other than this, that power can be exercised in cutting ways. In speaking to you her readers, the woman invites tolerance. Being silenced is an act of oppression, as Debbie Horsfall, George Orwell and countless others show us. The woman cannot succumb to the fear of 'thought police': real or imagined, external or internal. She must face the mastery of the 'proud but calcified language of the academy' and speak plainly of her experience, not simply seek permission like 'a good girl'.

No longer mesmerized by fear, she is at last in a position to move. She decides to examine this stolid object from all angles. She retreads her path seeking a way to cut through.

Encountering: the power of the block

She can barely recall her earliest encounters with the most petrified of academic writing, but a scenario painted by Patricia Nelson Limerick (1993) in an irreverent criticism of academic prose, rings true to memory. Limerick's *New York Times* article opens thus:

In ordinary life, when a listener cannot understand what someone has said, this is the usual exchange:

Listener: I cannot understand what you are saying.

Speaker: Let me try to say it more clearly

But in scholarly writing in the late 20th century, other rules apply. This is the implicit exchange:

Reader: I cannot understand what you are saying.

Academic Writer: Too bad. The problem is that you are an unsophisticated and untrained reader. If you were smarter, you would understand me.

The exchange remains implicit, because no one wants to say: “This doesn’t make any sense,” for fear that the response, “It would, if you were smarter,” might actually be true (Limerick, Patricia Nelson, 1993, p. 1).

While Limerick is using the persuasive generalizations of journalism here, there is nonetheless a compelling kernel in her characterization of the power relationship established between some academic writing and its readers. Limerick’s scenario ignores the existence of academic texts that are fresh and full of insight and conceals the fact that not all speakers in everyday life are so obliging to their listeners, as those of us who have failed to get clear explanations from politicians, government departments, doctors or lawyers can verify. She also disregards the fact that the media itself is not blameless in this respect. During 1990s news reports of the war in Bosnia, for instance, the term ‘ethnic cleansing’ could well have indicated a washing ritual by a particular cultural group, rather than the forced removal and murder of people of the Islamic faith. On the other hand, Limerick’s dialogue *does* encapsulate the silencing performed by academic writers who seem to adopt a position in relation to their audience that ‘if you don’t understand then the problem is you – not the writing’. This implicit exchange usually keeps most students and even other academics quiet when it could be contended that the problem of making sense lies with the tortuous prose rather than the reader. Students may mutter or laugh about the worst of academic writing, but the power dynamics ensure that they often don’t protest too loudly about it while they are trying to gain their ‘pass’.

Like many undergraduates, the woman had barely survived her early interactions with academic writing. As a twenty-two year old who had been working and travelling for some years she had struggled to make sense of many of her coursework readings so she could produce an ‘acceptable’ academic essay. Through trial and error she had gradually achieved some success. Like Patricia Nelson Limerick’s reader, she had believed that if she didn’t get the gist of a piece of academic writing then the problem lay with her, not the writing.

Keen to learn what was required of her in the socially prestigious setting of university, the travesty of being expected to decipher and discuss the main points in some set reading where meaning was obscured by poor or pretentious writing, did not strike the woman until well into her second year. Before that, like so many other students she had stressed and struggled her way through long and winding sentences. She had persevered with foggy word choice and jargon-ridden passages, where terms for specific theoretical concepts were used to pepper paragraphs without any definition, explanation or reference. Her mind would literally hurt as she encountered the impersonal pseudo-scientific style adopted in many disciplines, with an insistent over-use of the passive voice. She had puzzled over passages where almost any action was turned into a noun so that nobody could be recognized as doing anything anywhere, let alone having an original thought. Eija Ventola (1996, p. 153) summarises the linguistic processes of many academic texts in technical terms:

Complexity is often a result of such linguistic phenomena as high lexical density and heavy nominalizations in which verbal processes are coded in nominal structures. Such texts are no longer dynamic in nature, but static. The language used has become grammatically greatly metaphorized. The effects of these processes on the readability of an academic text are obvious: the texts become cumbersome and difficult to decode.

The woman counted herself lucky to survive the system. For those whose class, race, gender, age, language and cultural background already preclude comfort within a university setting, it may be impossible to withstand the pressure of working through inscrutable academic writing, compounded by the fear of being labelled lacking: 'not smart enough'. Comments by people she teaches in the Tertiary Preparation Certificate at TAFE or in later university studies echo the pressure of the unequal power exchange between students and academic prose. Some of the brightest, most motivated of women from the CEW course who choose an academic path to further their career goals tell of their anger, depression or frustration when they encounter the language of further study. They persevere and conquer such feelings – or drop out. For the violence and

exclusion of academic language is experienced personally. As one mature age woman in a British study comments:

It's so abstract, isn't it? It just so removes. And using all these, all these really difficult words, not the commonplace words that people understand.. like, you know, they're talking about the proletariat and like the proletariat don't even know what they're supposed to be! It makes no sense. (Edwards, Rosalind, 1993, p. 85).

A Nyungar Aboriginal student from Western Australia expresses similar feelings more bluntly, while at the same time showing the threats to self-esteem such language creates:

... well I've come across some of the words ... and I think they are just ridiculous words. You know, just too long winded to, to describe something that you know, I suppose just Aboriginal people can't perceive it or just can't grasp it, because we are just simple, we'll say something straight out, whereas when you look at some of the readings I read and some of the works, like it's just too scientific or too bullshit, hyperfalluted or whatever (Malcolm, Ian & Rochecouste, Judith, 1998, p. 67).

The pressures of writing academic prose, are multiplied for students by criticisms of their undergraduate essays, which must conform and be marked against a different set of rules than much of what they are reading: that of clarity, fluidity, elegance of expression in formal English and perfectly referenced logical structure. Eija Ventola (1996) examines manuals designed to assist students to acquire academic writing skills, finding that on "the one hand writers are told to write clear, uncomplicated prose" but on "the other hand, writers also frequently get plenty of advice that pulls them totally in the other direction"(Ventola, Eija, 1996, pp. 154-5).

Excerpt – from Lisa’s Learning Story

English always a struggle
never had the confidence
couldn't cope with
nouns verbs adjectives

still don't know what they are

Brian Street argues that education at all levels presents the view that there is only once literacy, which effectively silences people from a range of cultural backgrounds. His description of this process can also be applied to the silencing of voices that reflect class and gender:

... the distancing of language from subjects – the ways in which language is treated as though it were a thing, distanced from both teacher and learner and imposing on them external rules and requirements as though they were but passive recipients; ‘metalinguistic’ usages – the ways in which the social process of reading and writing are referred to ... as though they were independent and neutral competencies rather than laden with significance for power relations and ideology; ‘privileging’ – the ways in which reading and writing are given status vis-à-vis oral discourse as though ... intrinsically superior and, therefore, those who acquired it would also become superior (Street, Brian, 1995, p. 114).

One of her supervisors, Alison McConnell-Imbriotis (2005) points out in a group discussion at a PhD school that part of the problem is that power play through language is frequently concealed and the ‘rules’ applied unevenly. Greg Myers from Lancaster University notes that:

I have found from concordancing some of my comments on undergraduate coursework that I use the word *vague* with alarming frequency (43 times in 44,000 words in one year of comments in the sociolinguistics course, to be more exact). What is worrying is that I use it with several different meanings: sometimes to suggest a more precise alternative to a word, sometimes to criticize organization, sometimes to ask for evidence for a generalization, sometimes to point to the failure to spell out the implications of specific findings. It is hard to avoid the conclusion that my use of *vague* is, well, vague. What is clear in every comment is that my use is a criticism ... Yet linguistic and rhetorical

researchers studying academic discourse find that writers do use vague language frequently (Myers, Greg. 1996, pp. 3-4).

Despite this brutally honest self-disclosure about his frequently confusing use of the term 'vague', Greg Myers (1996) proceeds to argue that a certain level of vagueness in academic writing by academics is a useful and necessary strategy, which can protect writers from criticism by other academics.

In the practice of academic writing, power comes into play and sets up more than one set of double standards. For example, regular exposure to academic writing that adopts a foggy long-winded style has some students mimicking this in their own writing, including some of the worst habits of complicating or completely obscuring meaning. How this is received however, varies. In her second year her literature professor had helpfully crossed out the overblown word 'utilize' and advised her to stick with the equally meaningful term 'use'. In contrast, one of her friends who adopted a flippant attitude to the academic writing game, developed a series of high-sounding but meaningless phrases to use in her writing. One classic was 'pupating into a hazardous imago', apparently describing a particularly precarious stage for a caterpillar becoming a butterfly. Her friend had sprinkled this and similar phrases selectively into essays across a number of disciplines and repeatedly received a 'double tick' of approval in the margins, as well as improved marks, much to her amusement.

In spite of the comic aspects, there are serious downsides to obscuring language in academia and beyond. As Toni Morrison points out, language is intrinsic to what we know and how we exchange knowledge. She argues that the role of obscuring academic prose in establishing and maintaining power in fact inhibits our knowledge, and wonders:

... what could have been the intellectual history of any discipline if it had not insisted upon, or been forced into, the waste of time and life that rationalizations for and representations of dominance

required - lethal discourses of exclusion blocking access to cognition for both the excluder and the excluded (Morrison, Toni, 1997, p. 19).

The exclusions performed by academic language are part of a tradition of university education for a privileged elite. Jean Francois Lyotard (1989, pp. 118-119) mockingly outlines the exclusive linguistic roots of western academic philosophy:

What matters is that the question (and the possibility or impossibility of an answer) can be posed only in the *metalanguage* ... of philosophy. For such a metalanguage is already the language of masculinity in the western, and particularly Greek, sense. In fact, where do we actually see metalanguage founded? In those communities of free men who speak a Hellenic language, carry arms, worship the same gods and submit themselves to the law of equal political rights for all. These are the communities ... at the heart of feudal Greek society. Women are excluded at the outset from such groups (along with children, foreigners, half-breeds, slaves).

Although the gradual democratization of university education has begun to change the student population, the power that arises from this tradition often continues to apply. Ian Malcolm and Judith Rochecouste (1998, p. viii) explain that while there is more diversity among tertiary education students each year:

... not only do our universities generally fail to draw in a creative way on those resources to enhance the scope for cultural exchanges across the whole learning community; they also often fail to provide adequate support inside or outside the classroom for those whose first-language literacy practices differ significantly from those considered normative in Australian academic settings.

The woman starts to see some of the thorns of this great fallen tree, but also art in some of its whorls. Still something is missing, hidden from her in the powerful nature of this block.

Examining: the exclusive block

As a survivor of the academic system in which the power of written language played a pivotal role, the woman had acquired some of the necessary skills and even an appreciation for that power. She had learnt how to write a traditional academic treatise to meet the requirements of her markers. She knew to structure ideas in the impersonal essay or report style; producing words to represent her beliefs, understandings and interactions with her readings; to synthesize these into clusters of similarities and differences or strong argument with evidence. The woman had learnt to appreciate some of the usefulness and beauty of this form of writing: the facility of following up ideas and information allowed by referencing; the persuasiveness of well constructed and supported argument, the structure of essays which in some ways were audience-friendly: introducing the main points to be made, explaining and backing them up in a logical development, and concluding in a way that refreshed the reader's memory of the journey taken. Certainly this writing ability had increased her power in the world, both in terms of employment and in being able to use the written word to assert her needs.

She could not have progressed this far in academic life with good grades if she did not acquire these skills and find some pleasure in the process, but it was a labour of both love and pain as she learnt to erase herself from the prose. Most of her work as an undergraduate had been based on her passions, as she found a way to survive by having her own topics approved, then researching and writing about them. Again the power of traditional academic writing was convoluted, for in reality much of her learning of so-called 'objective' academic writing was inspired by the personal, 'subjective': her feminist interests as a student, in response to distinctly non-objective discriminations in what was deemed to be knowledge.

Take her undergraduate history professor in the early 1980s, for instance, teaching on the significance of the Eureka Stockade for Australian history, who had spoken in lectures only of men. “Where were the women?” she had asked him. “There were no women” he had replied with emphatic omnipotence, fixing her with steely blue eyes. Reporting the conversation she had asked her female tutor “Can I research that?” The tutor agreed, and the woman had embarked on a voyage of discovery, eager to write her findings, in which plenty of women figured in a wide range of roles (see, for example, Johnson, Laurel, 1995). Years later, as an adult educator teaching history to TAFE Year 10, she discovered others omitted from the university story: the Chinese miners massacred at Lambing Flat (Rolls, Eric, 1993).

Excerpt from Gai’s Learning Story

cause we didn’t
Learn nothing at school
Nothing
All the butchering ...
Just Captain Cook landed here

Her discovery as an undergraduate that women had been excluded from the story inspired her to wonder about other exclusions, and launch other research projects. She gained approval for her final Australian history assignment to uncover what she could of Aboriginal history, from pre-invasion to the then present. She requested permission to search and find out what roles were played by women in the Enlightenment and French Revolution. She took the only multi-disciplinary Women’s Studies units available. She approached studies in literature, theatre and media from feminist frameworks. So while at times the woman had felt the violence of reading academic language and struggled with writing to academic conventions, she was mostly buoyed by her interests, partially protected by her research topics. Her subjective self was always there, if hidden from view, underpinning her work.

The woman gradually realized the broader dynamics of exclusion performed by academic writing. For along with leaving out the majority of people from academic history, so too were their contributions to society and knowledge omitted. She realized, for instance, that Aboriginals had been the majority people in Australia, were crucial to the setting up of the British penal colony; that they had guided many of the so-called explorers and that the roads she now travelled were built on the very pathways used by them to traverse the continent. She knew that it was elite and educated women who set up the salons of Paris, fostering the flowering of Enlightenment thought and art. She learned that it was poor and angry women who precipitated the French Revolution, by forcing shopkeepers to sell them bread at a 'fair price' in order to feed themselves and their starving families. She knew that there was power in academic language to re-write and re-vise the stories of history and knowledge. She knew at the same time that it was a distortion to believe that the entire academic tradition of thinking and writing was 'man-made' or 'white' or 'European', even if much of the tradition was co-opted and presented in these ways through power. Can she not then use the language of academia for her own ends, for empowerment?

Excerpt – from Lisa's Learning story

so when you found
one of the women
looked at some
famous women

it was really good

How can this wooden obstacle frighten her? She has a love of trees, has in the past collected the moist decomposing centre from fallen logs to mix with soil and grow her plants. When and why did she start to think she needed an axe?

Experiencing: the violence of the block

By the final year of her degree the woman's tutors encouraged her to pursue an Honours year either in history or her other major. To qualify she had first to grapple with a respected academic writing on the 'Theory and Method of History'. She had wrestled with dense prose and wept with frustration trying to grasp any meaning to be glimpsed through opaque expression and the convoluted structure of the writing. She had felt the violence of the language in her brain and body. It literally made her forehead ache, pushing her into an anguish of nervous confusion as she read, looked up words and read again, feeling no more enlightened than when she began. She finally produced an essay, frazzled to the brink of collapse.

The assignment, to her disbelief, received a High Distinction grade. She was amazed that any marker could possibly have been so impressed by this performing seal trick of writing: making sense of obscurity only to produce further obscurity. Had she herself 'pupated into a hazardous imago', three thousand words in length? Perhaps because she had enjoyed so much of her study and research, she was shocked and perplexed.

Barely six months on she had re-read this essay to find that she could make as little sense of her own words as she could of the original theoretician. The language she had encountered had limited her knowledge; the writing of her own text had further limited knowledge both for herself and for any other reader she could imagine. She could still not explain the theoretician's ideas to one of her peers. Worse, none of her reading of this text or others in the unit on the theory and method of history actually informed her lucidly about the practice of researching and recording history, although to some extent

she had already been engaged in this practice. Yet she had learnt her writing lessons well: she was able to reproduce academic prose pointlessly rooted in the separated philosophical mind, which made little sense of either her own world or that of others, and in this case, taught little of how to make sense of the worlds of people from the past.

John Berger (1972, p. 15) describes the kind of academic language the woman had read and reproduced as 'mystification': "the process of explaining away what might otherwise be evident". He reproduces a portrait by Hals as illustration. We see a number of faces that we recognize as harsh, self-righteous or corrupt. Depicted are the governors of a 17th century Dutch Alms house who gave out public charity, on which the poverty-stricken Hals had been forced to rely the previous winter so as not to freeze to death. Knowing this context strengthens the viewer's impressions (Berger, John, 1972, pp. 12-13). Berger then quotes a well-known art historian writing about the painting to demonstrate the process of mystification:

Hal's unwavering commitment to his personal vision, which enriches our consciousness of our fellow men and heightens our awe for the ever-increasing power of the mighty impulses that enabled him to give us a close vision of life's vital forces (Berger, John, 1972, p. 13).

This heightened language masks a dearth of meaning, in contrast to the process of seeing, where we recognize a powerful message in the work, "in so far as it corresponds to our own observation of people, gestures, faces, institutions" (Berger, John, 1972, p. 14). Academic language that mystifies, removing us from our own seeing and knowing, and at the same time telling us that we *would* know if we were just more sophisticated, serves purposes that are the antithesis of social justice for women.

She looks at the block again and thinks there is little fertile mulch to be found here. The centre of the fallen tree seems to be hollow and dried up.

Learning: the exclusion of the block

So in her moment of 'success' with academic writing, receiving a High Distinction in her final piece of writing before graduation, the woman was excluded. For if the language she read and wrote was indecipherable, excluding her from knowing and meaning, but was meaningful to her academic lecturer, then she obviously was not meant to continue with academic work. Nowadays, she can make links between her own disabling experiences with academic language and the disheartenment many of her students experience when they move on to university studies. They speak to her of how they react to this exclusion, while trying to read and write in this language, which tells them they are not sufficiently smart, that they do not belong. Like her, very few continue immediately on to higher degrees, unless perhaps to a graduate diploma needed to qualify for a particular career path.

At the time she decided not to pursue an Honours year, lacking such insights, the woman was excluded and self-excluded. The cryptic, crippling nature of some academic writing, was only one of many disincentives since the academic language of exclusion was tied to a culture of exclusion. There were not only rampantly sexist and racist exclusions in the curriculum, but campus life was overwhelmingly patriarchal. Many academics were openly hostile to feminist work. Many academics and students were aggressively hostile to feminist activity in the student's union. Many academics and students engaged in constant sexual harassment. According to Patricia Gumpert (1997, p. 574) often women on American campuses experienced similar alienation. Joyce Stalker (2001) reminds us that misogyny is a useful tool for analyzing barriers to tertiary

education for women in their relationships outside the university; in the woman's experience misogyny could well be applied to many relationships *inside* the university. In making her decision not to continue, issues of class sat alongside those of gender. She was exhausted from combining paid work and study. The ordinary imperative to support herself combined with the exclusions of language and culture were enough to deter her from a higher degree.

She takes a break from the block and when she returns she sees that it is still rooted. Large tubers radiate beneath the surface of the soil into wider ground. She must be careful not to trip and fall.

Re-encountering: chips in the block

When the woman returns to higher education some six years later to gain a teaching qualification she finds there is considerable continuity in the state of academic prose. For example, some of her early reading includes wordy prose based on psychological research about the weighty question of whether adults can learn (Long, Huey, 1983). Having just spent three years as an untrained teacher of English on Crete, where she learnt on-the-job and acquired everyday Greek before returning to Australia to give birth and learn how to care for her baby at thirty, the woman is understandably impatient with scientific studies on such a question, to which the answer seems blindingly obvious.

Of course the woman also finds some of her reading stimulating, and like many postgraduate students, has acquired tactics to deal with academic writing. Some of these are simple study skills such as highlighting key words and points, skipping over long-winded or repetitive passages and looking up terms in specialist dictionaries. Some of the tactics are intellectually arrogant and rebellious: making choices of *what* she will read and *how much* she will read, based on writing style as well as content. For many readers the flip side of the interaction characterized by Patricia Nelson Limerick is a response of "if you

make little or no effort to speak to me with your language I'll think less of what you are telling me; I may even stop listening and assume you have nothing worthwhile to say." A Nyungar (indigenous West Australian) university student in a study by Ian Malcolm and Judith Rochecouste (1998, p. 67) describes such resistant reading strategies:

Some of the books when you got a word, like a fifteen letter word, you don't know what it means you can't even pronounce it, it's just sort of, well me I just read up to that, skip that word read on you know. And if you can't pronounce it why read it you know.

In such ways students reclaim some of their power in relation to academic language, weighing up the worth of writing in relation to their own expectations and experiences. The cost, however, is limiting knowledge as Toni Morrison claims, for both reader and writer miss out on the possibilities of exchange.

Excerpt from Kathy's Learning Story

my own story
ectopic pregnancy
brought back memories
writing it out
helped me cope
even though
few years ago
when it happened
didn't realise
what was going on
until I read it
in the research

By the time the woman starts her Master's degree her teaching experience has bolstered her belief that for adult educators concerned with social justice, the kinds of exchange encouraged by obscure academic language are not useful. When she begins to write of this however, her supervisor warns her of the complexities involved in questions of academic language. Trinh T. Minh-ha (1989, p. 16) for example, agrees that obscurity "is an imposition on the reader" but claims that clarity is not an apt benchmark since it is a traditional tool of

power. The woman wonders now whether it is truly clarity that is the problem, or its role in the misuse of power. Trinh Minh-ha sees writing not as an act in itself but claims that language is merely language. On the other hand Toni Morrison (1993, p. 22) argues that that “we *do* language” – underlining speaking, listening, reading and writing as powerful acts that generate meaning.

The woman finds her supervisor’s warning echoed in conflicting positions in feminist debates about academic language. Feminists such as Gaby Weiner (1994) raise concerns about the politics of inaccessible academic language. In response feminist Patti Lather “troubles the call for plain speaking by addressing Walter Benjamin’s words, ‘Nothing more subtle than the advice to be clear in order at least to appear true’”(Lather, Patti, 1996, p.525). She thus puts down ‘truth claims’, while busily making her own, such as, “neither is the transparent use of language innocent”(Lather, Patti, 1996, p. 527). Despite protestations of finding new language to challenge dominant beliefs, like the rest of us Patti Lather cannot use words without drawing on existing cultural meanings. For example, by using phrases such as “against either/or framings” and “my goal is not a facile ‘for or against’ the widespread cultural dissemination of ideas” Patti Lather (1996, p. 526) suggests that such positions are invalid or overly simplistic. And doubtless ‘for or against’ views are indeed so, sometimes. But can we not imagine situations where they are also appropriate and useful? If we stand beside a lynch mob we may find being either *for* or *against* their actions morally useful. So may the person about to be lynched, if we can use our ‘I’m not for but against’ position to stop the lynching. At the same time, it seems a subtle ‘either/or framing’ when Patti Lather uses Walter Benjamin’s words to suggest that clear writing predominantly masks words which wish to appear to be true. Can unclear writing not provide a parallel mask, which equally conceals ‘truth claims’, if not buries them altogether, since the reader struggles to decode the writer’s meanings? The woman would suggest that the phrase ‘against either/or framings’ performs just such a burial.

Before and during the prolonged period that the woman is overcome by writing block, debates about academic language also hit the headlines to underline the complexities. In 1995 the editor of *Philosophy and Literature*, Denis Dutton, set up a satirical 'bad writing award' to which readers gleefully submitted examples of what they considered to be "the most stylistically lamentable passages in scholarly books and articles published in the last few years" (Dutton, Denis, 1998, p. 1). The 'winner' of the fourth contest in 1998 is well-known American feminist Judith Butler (1991, p. 1) who consequently publishes a defense in the *New York Times*, explaining that in using "difficult and demanding language" she is questioning common sense and provoking new ways of looking at a familiar world:

Many quite nefarious ideologies pass for common sense. For decades of American history, it was 'common sense' in some quarters for white people to own slaves and for women not to vote ... if common sense sometimes preserves the social status quo, and that status quo treats unjust social hierarchies as natural, it makes good sense on such occasions to find ways of challenging common sense. Language that takes up this challenge can help point the way to a more socially just world (Butler, Judith, 1991, p. 1).

Yet the woman remains unconvinced. The examples that Judith Butler uses here might not be consensually defined as 'common sense'. Antonio Gramsci (1971, p. 362), for example, sees the 'common sense' of popular culture as a key site of ideological struggle, which is continually being transformed and enriched as people try to make 'good sense' of their lives and the future. Thus slavery, racism and misogyny, are systems of belief and practice that have been contested at many times and locations. If we listened to the slaves few were whispering any 'common sense' notion that their enslavement was a natural condition based on their inferiority. Nor was it women who stood in parliament arguing they were not fit to participate in 'democracy'. There have always also been those not enslaved or oppressed, who stood against these beliefs and practices, which are always tied to questions of power and exclusion. The myth that they were ever 'common sense' is helpful to ruling elites who gain from such

practices and often control what counts as history and knowledge. We can see this powerful exclusive process operating in the minimal media coverage given to the 'common sense' views held by millions of people who marched worldwide opposing the waging of war in Iraq without United Nations support.

Conflating common sense with racist and sexist ideologies presents a metaphor of not only common sense, but also the everyday language in which it is expressed, as downright dangerous. This also performs another implicit exclusion, giving the impression that it is usually 'common people' (read ordinary everyday workers, not rich, famous or highly educated folk) who speak and uphold such nasty 'common sense' views.

While feminists such as Patti Lather and Judith Butler share the woman's concerns with language change, they imply that it is clear everyday language that is dangerous and misleading, rather than the *content* of that language. Yet surely this is not *always* the case. Someone who argues upfront that Indigenous Australians are somehow 'lesser' than others in plain words, such as now-defunct Queensland politician Pauline Hanson, is certainly dangerous, as the history of Hitler's Deutschland 'uber alles' shows us. However, in some social contexts such plain but racist speakers may be easier to combat than someone who speaks in more guarded terms, but implements racially restrictive indigenous and refugee policies, as is the case of the current Australian Prime Minister John Howard. A man who openly sprouts that women's place is in the home, the kitchen, the brothel or the bedroom, may sometimes be easier to resist than one who constantly and confusingly proclaims "I love you" and "I'm sorry", then follows it with a fist to the face. The common sense saying, "At least you know where you stand" with plain speech or writing holds true in many cases.

Subsequent to the public explosion of questions about academic language in America in the nineties, accusations, counter-accusations and defenses appeared in both academic and non-academic publications (Goodheart, Eugene,

1999; Stanhope, Victoria, 1999). In 2003 a volume edited by Jonathon Culler and Kevin Lamb (2003) defended the 'bad writing' claims set up by Dutton's provocative awards. For instance Rey Chow (2003, p. 96) argues that complaints about impenetrable academic language target the humanities, but not science or technology where jargon and inscrutable writing is rife. Michael Warner (2003, p. 115) claims that attacks on 'bad' academic writing are made by political conservatives targetting left thinkers in the humanities. On the other hand, some scientists are also concerned with improving scientific prose. The University of California at Davis (2003) offers a course to this end, and provides a site with links to a number of articles addressing the topic of poor science writing and how to improve it. The site also provides articles demonstrating that debates about poor and pretentious prose in academia are far from new, and not simply linked to current academic trends. Evidence shows complaints about the problem from 1582 (Williams, Joseph, 1990) to George Orwell (1946). Newspaper articles on the subject continue to appear periodically today, even in Australia (Echlin, Helena, 2001; Moore, Tim, 2004).

Away from the bright glare of headlines the topic of communicative writing by academics both for their students as well as their peers, and a broader public, is worth talking about if we are to work towards social justice. Patti Lather (1996, p. 526) makes the important point that feminist struggles occur on different fronts and that to "be heard in the halls of High Theory, one must speak in the language of those who live there". At the same time, the majority of those who read academic texts are not academics, but students from increasingly diverse backgrounds who bring with them diverse bases of knowledge. The woman's re-encounters with the block of academic language and the debates surrounding it help clarify positions in the argument and although her writing dilemmas are not entirely solved, they transfer her thinking once again towards her audience.

She moves around the block looking for a fresh perspective. She notices new sprouts, perhaps emerging from concealed branches.

Re-conceptualising: change in the block

In many kinds of writing, the audience 'connects' with the ideas contained through human interaction, yet conventional academic writing lacks personal voice. This can become a block to readers and also to writers. As Debbie Horsfall (2001, p. 4) states:

Often we are expected to write ourselves out of the story we are telling. We are expected to negate our bodies, our responses, our feelings, our dreams, our passions and write in a cool, detached, disembodied manner. The report, the thesis, the article, the essay is assumed to merely re-present and discuss the 'facts' about what we have 'found'. This assumption, often well grounded in reality, asks us to deny our selves. This denial, especially for those who are struggling to find their voice, to believe that they have something to say that somebody will listen too, is death making ... To break out of this life denying hole we need to both understand the black hole, how we are held within it, while simultaneously growing the strength and courage to speak out.

Feminist scholarship has already considerably influenced writing and research practices to include the personal (Spigelman, Candace, 2001). And the personal in academic writing often holds powerful potential for both readers and writers.

Excerpt from Lisa's Learning Story

the teacher got us
to write from the heart
came a lot easier
still didn't think was any good
until Gai read it she
was crying by the end
she wanted to know more

The woman has begun to witness the strength and courage of feminist women writing academic work that threatens the impersonal block. She has applauded the breakthrough of 'I' in academic writing. She has learnt from the colloquial dialogue between Liz Stanley and Sue Wise (1983). She has admired the creative play of words in Helen Callaway's 'research as re-vision' (1981). She has been intrigued by what she learnt from hearing 'Nora's Voice' (Rameka, Nora & Stalker, Joyce, 1996) and the insights she gained from observing the dynamics in Jane Drurie's classroom (1996). Preparing for her Master's thesis the woman has been inspired to write an entire paper on feminist methods exploring the personal:

As I write this I become more and more embarrassed at the use of the word 'I', at the visibility and vulnerability of this 'I', at the emotionalism of writing about myself, at the seeming inappropriateness of using this word 'I' in the context of academia. I feel panic. As a woman I am talking about myself, too much, in public. Or am I? Do I dare to write in this way because this essay will probably be read only by my tutor, an academic, certainly, but also a feminist woman, and this kind of confessional 'I', discussion between women friends is a familiar form ... I become aware that I use the word 'I' only rarely in my professional life, that I am frequently in 'objective' invisible mode in the role of teacher, mentor, facilitator; in the role of colleague, silently persevering with the stresses and workloads in my job ...

Eventually she had revelled in 'I':

At this point, I feel my wry impatience with some of the academic literature I have encountered, with its thin veneer of liberatory rhetoric: being oppressed and powerless is not an academic exercise. In my experience, oppression entails a struggle to survive and overcome that which is imposed upon you. This rarely allows the luxury of the confused or completely relativist stance: to struggle to understand the oppressor too closely except to determine strategic action can be an immense trap for the oppressed, since the oppressor, by definition, rarely gives a shit about the oppressed.

However, having explored this form the woman does not want to be 'stuck' with the use of 'I' entirely. She does not wish to confine herself to the intimate first person and find she has emerged from one hole to be stuck in another,

particularly one which is so closely related to the divides set for women in the dogma of gender relations between objective/subjective, public/private, male/female. While she would reserve the right to take up "I" in academic writing she wants to explore and find other forms to express the 'subjectively objective'. She continues to write patchily using 'I' while waiting for inspiration. What forms can she find to span these imposed divides in order to represent her learning journey, the women's learning journeys? She is still a little stuck.

Perhaps she can graft new shoots onto one of the living limbs of the block?

Re-visioning: transforming the block

The woman hears of a weekend writing workshop, on using fiction techniques in non-fiction, with Barbara Brooks, author of Eleanor Dark's biography (1998). The small group who attend are given starter exercises. The woman writes. She enjoys writing, learning to make words 'resonate'. She goes to more workshops with poet Chris Mansell. She drafts poems, plays, stories. She has inklings of how she might proceed. Perhaps she might use the techniques of story prose and poetry, in which she has always dabbled. She begins to write pieces that she hopes will later fit into a patchwork, although she has no sure vision of the finished quilt.

The woman rents a cheap house overlooking rock platforms and sea for a weekend, borrows a laptop, has twenty-four hours by herself before her family comes. She reads a copy of *Meanjin* from the writing workshops. And here, during the count-down to zero on her time for solitary contemplation, she sees an article by Tom Griffiths (2000, p.132) that further alleviates her paralysis:

The metaphor of writing up divides scholarship into two phases, one long, uncertain and exciting - research - and the other short,

predetermined and boring - writing. Writing up completes research, it ties off ends. It is uncreative. It is not in dialogue with research; it simply reports on it... What a debilitating metaphor this is for us scholars for whom the role of language in shaping and probing reality is crucial... Another disabling metaphor or word is 'thesis'. 'Thesis' suggests something arcane, something limited and specialised that will never see the light of day, something that will only ever be bound and gagged. Publishers shudder at the word. I would prefer to talk about 'books', a word that reminds us of the need for a fully imagined audience.

The woman thinks of writing that is in dialogue with research; she starts to imagine an audience. Firstly her markers of course, but thinking also of the women who participated, how she might best represent their stories. She wonders if there are links and contrasts between their stories and her own. She thinks of other women she teaches in the CEW course who ask to read her research, those who go on to university study, and the ways she might best communicate with them. Could writing her own story also open up the experience of postgraduate research to other women? Perhaps adult educators and students of adult education, so often women, without time or inclination to wrestle with obscure language might be interested in her work. Above all she would like her thesis to be *educative*.

Excerpt from Sharing Stories

Kate: Yeah. I've got confidence to think that I can go to Uni now, whereas before, although I wanted to, I didn't think I could ...
Kath: Yeah. Searched out *how* you can do it
Kate: Yes, exactly, *how*
Kath: Yeah, it always took me, I didn't know how to do it ...how to get there ...

What if she told her own story as adult learner/teacher in the third person, declaring her personal more openly as a selection and representation of her experience; inviting her readers to share and compare with their own experiences, their own truths? Stories are inherently educational; a traditional form of learning in many cultures, and personal stories are a starting point for

sharing political meanings. Debbie Horsfall (2001, pp. 9-10) argues for the liberating potential of academic storytelling. Whether 'I', 'we' 'she', 'he' or 'they' stories, narratives invite creative audience participation. At the same time narrative is inherently accessible for writers; most of us make sense of our lives by 'telling our stories' when given the opportunity.

The woman ponders how she could combine some of the conventions of academic writing with those of narrative fiction. She tries it out, sending a sample to Margaret Somerville, who tells her to keep going: she enjoys this 'everywoman' character, who is in turns like but unlike her. The woman thinks about the conventions in academic writing she finds conducive to learning: the placing of research and theory into some context of time and place, the understanding that knowledge is produced *personally*, and she tries to use this as a model. She searches for ways to represent the women in her research, again combining academic conventions with fiction techniques, so that their stories can be seen and heard.

She writes academic stories in the language she has learnt, shaped by her individual consciousness and experience. Yet she is aware that her individuality, including her use of language, is part of the wider culture that has in turn shaped her since birth. She believes her stories to be her own but simultaneously shared, emerging from the past, the present and imagined future, borne along by dreams.

The woman believes that you, her audience will in turn read these stories through the filters of your consciousness, culture and the experiences that have shaped you. Some of your perceptions will be individual; some may be shared through our culture, or across cultures, through our shared humanity. Some of your perceptions will be different and those differences may range from slight to vast. She has read much academic writing and many stories based on experiences

and cultures not her own, and learned from them. She places trust in the honest sharing of stories.

If you are willing to listen to her voice and the voices of her students, to see what you understand of their words, what you share, what you dispute, what additions and alterations you would make, then she will first wrestle to choose her words with care. She will think of you before she asks you to listen, make efforts in her representations to communicate her knowledge at this moment in time, in the hope that we can start our conversation.

In choosing to write thus, the woman places herself within wider movements of people who are effecting change in academic writing, both spontaneous and orchestrated. Those opposing sexist and racist exclusions in language and proposing more democratic means of expressing knowledge have already made huge changes. Although planned reform varies in different language and disciplinary contexts, Anna Pauwels (1998, pp. 201- 205; p. 214) cites numerous studies which demonstrate significant decreases in gender-biased language, such as references to the so-called generic 'man' and 'he', and equally significant increases in gender-neutral language such as 'human' and 'they' or 'he/she', in course materials, textbooks, student writing and refereed journals. bell hooks (1994, pp. 171-175) tells of integrating black vernacular speech into her writing despite rejections from academic journals. Suresh Canagarajah (1999, p. 174) studies the ways in which post-colonial communities are creating a more pluralized academic English, with the example of a student who:

... negotiates a range of conflicting discourses to develop a formidable text that speaks uniquely and originally on the subject she chooses to explore for her thesis. She wrestles with the established conventions and codes of academic discourse to construct a hybrid text that is infused with her own desired discourses. In this way, she provides a representation of her identity, thought, and values that are most satisfactory and empowering for her. What is strategic is that in engaging with the conventions of the academic community, she ensures that she does not lose her audience.

... Thus she is able to make a powerful advocacy of her own point of view and knowledge. If she had ignored the established discourse, she would have lost her audience and kept her critical knowledge only to herself.

In making a similar choice to both harness and break conventions of both academic writing and fiction, the woman's intent is not prescriptive. She is aware that there is different writing for different audiences, that there will be those who share her disposition and those who vehemently oppose her, some who are simply disinterested, as well as those who would adjust the position she is taking in a myriad of ways. She personally believes that writing about adult education should be educative to as many adults as possible, particularly those who are most powerless, oppressed and in need of the knowledge and opportunities it can offer. She knows she will not single-handedly take the academic world by storm, but in making choices she is already linking with others altering the exclusive practices of academic writing, as individuals and in groups, in both formal and informal ways and networks. Daiva Markelis (2002, p. 726-8) states that the personal in academic writing is seen as a threat that must be subjugated, perhaps because, as she points out, "the choice to use the personal is, for many, based on the desire for a more inclusive conversation".

An academy that not only allows but encourages personal experience in various forms, making links between subjectivity/objectivity, theory/practice; one that does not dismiss creative forms including stories, but embraces them, has of course to dialogue with 'differences' that may threaten traditionally dominant structures in higher education. Tertiary education may need to deal with plural ways of knowing through language, with diverse 'common senses'. Those who teach may have much to learn:

Like Nyungars have their own way of putting something in their own Nyungar prose and it was explained that once we were in tertiary that they wouldn't accept that sort of Nyungar prose in the assignments or even in the tut's (Malcolm, Ian and Rochecouste, Judith, 1998, p. 68).

Eventually those in the academic halls of high theory may well have to learn from many languages, just as she, as academic researcher, must turn now to learn from the multiple voices of one small group of women.

Chapter 5 Resolution I

... the action of a force directed in the opposite direction ...
(Todorov, Tzvetan, 1977, p. 111).

Sharing Stories

Writing, in a way, is listening to the others' language and reading with the others' eyes. The more ears I am able to hear with, the farther I see the plurality of meaning and the less I lend myself to the illusion of a single message. I say I write when I leave speech, when I lose my grip on it and let it make its way on its own.
(Trinh, T. Minh-Ha, 1989, pp. 30, 35).

In working through the block of academic writing the woman has understood the silencing of traditional styles and structures, and the liberating potential of personal stories for diverse ways of knowing. Just as in her classroom she wants the voices of her adult students to be heard, in her research she wants their meanings to be seen. Trinh T. Minh-Ha (1989, p. 67) in critically analysing anthropology and the social sciences, notes that:

A conversation of "us" with "us" about "them" is a conversation in which "them" is silenced. "Them" always stands on the other side of the hill, naked and speechless, barely present in its absence.

The woman has invited her students to sit down with her, and thus to sit at the table with you, her academic audience. She stands warned of the power inherent in this situation. The woman does not want her students to be left, on the other side of the hill, either speechless or naked. On the contrary, she wants the women to speak for themselves. Inspired by feminist and adult education calls for research 'with' and 'for' people rather than 'on' them, the woman chooses to re-present the entire transcript of the first group discussion she held with her students. She makes only minor edits, deleting 'ums', small repetitions and sidetracks. She leaves sections that have already appeared as excerpts in other chapters in the text so that they can be seen in their full context. With her audience in mind, she does not adopt a complex notation system, but does insert headings where conversation shifts from one broad

topic to another, so that there are reference point 'markers' in the transcript, since reading a discussion between seven individuals is quite different to participating in or observing one, when there are a range of faces, personalities, expressions, tones and gestures accompanying the talk.

The woman finds support for re-presenting the transcript in the ethnographic approach to conversation analysis. According to Graham Watson (1996, p. 2) this approach regards "the work that utterances do as a phenomenon to be displayed, not as a phenomenon to be debunked or mocked". The woman does not want to "subvert" or "replace" the understandings of the women, by her own "us" interpretations, before they have even been expressed (barely present in their absence).

Broadly using understandings gained from conversation analysis allows us to consider the relationships made visible through talk. The reader can notice, for example, how participants achieve 'turn taking' in the conversation, how mutual understandings or differences are negotiated, how topics are changed and how speakers achieve the closing of conversation (Have, Paul, 1999, pp. 3, 18-21). Peter Sawchuck (2003, pp. 68-69) notes how by applying some of the findings of conversation analysis to videotapes of unemployed workers learning computers, learning can be seen in real-time, as moment by moment interaction. He notes how such microinteractions show that "learning is a situated social act that people perform together rather than the passive transmission and cognitive absorption of information". Analysis of control over turn-taking in educational settings, and in this case educational research settings, is of interest, in relation to the unequal distribution of knowledge and hence power that defines expert-novice relations (Sawchuck, Peter, 2003, p. 76). This is worth observing in relation to the women's discussion, since the relationships have been previously established in the feminist classroom, but at the same time they are all novices to the research process, although the woman as researcher ostensibly has more expertise and power. The transcript of talk makes visible some of the ways in which these different power variables are negotiated to achieve the research collectively by maintaining and adjusting social relationships.

In making the verbal interactions fully visible, the woman also invites you as readers to respond to the conversation without pre-empting what your eyes will see and your ears will hear. She recognises that there are various possible 'readings' of the 'text' of the conversation. For example, using Stuart Hall's framework (1997, p. 32) in relation to television texts, her own analysis will be a 'professional' decoding, for she has been a main instigator in producing the text. However, the woman is a 'professional' negotiating a new relationship as researcher, often at times with hesitancy, as with any learner. By presenting the transcript, the woman also respects your right to negotiate your own reading, asks you to 'listen to the others' language and read with the others' eyes', as Trinh T. Minh-ha suggests, before you are coerced into agreeing, amending or contesting her analysis.

Thus, the woman invites you to the sharing of stories. As the debate about academic language hits headlines and the world bank, world trade organisation, politicians, bureaucrats and businessmen, the famous and anonymous men in suits and boardrooms, whose faces grace our lounge room screens either constantly or never at all, meet and decide the fates of peoples globally, a group of seven women, with no particular claim to fame in a mass media-driven world, sit down together.

They meet in a small room at one side of the well-appointed new library of the Technical and Further Education Commission (TAFE), in Nowra, New South Wales, Australia. The windows overlook jacarandas and gum trees, with fading camellia and azalea blooms fringing a comparatively tiny grey building to the right, below. Only a year ago one over-crowded room there housed the same collection of books, videos, magazines, journals, staff and students, all of which now enjoy more comfortable, spacious surrounds. The women sit in aqua blue chairs around a light grey institutional table, with a big old black tape recorder perched in the middle, laughing nervously at the change this ominous instrument brings to their situation, reading information about the research, filling in consent forms, asking questions, sharing their stories.

Questions of Research

Kath: Why does it say this about complaints? It sounds a bit scary —

Deb: That's a standard thing that they say to put on the consent form ... I'm not going to do anything tricky. That's why I've outlined at the beginning that you can have input into how much involvement you have, and perhaps a part of what I have to record in my write-up, is ... how much input you do have ... like we talked about journals, but the realities of life were that it was too hard for most of you to actually manage to keep a journal and one student did, so then we went to looking at coursework for some of the other students —but I can still use what's in your journal Gai. So, I think I will talk about those issues, the method — how we did the research, as well as what we found out — because it's an important point that most of us don't have the dedication or time to —

Gai: Yes, your mind sort of goes "Oh, I've got to do that project today, and then you forget all about it, and later "Oh gee, I didn't write that journal"

Deb: Yes, that right, and you raised a point too, didn't you Kath?

Kath: Let's see — that's right — will we be doing this research till the year 2001?

Deb: No —well, except — if you want to have a look and see what I'm writing — but 2001 is the time the university has given me. I would actually like to try and finish before then, but it's good that I have got that time, since I have to fit it around work and family. The process of writing up, it's like a book, you have to organise your information into chapters, and that actually has to be printed, and it ends up bound,

bigger than this (shows book) — I've never done this before (group laughter) — but at the workshop that I went to last time, the tutors and an ex-student talked about it. The writing is quite time consuming, so I think that the last period of time will be for me, to be writing and getting the thesis printed — You get your drafts read by your supervisors, and you edit it and they give you suggestions as you're going along — So the actual writing up of the thesis, is a big process

Kath: So how long is our actual involvement?

Deb: Well, as it says on the forms, you can withdraw at any time, but what I envisaged was using some of the ideas we talked about in class. I thought we would meet now, and do some reflecting on the course at this stage, and then maybe I could organise some individual interviews, after this, and then maybe I'd catch up with you towards the end of the year and see how you view the course now that you've been doing other things, and where you're at now, because it might be different — I guess I thought we could decide then, I don't want it to go on indefinitely! I thought, one more follow up — but also I need some input from you about if you're happy about what I'm writing. It's a slightly different kind of method — a lot of people go into research with a theory — ok I want to find out if this theory, these ideas I have are correct — What I'm trying to do is actually allow you, the participants, to have more of an imprint on it, because my ideas might not be what was important to you — the things that come out from you could be quite different so — it's called — there's all these names for the process — ethnomethodology — grounded theory — where ... you spend time with participants and then you — draw out your theory from what people have said rather than say, “ok, this is my theory, now I'm going to survey these people — to test my theory”, do you know what I mean? —— (silence)

So that's the whole idea, that you're forming the theory by sharing your information with me — 'cause then I look at it and think, how

does this fit with all the other things that I've read or does it fit at all, maybe it doesn't, maybe this is quite new ... Does that make sense?

Group: Laughter

Gai: It's pretty involved — is this just a part of this honours degree?

Deb: Yes, it's a Masters Honours degree, so that means that you do a thesis, which is what this research is. It's the kind of degree where you get to do your own research project and you get to write it up — and, it may be published at a later date, if you want it to be, if it's good enough — there's different kinds of Masters degrees ...

Gai: Oh right —

Deb: I'm learning how to be a researcher and how to write things up, how to get them published, if that's what you want —

Kath: It says something here about it being educational to us as well. Would it be to the extent that it could be something we could actually put on our resume, took part in this research project and ? —

Deb: Yes, well that's right. And certainly for those of you who are interested in further study I guess it's interesting to you because it gives you an insight into that, and I guess the other educational thing, is that maybe it will give you a record of your own progress as well, it's educational to look at your actual education, if you like, well where was I then, and where am I now? Or at least that's the way I saw it —

Group: Yeah (thoughtful murmurs)

Kath: How long has the CEW course actually been running at TAFE?

Deb: Many years —

Kath: So has this sort of thing ever been researched before?

Deb: I think quite a few women who have been involved with TAFE courses have done Masters level research, but they've never perhaps published it, so I actually have to find out where those Masters degrees are, they are held at the Universities — I found one project that was done on a similar course in 1987, and I just got a copy of that yesterday — It was more an evaluation of the course, it wasn't exactly the same as my project. That's part of what I have to look at . I guess because I've been teaching on the course a long time, and I don't really get to follow up with the women, it fascinates me where the different women from the courses have got to —

Gai: Yeah that would be interesting

Deb: Yeah, it's really fascinating. I don't have quite that same experience with any other course, or it's not as dramatic, like, where, how, people were feeling when they came in and where they seem to get to — and all different areas. I suppose it happens in the Tertiary Preparation Certificate, but then, often people go to University because that's what the course is designed for — whereas the interesting thing about Career Education for Women is that there are lots of different kinds of things that women end up doing, and maybe in a subtle way the course influences you, it doesn't have to be to do with careers or education. I've met people who didn't chop down all the trees on their block of land because they did the science course and they learnt about permaculture and that you can grow things under trees — it's just really interesting, the different influences people have — So, did any of you others have any questions?

- Ren: No, Gai and Kath are pretty good at that, we just leave all the questions up to them (group laughter)
- Gai: They have all the course, so why change now?(laughs, others join in)
- Deb: Now's a good opportunity
- Gai: Yes, don't let us stop you
- Deb: — so was there anything else in any of that, the way it was going to be done, or confidentiality or anything else about that?
- Some: (murmurs of 'no')
- Deb: What about naming? — Because I've actually put in there individual names will not be used without permission, usually that's how you do it, individual names will not be used, but I don't know whether you might want to use your names, you might want to be 'famous'? — (laughter then silence) I'll just leave the options open?
- Kate: It doesn't worry me
- All: Doesn't worry me either (murmurs of assent)
- Deb: Probably when it gets to that stage of writing up you'll have a stronger idea about how you'd like to be represented, whether you'd like to use a pseudonym. The last project I did they picked the name that they'd always wanted to be, and that's what they called themselves - that was fun!
- Group: (laughter)

Ren: Yeah, I might nickname mine — cause are you going into the personal side as well?

Deb: If that comes up —

The personal side

Gai: I remember you said that this course brings up a lot of personal things

Some: Yes (murmurs of agreements)

Kath: I think I got more out of that side of it actually, than the academic side

Lisa: Yeah, that's how I feel too

Ren: Well it certainly helped me get in touch with my inside (laughs, group joins in)

Deb: Well, that's interesting

Gai: Whether you wanted to or not (laughs)

Ren: It was pretty scary actually, for a while — I'm not going to continue with that counselling group outside anymore for a while now. I'm dropping that for a while, it's just — because, see, while I had this to come to it was sort of at the back of my mind, so I had something to do during the week and everything, but — yeah, I'm just going to leave it for a while now and —

Concerning Ren

Gai: Do you think that's a good idea?

Deb: I thought you were going to be studying?

Ren: Oh yeah I am, but I'm doing it at home and —

Deb: You're not doing any of it here then?

Ren: No I have to, because there's four of them that are covered by OTEN, all the computer ones, Computer Accounting, Computer Receivable.

Deb: And they're not running here?

Ren: I don't know, I don't know what I'm going to do then, because I can't get the Certificate unless I do all the courses, and they don't offer it through OTEN (TAFE Open Training & Education Network)

Deb: Why don't you do some of the CGE (Certificate in General Education) you were talking about, that way you could keep up the contact, because you're sounding like you're going to get isolated here —

Ren: Yes, but I want to do my bookkeeping this year and get that over and done with, and then I might do that next year, when my son goes to school, because the hours just don't fit in at the moment. Next year I'll be able to afford to get after school care, because my youngest son will be going to school...

Deb: ... Have you talked to Anne (TAFE Counsellor) about it?

Ren: No, not yet

Deb: You might have a talk with her, she used to be a Counsellor with OTEN — for years — so she's very — knowledgable

Kate: Yes

Lisa: Okay, so she'd know ...

Writing personal reflections

Deb: ... Well it's interesting that you were just getting on to — that some of it was more personal, the benefits for some of you — I've been thinking about how can we get into this, how should we start, because most of you didn't have time to write journals — and Isobel's been teaching you about writing reflections and saying you got right into it

Gai: OHHH

Lisa: NOO

Gai: Only cause we HAD to (laughs)

Lisa: We didn't like it

Deb: So you didn't like it? Maria (Language and Study Skills teacher) said to me you were right into it, she was lying to me was she?(laughs)

Gai: Maria would do anything to make us work! (laughs)

Deb: Alright, well I won't make you write anything, okay that's — I just thought because she said that to me, but if that's not the case, well, we won't

Gai: Oh well — no — but, well I don't know about the rest of them, but every portfolio I did I wrote a reflection on it —

Group: Yes

Gai: So couldn't you read them?

Deb: Yes, I could

Gai: Because I'd only rewrite it, I'd only just go back and write it again — do you want to look at them?

Deb: That would be great. I actually thought the course materials might be useful like a journal, I know you did a timeline, and then went back and changed it and put more positive things in, and some of the things we did in Careers about goals and self-esteem and that kind of stuff, and the reflections — I thought maybe I could collect some of them in lieu of these journals —

Kath: Things that we've actually already done

Deb: Yeah, if that's alright?

Gai: You can have all of it!

Deb: Yes, I could just take the folders away because you mightn't need it at the moment, and copy out bits that I want — Does that sound good?

Group: Yeah (murmurs of assent)

Deb: Well while we are on the topic, you may as well explain what you mean about it was more useful to you ... at a personal level —

Lisa: Yes, because when I started the course I really wasn't sure about my personal life, but this made me *stronger*, I could stand up and say, well this is how *I* want to live and this is what I'm going to do — I don't know, it just gave me the strength to *do* that — and be able to say well no, you can go and live your life the way you want but I want my life to be like *this*

Deb: That's interesting — that happened fairly quickly for you too, didn't it?

Lisa: *Yeah* (emphatically)

Deb: Within, sort of, a month?

Lisa: Yeah, I think it just gave me something else to look forward to and not have to dwell on things — past things —

Kath: Mmm (nodding agreement)

Deb: — fascinating — and you felt like that too Kath?

Kath: Yeah, pretty much the same as what Lisa has just said, yeah

Deb: That quickly, for you?

Kath: It was just, gradually, over the course, yeah.

Deb: So it was more subtle for you, not quite as quick?

Kath: — not subtle, between the time it was held, what was it - 4, 5 months? I think that's pretty quick!

Deb: Yeah, that's true (laughter) What was the biggest turning point, for you, then, when you felt really strong?

Kath: I think in the beginning when we were doing all the assertiveness training and, sort of, looking into your own personality, and strengths and weaknesses and studying that, yeah

Deb: So actually thinking about yourself?

Kath: Yeah.

Ren: Actually, it would have been good to do that again at the last lesson, you know, to re-do it, like the sheet that we did, at the beginning —

Kath: Yeah

Some: Yeah

Deb: Oh right, now which sheet was that?

Ren: Just how confident, what we thought about ourselves, whether we're happy with ourselves

Some: Yeah the quiz thing

Deb: Oh, the quiz, that little assertiveness, self-esteem quiz ?

Group: Yes, yeah

Deb: Well I can bring it round to you when we do the interviews if you want

Kate: Yes, could we still do that, and you could compare them

Deb: Okay

Kath: That's the thing that started me —

Ren: (laughing) Actually, mine would go backwards in a lot of things because education would go up — but not in —

Lisa: Laughs

Deb: Actually I remember yours, Lisa, (laughing), because that must have been when the big turning point was for you, because, you came back, and in the column for your husband, you had that you asserted everywhere, and I was saying, 'WOW!' and you said, 'That's only since yesterday!'

Lisa: (Laughing) Yeah, he noticed too, he said "Oh since you started this course, you know" (laughs) I said "Yeah well —"

Kath: There was one where there was a score, and I remember I was the *lowest* score, remember that?

Deb: Oh that was the self esteem quiz, not the assertiveness quiz

Kath: That's it, yeah

Ren: Yeah, that one

Kath: And like, to me that was a big eye-opener, wow, I've got the *lowest* score, and I thought, I've got to do something about this

Gai: That's the one I thought you were talking about —

Ren: (in the background) Yeah, I was the second lowest, the second lowest

Lisa: I can't remember that one —

Kath: Yeah, the lowest score. So if I did that again now it would be interesting to see what score I'd get

Deb: Yes, so both the self-esteem and the assertiveness quiz were important for some of you. That's interesting, because the big thing I remember watching in you Kath was when you came back from court

Kath: Yeah

Deb: Remember, you were so nervous, and when you came back you were saying: "YES, I did it!". That was such a powerful —

Gai: Yeah, that's a victory

Ren: Yeah, that was a big day that

Kath: Yeah, the build up to that was really important, because, I don't know, if I didn't have this course to come to every day, when I was waiting for that court date to come up, yeah, I don't know what I would have done —

Ren: Yeah, that's what I'm thinking now, I'm gonna go insane (laughs)

Kath: Something I could keep my mind on, you know —

Deb: I know, that's why we're worried about you Ren, studying at home alone

Ren: Look, my life has changed so much over the last six months, I mean, I've been through a divorce, I've been through the assault thing, I've been through —

Kath: Yeah, same here —

Ren: an idiot boyfriend (laughs), I've been through a move, yeah, so ...

Deb: ... You think you'll manage?

Ren: Yeah. I went and dropped my resume off everywhere yesterday, everywhere, you see, because I thought, If I'm not going to a course, I've got to get out there and be with people (laughs)

Debra: Oh well, you've got a couple of things going then, that's good, because it really raised heaps for you this course, didn't it?

Ren: Oh yeah, my head was a mess. It's clear at the moment. I think moving out of town has helped a lot, because I don't have to worry about who I'm going to bump into today, and who's going to ring me, cause there's about six people who've got my phone number and that's it

Deb: So you feel a bit safer out there?

Ren: Yeah, but I've got to go to this party on Saturday, because a friend of mine has been going through a lot worse than what I have, and I promised her I'd go. She's having, like one of those catalogue party things, and, two of the girls, that I've cut off contact with, are going, so that's gonna be —

Gai: That's where you need your assertiveness training, hold your head up high, shoulders back —

Ren: Oh, I can't wait —

Gai: — and walk, what was it? What was that one we did, the walk ?

Kath: Power walk

Deb: Yes (laughs) I remember that

Those who left

Gai: Yeah, I remember that ... (name of group member who withdrew from the course) doing that walk —

Deb: Who was that?

Gai: With the light hair

Deb: Why, did she bump you?

Lisa: *Bump* her?

Gai: She *charged* me. Real aggressive I feel sorry for that girl ...

Kath: That's it, exactly, she was like a little girl —

Deb: We had a lot of students that actually didn't manage to get through the course this time, it was just, it seems like there were insurmountable things —

Gai: Yeah, and that makes me wonder how they're gonna be for the rest of their lives

Kath: I just don't think they were ready, it wasn't the time for them —

Gai: It's just a shame but, because there were so many

Kath: Later on they'll come to it

Ren: I think they will, I reckon they'll come back later I think, because it *does*, it brings up a lot of *personal* stuff, and I just don't think they could handle the emotional, *and* the academic side —

Kath: Yeah, it just wasn't the time for them —

Returning to the personal

Deb: And did the course do that for you too, Kathy, or did you sort of feel that what you got out of it was — less personal — more —?

Kathy: It helped my whole life, really, it helped — it was just good being round the girls all the time — cause that's what I needed.

Deb: Mmm ——— So was it good because it gave you a laugh, or support or ?

Kathy: Both, a bit of both

Deb: Yeah ?

Kathy: Hard to describe it —

Deb: Yeah —

Ren: She was really nervous, that first day

Kath: Yeah (emphatically)

Group: Laughter

Kathy: Wasn't I what?

Ren: She's really into it now —

Kathy: Yeeah (emphatically)

Deb: So you're a lot more confident now?

Kathy: Oh yeah, I feel heaps more confident

Ren: Yeah (laughs) , so do I —

Kath: Yeah, watch out ! (laughs)

Kate: (laughs)

Kathy: Yeah, like, before I wasn't game enough to say to Rob, now I'm gonna do this and I'm gonna do that, now I just *tell* him

Group: (laughter)

Deb: (laughing) So there's been a big change in your personal relationship?

Kathy: Yes

Deb: And were your kids always supportive, or —?

Kathy: *Yee- ah.* Oh a couple of times there I was, just thought, “Oh I’m **not** going back to TAFE. *That’s it! I’ve had enough!* And Becky goes, “You’ve gotta go Mum. You’ve gotta do this. You’ve gotta *do it!*”
(laughs)

Group: (laughter)

Kate: (Quietly) Good on her

Ren: But I remember, you were saying, that he was a bit threatened, too, he was giving you a hard time at the beginning, wasn’t he? — Now he’s come through —

Kathy: Oh, he was all right for the — the first month, and after that, you know

Deb: Uh huh? ——— But has it settled, now?

Kathy: (enthusiastically) Oh yeah, yeah!

Letting her in on the group joke

Ren: Oh he’s fixing all our cars now

Group: Bursts of loud laughter

Kath: (laughing) He’s got some work out of it

Lisa: (laughing) He’s got a **business**. He’s got a business out of Kathy’s class.

Deb: Oh, right?

Kathy: I'd go home and say "oh, such and such wants you to have a look at her car" and he'd say "oh, okay". Go home again and say "such and such wants you to look at her car" In the end, when I went home he goes, "Who else wants me to look at her car? (laughs) Oh so funny

Deb: (laughing) So he's accepted it?

Lisa: He's gonna put a sign out the front 'CEW MECHANIC'

Group: (loud laughter)

Kath: Career Education Mechanic

Deb: So do you think that it's helped, that the group of you have been in contact with him, rather than you just coming home on your own with stuff from the course? Like, because he's met some of the rest of you, that's sort of made it easier?

Kathy: Oh, he's met some —

Kath: He's met (name of another student who withdrew from the course)

Kathy: But she didn't know he was my husband. I went home one day

Group: Yeah

Lisa: She was sitting on the front porch (laughing)

Kathy: Yes, she was sitting on the front porch, they were waving to us as we went past, so I took Lisa home and I went back and I said, "How'd you know where I live?" and she said, "I didn't come here to see you I come here to see your husband". His mate sent her around our place (laughs)

Deb: Oh, for the car?

Kathy: Yeah (laughing)

Group: (laughter)

Kathy: Because Robert turned around and he said to her, “Oh, you better move your car because my wife’ll be back in a minute” and she goes “Who’s your wife?” and he goes “The woman that just went past in the little red car” and she goes “I know her, I went to TAFE with her” (laughing)

Deb: (laughs) And he’s okay about you going on with your studies?

Kathy: (Playfully, but meaning it) He’s got no choice in the matter

Deb: Oh, okay (laughs) — you’re assertive now —

Kathy: Yep

Sharing assertiveness

Lisa: I think we’re *all* assertive now (laughs) — even Jo.

Ren: Oh Jo, she’s the worst! (laughs)

Kath: Yes, Jo’s been the most noticeable change

Ren: Yes, she was so quiet

Kath: She’s come out of herself just so much —

Kathy: I’ve told him, this, you know, it’s for *me* not for him —

Deb: Yes, that's great ——— This is great — it's like a social chat ...

Reflecting through talk

Lisa: It's better than writing reflections too.

Kathy: It's easier to start talking —

Ren: Yeah, I didn't even realise (laughs)

Lisa: It's easier to talk about than to write them down, because I sat and tried to write reflections for you and I couldn't write them, I just didn't know what to write —

Kate: Some I found okay — the women one for Isobel I found hard, and yet I wrote the Aboriginal one —

Lisa: Yeah, I really enjoyed that class and I couldn't write reflections on it.

Kath: Yeah, we all found that it was hard to write a reflection on her class

Gai: Yet that was the class that we didn't like earlier —

Kathy: I had trouble writing reflections for **all** the classes (laughs)

Gai: — that we all — No, I didn't have trouble with all —

Ren: I didn't know what reflections were

Gai: In the first two weeks, Isobel's was the class that we were all going
"Oh shit , I don't think we want to do this —"

Lisa: No I liked it

Gai: — and then that ended up one of the favourites (laughs)

Group: Yeah

That critical moment

Deb: Well the funny thing was that that's also what brought that great big
'crunch' conversation up that everybody was able to talk about some
of their, more — 'secret' personal experiences, you know, the
enforced secrecy of assaults and things that came out —

Lisa: I missed that class

Kath: What was this?

Gai: Oh yeah, that was really heavy —

Ren: Glad I wasn't there (laughs)

Gai: Shocker

Ren: Gai says to me, "Oh lucky you weren't in class this morning" and I
said "Why?" and she said " Ooh, a heavy thing came out".

Kath: Did I miss that?

Deb: No you were there that day —

Gai: I don't wanna be here

Ren: She said "lucky you missed it — you would have lost it mate".

Kath: I can't remember a thing

Gai: Everyone was talking about their assaults

Deb: Briefly mentioned it — some people talked about it more in depth, but yeah —

Gai: Three quarters of the class!

Kath: Oh right, I remember it

Ren: Well the statistics are one in four

Gai: Yes?

Deb: Yes, one in three to four girls are sexually assaulted by age eighteen, but one of the students was talking about an assault as an adult

Gai: So that was about right then!

Kath: Was that you in that class or was it Isobel's?

Deb: No it was me, but everybody was angry about Isobel's class.

Deb: No it was me, but everybody was angry about Isobel's class.

Kath: Oh I remember —

Deb: — and one of the women who is not in the class anymore said, "Well here's what happened to me" and I just thought "Uhhh " (long exhaled breath)

Lisa: — and this is why I have trouble with the class (quietly)

Kath: You opened up a can of worms didn't you?

Deb: Well — no

Gai: No, / did. Well because Deb had always said, if we had a problem

Kate: Wasn't it (names student)? She said that she'd always had a problem with Aboriginals because she had been assaulted by one —

Gai: I said that we had a problem —

Deb: — that's what started the stuff about sexual assaults

Kath: And she blamed video hits — that was funny

Kathy: Did she?

Lisa: That was another class — she blamed video hits, because her daughters have a thing for Koories, because of all the black singers

Gai: See, with all that, I never thought this was that type of course — I never thought it was a personal type of course —

Deb: That's never happened in a classroom I've taught in, quite like that before, not like that. I've had the sexual assault counsellor to talk about child sexual assault, and that has allowed us to talk about it as an issue, because it *is* a major issue —

Kath: It showed there was a great issue for the group

Deb: Yes, and it's an issue for our female children, our male — but often women talk to me about more personal issues in breaks or see me separately, never quite so openly in the classroom before —

Gai: That's sort of what got me, because I thought, what am I doing sitting here in amongst all these people?

Kath: It showed that there was a need

Deb: So you felt there was something wrong with these people?

Gai: No, just, I was surprised that they would be so open —

Kath: So early in the course —

Gai: When they didn't know anybody —

Kathy: I was shocked at myself opening up like that too, I was

Gai: To talk so personal amongst all those women that you didn't know

Kath: There must have been a need for them to open up —

Kate: Sometimes it's easier to talk among strangers

Ren: No, it wouldn't have been — If I would have been there I would have got up and walked out of class

Gai: But those sort of topics, when we we're at a TAFE course? We were at TAFE course, we weren't at a clinic, or a — specific group —

Kathy: That's the first time I've ever opened up to anyone about it

Gai: — and I went "Oh, no." It was just amazing

Kath: It was good therapy, I reckon

Kathy: I went home that afternoon and I sat there and I just cried and cried and cried and Robert goes "What's wrong with you?" and I told him. Oh boy did he go off then!

Deb: Because you'd said it?

Kathy: Mmmm

Deb: Yeah (with sympathy)

Kathy: But I said I felt better for it —

Gai: But you must have felt safe enough, even though they were strangers

Kathy: Cause I've locked that up in *here* for years

Gai: The women must have felt safe enough, that I think was amazing, to feel safe enough in a group of strange women, to speak about so much personal —

Deb: I think I allowed that to happen too

Gai: Well obviously it was good for them —

Deb: When the student said what she did, I had to make a conscious choice about it, and that put people who, perhaps, weren't aware of those extremes, it put you in a difficult situation, because you might have felt, like — I don't want to know about this — but I felt that it was a really important thing, once one student had actually said that, to admit, yes, this happens, and, I did that, by saying one thing, which was including some of my personal experience, and that opened it up — as soon as I said that, it allowed anyone else to say: "well yes, this has happened to me"

Group: (murmurs of agreement) Yeah

Deb: And that, might not be comfortable for everyone, and I did try to check all that out

Kate: Yeah, you did

Deb: Like you're saying, I actually thought, yes this is really important, this is not your fault, it's not anybody's fault in this room, there's no shame for you, so you should be able to say that — there is too much silencing of women's experiences —

Kath: I remember you did ask everybody if they felt comfortable, and gave them the opportunity to speak, leave —

Kathy: I think the whole thing brought the whole class closer together

Deb: Yes, but it really was shocking, when (student's name) said that at first, it really shocked me — thinking, okay, how do I deal with this?

Gai: Yeah, I picked my chin up off the chair (laughs)

Deb: What do I say here, because it was really confrontational, wasn't it?

Kath: And there were so many others who had had that experience too —

Deb: Yes, that's right. But the context in which she said it, was that she was really saying it was Aboriginal, because he (her rapist) was Aboriginal, she was angry, and it was all mixed up, and it was really difficult —

Kath: That's why she had a problem with Isobel's class

Lisa: Yes, but I think that (student's name) did start to change after Isobel's class, because you could notice, and I don't really think that she was prejudiced against the Koorie people, I think that it was just that experience —

Gai: She still had a lot of unresolved anger, that's all —

Kathy: I wonder how she's going now?

Deb: She has been in touch, but she's very ill ...

Back to the personal again

Deb: So Kate, what did you feel —? I guess — did you feel the personal aspect more than the educational, or — ?

Kate: A bit of both. One thing that was really obvious, was getting permission to use the broken record technique, because, I've always not been a good arguer, because I felt once I said something, I'd said it, and I couldn't see the point of saying it again

Deb: Yes —

Kate: And not long after I had a discussion with my ex, where I would have lost if I hadn't been able to repeat myself, but because I kept repeating myself, and it was quite ridiculous —

Kath: You and me both

Kate: It was quite ridiculous. Yes we did, no we didn't, and it went on for about half an hour BUT, he hung up on me, which is a first. And I won that battle (laughs)

Group: (laughter)

Kate: And what he had led me to believe, the agreement we made, I kept him to it

Deb: That's great

Ren: Yeah, that was excellent, learning that

Gai: Yeah, it was like you gave us permission. It worked for me too —

Kate: That was one dramatic thing, but sort of —

Gai: Even works on the kids —

University goals and barriers

Kate: Yeah. I've got confidence to think that I can go to Uni now, whereas before, although I wanted to, I didn't think I could —

Kath: Yeah. Searched out **how** you can do it

Kate: Yes, exactly, **how**

Kath: Yeah, it always took me, I didn't know how to do it — how to get there

Lisa: Yeah, like as I was growing up, because my brother was always so '*intelligent*', that it was always him that was going to go to Uni, and I could never do anything. You know, like I would never amount to anything in my life, but this has showed me that I can

Kath: Mmm (agreement)

Lisa: I just have to try (laughs)

Ren: Like the pen thing

Lisa: Yeah right yeah (laughs)

Group: (laughter)

Deb: What's the pen thing?

Lisa: Oh, my kids bought me these pens for Mother's Day, then they bought up about Parker pens. Well, it was sort of a big thing in my family, where, I was the only one that didn't get a set of Parker Pens, because my brother was 'brainy', you know, he was in the top classes, *he* got a set of Parker Pens, well I never got any. Well then my little sister comes along, and I'm twelve years older than her, and *she* gets a set of Parker Pens, and I thought "Wow, what about me, poor little lonely Lisa doesn't get anything, and it's still, to this day, it's *still* like that. To this day, my mother will buy me something for five dollars for a present and my sister in law, who's only married into the family, a 60,70, 80 dollar present. She gets a birthday cake every birthday, I don't even get a phone call — so

Deb: — So you — recognised that early influence and you felt differently about it, coming — here?

Lisa: Yeah, that's how I feel now, well I can do it too, I don't need my mother's approval, or for her to say, well, "Look at my daughter, look at how good my daughter is, she's going to Uni". I don't need my mother to say that anymore, whereas, before I did

Ren: Yeah, you felt that you did

Lisa: Well she always bragged about him "My son, my Son"

Kate: My grandmother does that with my cousin who went to Uni and is a teacher

Lisa: And my aunty, I went to meet my aunty because I don't know my father's family very well, and she said, you know, "How come you haven't been in contact with your mother?" Since I've been to Nowra, and I said, "Well because, I don't feel like I need to contact her anymore, she's got her family, she's got my brother, his wife and my sister, and that's what she wanted —

Counselling, course and personal growth

Deb: So did you feel as clear about that — like you must have known that you had that resentment and some of the others, have mentioned as well, that you were aware of the treatment that you had that was unequal or some of the negative messages, so — you already knew that before you came here, or were partly aware of it? So what happened when you came, did it just — what's the process that made it clearer for you or stronger?

Lisa: Well I started counselling before I came here — I was going to see (name of counsellor in a community welfare agency) — and he sort of helped, and that's why I came to the course, and then this just reinforced everything that he was telling me anyway —

Deb: So it sort of crystallized it for you ?

Lisa: Yeah

Kath: Yeah

Gai: Yeah I wrote that down in my reflections — like that I knew, that I felt, that I was stronger and I'd let the past go and that I was growing and growing, but that this course just reinforced everything. That I had (laughs). Yeah, cause it's sort of good that even though you know you have, or you think you have, but it's not until you get in a group or you get in a discussion that then, listening to the other women, you think, yeah, well I really have come a long way —

Deb: Because you think you maybe recognise where you were?

Gai: Yeah, I've been there, done that, yeah, and it just reinforces it, and you think, "Yeah, hey I have really put that away, I have really dealt with that". Cause you can think you have dealt with things, but you haven't — they can rear their ugly heads —

Kate: And sometimes too, dealing with things is a process anyway. It's like steps, you do a bit and you think you're right, but then later down the track there's more stuff comes out, it's like a process —

Deb: Mmm, that's true — actually a counsellor said to me, it's like a spiral, that because you're on the same plane, you think you're back in the same place. You feel like that, but you're actually not, because it's

like a spiral and you might be covering some of that same territory but you're not actually covering it in the same way, you're somewhere else — Do you know what I mean?

Gai: Hopefully, yeah, you're some distance away

Group: (murmurs of agreement)

Deb: It might be related but you're not in exactly the same place that you were, six months down the track — hopefully (laughs)

Group: (quiet laughter)

Gai: That yeah, like you said, "oh yeah, been past that, yeah it's still there but it's not that same —

Coming to the course

Deb: — But you were really hungry for the academic side of the course when you came, Gai?

Gai: (laughs loudly)

Kath: Computers

Gai: I don't know, yeah, I was just —

Ren: I'll tell you — that day that you rang up and told her that she got into the course, I was in the bath, I was sick — and she comes running in saying —

Gai: the phone's gonna ring

Ren: “Ren Ren your phones gonna ring, quick the phones gonna ring! We got in! We got in!”

Gai: And she didn’t even get out. “Oh come in, bring the phone in”

Ren: And she’s sitting there, we’re both sitting there, she’s sitting on the toilet seat lid and I’m laying in the bath

Group: (laughter)

Ren: She was so excited that she got in — oh well we both were, cause —

Gai: Yeah, cause we knew it was a hard course to get into

Kath: Was it hard to get into was it?

Kate: Well normally, yeah, sort of, fifteen, there’s a cut off —

Kath: So was I lucky to get in was I? I didn’t realise that —

Deb: Well, yes, it was only last semester that we didn’t have an over-demand, like we have got this semester, too many for the number of places —

Kate: I came a couple of years ago and the room was chockers —

Deb: Oh, you came the time I had forty —

Kate: Yeah, and I did get in but I, had another commitment, I couldn’t come on the Thursday, so I wasn’t able to come then —

Deb: So you’d been thinking about coming to do the course for some time?

Kate: Yes —

Ren: That's the thing, getting up and doing it — I'd been thinking about doing it — my Mum did it five years ago, and I've been thinking about it all that time and then —

Gai: Yeah, she babysat for me when I went down to JET (Jobs, Education and Training Officer at Centrelink) , and she said, what are you going down there for? And then I said, can you look after her a little bit longer I have to duck back over to TAFE and blah blah blah, I said I'm gonna do this CEW course. "Oh, I'll DO IT! Come on, if you do it, I'll do it".

Ren: That's what it is, it's the motivation, just getting started again, and when she came back and said that, I was like, "YES, finally someone that I know is doing it"

Kath: How many wanted to do it this time?

Lisa: There wasn't that many of us there at the information session, I don't think there were fifteen in the room —

Deb: No

Ren: No but there was some that had already applied

Deb: I think about twenty this time, and probably about —

Kath: And you had to take only fifteen — so how did you decide, who does the course?

Deb: I've got a set list of selection criteria — I look to see whether this woman will benefit from the course first, rather than another course —

Ren: Like the WOW (Work Opportunities for Women course) or something

Deb: WOW or other courses — sometimes I might see - this woman has already done this training, and she's really more advanced, maybe she might be better to do a different course — that doesn't usually work, because, I think, of the confidence issues you're talking about, yeah, so really that's not terribly successful. So basically I try to find other places for students, and occasionally it does work. Occasionally there's somebody who says "Yeah, I can see that this would be too basic for me now" or "I'm not really interested, I thought it was part-time not full-time" so then I can direct them to another course. So I try to meet the demand rather than refer them to a waiting list, which is awful really, but sometimes I have to —

Kath: Mmm (murmurs of understanding)

The academic side

Ren: But it's not that basic — cause at first, like, I really thought that it would be really basic, hey? And like I was mainly doing it so that I could get into the swing of things again, but, once I started doing it there was a lot of —

Kath: You got —

Ren: — thinking involved, I mean, especially when you've been by yourself at home with three kids and you had to go home and *THERE WAS SUPPOSED TO BE NO HOMEWORK* (ironic laugh)

Group: (laughter)

Ren: But there was HEAPS!

Deb: Yeah?

Ren: Like you did, it opened your mind up a lot. I learnt heaps anyway —

Deb: Yeah, I don't think it's — it's like a preparatory course really, it gives you a taster, but it's certainly not as demanding as some of the other courses in terms of assignments and things, but it's not supposed to be. I think because you do so many subjects, you cover a lot of material, you did a fair bit of research —

Kath: There was enough assignments, thanks —

Deb: Yeah?

Kath: *Yeah* (laughs)

Kate: There'll be more next term if you do the CGE (Certificate in General Education)

Kath: Don't turn me off

Deb: That's why I said don't do five subjects

Kath: Well, we won't be doing computers, will we?

Deb: No, but it might be better not to do full time because you will find that it's more demanding in terms of assignments, so you're better off, maybe, to do part-time, it depends on your family commitments — Each subject is four hours a week, not two, and you might have three or four assignments for each subject. I wanted (name of past student) to talk to you, she was one who decided, "Yes, I'll do five" and when she did, she said, "Yeah, it nearly killed me"

Group: (laughter)

Deb: Looking after all the kids and studying —

Kath: That's what I've been worried about, that I shouldn't do it —

Ren: No, just slow it down —

Gai: Do it, just do two or three subjects —

Deb: Yes

Kath: Sometimes I feel there was enough work to in this course

Kathy: Sandra (another ex-student) just did three —

Income support

Lisa: Does she get Austudy? (a means-tested government allowance for students)

Kathy: Yeah, as long as you do your ten hours —

Ren: Yes, this course I've applied for, it's only six months like at TAFE, here, but I've got two years to do each module, so, and there's like twenty six modules, and I thought, you know, but they do it for people that have got children. You want to, don't jump into it —

Deb: Two or three subjects maximum is fine, and you don't need to do it all, you can go into TPC if you want without that Certificate, you don't need it, you just need the skills. You know, you can *choose* to do it.

Ren: And your work will be a lot better too, if you just do a couple at a time

Deb: How many hours of computing in your course Gai?

Gai: Nine. And I need to know what a full-time workload is — But you can get Austudy, it has to be 25% of a full-time workload, but nowhere in the Austudy book does it say how many hours is a full-time workload. Forty hour week?

Kate: 35 hours?

Deb: Oh no, twenty hours would be maximum study

Gai: Yeah, see? So nine hours has got to cover it —

Deb: If you get two hours tutorial support, or an hour

Gai: Just to make sure

Group: Yeah, the name's changed, again, Pensioner Education Supplement, it's only the name —

Return to research ethics

Deb: You should have one of these (ethics forms) too, to keep

Kathy: No, no — it'll be right

Ren: Don't worry

Deb: I've got one for you, you're supposed to have the contact names

Gai: Oh yeah, we'll have a copy Deb (loudly, with irony)

Lisa: Oh all right then

Kate: Okay (laughs)

Kate: I'll stick it in my portfolio

Gai: She talked us into it (jesting) — in case the ethics committee comes after us —

Kate: Yes, we might have to call them (with irony)

Ren: They sound real scary —

Deb: Well you might have to call *me* — (lightheartedly)

Gai: 'The Human Research Ethics Committee' (reading and laughing)
We're going to have frontal lobotomies, all of us —

Group: (laughter)

Lisa: No way

Deb: Well it actually had questions on it like (reading) "Please describe any serious risks or burdens this research might place on your participants, and how this will be rectified."

Ren: So it must be just a standard hey?

Debra: Yes, "e.g. the invasion upon privacy, emotional embarrassment or upset", and also I had to say, what I'd do if participants became upset (laughs). It should have been filled in before the course, shouldn't it?

Group: (laughter)

Deb: — what support do I have available for you —

Gai: I was just about to say, well, you were a good support like that, because, if any issues were raised, you knew where to direct someone —

Ren: Yeah, well

Gai: Whatever particular need —

Ren: Well, you put me onto the counsellors here

Gai: and Kathy and Ren, so you know where —

Deb: That's right, I wrote that down - that as part of my job I find support for students — but they did have things like maybe, "does the project require the withholding of the aims and conduct of the research"

Kath: Does it?

Deb: No, not at all! But sometimes it's been done, there was one well-known study, where people believed they were giving electric shocks to other people, and it was surprising how people kept going, but they weren't really inflicting shocks so there was information withheld — Anyway, of course I'm not doing anything like that — We better have our morning tea eh? — Do you want it outside or in here?

Ren: Let's go outside, I want to have a smoke?

Deb: Don't you want to have some cake?

Kath: How about coffee, then go and have a smoke?

Group: start chatting, pouring tea and coffee, cutting cake.

Sensing the social

The woman has transcribed the tape of the group discussion in her study over one three-day weekend: listening, typing, rewinding, listening again, trying to make a word perfect written record, including pauses and laughter, without becoming too technical about notation. At first the process is offputting: she is uncomfortable with her own voice, and sorely misses the body signals that create so much meaning in the classroom. Gradually, however, as she listens and types and rewinds and listens again, she is transported. Not to the same world that she inhabited where the group of women met and talked in the small glass-framed meeting room of the glorious new library; but to a world where there are only voices. She registers each as belonging to one woman or another. She starts to hear trends in the conversation. She notices, for example, that occasionally voices meld on top of each other at cross purposes, particularly when there is confusion or conflict over that 'critical moment', whereas in contrast, most of the talk exemplifies beautifully the social practice of sequential, one-at-a-time 'turn taking' described originally by Harvey Sacks, Emanuel Schlegoff and Gail Jefferson (Have, Paul Ten, 1999, pp, 5, 21-23).

With the transcription complete bright on Sunday morning, the woman views a new text, a paper copy of talk that can be seen as well as heard. She reflects on the changes in this text. Tony Schirato and Susan Yell (1996, pp. 67-70) explore some of the many differences in the processes of speech and writing, including the transient nature of speech unless recorded, compared to the permanence of writing where we can double-check our understandings; speech usually occurs face-to-face in real time, compared to writing which is usually a medium of physical separation and segregated time. Most of the woman's teaching occurs in speech, except for marking, which is her least favourite task. With it she has learnt to be painstaking, for it is far more difficult to erase a hurtful pen mark than to amend or refine a spoken comment. The woman sits in her study contemplating this altered text, jotting down ideas on pale purple paper. She notices that as teacher/ researcher she signals topic change most often, at the beginning of the discussion and each time that she

returns the conversation to the core theme the women have raised to ensure each individual has their say. However, ownership of topic change also varies quite early in the discussion with Gai and Ren jumping in immediately after questions of research, and this continues at various points as Lisa, and even Kate, who is fairly quiet, join them or one of the others to take the talk in a new or related direction. She contemplates what this means in terms of the 'blend' of power and knowledge in their social relations, partially reflecting traditional educational research where the instructor controls turn-taking and speaker selection, but also breaking with this pattern, as in Peter Sawchuck's research (2003, pp. 74-76), where adult informal learning in groups did not follow either this or general conversational patterns, but showed individual participation shifted and change was often achieved collectively.

Looking again at the conversation while mentally hearing the taped voices, she notices with surprise that the group discussion flows in a circle: they have concluded where they started, with questions of research and the ethics forms. The tone however has shifted from one of caution and the woman answering questions as 'expert' researcher, to a collective send-up by the students of her new role alongside the research ethics committee, threatening 'frontal lobotomies' for all. Graham Watson (1996, p. 3) elucidates this structuring:

Conversation analysis and ethnomethodology regard the work that utterances do as being done within a sequence. Conversation unfolds. Stories begin with a beginning and end with an ending. Answers follow questions... Interlocutors continually display to each other a collaborative fixing of a sense of the talk so far. The sense or meaning to which I refer is not one preset according to some analytic scheme and imposed by the analyst. It is one that the participants themselves achieve and make visible in the very course of its production.

A shape seems to emerge from the women's talk that emphasizes the social nature of their learning. As Gai and Kath ask 'Questions of research', and the woman wonders if anyone else has queries, Ren points out that they are following a social dynamic already established and comfortable from the classroom. These two women are the questioners of the group, the others

allow and support this role for them in a good-natured way, benefiting from their enquiries.

The social relationships that emerge from the shared stories flow from the interactions in CEW but sometimes pre-date and extend beyond the formal course. The woman had known that Gai and Ren were friends and neighbours, but had not realised how important their friendship had been in Ren's 'Coming to the course', as signalled by their shared story of the bath. When Gai's concern for her friend moves the woman back into a teaching role in 'Concerning Ren' to discuss future plans, the other women seem quite comfortable to 'sit' with this familiar situation, with three doing most of the talking, until they too participate to move the conversation forward. In 'Letting her in on the group joke' the women tell a tale of social interactions that have occurred outside and through the course, with Kathy's husband becoming the 'Career Education Mechanic'. There are obviously details omitted that the women share in the extent of their hilarity. The woman is left wondering whether this informal contact has helped Kathy to quell her partner's barely mentioned but significant disapproval of the course, and whether the group joke also tactfully keeps Kathy from further probing and prying.

She gains glimpses of the social relationships developed in the course through the transcript in ways that are not available in her everyday classroom practice, where she responds to dynamics that are never recorded, and can reflect only through selective memory. For example, it is clear that the women on both sides of the teaching/learning interactions have listened to and learnt from each other. In introducing 'The Personal side' to the discussion Gai remembers the woman's words as coordinator in the initial information session, while when they go 'Back to the personal' Kate recalls being 'given permission' to repeat herself assertively. On the other hand she notices in 'Returning to the Personal' how as teacher she has observed and learnt from Lisa's overnight transformation in filling out the assertiveness quiz and Kath's suddenly emerging confidence when she wins victory in her court case. The women take up concerns, build on, and draw out each other's experiences; even giving details of Jo's transformation in 'Sharing assertiveness', since she

cannot be present. The women also obviously differ at times, most strongly in the section recalling 'That critical moment' in 'Women and Cultural Studies', where they gradually talk through their sometimes conflicting perspectives, expressing, listening and learning from each other.

As she scribbles her notes on mauve sheets, the woman's household begins to move. Her son wakes up, comes in and they chat for a bit until they start to disagree about who left the mess in her study, which she says *he* has to clean up. She makes a mental note that they need another computer; she needs this space to be hers again, for gradually homework and other people's projects seem to be taking over. Her partner and daughter come in and argue playfully about who has made the last cup of tea or not. She asks them politely to leave. She'll be out soon. Today, this is the interrupted 'site of her production' (Foley, Griff, 1993). *Where was she?* Only this short time to snatch and her concentration now broken. They obviously all want some of her attention. Should she close the door? Just type the words from the lavender page. She will not be able to think more about what they signify, or expand, or clarify. Simply record as quickly as possible, before she spends some time with her family.

Chapter 6. Disequilibrium - Conflict II

There results a state of disequilibrium;
by the action of a force ...
(Todorov, Tzvetan, 1977, p. 111).

Giving and Taking Time

Substantial creative achievement demands not necessarily genius, but acumen, bent, persistence, time. And time, in the framework of industrial development, means a wage that admits of leisure and living conditions that do not require that writing be incessantly interrupted, deferred, denied, at any rate subordinated to family responsibilities ...
(Trinh, T. Minh-ha, 1989, p.7).

Learning is a creative achievement, which in formal education nearly always entails writing, and writing takes time. While there are many social factors raised by the women in their sharing of stories, the one that becomes most immediately salient to the woman as she struggles to combine producing her thesis with paid and unpaid work is the issue of time. When the women reflect on the academic requirements of the Career Education for Women course and plan their future work and study, managing time in relation to family commitments and finances is a key factor influencing their decisions.

Excerpts from Sharing Stories

Kath: That's what I've been worried about, that I shouldn't do it ...

Ren: No, just slow it down ...

Gai: Do it, just do two or three subjects ...

Deb: Yes

Kath: Sometimes I feel there was enough work to in this course...

Gai: ... And I need to know what a full-time workload is ...

But you can get Austudy, it has to be 25% of a full-time workload ...

Structuring time

Many of the women who undertake the Career Education for Women (CEW) course find it sufficiently demanding both academically and in terms of time, as we can see from the emphatic comments of Ren and Kath: there were enough assignments, 'thanks'. Yet in a number of ways the course is structured to accommodate women's needs, as discussed in relation to the framework by Erika Kates (1999) in Chapter 3, with a major exception being lack of on-site childcare. Another key component of the course that most directly facilitates women's participation is timetabling. The women meet for four days each week, so qualify for income support and must be ready to commit a substantial amount of time to their personal and social learning in the classroom. However, lessons are scheduled to start at 9.30 or 10am and finish at 2.30pm in time for women to travel, pick up, drop off or get home at a reasonable hour for children or to meet other responsibilities.

In this way the CEW course cushions women from the less user-friendly demands of most formal education available to further their career prospects. In contrast, as the women plan their next career steps they must consider conflicting demands of time. Ren chooses to study by correspondence until her youngest starts school; Kath has serious dilemmas about the time required by the Certificate in General Education when she still has young children in her care. In the Career Education for Women course most syllabi integrate assignment work within class time, and academic work incorporates time for the personal and for relationship. The success of this structure is reflected in the women's stories about what they learnt about self as well as academically, and in the dynamic social interactions evident in their sharing of these stories. While the setting of homework is consciously restricted, the relatively small amounts that spill over into time outside class compared to other courses, has still obviously caused some of the women conflicts.

In *Access to Careers* the woman talks to the students about strategies to manage their time: using diaries and a year planner, as well as drawing up a personal timetable so they can 'see' how their time is spent or stretched between competing demands. The woman encourages them to ensure they set aside some personal time. Each semester some of the women will comment that the course time is their 'me' time, away from caring for children or other family. For many women education is 'personal time', but at the same time it is 'work'. They often discuss how to squeeze a couple of hours into their lives each week for sorting their folders, finishing off or catching up on work they have not completed in class, as well as to find some space for themselves. She stresses how it is also important that they have personal time for relaxation and recreation. They brainstorm ways to take care of themselves in whatever amounts of personal time they can manage. The rationale for this teaching strategy is to examine time management skills that women can use in an ongoing way, so that when they go on to their week's work experience (from which many return both elated but exhausted), and later to further study or paid work, they can revise their time limitations and needs.

Excerpt from Kathy's Learning Story

personal timetable
important too
stuck to it
and your planner ...

Time management strategies such as these become increasingly necessary in what Mechthild Hart (1992, p. 164) describes as industrial time structures, often paralleled in education, where time is quantified and regimented. Outside of special access programs for women, managing quantified time while studying to further career goals can be difficult, since timetables, course and institutional structures are often in conflict with women's needs. The majority of women in society have children; yet many trade areas, particularly male-dominated ones,

have an 8 am start that is prohibitive, if not impossible, for women with children. General education and some trade areas such as welfare, childcare and computer courses which begin at 9am and end at 3.30pm, may be just manageable when children are old enough to be independent for short periods. On the other hand, these courses require many more additional hours outside of class working on assignments than do most of the trade areas. Evening timetables for paid workers, often scheduled between 5.30 - 9.30pm, do not offer an alternative for many women, unless a partner or other support person is available to take over the busy family night routine. Similar timetabling operates for university courses, accompanied by more and more time-consuming assignments, in an escalating hierarchy that continues through to postgraduate levels of education.

Rosalind Edwards (1993), in a study of mature women students returning to higher education, drawing on the 1974 work of Rose and Louis Coser, analyses both family and higher education as 'greedy institutions' for women. One, the family, requires constant allegiance and availability to cater to all physical and emotional needs in a way that is not required of men; the other, higher education, demands the study commitment of an 18-year-old bachelor boy living a totally supported lifestyle. Edwards' study showed that for women returning to university, references to both physical and psychic time permeated their accounts of combining family and education (Edwards, Rosalind, 1993, pp. 62-63). Despite the increasing numbers of women in adult and higher education as both students and workers (remembering 'the invisible owners') the structuring of demands on time have altered little to reflect their lives.

According to Mechthild Hart (1992) the organization of education mirrors quantified industrial time structures, which break the organic connection between time and experience:

Within the industrial time structure, time is either experienced as a standstill because every time-unit that passes is identical with the one

that came before and the one that follows. This is the case in highly repetitive work. Or time is experienced as a race, as for instance in the case of 'busy schedules', where too many tasks have to be accomplished in a short period or have to be completed at high speed (Hart, Mechthild, 1992, p. 164).

Schooling thus includes many years of repetitive learning routines and worksheets, with children frequently displaying unrest or disinterest. As education progresses through senior years of high school and tertiary education, time is increasingly experienced as a 'race' to achieve set criteria and levels of learning, submit all assignments and prepare for exams. This is not to imply that there are no inspiring moments of learning or life-altering interactions between humans occurring within existing education systems, but to recognize that the structuring of time and space (the latter already touched on in Chapter 3) always affects how and what is educationally possible, and the quality of learning that occurs (Hart, Mechthild, 1992, p. 163).

Hart argues that learning ideally requires a historical continuum of past, present and future, and an experience that is structured organically and qualitatively, rather than quantitatively:

How time unfolds, what rhythm it assumes, depends on the quality of the experience itself. Many experiences ideally require such qualitative structuring of time, although, in reality, it seems that practically all our experiences are rearranged under the spell of quantitative, objective time, no longer allowing us to linger or simply move along with the task, and to assume a stance of 'it takes as long as it takes', instead of being forced into an externally determined time frame (Hart, Mechthild, 1992, p. 164).

To some extent the structure of learning in the Career Education for Women course seeks to bridge organic, qualitative time and quantified, industrial time frames in education. This can occur because much of the learning links to and builds on women's experiences, encouraging both personal and relationship growth, as well as expanding academic skills and knowledge. The course

structure allows women to work both individually and in groups. After the first few weeks, some subjects also allow women to work at different paces and to different degrees of depth in many areas. Eventually, however, the women arrive at set outcomes by the end of the quantitatively time-framed course. There is an optional alternative exit qualification for women if not all subjects are completed, allowing a *Statement of Attainment in Work Opportunities for Women* to be awarded. Although there are assignments, some outcomes can be assessed as part of continuous learning in class and some can be assessed across different subject syllabi, so there is room for flexibility.

This bridging timeframe is facilitated because the course draws on, rather than rejects women's past, present and future experience as a knowledge base. While re-written in competency-based language, the course works in a different direction to the current discourses of "learning as a tool for skilling up the country" (Shore, Sue, 1998, p. 90). For example, a prominent feature of the organic time shared by the CEW students is the constant laughter in the sharing of stories; the course operates predominantly on a cooperative rather than a competitive basis. This collective learning which bridges the personal and social, unfolds at its own pace, has more than one trajectory, yet achieves broad goals by the end, is illustrated in the shifts and topic changes in the women's shared stories to achieve research.

In this discussion as the women broach continuing with education structured by more quantitative, industrial time in order to further career in terms of paid employment, they often choose part-time study as their best alternative. As coordinator she herself often advises this choice, depending on the student's situation and competing responsibilities: how much time a woman has committed to other people, to paid and unpaid tasks, and how much time she can keep to look after herself, on top of study. For women 'creative achievement', in terms of formal course completion is frequently deferred; their qualifications, and the 'pay off' in terms of increased opportunities, employment, wages and conditions takes more time, which is often measured in years.

Home, family, community time

Like the women she advises, the woman has chosen part-time study for the past eight years and of course, all her qualifications have taken more time to achieve as a result. Changing priorities and commitments along the way, she has balanced higher education with the necessities, joys and ambitions of parenting and paid work, with relative success. So it is highly ironic that while she teaches time management her efforts on her thesis are constantly thwarted by the taking of her time. Time taken by the demands of paid work: of earning a living, paying the bills, meeting repayments, bringing home the bacon, the bread, the pasta, the fruit, the vegetables, the clothes, the shoes, the school uniforms, and all such distinctly nonacademic requirements of daily life. Time taken by the demands of unpaid work: washing the clothes, the floors, the shower, the bathtub, cooking the meals, making sure the garbage is taken out, organising with family for responsibilities, for recreation; being a partner, a parent, a friend.

The patches of time the woman finds for her thesis are always interspersed by unpaid work. And while her home and lovingly furnished study sometimes provide a refuge from the demands of teaching, they also require constant maintenance. When she has a day off paid work for her research, or when she takes a Sunday afternoon or vacation day to sit at the computer, transcribe interview tapes, read notes, draft and edit her writing; she has always to interrupt and divert from her research work to drive, drop off, pick up, shop, open mail, wash clothes, clean, prepare meals.

The woman dislikes so much of housework, yet some tasks are simply unavoidable if she and the rest of the family are not to sink into mess, smell, fungus in the showers and drains, dust mite in the corners, crusty, coagulating plates accumulating in the kitchen, bins overflowing. Her study also adds

another load: keeping track of the mounds of paperwork generated in his highly regulated society.

Of course she also finds pleasures in some of the unavoidable tasks of the home that distract her from study. The warm sun on her back, hands deftly shaking and pegging damp, fresh-smelling clothes on the line, air of outdoors with birds trilling and chirping above and about, her mind free to wander. On days when she sees the sky darken from her study window and hears the birdsong alter, signalling rain, keen to avoid the tiresome task of drying clothes, she flees from papers, books, computer, to hurriedly unpeg board shorts, jeans, shirts, socks, underwear, towels, sheets and doona covers as quickly as possible, before the sky lets down its bounty on the so often dry terrain.

Other home tasks like cooking she commits to for satisfaction as well as health: chopping and crushing the pungent flesh of onion and garlic; washing, peeling, cutting vegetables, sweet and spicy aromas wafting as they simmer. She throws together meals that are tasty, shared, enjoyed, and instantly appreciated; the evidence and credit for her production immediate, rather than deferred, like her study and teaching work. She wonders if some of her pleasure and sense of freedom in these tasks, even when they are punctuating her thesis, stems from a more organic organization of time, where housework allows her thoughts to continue and her body to stretch and move through different spaces.

On the other hand she knows that preference is also involved. In discussions with women in the CEW courses each term she has learnt that for some of them the unpaid tasks that she detests and avoids, no matter how leisurely her organisation of time, afford similar satisfaction to the pleasure she takes in cooking:

To the Ironing Board

It's not supposed to be like this:
illicit bliss taking you in my arms.
By all sociological decrees we're incompatible.
(Kent, Jean, 1986, p. 227)

A number of her students, for example, have lovingly described to her how they enjoy the crisp fragrance of clothes pressed into order, while they listen to music or tune in to some meaningless show 'on the box'.

This was a topic they discussed in the course in relationship to managing time. Always someone would add a new 'tip' for reducing housework. They could delegate chores. They could draw some housework boundaries to suit: for her, forget ironing: this was a 'chore' which she did only as absolutely necessary, five minutes before the clothes were worn, not ironing any items she could 'get away with'. Women could defer dirty dishes, untidy rooms to get on with their study or paid work. She knew that this juggling act between what had to be done and what could be cut or amended or completely neglected and rejected, what could be delegated, was accomplished by women in endless variations, by her female students, friends and colleagues, and that their patterns for dealing with housework demands changed at different times of their family life.

Excerpt from Lisa's Learning Story

Done this great course
and it says -
'Don't worry
about your housework'

Despite women's increasing participation in adult and higher education and the paid workforce, research consistently shows a strong gender imbalance in who is doing the unpaid work of the house. A 1987 pilot study of domestic work in 1000 households by the Australian Bureau of Statistics showed that the division of unpaid work between women and men remained extraordinarily unfair, despite women's rising level of paid employment (Pocock, Barbara, 1995, p. 103). In 1992, women still spent more than double the time that men did on household work, even when in paid employment, and exponentially more than this when not in paid employment (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1995, pp. 1-3). It is more difficult to track how many of the women categorized in statistics as 'unemployed' were attempting to combine study with caring for family and home. By 1997 there has been small change: 90% of women compared to 63% of men spent time on housework, with women spending on average two and half hours per day in comparison to men's 1 hour on cooking, laundry and cleaning (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1998, p. 2). Although excluded from the national accounts, in 2001, the estimated value of such unpaid work was around \$250 billion a year, approximately half of the Gross Domestic Product, and 65% of this work was done by women (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2001a, p. 1). It seems the time management strategy of sharing domestic work with male partners has a long way to go before any kind of equality is reached, which means that for women returning to study or work, time spent doing the work of the home is a constant added pressure.

Of course the life of the home is not based entirely on tasks and objects, but more importantly on the people housed there. And while family can provide warmth, encouragement, laughter, love; they also require consistent providing *for*. Successive studies indicate that like other unpaid work in the home, the majority of the care of children is still predominantly done by women, whether they are in paid work or not (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1995 & 1998). In addition, many women who enrol in the CEW course may have almost sole responsibility for their children, as was the situation of the woman herself for

eight years. Even now with a partner and older children from primary to high school age, the woman's home life needs, wants, demands, confronts, and conflicts with her time for study. Furthermore, the unpaid 'people work' of family requires not only time but also the energy of using complex personal qualities and communication skills. Listening: showing empathy, encouragement, understanding, considering. Speaking: calming others, keeping calm yourself, being firm, being flexible, being clear, working out what the hell you want to be clear about. There are notes from school to sign, notes to school to write, shoes outgrown to be replaced, socks lost or worn out, money needed for this or that, exercise books or geometry sets or calculators or rulers or erasers to be purchased, homework needing help, assignments competing for home computer time, holidays begging to be booked, school mates wanting to sleep over, there are games, toys, sport, hobbies, boyfriends, girlfriends, school camps, dances and formals. Simultaneously there is the work of negotiating differences over discipline with her partner, fielding the entire net of family dynamics and desires while holding on to and pursuing her personal goals alongside those she holds for her partnership and parenting.

While recognizing that women work within and against many culturally constructed emotional dimensions of the work of home and family, as analysed by numerous feminists, it is also important not to reinforce dominant cultural values in diminishing the importance and value of such work. Caring for children and other people is crucial and complex, life-sustaining and life-developing work, and the lived experience of women negotiating balances between such work and formal education are similarly complex. As Jean Elshtain reminds us:

Mothering is *not* a 'role' on a par with being a file clerk, a scientist, or a member of the Air Force. Mothering is a complicated, rich, ambivalent, vexing, joyous activity which is biological, natural, social, symbolic and emotional. It carries profoundly resonant emotional and sexual imperatives. A tendency to downplay the differences that pertain between, say, mothering and holding down a job, not only drains our private relations of most of their significance, but also oversimplifies what

can or should be done to alter things for women (Elshtain, Jean, 1981, cited in Edwards, Rosalind, 1993, p.12).

Mechthild Hart (1992, pp. 188-189) draws on the work of a number of feminist scholars to analyse the ways women learn to know through mothering, forming provisional knowledge that is “constantly affirmed or disaffirmed, created and recreated in accordance with the unique and constantly changing reality of the child”. This is not to say that women’s ways of knowing do not include absolute positions and boundaries. As Jane Kenway (1995, p. 134) amusingly points out, completely relative postmodern truths are not always useful “for mothers of adolescent daughters who might like to have a little order in their lives, exert a little authority, clarify a few matters, like for instance ‘what happened to my shirt that you borrowed two weeks ago?’”. Women’s ways of knowing often mean, however, that even when taking a firm line there will be no shooting at dawn if the shirt is hopelessly lost. Mothering work teaches multiple ways of knowing that include and bridge self and other, subjective and objective and many shades of similarity and difference, change and continuity.

Of course the complex ways of knowing that emerge from family and home are not confined to women with children, but flow from and into many human relationships. As the women share their stories we see them taking time to encourage Ren and Kath with their plans for further study; in turn we see Ren encouraging Kathy to articulate her thoughts and Lisa to tell her story of the ‘Parker pens’. Many women value relationship with people other than children: partners, parents, grandparents, friends, community. All such relationships require at least some organic time to meet practical needs, develop and grow. While time for self and independent time may be an important part of relationship, maintaining relationship by spending only severely restricted, measured time units is barely possible, as in the syndrome of the absent father.

Relationship to build community requires time. For example, as a relatively educated woman with writing skills, family, friends, ex-students and acquaintances frequently request her 'spare' time:

"A writer," proclaims Toni Cade Bamabara, "like any other cultural worker, like any other member of the community, ought to try to put her/his skills in the service of the community." It is apparently on account of such a conviction that Bamabara began a career as the neighborhood scribe, "helping people write letters to faraway relatives as well as letters of complaint, petitions, contracts ..." (Bamabara, Toni Cade, 1979, cited in Trinh, T. Minh-ha, 1989, p. 10).

While the woman does not work in the so-called 'third world', but the 'first', where where the population is largely literate, she is part of a culture undergoing the major revolution of computerisation, beset with increasing competition for the reduced numbers of jobs available, a rural region where unemployment is high. Both in her paid and unpaid work she helps people in her social network find courses and employment vacancies, analyse job advertisements, write application letters and resumes, provide references and prepare for interviews. Occasionally she helps with a business or complaint letter, a legal or government matter. Rather than literacy, it is increasingly *high levels* of literacy that are a vital link for people attempting to negotiate an extremely competitive employment market and a strongly bureaucratic culture. And these job applications and personal matters often also have pressing deadlines, crucial to people's economic or personal survival that are not easily delayed or declined like her thesis.

Mechthild Hart (1992, p. 167) points out that in strictly measured industrial time frames the human quality is eliminated as irrational surplus; yet for many women, who value relationship with family and community as one major aspect of their career, some organic time is essential. Arguably such organic time is also crucial for creative learning: for thinking, reading, writing, practising, individually and in groups; a concept which stands in opposition to increasingly tight

education schedules focused on narrow skills and competencies. So while education can be a pleasure and liberation for women it can also bring the pain of ever-increasing demands for time not structured to recognise their lives. The constant submission deadlines for essays and assignments, so often grounded in a removed knowledge base, can become mere hoops to be jumped through rather than measures of deeply integrated learning. Even at postgraduate doctoral level, where the production of 'new knowledge' is both goal and requisite, restrictions on time are increasingly applied to length of candidature, as if knowledge is birthed to a set time schedule by all.

And while the woman has managed both family and higher education in the past, a number of factors in her life have changed and perhaps made the balancing of time more difficult. First, the demands of researching and writing a postgraduate thesis are qualitatively different than those for writing even lengthy research essays, requiring far longer periods of immersion and focus. Second, like the rest of university study the requirements are framed around the available time of a full-time student, and fully supported bachelor or husband. Third, while she now has a partner who helps share the work of the home, she also has a relationship to maintain and build, as well as a larger family and community network requiring her input. Fourth, the effects on her health and energy of balancing family and work with the demands of study seem to be cumulative: she gets tired earlier and more quickly. Finally, and more time consuming and energy draining than all of these, are the increasingly greedy demands of her educational workplace.

Time aside

You may well have wondered, dear reader, about the title of this chapter, and how this research story turned from heading towards resolution, with the sharing of the CEW women's stories, to yet another conflict. This is not the conventional narrative structure delineated by Tsvetan Todorov (1977). We know, however, that the timing of women's lives, like the structure of women's fiction, does not

always fit the frameworks set down by men. The writer Barbara Baynton (1857-1929) for example, in 'The Chosen Vessel', does not follow her unfortunate heroine through the short story convention of rising action to a single climax, as, alone in the bush with babe-in-arms, her character is stalked by a malevolent swagman. Instead she takes us to the final scene of tragedy from three different angles, treble echoing her strident criticisms of a patriarchal society in which women suffered (Krimmer, Sally & Lawson, Alan, 1980, pp. 81-88). Similarly, the woman's story of research follows an alternate path, in this case, of writing in dialogue with research (Griffiths, Tom, 2000). You may have noticed that the chapter seems to start with the CEW women, then move away from them, with the story of the woman as student/teacher once again figuring large. You are not alone in wondering what got in the way, for so does the woman herself, until she gets a handle on the time conflicts between her research and the workplace on which she relies for economic survival.

Time Earning an Educational Wage

Behind the scenes for the woman as teacher, there is escalating drama in achieving the smooth running of the women's course. While within the CEW course classroom there is a sense of sharing the personal, relationship and qualitative time, just as in the theatre, where rehearsals, stage mechanics and sometimes the safety pins holding together the costumes are concealed from the audience, the increasing amounts of industrial time required to orchestrate her paid work remain hidden from the students who participate in the show. The woman realizes that the biggest factor in not achieving her study goals is that the performance of her paid work is eating her alive.

The woman's teaching workplace at TAFE was increasingly non-stop: planning courses; writing and delivering promotions for courses; organising 'flexible delivery' of courses, which in practice meant tailor-making programs for

individuals or very small groups of students and teaching the subjects with less hours. Clearing messages, answering phone calls, making phone calls, internal, external; designing, updating and printing course application forms; organising rooms, organising teachers, lobbying for computer room bookings; word processing, printing and distributing timetables; checking and ordering supplies for subjects or the section; checking e-mail, responding to email, composing and sending email; dealing with the incessant flow of paperwork, policies, policy changes, administrative changes.

All these tasks demanded attention before she even attempted what were the core tasks for teaching and learning: reading, thinking, researching and planning lessons; researching and producing teaching resources; word processing and photocopying student handouts; adjusting lessons to meet the needs of particular groups; evaluating lessons; booking library information sessions for catalogue, internet and database use; booking library facilities for student research or computer use; responding to student questions; facilitating student discussions and groups with differences, diversity, clashes of opinions and personalities as well as varying responses to learning activities; giving students feedback on written and oral work, marking assignments and papers; responding to individual student problems; contacting counsellors and teacher-consultants for students with disabilities, organising appointments, requesting support; talking to students who come to the offices looking for her or looking for other teachers; making appointments for students to apply for recognition of prior learning or exemptions from subjects, reading and analysing and filling out the paperwork for their applications.

These disjointed, disparate demands on the woman's time at work were complicated by a whirlwind of continual change, which caught her and swept up her days, weeks, semesters. She adapts to new technologies, educational philosophies, endless management and administrative restructures. Over a ten year period she has learned to use computers, answering services, voicemail,

email and the internet, trying to keep abreast of changes to software programs and integrating the use of these new technologies into her teaching, including online learning. Computer systems also increasingly infiltrate administrative tasks such as keeping rolls, filling out pay forms, checking pay slips and leave entitlements. Simultaneously, the redistribution of campus responsibilities means years of trying to run programs at a location an hour's drive by car. The same requirements of course management have to be re-adjusted for a smaller community with different needs and resources, requiring new networks, as well as travelling time to teach and coordinate.

Meanwhile, the entire educational culture has been converted to competency-based training. She has been involved in re-writing course and subject syllabuses and marking criteria; re-training herself and other staff; adjusting teaching methods, lesson plans, assessment methods; struggling to obtain resources to implement these changes. She has also struggled with the particular difficulties of implementing behaviourist curriculum to general education subjects like Communication, English and Humanities, which arguably require 'mental' attributes, such as empathy, analysis, evaluation, and not merely 'skills'. Like so many other teachers (Blackmore, Jill, 1992, p. 234) she has adapted to these challenges as best she can: welcoming the beneficial aspects and finding solutions to the problems posed.

The time-consuming workload of implementing competency-based education is reflected in a study of twelve educational sites in southern and eastern Australia, which found that for teachers, "in many cases it has involved changes in every area of their work" (Smith, Erica & Lowrie, Tom, 1997, p.25). The researchers found seventeen separate issues of concern shared by teachers under such all-encompassing headings as: organisation, management, and delivery; curriculum; teaching and learning; assessment, reporting and recognition of prior learning (Smith, Erica & Lowrie, Tom, 1997, pp.28-29). The woman's concerns

about the relevance of competency based education for her subject areas are also reflected in research:

... any new innovations in the field need to address educational and philosophical ideas associated with specific fields of study (Hill, Doug, Smith, Erica & Lowrie, Tom, 2000, pp. 3 - 4).

The woman negotiates these changes while cuts to funding mean that there are less full-time staff members in her section to meet the growing workload. One full time staff member has retired, her colleague fills the head teacher position, and the other full-time staff member's position is not replaced. Despite repeated requests, managers will not fund the lost full-time position. In fact, even before this reduction in staffing occurs, there has been a hold on full-time teacher recruitment for ten of the thirteen years in which she has worked for her section, so that the current shortage of full-time staff, which constantly diminishes her 'free' time and mental 'space' is worsened by a long-term lack of recruitment. Thus in all but the actual face-to-face teaching load covered by casual teaching staff¹ two women were now trying to undertake more work than that previously produced by three.

The woman feels the strain of repeated funding cuts in her everyday work. Commonwealth funds through the Australian National Training Authority Agreement were cut in 1996 and since 1998 there has been no further increases, so in real terms there was a cumulative reduction of \$240 million in funding for Vocational Education and Training in that period (Currie, Wendy, 2000, p.1). The NSW government budget 2000-2001 provided only a 0.6% increase for education on the previous year's already lowered actual expenditure, which was much less than the expected inflation rate of about 6%. During the same period, student enrolments continued to grow but had to be met

¹ While officially TAFE NSW refers to its non-permanent staff as 'part-time teachers', this is a misleading misnomer, as they are actually employed on a casual basis.

by “growth through efficiencies” (Bradley, Phil, 2000, p.1). Educational funding cuts particularly targeted access programs where women formed the majority of both teaching staff and students (Blackmore, Jill & Angwin, Jennifer, 1997, pp. 4-5). An Australian Education Union (2001) survey confirmed that her local stresses and the robbing of her time are widely shared. Over half of the TAFE teachers who responded listed funding cuts as one of the five changes that had most impacted on their work, along with cuts to teaching staff, changes in delivery and curriculum, reporting and accountability requirements and reduced job security, combined with greater casualisation of the teaching workforce.

And for the casual teachers, the situation seems even less hopeful than at the time the adult educator began her own career as a ‘part-time’ staff member. The overstretched full time teachers are barely available to help new or existing casuals, already marginalized and lacking information in the workplace. They receive disproportionately low pay compared to full time staff, and most receive no wage over non-teaching and vacation weeks. Despite this, a number of these staff members (mostly women in her section) remain dedicated team members for years, also working increasingly hard. In 2005 the NSW TAFE teachers union finally wins a fraught battle to improve the conditions of casual staff, although for those who would like permanence and stability prospects remain poor. In the entire Australian vocational education sector, of which TAFE is a major part, just under half of teaching staff are employed casually according to the Australian Bureau of Statistics (2000, p.1). Australian Education Union figures suggest that in many Australian states the proportion of casual staff is much greater and rising significantly (Forward, Pat, 2000, pp. 2- 3).

Some casual teachers simply moved on at the first opportunity, so that there is a constant flow of experienced professionals who work for a relatively short time then find more satisfactory employment. It is an intensifying struggle for the woman to give time to supporting new part-time teachers: face-to-face, by phone, by email; in increasingly fragmented ways. In addition the need to advertise,

select, interview and write up recruitment reports to gain replacement staff as part-time teachers leave, becomes another regular time-burden.

The government 'push' towards privatizing education aggravates the time-taking complications of changes in structure, skills-based training and staffing levels. For TAFE must now not only 'compete' against 'private providers' and other government agencies for funds to run courses, but must also compete with its own sections for funds, in what becomes a ludicrous spiral of internal 'competition'. Teaching sections must not only seek funds to run special commercial courses and their usual community courses wherever possible, but must also 'bill' other sections for any teaching (called 'servicing') done on their courses, while sections across TAFE Institutes are forced to 'conquer and divide' money for equipment, supplies and actual course offerings. The teaching section is thus lured to busily seek commercial courses by the promise of small amounts of money for stationery or equipment.

The external and internal competition fostered by government privatization policies simply adds to the woman's workload. Time spent seeking funding sources, meeting with 'industry' and TAFE commercial section staff, costing and organising courses, applying for government funds and filling in reports, is never totally factored into the cost of commercial courses. Time spent on the additional planning and paperwork involved in internal bidding and billing for courses, resources and servicing, labour costs, become additional unpaid work for the already overloaded full-time teacher and Head Teacher.

Bronwyn Davies, Jenny Browne, Susanne Gannon, Eileen Honan & Margaret Somerville (2005) characterise these new manager-driven worksites in education as working through multiple eyes at every level:

Within the terms of the new system individuals are presented with an (often overwhelming) range of pressing choices and administrative tasks for which they are responsible and, having learned to be one of the pairs of eyes that watches and calculates value in terms of the budget, we responsibly gaze on our own acts and the acts of others. And we shape ourselves (or try to) as the ones who have (a monetary) value to the organisations we work in. At the same time any questioning of the system itself is silenced or trivialized (Davies et al, 2005, p. 345).

This external/internal gaze of economic surveillance in education operates on the very foundation of adult educators' organic human values and relationships. For while all the busy schedules and tasks that are to be completed are at one level to appease successive levels of management in the educational hierarchy through to the government in order to maintain and secure funding, underpinning these hectic schedules and tasks, the educator seeks to maintain the human conditions of learning for their students. The many women who work in adult education, the 'invisible owners', are thus caught between increasingly quantified industrial time and the needs of learners and teachers for organic human time and relationship. The cost is often borne by the bodymindheartspirit. The woman and her female colleagues often eat lunch over their desks or miss it for some hours, hold off such basic human functions like going to the toilet, take work home to complete at night or in the early morning while the life of the home is still. The much criticized teacher holidays (as if the complex, exhausting human work of teaching, like that of mothering, does not require or deserve the recognition of a significant time break) increasingly becomes a myth:

I would give this breeze off the hills for a day
without marking, a thousand papers
folding their wings like crushed birds. that box
I brought home in the boot of my car ...
(Wakeling, Louise, 2002, p. 22)

Stressed time: it seems that everything in her workplace is done 'on the run'; that there is increasingly more to do with less. Less time to liaise with students and colleagues, less hours for courses, less money to run courses, less hours to help students through tutorial support, less money to employ counsellors to meet the ever-increasing demand for help with course and career advice or personal problems that interfere with coursework; less money for library resources and staff, less office staff answer to enquiries, produce timely course information, enter student records and process student results. The only grace to offset these administrative cuts was that her section eventually gains some part-time clerical assistance. The woman who works in this role is an invaluable help amid the burgeoning stress. Yet over the following years, the assistant also becomes progressively overloaded as teaching sections pile requests on her in-tray for the minimal hours per week that she is employed.

And what are the social consequences of all his hectic misuse of industrial time, the woman wonders. Mechthild Hart (1992, pp. 166-167) theorises how frantically busy schedules inhibit the more complex parts of human memory, and thus inhibit the very possibilities of thinking about the future. Hart (1992, p. 166) explains how the juggling of too many 'chores' draws on the simplest aspect of memory: "to 'keep in mind' the list of tasks and activities that need to be done, or more precisely, that need to *have been done* or finished by the end of the day, next week, in a year". She argues that this blocks out the unique and unpredictable aspects of memory, "where the live interaction of past, present and future is still intact, where human memory can unfold its unique creative and imaginative potential". If, as Mechthild Hart proposes, the fragmentation of time fragments our very consciousness, then such highly regulated time successfully inhibits our ability to learn from our experiences. While this may be a neat fit with narrowly focused agendas to skill up a docile workforce for industry, the increasing fragmentation created by pressurized industrial time stops us from

examining the past, analysing the present, and envisaging any alternative future. In 'commonsense terms', we are 'heads down, bums up' unlikely 'to see the wood for the trees':

The students must embody the new workplace rhetoric and so must she. They must make it their own, no matter that it might be counterproductive in terms of learning or in terms of the stresses on their bodies (Davies, Bronwyn et al, 2005, p. 359).

The woman is increasingly frustrated, caught in the trap of hectic industrial time. *Substantial creative achievement requires ... time.* Less time, no time: to question, to think, to write. For the first time in her career she cannot complete tasks she has committed to. She spends increasing unpaid hours to keep 'on top' of the workload: she starts work in the early morning when the cleaners are doing their rounds, she stays late, she catches up on work during holidays. She still tries to offer 'quality' education in the women's course and other classes, she is still committed to the life of family and home, still trying to find time for her thesis. But as she teaches the women in their career classes, she is one woman: something has to give or some things have to be taken back.

Time for Resistance

Industrial timeframes have a long history of being inculcated and policed, from school bells to late detention, to the mechanical clocking on and off at the factory. There has also been a long history of both spontaneous and organized resistance against them, whether relatively simple acts of climbing the school fence or long and complex campaigns for the eight hour day or paid leave to birth a baby. Michel Foucault is widely credited with proposing that wherever there is power, there is also resistance, although discussion of such matters also has a long history, including feminist analyses and action. The Bible itself is full of incitements to resist oppression and defend the poor and powerless.

So like people throughout history, despite an atmosphere that discourages such responses, the woman resists many of the changes that are taking her time, which in turn takes up more time. She champions the cause of continuing the women's programs (often the first in the section seen as expendable); she protests to keep the timetable for the women's program 'different' to the other courses, inside school hours and holidays; she negotiates to keep programs on offer for the smaller numbers of students at the more isolated campus further down the coast; she has scuffles and skirmishes to allow her students to continue to go on excursions; she agitates to keep First Aid as an elective for the women's course despite cost; she struggles to obtain paid meetings and staff development time for the casual teachers on her course. She strikes and demonstrates with other teachers about TAFE funding cuts and teacher wages. The woman, along with the Counsellor and others wrangle with management over a decision to cut the local Course Information Officer position, to no avail. The woman agitates to reinstate the Institute Women's Strategy Officer, with partial success. She opposes reduced library hours and staffing with the Institute Librarians and the Public Service Union in a prolonged tussle which eventually results in an overwhelming success. She manoeuvres to acquire computers, printers, scanners for staff and students; she requests, contends, challenges to get computers installed, updated, repaired. She fights and gains some ground, she fights, wins and loses, she fights battles that will have to be fought again.

She has fragments of angry insight. She wonders how truly efficient are these 'efficiencies'? How can an educational organisation offer quality when so little time is actually devoted to achieving it? How can education be a focus at all when decision-making concentrates almost exclusively on cost and the funding basis of Actual Student Contact Hours (ASCH): a crude, 'bums on seats' measure of educational participation, counting only enrolments and initial attendance at a course, and nothing of any other educational, personal or social outcome? How economically 'efficient' can it be to have professional teaching

staff filling in floods of computerized forms; sections submitting hours of paperwork to charge and pay each other for teaching services or curriculum development? How is it an effective use of wages to make Head Teachers economic and administrative managers to the detriment of their responsibilities for educational leadership? None of these changes produces the 'quality' education of government rhetoric. The educational quality seems to her to happen through the efforts of staff in spite of, rather than because of, the top-heavy layers of the management hierarchy, whose actions often seem to be indifferent or directly oppositional to these efforts.

Such resistant observations are echoed in an Australian Education Union Survey (2001, p, 2), finding that the major restructuring around the privatization of education has had enormous negative effects on the quality of education and teaching work. Overall 86% of teachers noted increased workload and increased stress at work; 68% felt their ability to maintain quality education has been eroded; 61% said that professional interaction between staff had been eroded, with half stating that their relations with students have been eroded. Such statistics do not however, convey the disheartenment, disillusionment, frustration and general lack of morale that often permeates staffrooms 'behind the scenes', nor the attempts to resist or negotiate the changes (Clark, Judith, 2003). While this may be kept largely at bay from students, with the smiling face and the valiant attempt to maintain quality prevailing, it is impossible for the time consuming nature of these changes and the exhausted negativity they create, not to filter through to the quality of education. Sadly, many older staff seem to simply 'wait out' their retirement. Teachers of dedication and talent move to other work. The woman herself seeks and gains part-time employment at the local university campus to find some respite from the poor teaching conditions and long hours of unpaid work at TAFE. The job adds further pressure to her study situation, but also open alternatives to her present career, draws a definite barrier around the time she can spend at TAFE, and gives her some social interaction in a more academic environment, as well as funds to travel for study.

During this time of workload stress, the woman dreams vividly that she has returned to her tiny whitewashed Cretan house. In her night visions she is back in the tempo of days and seasons intermingling with patterns of repeated and varied activity and rest, celebrating life. She and her friends prepare and eat fresh foods as they are harvested and brought to market, or collected together from the fields. Her daily bread is purchased crusty from the local bakery. In winter she teaches in the afternoons, in summer the mornings, so that in the zenith of heat the slowing rhythm of her body relaxes in the shade beneath grapevine. She is once again money poor but time rich. She has planted herbs; painted empty tins sky blue and loaded them with crimson and magenta geraniums. In her free time she walks the dusty paths through olive groves, stopping for a drink at a 'kafénion'. She writes short stories and poetry. She walks roads beside the sea with the tang of salt, wild thyme, sage and oregano sharp in the air. As she descends she notices the landscape around her bare-clay lemon-tree yard has become more developed, more loaded with traffic and tourists. She suddenly recalls that she is on vacation from her life in Australia. She cannot force herself to organize a return ticket. She wants desperately to stay, to delay her return, even though she knows she is expected to teach in a few short days. Perhaps while the conscious mind is swamped by the busy-ness of industrial time, our subconscious plots its escape, or at least makes connections with our past, present and future.

How women do long for these moments of organic time, in an historic thread no doubt predating Virginia Woolf's cry for 'a room of one's own', across ages and locations and contexts to this day:

Flying, when I'm working well and the words flow out like a thread that I'm just hanging on to and following. I'm high in my treehouse and looking at blue butterflies, bougainvillea and birds. I don't know where I'm going, where these words are taking me but I know I'd rather be here, hanging on and flying, than anywhere else.

Time is irrelevant here, as is the (monetary) value of what we write. We are unequivocally in a state of joy, even bliss, where our capacity to act is intensified and the possibility of going beyond the already known lures us on (Davies, Bronwyn et al, 2005 p. 355).

While the woman's subconscious dreams its escape, her student persona starts to research, trying to make sense of these time-gobbling complications in her working life, and how they relate to those of others in the context of the island continent where she lives, and to other contexts further afield. She begins to re-vision her loss of time, her paid work, her unpaid work; buoyed by her belief that individual stories are also part of collective experience:

I live in the Australian state of Victoria, a state governed by radical conservatives who, since coming to power less than two years ago, have vandalized the school system, removed 8,200 teaching positions, closed or amalgamated over 230 schools, wound back the provision of educational support services, pushed schools into a market mode, instituted a model of management which has turned educational leadership into a form of institutional management devoid of educational concerns, undermined the morale of teachers, almost totally destroyed the teachers' unions, officially removed the concept of social justice from the educational agenda, shaved \$300 million off the state education budget and increased aid to private schools by 15 per cent in real terms (Kenway, Jane, 1995, p. 131).

History is better made than predicted but even the most cursory reading of contemporary events and current trends in Canada suggests that for women in education, the 21st century will provide dangerous terrain indeed. The cumulative effects of the government-supported, corporate effort to implement the neo-liberal economic agenda ... the ongoing destruction of public services and the commercialization of education will have specific consequences for women as educational workers (Coulter, Rebecca, 1998, p. 107).

She starts to make connections with her local story, to regional stories, to state and national stories, to international stories.

Time for life and death

The woman pirated time to work on this research. She worked at setting boundaries, keeping off campus on her rostered day off, trying to make time, thieve time, for leisure, and for the leisure/work of this 'thesis', this word which she used to say: "No', sorry I can't take that on, I have to complete my 'thesis'". Of course her study could also become another burden on her time, but she started to use it to her advantage: to make sense of her working world.

The woman works consistently to reach this point in her chapter, during her September 'break' from TAFE. She desperately wants to complete two or three chapters of her thesis, having discussed the possibility of upgrading to a PhD with her supervisor. She resolves to do so over the next few months, knowing she can achieve at least this much writing, ready for the required 'peer review'. The idea had arisen in a driveway chat with another 'skateboarder mum', whose sister had upgraded her Masters in this way, which sparks the woman to enquire whether the depth and breadth of her own work might allow this. Her research has become more immediately relevant to her career options, since she has gained part-time tutoring work, and this may be one way to shorten some of the time needed to gain a qualification that adequately recognizes her adult education work and study.

She pushes aside other commitments. She has TAFE and University marking due, but leaves this until the last possible two days. She also usually takes extra time for her family during vacation periods, including time to visit her elderly grandmother, who lives only forty minutes away. Ninety-three years of living have changed her Nan's perspective on time as well as her needs for help, from changing a light bulb to buying batteries to having her 'tele' fixed. So the woman must set aside at least half a day and then some for a visit, and the writing process takes so much time. She laughs thinking of her grandmother's voice: "Why are you leaving already? You're always in such a rush dear. What do you

want to go home for?”” as the woman tries to explain to Nan her competing commitments.

Doggedly the woman keeps working on the chapter, and merely phones her grandmother, feeling guilty. She has been aware that her Nan needs additional care for some time; she has been putting off dealing with this, knowing she should talk to her mother, although their relationship is strained. “Not long until Christmas’, she thinks, but also missing the time she usually spends with her Nan. At this stage of life the older woman always enjoys a laugh and a recollection from her younger years: floods in Narrabri at three, moving to Randwick and running wild over the sand dunes at Coogee with her brothers, tales of getting her first job as a seamstress in Sydney by being first in the long queue of contenders. By the end of the break, the woman emails the draft chapter, elated to have written another segment, produced in this time stolen from family. Her supervisor sends her an article, pointing her toward a widening of her perspective.

By December the time pillaged from the spring break catches up with her. The area is beset by bushfires. She spends Christmas and Boxing Day trying get to her Nan through roads that are opened only to suddenly close again as flames turn with fierce switching winds. Finally she and her son make it through to find her grandmother reduced to total disorientation: alone, no telephone or electricity for two days. Her elderly Nan seems suddenly unaware that her fridge is full of rotting food and that there are toilet messes on her lounge and floor.

The woman takes her grandmother home and she and her partner nurse her in shifts, cleaning up more messes between bed and bathroom, finding plastic sheets for the lounge and bedding, feeding, bathing and dressing her. The woman makes phone calls, appointments, organises a shower service, incontinence pads. They clean her grandmother’s home, exorcising years of dust and grime and hoarding: scrubbing and disinfecting and throwing away what

was forbidden to be touched by Nan's pride until now, while the old woman sits in her comfortable chair watching them work, bemused by this flurry of activity.

When the woman sees the Aged Care Assessor a nursing home is recommended; much against her Nan's wishes. The nurse notices the old woman's breathing is laboured. It may be due to the bushfire fumes which hang in the air, but it must be checked out. As she drives her grandmother home she wonders how long she can ward off the nursing home with additional assistance. Her mobile rings and she rushes back to the hospital for an all-night stint for her stepdaughter's first birthing. Friday night fear, anxiety, and finally joy as by dawn a healthy boy is born.

On Sunday the baby and new mother come home to the other side of the duplex where they will set up the exciting and demanding work of nurturing a newborn, with grandmotherly support close at hand. On Monday afternoon the woman is called again to the hospital where her own grandmother lies awkwardly on a casualty stretcher in a cubicle, confused and frightened. Busy nurses insert needles in her drip, do not hear or reply as the old woman questions them. The woman reassures her, repeating information over and over. A heart specialist arrives to tell her and immediate family that Nan's condition is untreatable due to her age. By morning the old woman has been moved to intensive care, crowded and makeshift while hospital renovations take place. At least the Sister here is kind, taking time to explain to the old woman what she is doing, but the specialist confirms there is little to be done.

The woman knows how much her Nan loves her own home; the hospital conditions are awful, so she asks if she can take her Nan to care for her. The doctor agrees instantly, for there is really no room for her. She asks for instructions, what to expect. Her Nan will die in the next two days, but at least have the consolation and comfort of her own bed. But there is little comfort in the reality of those dying moments when they arrive too soon that evening.

Small consolation that her Nan has had a 'good innings' as people remind her later, that she is in her own home, as she always wanted. Confronted with the fear and confusion of her grandmother struggling for breath, struggling to understand what is happening to her, through an erratically palpitating heart, as she holds her hand and tries to reassure her. Although her Nan does calm a little, just before the end, as she eats a morsel of one of her favourite desserts.

Busy schedules once again. Death Certificates, funeral arrangements, burial plots, a viewing, people to be notified, eulogy to be written, food to be arranged and afterwards the house to be faced. Clearing away a lifetime, a bit at a time. She wanders outside when it becomes too much, breathes the sea air, sits under the shady pine tree where Nan spent so many of her last days, waving and chatting to passers-by. Only then to be struck so completely by

Grief

Unassailable.

The loss of one who has always been in her life, as adult and elder, from her earliest breath. That aged hand, so familiar in every wrinkle, shape and misshape of arthritic finger ... she does not want to let go of that capable hand.

She cries in the evenings or sits and thinks or drinks a few shots to numb the emotions that by all rational, optimistic accounts (a long life, a good innings, can't expect more than that!), she should not feel. She takes comfort in snuggling the baby whenever she can, in helping her stepdaughter take on this life-changing new work. She cannot think to write. She returns to TAFE feeling like a fragile bird in a familiar nest.

For as you know, dear reader, death and life are organic matters that do not follow industrial time frames or educational schedules. Such events occur in

their own time, interrupting our stories, infiltrating heartbodymindspirit, spilling between public and private, refusing to be contained. They are sometimes beyond words, and certainly beyond the narrow provisions of industrial leave. As she stands by friends and colleagues who lose husbands, mothers and fathers over the next few years she wonders what happened to the concepts of nurturing and mourning in the constructs of busy schedules.

Excerpt from Kathy's Learning Story

I looked after Mum
she made me promise
that after she went
I'd do something

The profound learning about life and death, love and loss, joy and grief, body and spirit that flows from nurturing children and caring for elders is inadmissible in much higher education. Yet despite a social system that does not recognize, reward or facilitate it, like Kathy, like many of the women in the CEW course, the woman holds fast to her knowledge of the absolute human value of this work.

Globalising time

Eventually as matters of life and death settle, the woman reads the article her supervisor sent months before, which begins to explain how her paid work has been pushed into tighter and tighter time schedules. She picks up the thread where her story had begun to intersect with other educator's stories, both nationally and internationally, of 'new but not so new' times:

It is well established that there has been a new era, perhaps a paradigm shift, beginning somewhere around 1990 in which work and learning, and the relations between them, began to be theorised and practised differently. In the Western world at least, we are by now familiar with the contemporary language of these

'new times' and aware that we live, work, learn and think in a postmodern era of globalisation ... (Somerville, Margaret, forthcoming 2006)

The woman takes time to understand the conditions of her production as an adult educator and adult student, and about the world of work and study for which she prepares the CEW women. She researches the social context that shapes her local conditions, the widespread changes occurring on her planet earth encapsulated by the catchphrase 'globalisation'.

So what was this 'globalisation' and how 'new' was it? Jill Blackmore (2000, p.18) explains that:

Globalisation can be understood as being about ever faster flows of ideas, policies, images, goods, people, money and cultures i.e. cultural, political and economic globalisation ... (however) economic globalisation ... has impacted greatest on the nature of educational work.

While the economic changes of 'globalisation' have been occurring rapidly for the last two decades, they also emerge from the past. According to Richa Nagar, Victoria Lawson, Linda McDowell & Susan Hanson (2002. p. 2):

globalization is not new. Political and economic relations at the global scale have long histories, rooted in colonialism, imperialism and the discourses and practices of the development industry

D. W. Livingstone (2001) also comments that constant change has been the hallmark of industrial capitalist societies since the early 1800s, as part of competition for markets and maximum profits. Changes in communication may well have facilitated global economic change, but have also been researched and invested in specifically to facilitate these changes.

The woman finds the interdisciplinary exploration required to understand globalisation time-consuming. She seeks refuge in cutting the orange flesh of butternut pumpkin and sweet potato, thinking of dinner and feeding her family. As she cooks her mind tangos with her reading to make tangible the remote intangible 'powers that be', people who plan and make decisions at high levels, as well as the academic theories of economy that support them. Stirring her warming soup, she ponders. None of this seems to her to be about sustaining life, but simply profiting from it, although as Jeannie Rea (1997) explains, the 'trickle down effect' argued by economic rationalists would claim otherwise. The woman smiles, remembering an American comic wisecracking that when politicians use the term 'trickle down effect', they forget how common folk know this really means they are being pissed on from a great height. She cannot reference the joke: just one of those fleeting memorable segments you catch of a comedy festival by chance on TV. While often academic writing warns against 'conspiracy theories' or the agency of powerful institutions (see for example, Nagar, Richa et al, 2002, p. 12), she cannot ignore her own experience and knowledge of human history, peppered with conspiracies between powerful people in powerful institutions. She goes back to her research, working from the top down.

Phillip Brown & Hugh Lauder (1997, p.173) explain economic globalisation as spurred by large transnational corporations, seeking to expand their profits by further breaking down 'national' and 'international' barriers to consumption and production. Jeannie Rea (1997, p. 298) provides a political and social context for the trend which she sees as fuelled by political realignments (following the collapse of the Eastern bloc), facilitated by rapid developments in production, communications and transport technologies, so that it has become financially cheaper for such corporations to produce components in different countries, assemble in another country, market and distribute in yet another country.

Subsequently, since the mid-1970s forty three percent of the largest economic world powers are transnational companies (Rea, Jeannie, 1997, pp. 298-299). By disassociating production from national corporate roots and moving factories to the 'highest bidding' countries or regions which offer low wages, few labour market laws or trade union interference, the largest, most powerful corporations have set up a global auction "where corporate investors are able to play off nations, communities and workers as a way of increasing profit margins ...forcing concessions on wage levels, rents, taxes in exchange for investment in local jobs (Brown, Phillip & Lauder, Hugh,1997, p. 173). Corporations are able to gain huge financial incentives from governments using taxpayer funds because they are eager to attract transnational corporations for the promise of employment and technological resources (Rea, Jeannie, 1997, p. 299) In terms of the global auction, incentives for corporate investment become ever more generous for the investor and onerous for local people (Rea, Jeannie, 1997, p. 299).

The ideology of 'free trade' which justifies such change has been promoted by the International Monetary Fund, World Bank and General Agreement of Trade and Tariffs (GATT), all established after World War II to pave the way for transnational businesses, pushing governments to reduce or eliminate tariffs, subsidies and regulations, making markets more 'competitive' with a 'survival of the fittest' rationale (Rea, Jeannie, 1997, p. 299). The creation of the World Trade Organisation in 1995 by the member countries of GATT has further promoted such policies and actions around the world. The changes of globalisation are justified by economic rationalist (or neo-liberal, or 'New Right') policies pushed on and by national and regional governments, which have resulted in the closure or 'downsizing' of many local, regional and national businesses, causing unemployment (Rea, Jeannie, 1997, p.299). International financial organisations as well as the OECD have also lobbied governments to reduce public spending on education, health and welfare and privatise or contract out government services (Blackmore, Jill, 2000 p.18). Since Australia, (along with the majority of what are termed 'third world' countries) was marginal to the new

international trading blocs created by the North American Free Trade Agreement, the Asia-Pacific Economic Community and the European Union, the country was hit by economic rationalist restructuring harder and faster than those countries within these blocs and countries at the core of the new global markets, such as the USA and Germany (Jill Blackmore, 2000, p. 19). In Australia, educational funds have decreased from 5.3% of Gross Domestic Product to 4.7% (Blackmore, Jill & Angwin, Jennifer 1997, p. 1) which ranks Australia at 21 out of 24 OECD countries in terms of educational expenditure overall, but third in terms of expenditure on private education (Blackmore, Jill, 2000, p. 19). The privatisation of government services therefore becomes another 'window of opportunity' to business.

While global changes in education have been implemented in various ways in different contexts, similar principles of economic rationalism or neo-liberalism have set the terms for debate (Brown, Phillip, Halsey, Albert, Lauder, Hugh & Wells, Amy Stuart, 1997, pp.19 -20). The ideological shifts used to justify restructuring in education are first, that education is promoted as a way to achieve greater productivity and thus the way to ensure survival at all levels of the individual, family, community local, regional, state, and national economy, in the context of a rapidly changing, internationalized marketplace (Blackmore, Jill & Angwin, Jennifer 1997, p. 1). Second, education itself is promoted as a service industry and a product to be sold at all these levels. Thus there has been a concerted effort to shift the view of education from a universal, public service for the public good to that of education as a consumer service and commodity for private profit (Blackmore, Jill & Angwin, Jennifer, 1997, p. 1).

The woman's story of time as an adult educator illustrates how the "contradictory imperatives of the push for quality and the restructuring of educational work are played out in the professional and personal lives of teachers" reducing their "professional autonomy, their capacity for innovation, as well as their working

conditions” (Blackmore, Jill & Angwin, Jennifer, 1997, p. 2). There are significant consequences for women educators and their students:

What is often forgotten is that the material and cultural conditions of teachers’ work are the material and cultural conditions of students learning (Blackmore, Jill & Angwin, Jennifer, 1997, p. 2).

Just when teaching had begun in the past few decades to offer women a career with time for combining family and work, it is increasingly cornering them in poorly paid, insecure, casual employment with the pressure do more with less and more for no pay. (Why does *that* sound familiar?) As one casual says:

I’ve worked more hours and much harder juggling time and being in different places than in teaching, and I get a lower wage of only \$29000 ... you live with constant uncertainty... It is a logistical nightmare to balance it all out in order to get enough to survive, organise your life and home, and do a good job (Blackmore Jill & Angwin, Jennifer, 1997, p. 12).

Women in education, like those in other parts of the re-structured ‘service’ economy, are being caught in the trap of casualisation long beyond the time when it might be a preference due to responsibilities for young children. Gender divisions and ideology thus underpin the economic restructuring of globalisation, with the increasing movement of women into the workforce and the devaluation of the conditions in the areas into which they move. With growing unemployment due to economic re-structuring, there is also increasing pressure on women to accept casual conditions, and increasing pressure on those who have a full-time position to be ‘grateful’, working harder and faster to meet the industrial time requirements of the surveilling ‘eye’.

Globalisation has not only gobbled up time for many teachers but for all workers, who are of course increasingly women. While the average Australian worked 40.5 to 41.5 hours per week from 1966 to the early 1990s, by 1995, the average

hours worked increased to 43 per week, without any increase in paid overtime. The same period saw the increase of participation by women in the workforce from 36.6% in 1966 to 53.3% (Buchanan, John & Bearfield, Sue, 1997, p. 68) and an increasing number of casual workers, particularly women. Ironically, the pressure to work longer hours is particularly intense for people between the ages of 25 - 44, at a time when they have dependent children (Buchanan, John & Bearfield, Sue, 1997, p.68). Jeannie Rea (1997, p. 299) argues that economic globalisation links with existing power inequities, effecting the poorest in the poor countries, widening the gap between rich and poor countries, widening the gap between the rich and poor within all countries. In gender terms, the negative impacts fall particularly hard on a majority of women, already disproportionately hit by poverty across all these categories (Rea, Jeannie, 1997, p. 299).

On the other hand, if we are to understand the impacts of globalisation on our time, and wrest any of it back, it is important to view globalisation not only from the top down, but from the bottom up. Richa Nagar et al (2002, p. 260) warn that by looking only at the limited public spheres of economic and political processes, we ignore the informal spheres and economies of production, the household and caring work that subsidize global capitalism (Nagar et al, 2002, p. 260). This subsidy is further increased as economic rationalist cuts are made to education, health and welfare services, as illustrated by the woman's role as community writer of job applications and her nursing work with her grandmother. Jill Blackmore (2000, (pp 20-21) found in re-structured schools that women volunteers were taking on increasing amounts of fundraising, maintenance, tutoring and administration. The emphasis in globalization critiques on international and national scales, while allowing useful generalizations to be drawn, also blurs local differences (Nagar, Richa et al pp. 265 – 267). For example, the description by Jane Kenway (1995, p. 131) quoted earlier about cuts to the Victorian school education system, while relating to her own story in general, simultaneously shows more rapid and ravaging changes by a stridently neo-liberal government than those made in her own state, where re-structuring

was done by degrees. In terms of resistance, it is interesting to note that the Victorian state government that implemented these radical changes was overwhelmingly defeated at the next election.

The woman's story and struggles to balance time for self and relationship with learning and earning to survive, her loss of time and overload, her fights to maintain the women's course, her placation of the system by gaining outside funds to keep running the course at two locations, her defeats as well as victories cut globalisation down to local, personal size. According to Richa Nagar et al, (2002, p. 280) approaching globalisation from particular geographic and historical contexts can open spaces for different stories, not simply characterised by passive women and victims. They can document the full range of responses to such changes including resistance, negotiation, accommodation and acquiescence. This can yield "insights that are portable and hence applicable to other contexts" (Nagar, Richa, et al, 2002, p. 280). For example, the joint work of librarians, teachers and union across a number of local sites in a prolonged series of meetings and conflicts with management to successfully extend library services for students in the face of threatened cuts, models how networks can be used, including email technology across distances, to resist imposed changes.

As a teacher assisting the women to investigate, plan and pursue their career goals in environments where they will be increasingly confronted with greed and need, the woman encourages her students to respect their own time frames, incorporating their personal, family, community, education and economic needs, as one survival strategy. Despite the odds, women continue to progress and achieve successes on all these fronts, but without broader social and structural change educational qualifications will continue to take women too long, and their achievements in managing their paid and unpaid work will too often be at their own expense. As the women face a new threat to paid working conditions with drastically altered Australian industrial relations laws, the woman implements a responsive change in the course, dropping the vocational elective to offer a more

comprehensive history of working women from past to present, alongside practical negotiation skills.

Time to move on

With globalisation pressurizing time in our society into tightly measured units while governments and business pay thin-lip service to 'family friendly' work and education, feminists need to re-vision the changes and consequences for women in relation to time for self, family, home, education and work. Women continue to embrace education and paid employment as necessity and freedom. They continue to conquer, negotiate and suffer the greedy demands of time organized against, rather than for, organic human needs to function, create, produce, re-produce, grow and learn. Australia's new federal industrial relations laws, the privatization and funding deprivation of public education pose further threats to women's conditions for working and learning.

Resistance however, is possible. As the struggle of the librarians demonstrates, liaison with unions can be crucial to success. Email networks are another form of lobbying: in 2004 when fees were proposed for women's courses such as CEW and WOW in TAFE, virulent online and media campaigns staved off the change and kept them fee-free. Women as individuals and in groups may well have to constantly re-evaluate and re-group to salvage what can be resisted and focus on what can be fought for, if the 'new economies' are not to be built on further fragmentation of our human lives and relationships. Men also need to be party to change: if they are not to be isolated from the rich private life of relationship, they must start to take responsibility for the unpaid work of home. Without resistance new industrial relations laws may well return some men to the higher wage-earning workhorse status of the 1950s, constantly absent from family in order to foot the bills. Networks of activists of both genders are essential for social justice, to create truly 'family friendly' education and work. Courses that bridge industrial and organic time frames, and draw on students' knowledge rather than separate them from it, may also be a crucial part of movement forward.

Thus the woman takes back her time, upgrading to a PhD, obtaining a scholarship so that she can work part-time and study full-time from home, achieving a new balance between economic, education and family needs, in a mix of industrial and organic time. Through re-searching, reflecting in thought, dreams, writing, reading, she re-learns what she can from her own experience and from the experiences of others, so that she can take action in her own life, her own work, with and for others, in her own time:

... it is precisely there where the live interaction of past, present, and future is still intact, where human memory can unfold its unique creative and imaginative potential (Hart, Mechthild, 1992, pp. 166-167).

Chapter 7 Resolution II

... the equilibrium is re-established ...
(Todorov, Tzvetan, 1977, p. 111).

A Tapestry of Tales

The vitality of language lies in its ability to limn the actual, imagined and possible lives of its speakers, readers, writers. Although its poise is sometimes in displacing experience, it is not a substitute for it. It arcs toward the place where meaning may lie ...
(Morrison, Toni, 1993, p. 20).

The woman takes back time from work and borrows it from family to make more regular research visits to Armidale, creating social contact with supervisors and other students, and so begins to ponder how she will present and discuss the individual interviews she and her students have produced. She wants to empower the women's interpretations so that they sit alongside hers in the research, rather than have their voices enter the text only when framed by her analysis, in the conventional academic style. At first she thinks she will edit the transcripts lightly for brevity and clarity, erasing some of the repetitions, cutting out her questions and prompts, to create narratives out of the conversations. The woman is drawing on a model here, just as she teaches her students to do in English classes, for she so enjoyed reading the strong persona of 'Nora's Voice' (Rameka, Nora & Stalker, Joyce, 1996) created in this way. In envisaging the women's interviews as learning stories, she desires that the women's own words, perceptions, emphases, will communicate to her readers meaningfully, as they do to her.

Innovative forms of academic writing by feminists have already attracted her, so when in early spring her supervisor points her towards experimental narrative forms of writing research in the work of Laurel Richardson (1992) she is immediately interested. However, looking at "Louisa May's Story of Her Life', a transcript masquerading as a poem/a poem masquerading as a transcript "(Richardson, Laurel, 1992, p.127) she almost dismisses the idea

for her own work out of hand. The woman loves poetry, or at least the poetry that she loves: full of the emotion and intensity of language, the mystery and logic of music, of visual art:

Hard, fine and passionate, can language glow
Like ice and fire, both luminous and cool
(Hewett, Dorothy, 1995, p. 116.)

She does not wish to create what might be poor poetry out of the women's stories.

Yet there were many positive features drawing the woman to this hybrid form. Laurel Richardson (1992, pp. 130-132) describes how her method united two aspects of herself, the poetic and the sociological, to push through both the narrow boundaries of academic writing and the block these imposed on her. At the same time, it was obvious that the hybrid poetic form gave primary place to Louisa May's voice and persona in the telling of her own story, in concise, compact words. On her next working trip to Armidale, tired and worn down from working on her thesis incessantly over her summer break while still fitting in Christmas, parenting, partnering and grand-parenting, the woman reconsiders. Perhaps this is a way to encapsulate? For she does not have just one woman's story to tell; and there are limitations of time, space and interest both for reader and writer, as her supervisor so prudently points out. Like found poems, the hybrid research form will not be poetry completely of her making. On the other hand the form also brings added responsibility, for these are her students' stories. Can the woman perhaps hone the language to her poetic satisfaction while being true to her sources?

Unravelling and weaving stories of learning

The woman takes one transcript at random and decides to 'play', to see what eventuates. She tries using a highlighter on one of her interviews, carefully honing down the language to choose the keywords that are rich in meaning. Surprisingly, she is pleased, so shows the results to Margaret, her supervisor, with excitement and trepidation. Dr. Somerville nods approval quietly and suggests grouping them into sense units, perhaps headings? Back at the

computer, using Gai's words, she forms logical groupings based entirely on the words and pauses of the transcript, trying to honour the individual expressive voice. She realises that this may be an alternate way to achieve the logical extension she has been seeking to her feminist research approach in Chapter 7 derived from the practices of conversation analysis:

While the majority of feminists agree that our data collection practices should cultivate non-hierarchical research relations ... this tends not to be translated at the analytic level, where the relative importance given to the perspective of the respondent over that of the researcher is reversed... The conversation analysis researcher, by contrast, generally avoids imposing their own categories and agenda on their data, and instead considers what is going on from a member's perspective (Speers, Susan, 2002, p. 785).

Now the woman is enjoying this thesis production again, as she 'plays' poetically with the interview transcripts. The process of producing the learning stories is completely absorbing and exciting, as she immerses herself in first one, then another of the women's words. Later she writes of her learning:

By reading, re-reading and highlighting my printed transcripts, then word processing to peel away connecting non-essential words and hesitations, I began to reveal key meanings. I listened and looked for the women's perceptions, thoughts, feelings, the ways in which they grouped meanings. I followed the rhythms, stresses and intonations of the women's everyday language. What was revealed to me was a distilled essence of each woman's experiences of learning ... (Evelyn, Debra, 2004, p. 89).

The woman realises that in some ways this writing method reflected her teaching methods as an adult educator: responding to shifting sets of individual humans, groupings and sub-groupings. In her everyday work spanning 'public' and 'private' spheres, she does this automatically, blending language awareness with other key meanings she derives and deduces from a myriad of gestures, expressions, bodies, spaces, movements. Now she takes pleasure in responding to the core meanings she discovers while paring down spoken language as text. Joyce Stalker (1998, p. 202) argues that

poetry also blurs the lines between the arbitrary divisions of 'public' and 'private', 'objective' and 'subjective'; complementing instead the notion of a third sphere of intimacy, which cuts across these dualities:

... integrating the dislikes, desires and aversions with the remote, standardized and neutral ... through the common base of experience ...

So the woman presents you, dear reader, with a form of scanned transcript, borrowing from the techniques of poetry but blending them with objectivity and empathy to create a form of researched free verse, called 'Learning Stories'. In form and layout she attempts to follow patterns of vernacular as well as the varying measures of emphasis and connection or disconnection each woman places on parts of her learning journey. Simultaneously she follows some poetic conventions; emphasizing disjunctions, allowing repetition and imagery to provoke the reader, to stimulate imagination as well as understanding. The woman wants to display the women's meanings with the full richness of individual voices; melodies, bass notes, variations on tunes, whether blended in harmony, strident or syncopated.

She hopes that the nuances of group and individual stories will be retained in this way more than if she merely analyses, compartmentalises, summarises. She hopes that these words will weave and unravel a tapestry of tales, re-presenting more than just similarities and differences: where affinities, assonances, parallels, bare threads of resemblance are alive alongside distinctions, divergences, discords.

Gai's Learning Story

about going for a job

how to use past skills
Don's son came
his girlfriend was
applying in the bank
didn't have experience
but worked in retail
and I said
"Didn't she do the till
make up the money
at the end of day?
That's banking!"

to be more confident
like you taught us
ask anyway if they say no
they say no so what

Write your resume
stuff like that
I didn't know nothing
about them

Academic wise

was real good
computers was
whole purpose
learnt heaps in that
enough to go home
start playing

same with other girls
not be scared
of this machinery

Gai's Learning Story

dealing with people

dealing with those women
One-on-one don't think I've ever
really had to all these years
worked with a heap but you're
At Work Doing a Job

was every day then lunchtime
had to learn how to interact
have patience know when
don't say anything

Different personalities hard
sometimes

I nearly dropped out

that discussion

um sex and incest and that
thinking well I didn't come here
for this
do I want to keep going
pull out?

After I sat back thought
These women really needed
to do that
didn't really hurt me
... just upsetting ...

Another woman made it hard
trying to pull me down
overbearing
but I thought No

I'm stronger than that

Gai's Learning Story

had four years all men

basically on my own
they'd come and go
yeah men are lot different
talk about
Different things
They're not real
In-depth
Then all of a sudden
this heavy talk
even the old peer pressure
couldn't go sit by yourself
everyone would want to know
what's wrong with you

good in the end
glad I stuck it out

Study again

Enjoy it again even when
we had to do portfolios
Science I thought "Oh shit
bloody women's health"
but we had to

Investigate
down the women's health place
up to the hospital
talked to them
got all my paperwork

Sorted it all out sort of
woke the brain up
Read
put words on paper again
long time since I had to do that

...twenty years ago

Gai's Learning Story

Strange at school

Teacher just says
"Righto you got to do this & this"
Well you don't
Now they say "Righto we have to do this
but you have to think How"
give guidance where to go

When you've only had school
different in adult education
only had one type
of learning experience
you have to forge a new one
help teach my kids now

"C'mon you can find that!"
Give them hints
'cause

We should've learnt more like that

God help me

if I've ever gotta sit
a real heavy exam
really got to get under control
get so nervous so uptight
just had one for computers
Fair dinkum I made myself sick
Got this thing to get A's

with First Aid
missed two questions
bothered me
still bothers me
I found valerian
had to take valerian
just to settle couldn't sleep

things start
going out of
my head

Gai's Learning Story

with maths because I liked it

doing my own thing
grabbed the abacus
spent a lot of time
going through books
was fun for me
having something to do
I even taught the teacher
the Russian set
she didn't know
Romans had one too
school expected you
get the answer
straight away
Leslie's trying to teach
make a mistake guess
check instead
play until you
find the answer

don't have to get it
perfect first go

just brilliant when we went

Career Reference Centre

had to pick two areas
investigate
started to look seriously
at Welfare
then when we went into it
I said "No, that's not for me"
would take too much on board
emotionally administration
have to take it home with you
that careers place was mind-blowing
don't know why it's not known
for the kids down here

Gai's Learning Story

And Isobel's

Learnt lots, which I
didn't think I would
The history of this country
I never knew

But that first class was Bad
Kooris started everyone's back up
just Bang really heated
Good you saw her explained
we started getting into it
schools are now too
cause we didn't
Learn nothing at school
Nothing
All the butchering ...

Just Captain Cook landed here
Didn't like history

But that was ...

interesting history

got the video 'Destination Australia'
wrote my own notes
So I could learn more
what the hell
was going on in this place
why the Aborigines
are where they are

Gai's Learning Story

Pat O'Shane

she's great
should be
Prime Minister
coming through
being Koori
sticking up
for women

different type
of Judge
doesn't go by
the letter of the law
applies law to today
not what standards were
when they were made

started sixth form

wanted to be a teacher
that's why I kept going

got kicked out of home
no help in them days
ended up moving to Sydney
working Telstra White Pages

love animals so thought
I'll be a Veterinary Nurse
but big city, bit of a mess
I didn't pass the exam

... Then I started
on the downhill slide

Gai's Learning Story

years later I lost my job

knew I wanted to do ... something
talked to a JET advisor¹
I said "you know computers
are the way of the world
and I like to fix things"

sent me to Electrical Engineering
Well I sat in the first class
that far over my head it scared
me off took a couple of years
until I lost that job

... Hello better get off my bum
(it was just cleaning anyway)

went back to JET (dumb thing to do)
different lady told me to go
reception or some bloody thing
only cause I went to the TAFE
looked at the information

there was a lady there
can't think what she was
came out I was single mum
liked computers
said 'there is this CEW'

only for that I knew
where what how why

a hell of a long road
a lot of wasted time

¹ Jobs, Education and Training Advisor employed by the Federal Government social security department called Centrelink, working mostly with people on parenting payments.

Gai's Learning Story

Didn't want to get stuck

At the end
go to the library
on weekends
going through books
I liked that
not doing enough now
only half as much
want more
writing up on the fridge
all the things we'd need
started doing my ironing
in the mornings seven o'clock
getting up at six going for walk
I've kept that going

Working in a Club
odd hours organising kids
had to re-arrange it
with the course
as in a day

I have heaps more time

this interview

Made me remember
things I'd forgotten

Jo's Learning Story

most positive thing

was to be positive
about myself
have more self esteem
be little bit more aggressive
in things I want to do

Thought
"Oh, I'm basically stupid"
Realised I'm not
I can do
a lot of things
if I put my mind to it

Assertive – aggressive –

Well it works
In my course
if I didn't like
anything
I could just speak up
"Can you explain it more?"
or "Can you help?"

before, I'd just sit back
"Oh, don't worry,
I'll get to it myself."

how well

I could write
when I sat down
thought about it
Marie showed us
to proof-read
She'd say, "Hey put in your
punctuation marks" explain
"go through read them again
so you know you are right"

quite surprised
how well
I was doing

Jo's Learning Story

if I had a problem

just ask the teachers
if they could help
they'd explain
how to do
if they were busy
ask the person next to me
they were quite willing and
teachers were quite willing
went right into depth
so you could understand

get help when you needed
different from school
had to sit there and think
"Oh, I'm too scared to ask"
being able to ask
felt more comfortable

clammed up with maths

but Leslie would
draw diagrams
make it really easy
with decimals
put numbers on a see-saw
if tipped that way
this would fall off
would become *this*
really helped me

thought " I don't know what
the heck you're on about"
but when she
did diagrams
could understand
much better

Jo's Learning Story

careers like

didn't realise what I wanted to do
work with children or travel
I think that children won
been wanting for a long time
going to Careers Centre
made me look

then I decided to go for it
started the Child Care course

children magnet

loved that
work experience
pre-school
soon as I walked in
swamped with children
had fun got on the floor
played
in the sand pit
helped with lunches
had a ball

kids absolutely thought
I was wonderful

didn't want me to go

must have been
something special

trouble with that survey

self-esteem quiz thing
before I was thinking
"what do I put for this?"
doing it again now
just breezed through

so easy

Jo's Learning Story

would've liked

more on environment
didn't really do a lot
mostly greenhouse effect
women's health wasn't
too bad but boring
informative not interesting

think it was me and Gai
wanted to do bush

we were sort of
over-ruled

a pain

just
starting to understand
one in group
would disrupt us
"But, I don't understand this"
"But how can you do that?"
Teacher would start explaining
another different way

I just got totally lost

happened a lot in maths

scared to death

wasn't good at maths in high school
was lower grade even though I got "A"
just terrified of maths

came thought "Maths - Freeze up"
but after Leslie seemed so really nice
didn't feel too scared to ask
like in high school too scared to move
teacher wasn't very nice didn't want to help
learning off Leslie was just fantastic

don't know why
I was scared
in the first place

Jo's Learning Story

more confident with women

school where you got
male teacher
too scared to ask
don't know if
you're doing right thing
women teachers and
a group of women
helped me be confident

everybody
would help
each other

brother brought home handbook

going through it got to that page
Career Education for Women
"Oh, that sounds interesting"
kept flicking over open it
over again come back
same page all the time
"This is what I need."
so applied got in

the best thing
I've ever done

started me off

with the studying
helped get back
into it
wasn't scared then
to go on

hadn't really done any courses
finished work three years
thought I would do course
that was the whole idea
helped me build
my self
esteem

Jo's Learning Story

that stage

really don't want to
just tired couldn't be bothered

thought "If I give up now I'm silly
I've gone so far why give up now?"
got back into mood had a chat
the others encouraged me
basically told me
they'd kill me if I didn't

That kept me coming

Getting up early getting son off to school
then "ohhh I've got to go in today
I'd rather be doing this or this"
just getting tired fed up with myself
Dragged myself here everybody
Cheery "Hello. Good morning"

It was worth coming

the encouragement
of the other ladies
was brilliant

can look back

how we were going
what we were doing
bring it all back
this helped me
which direction I wanted

and you've come
a long way
Definitely

Kate's Learning Story

not as stupid

really thought I was
backward in maths
actually quite capable
nice surprise
good to carry on

in CGE²
have the opportunity
again
make up time lost
in high school

First Aid forgotten most already
that's okay
Computers how to use mine
Women and Cultural Studies -
things that happened
to Aborigines
which I sort of knew
but not really

find my goal

my goal was to have a goal
careers helped me find
to study Archaeology
enabled me to know
how to go to Uni
steps to take

Biggest thing
I got out of CEW

² Abbreviation for the Certificate in General Education, the Year 10 equivalent course in TAFE NSW, now called the Certificate in General and Vocational Education (CGVE).

Kate's Learning Story

assertiveness needed

big fight with my ex and
'broken record' technique
I needed permission
to say something
more than once

he hung up on me
cause he was trying
to con me

first time ever
and
I won

felt awful had to argue

but can't let him walk
all over me
really pleased I learnt
technique week before
felt very empowering

since then
we had one other fight
he wasn't... he knew
I was stronger
he didn't fight as hard

backed off sooner

Kate's Learning Story

enjoy study

at school I didn't
whole heap of things
like family home life
came into that
didn't really enjoy

but I'm enjoying this
wanted to do CEW
for a few years
always felt
I would like to go on

just sharing

with the other girls
coming
through

similar experiences

listening then doing

like Maria taught us
how to do rough drafts
actual doing helped me learn

good to be told but
when you *do* it reinforces
you learn much better

Kate's Learning Story

home researching

looking up encyclopaedia
broaden like with maths
other number systems
Babylonian system baffled
seemed so strange
looked it up more I looked
the more confusing
two different systems
so I went into how
Babylon developed
over thousands of years
different influences
they *did* use different systems
at same time I found that
interesting

not my cup of tea

science was lot of
women's health
already studied some
when I did nursing

knew how

to use computer
word processing liked
all the letters being creative
wasn't crash-hot on spreadsheets

doesn't worry me can get a graph
internet was frustrating
looking up definitions
not how to get around

but got confidence
to come to library
research on my own
so wasn't total waste time
being told to be wary
what you get off the net
because you tend to think
information is right
and it's not

Kate's Learning Story

I had the right

have say express opinions
change my mind make decisions
cope with consequences
whether good or bad

be my own person
helped build confidence
grew up not to say
don't know don't understand

be able say yes no
without being made guilty

often I have in the past

to relate without depending
cause often you try get approval
where you don't really need to

Typed it up hit the right spot
Going to stick it on my wall

impact

was research
an Aboriginal woman
I did Mum Shirl

between handing in
getting it back

She died

quite an impact
a very special lady
wish I had
known her

Kate's Learning Story

handout

how Aboriginal women
made to keep silent
about their life
the night before
talking to my mum
tried to express feelings
cut them off denied
more or less told me
"Oh, don't feel like that"
When I came in
next morning thought
over my life
whenever expressed
negative feelings
cut off denied

realise that had
not been good
I have a right
when I feel awful
to say "*I feel awful*"
might not want
sympathy
just someone
to acknowledge

my reflection
powerful
I couldn't read
in class thought
I would cry

probably could now
but at the time ...

Kate's Learning Story

suppose that's something

you don't see that as being
"Oh yes that's something that I learnt"

Myself and my relationship
with my mum
when talking about
what I learnt before
I didn't mention it
doesn't seem to be solid
doesn't seem as tangible
that was the word
I was looking for

but it *is*

fight with my ex

made things not-so-nice
being able to come here talk
knowing there were others
been through similar
empathize

wasn't really a
hindrance
to my learning

just upsetting

made more comfortable

talked stuff
women's health
wouldn't share with man there
personal women's things

day we talked about
the abuse
something like that
wouldn't come out

Kate's Learning Story

being at home

left work before
my daughter
was born
she is
fifteen now
I didn't
and don't want
to go back
nursing
been too long
I'd have to start
again

wanted to look
in different area
things I'd heard
about CEW
think it was
my JET advisor
sounded interesting
felt it was
a springboard
a stepping stone
show me areas
I could go
and it did

Kate's Learning Story

affected the kids

I wasn't there as often
Thursday's got home
just before them
my son made comment
towards end of course
"I'll be glad when
you've finished mum
then you will be home"
and I said "Sweetheart
this is just the start!"

they did need
some adjustment
but I didn't find it
a major thing
now two days of week
they beat me home
let themselves in
get organised
make sure there is key
in the right spot

good be able
go home say
"Do you know what
I learnt today?"

feel OK

it's interesting
what you're looking at....
Is making me stop
look back think
"Oh, look how far
I've come..."

Kath's Learning Story

class of women

big in beginning
being nervous
first coming in
not knowing
what it's going to be
finding
lot in common
really helpful
to relate
comfortable class
it was so easy
to make friends

important

to have women teachers
this particular course
understand where you are
where you have been
self esteem, assertiveness
women teachers relate
better than men
a man doesn't usually need
to learn that stuff
they've already got it

Kath's Learning Story

how others perceive you

wrote down good points
about someone else
found that interesting
figured no-one would lie
good to see things
about me that are okay
sometimes it's hard
to see my own qualities
actually surprised
at a couple of things
people wrote
never thought I was
but they said it
so must be right
I just believed them

'Always smiling'
'having a laugh'
class I was like that
isn't me all the time
didn't know I was funny
'A good listener'
was surprised
they picked that up

self esteem lesson

especially assertiveness
something I needed
'cause
I was the total
opposite

am trying to
put into practice
everyday
don't always get it right
but always remember it

found I can be assertive
with some people not others
ones I feel comfortable with
I've been laying it on thick
but jee it feels good
when I'm able to do it

Kath's Learning Story

job interviews

confidence builder
mock panels
putting together resume
learnt a lot about myself
once I put it on paper

goal setting

difficult
I'm not sure why
guess I never had to
being married young
becoming dependent
husband to provide
everything
had no need to be
a goal setter

when I found myself
on my own
I realised
how important that was
had to learn how
to find my own space
time at home
has been difficult
to put into practice
impossible actually

managed to get by
without it
still get things done
that I have to do
I've probably got a space
in my head
to switch on or off
and somehow
it works

Kath's Learning Story

teacher-student

relationships
was difficult
for first time
same age
as your teacher
sometimes older
still got
in your mind
that teachers are
above you
but since you are
on the same level
hard to know
how to relate
or act around
yeah ...

When in school

I was very obedient
whatever teacher said
went
but in this course
we are encouraged
to be open
treat you like equals
found that hard
'cause I still look to
an authority figure
difficult to find
exactly how to do

on academic level

only subject learnt
was maths
other lessons
refreshed
what was
there
didn't really learn
anything new
but did really enjoy
the work we did

Kath's Learning Story

how I learnt

most important thing
you go into this course
really wanting to learn
really wanting to do it
straight away
makes it easier

how I learnt ...
from listening
listening to what teacher had to say
and
listening to other people's experiences
even though we did a lot of talking
and interrupting

I listened at the same time

beginning

self esteem thing we did
really motivated me
to help with learning process
even though I was keen to start
that gave me a lot of motivation

I wanted to better myself

forgot to mention

computers I learnt a lot
probably will do more
next year
you can forget
if not using everyday
don't have one at home
now I'm
doing medical terminology
looking at being receptionist
in medical field somewhere
so I'll have that certificate
just need a computer one
got the basic one
want to do the next one up

Kath's Learning Story

Can demonstrate

computer skills
spreadsheets was something
a flier a layout a border
use desktop publishing
draw pictures really fun
business letters
set out properly
really useful
really fun

wanted something different

maths we did biorhythms
thought
"oh this is really good"
but you never use it
never ever use it
yet interesting
learning about it

hated timelines

look what I've
done with my life
you've got it so clear
in black and white
hated it
hated my life
got to do something
about it
got to change

just loved

my rights
going to write up bigger
something I can stick up
look at keep learning
all things I actually believe
but no one has said
you can have these things
you *should* have them

Kath's Learning Story

Stereotypes

to think about
the way women
can be
other than how
they have been
in the past

how I'd like to be
a non-stereotype

What hindered

the children at home
when wanted to study
should have made use
of study centre
but I didn't

in my life impossible
to set time aside
on top of going everyday
on top of home stuff
if I could have used that
it would have been good

in class

sometimes
when everyone
was mucking up
I wanted to listen
but then I know
I had my time
doing that as well

Kath's Learning Story

my marriage

coming to an end
realised had to start
looking into future
going to be on my own
five children
realised I had to do
something

why this particular course
can't remember
what it was
why I picked it
guess I was
just meant to
just the name
the title
sounded
good

one other thing

helped
learning process
was teachers
way they taught
ran the classes
they encouraged
I felt encouraged

they seemed to enjoy
that's the difference
only just realised
right now saying it
but teachers in school
never seemed to
they were just there
did it couldn't wait
to go again

teachers in this course
seemed to enjoy
their work
that helped
a lot

Kath's Learning Story

court case

pending
lot of pressures
surrounding
would have
enjoyed course
even more

spoilt it
having that
hanging
over
head

victory

in the court case
surprised myself
thought I was going to
crumble
but I didn't

did a lot of
self-esteem stuff
just before
sure that helped
his lawyer tried
to get me
tongue tied
to catch me out
say wrong thing
and I didn't

don't know how
but I stumped him
instead of him
stumping me
someone said to me
this particular lawyer
never ever seen him
stumped in court
what to say next
that day

I did it!

Kath's Learning Story

Angle

he was coming from
I'd planned something
to get an AVO
on my husband
I made this occur

tripped him up
Of course
everything's
always my fault
'Cause all ever got
was that things
were
my
fault

had started to see

in assertiveness
things weren't
always my fault
I wasn't always
the one in the wrong
started to see
wrong things in him
his behaviour
in a different way
in a different light

but that's because
I see myself
in a different light

feel good

with this interview
I'm able to help
do something
that means something
to somebody

Kathy's Learning Story

only knew

little bit
adding up
times-ing
4 times 5 times

above that would have to
get pen and paper
try and work it out
or a calculator

spelling

improved
learning the way
to sound them out
where to put commas
where not to
would sit there
spell a word
have a letter missing
or
wrong letter one spot
but
I worked it out

don't like

maths with letters
cannot pick that up
tried so hard

going to school
never had algebra
was for uni students
now high school students
some primary kids
doing it these days

Lesley knew
I didn't like it but
she helped me out a lot
she's a great teacher
all the teachers are great

Kathy's Learning Story

about First Aid

wasn't much I knew
now I have Certificate
am very proud
didn't think
I'd get there

friends ask questions
about incidents
I can say what to do
straight off
the top of my head

they say "Sure"
so I give them
the book
"Have a look"
sure enough
I was right
Right on

science enjoyed

done a thing
on women's health
my own story
ectopic pregnancy
brought back
memories
writing it out
helped me cope
even though
few years ago
when it happened
didn't realise
what was going on

until I read it
in the research

unbelievable

what you can find out
all the subjects
individuals information
knew nothing about research
girls explained what to do

turned out fine changed my life

Kathy's Learning Story

before

was a housewife
didn't do much
"Well, it's about time
I *done* something"
I looked after Mum
she made me promise
that after she went
I'd do something
about the nursing
Wanted to
before I left school

Come to TAFE
I've done the CEW
almost finished CAFE³
so determined

made that promise to Mum
and I'm keeping it
not going back
on that

support

from husband daughters
sometimes sat there
"I'm going to give up
don't want go further"

"No, mum – keep going,
you're doing really well
look at all certificates you've got"

"Okay, I'll keep going"

Every time feel down
I look at those certificates
so proud

^{3 3} Certificate in Adult Foundation Education, now renamed Certificate in Foundation and Vocational Education (FAVE).

Kathy's Learning Story

hated computers

knew nothing at first
starting to enjoy
got one at home now
things I do at TAFE
practise so can't forget
refreshes me

showed

daughter on computer at home
"How did you do that, Mum?"
She thinks it's great

more confidence

in myself thanks to you
and other girls in CEW
stand up to different ones
won't just sit ignore
stand up whatever situation
husband shocked at first "wow
not same person anymore"
Noticed the change

few friends

talked about doing course
I've said "Best to do
for women go for CEW
not only that you get
a few certificates
you should do it"

knowing no men

could talk openly
not beat around the bush
helped a lot

Kathy's Learning Story

whenever I couldn't

would ask the teacher
she could help
would sit down and help
which is fantastic

like long division
didn't have a clue
Leslie showed me
so now I can do

at home I help
my daughter with her maths

with the research didn't know
until it was explained
steps to take to do

Isobel explained
go into the library

you can find

lot of information
in a library
if you can't find
in your TAFE library
go to Town library
just keep looking

it's there somewhere

my youngest
didn't know either
"Go to library at school
look up what
you're searching for
you will find it"

and she did

Good to know
I can help
whereas before
"Look darl
don't know
have to ask

your teachers"

Kathy's Learning Story

keep coming

had to see specialist
how am I going to catch up?
asked girls get handouts
they've taken notes for me

All the way through
What have I missed?
Do I have to do something?
makes you panic

More attendance you do
the more you learn
if you miss out too much
you fail don't get a pass

I *like* getting that *pass*

special tutorial

found that helpful
first I thought
"no-one's going to be there
but I have to go need help"
Once I went I found it
quite interesting

the help's there
if you need it

can say the word

Bibliography
didn't know what word meant
now I know how to write one

ideal holiday

had to write out
Bali Island of the Gods
really enjoyed doing that

had a fair idea

I've had interviews before
but for work experience hospital
"Going to do this *right* way
the way Deb taught us"

I went in there and *I done it*

Kathy's Learning Story

like the resume

didn't have a clue
now I have a few
on computer at home
keep updating
just updated it now

what's a mind map

never heard before
got my daughter to do
showed her mine

she drew up fantastic one
about things she wants
has it pinned inside
her wardrobe door

keeps looking at it

portfolios

you explained
bits pieces of work
put together
interesting but
didn't know
what to put in
what not to put in
last semester
didn't have many in it
with this course
put heaps in

I made up for it

personal timetable

important too
stuck to it
and your planner
otherwise you lose
track of time
don't know

where
you are

Kathy's Learning Story

Found

Women and Cultural Studies
interesting 'cause
my grandfather was Aboriginal
remember when a little girl
but didn't couldn't remember
much about him only
some of the stories
he used to tell

videos Isobel showed
made me understand
my background
'Alinta the Flame'
'Nadina the Shadow'
what they went through
didn't realise that bad
until I actually watched it

know your background

important

when my grandfather died
mum and dad split up
mum kept us away
didn't really want us
('cause my mum was white)
have anything to do
with that part

don't know why

she was really close
to my grandfather
like a father to her as well
she thought
"Well, if he's not here
why should I let my kids
know that part?"

regretted later on in life
just before she passed away
apologised
I turned around and said
"Look Mum. Whatever we've
both done wrong in the past
it's forgotten. Forget it
I forgive you."

Kathy's Learning Story

some women

Daisy Bates
actually local
came here from England
when she was young
to work with Aboriginals
ended up marrying
Jack Bates from Berry
in 1885 long time ago

Yvonne Cawley
went through heaps
a champion
first discovered
she was 10 years old
had her second baby
had to give up tennis but
she travelled everywhere

they're unbelievable
some of these women

first research

How am I going to do this?
what information do I use
what do I don't use?

sat there and sat there -
only way is to take books home
so I took them home

kept putting it off putting it off
I have to take books back so
actually writ what was in the books

got sheets paper that I writ out
got to shorten all this
summarize right down

kept reading bits parts
can change that without lying
just telling the truth

shortened that bit down
I just did it
section by section

Kathy's Learning Story

Problem solving

strategies showed
couldn't believe like
there was trick to them
took ages to work out
don't know how many pieces
paper I screwed up
Started over again
Got to figure this out
eventually
got it

fractions your decimals
percentages didn't understand
knew the halves quarters
three-quarters and your full
other than that didn't know
a damn thing about them
now I do

reflections

on different subjects
wasn't sure how
just didn't want to
I'll be honest
'cause I didn't know how
eventually somebody
showed me
write your comment
what you felt

putting in words
helps you understand

looking back
"Oh, / thought of that"

maths had to

research
done it on greenslips
rang all these places
had to put in a graph
difference in prices
unbelievable some
two-three hundred dollars

Kathy's Learning Story

Experiments

very interesting
Kate and I put carnations
in jars food colouring
they changed colour
If you split the stem
put in one jar
one in other side
with different colouring
ends up blended
tips come one colour
edge of carnation
comes out one
base of it another
unreal

hate looking at that

there's my story
my own story, that one

particularly liked

the magazine
we made
was great
had a ball

only Internet

still don't like
not changed my mind
rather look in books
too too much on net
try to go through it
just not enough room
in my brain

Kathy's Learning Story

had to leave

personal because of Mum
then she died took me
twelve months make mind up
"I've promised her"
a friend said "best one for you CEW"
gave me your name number
and here I am now ...

went as far as Year 9
(back then was third form)
only education I had ...
learned pieces on the way
done industrial cleaning
18 week course rammed into 3
was hard was really tough
8 o'clock morning till 7.30 at night
just all day just all crammed....

husband kept

putting it down at first
when he noticed change
improvement with my work
he come around
encouraged me
so has my two daughters
good when you get
encouragement real boost
your friends as well
"Wow – look at the certificates
and you're going to get more!

Why are you doing it?"
"Cause I want to."

Kathy's Learning Story

parts of our past

were brought up
whole class
opened up
poured out
that affected me
a great deal

Yes

went home
pulled up in driveway
sat in the car
I just bawled
"What's wrong?" told him
he just went OFF ...

going to come in here ...

I said "No, I'm glad ..."
kept it bottled
since I was seven
finally able open up
tell somebody
that one incident
big impact

managed

settle him down
relieved to
get it off
my shoulders

Kathy's Learning Story

nervous

What sort of questions?
How am I going to answer?
found quite easy different
been interviews before
but not this sort

not bad as it seems
helps your research
you've helped me a lot
one way I can pay you back

interesting you doing a course
I thought "You're a teacher
here to teach us
we're to learn from you"
when you told us
"Wow, she's a teacher
and she's a student as well"
I spun out of it
"Go for it, Deb. Go for it"
I was happy for you

Will it actually come out
in a book ...?

every woman

should do it
don't want
to discriminate
against men
but it's good
having a course
just for women

Lisa's Learning Story

to be assertive

though I didn't take part
listened learnt sat back
sorted out my personal life

before I let everybody
walk all over me
nobody tells me
what to do
anymore

Now *I'm* the queen
of my castle

Housework best

not to worry about it
told everybody about that
"done this great course
and it says -'Don't worry
about your housework'"

Let it go

always hated words

the teacher got us
to write from the heart
came a lot easier
still didn't think
I was any good
until Gai read it
was crying by the end
wanted to know more

English always a struggle
never had the confidence
couldn't cope with
nouns verbs adjectives

still don't know what they are
as long as I put them together
doesn't matter

Lisa's Learning Story

I'm important too

just as much
as anybody else

In the course
you get at that

I'm here
I should stand up
be counted
with everyone else

Hands-on

worked in groups
helped each other
teacher wasn't
standing there
telling us
learnt together
found things out
for ourselves

think I learn
better like that

being with women

women teachers and women
you've shared the same things
same issues to deal with
come together same reasons

Like to know they know
what's inside you
they've been there too

more relaxed more comfortable

helps to build up then
cause once you start studying
then you can't stop

Lisa's Learning Story

**don't think anything
got in the way**

the attitude was
you can do it
there's nothing
you can't do

praised for
everything
even if it wasn't
quite up to scratch
subtle ways
helping around

wasn't straight out
"You done that wrong"
was "maybe if you try
this way"

lot didn't like

the Aboriginal side
I found interesting
showed where
my family come from
why their attitudes
are the way they are
even with my husband

A lot I'd already heard

And a lot more as well

Lisa's Learning Story

women made it too

we had a list
male on one side
female on the other
different careers
there was no women
we couldn't think
of any women who'd
succeeded
there was more men

so when you found
one of the women
looked at some
famous women

it was really good

Wanted career

Worked before I came to Nowra
lot of family hassles
wanted to get away
moved but no jobs
I needed to go to school

The counsellor downstairs
gave me a heap of courses
she pointed to this one
and WOW but I wanted full-time
Enrolled hoping to get into nursing

Changed my mind completely
half way through the course

Lisa's Learning Story

Couldn't stand school

Hated it - hated it
No I loved primary
don't know what
changed my mind
once I got to high school
the kids I hung around
or teachers' attitudes
couldn't *stand* the place

so got pregnant
to get out
stupid

Husband not impressed

with me coming back
got over that soon
now in the morning
it's real casual "Oh
have you got TAFE?
What time?" family fit
around me now

still don't have anywhere
to study but don't have kids
round me anymore
they're always running
straight out the door

while its daylight anyway

Subjects

enjoyed maths
even liked history
wasn't confident with reading
whereas I read for fun now

Lisa's Learning Story

this interview

could do after every course
good idea sit back reflect
I didn't really think before -
done CEW moved on
that was it
Looking back *how* I learnt
how it happened *why* and
what it's done for my life
then you
keep putting those things
into practice
know what's working for you
and keep going

brought up Christian

to fear God
as well as TAFE course
I'm doing Bible Studies
learning I don't have to fear
just have to love him
and he loves me
Nothing I do is bad enough
to turn him away
so I don't care
what anyone else thinks
as long as I'm pleasing him
I'm right

not saying he's for everybody
being raised like that
went off track turned away
then came back

for me it's a positive

Ren's Learning Story

not as dumb
as I thought
that's a start

about myself

course opens up
about yourself
where to go for help
knowing that you aren't
only person in that boat

friend going to tech
never knew
there was a counsellor
you introduced us
straight away
even to the lady
so when I saw
how badly
I thought about myself
I asked about counselling

she put me
onto the group
I'm seeing now
Helped a lot
Upset me a lot

It'll be good for my boys
when I'm feeling better
about myself

thought pretty good

at English and Maths
doing classes
I picked up
just so much
more

Ren's Learning Story

everyday life

even handling the kids
better able talk to them
used to say three times
then yell throw in swear word
People said "You shouldn't
yell at your kids all the time"
I'd say "Well *you* talk to them"

In your class I learnt
instead of going from
"don't do"
to yelling swearing
now they know
my stern voice
next time trouble
I use normal tone first
then stricter tone
they're pretty good then

understand homework

was showing maths old way
Leslie taught way they do it now
kids were getting so confused
I was teaching one way
teacher was teaching another

still refer back

First Aid book
Mum said
"This guy got bitten
by a snake"
so checked
what to do
something every
household should have

Ren's Learning Story

The Aboriginal thing

really blew me away
Isobel giving us videos
really opened my mind
made me see a different light
even though I've always known
what happened
not to the extent

Now any kind of prejudice
the kids make even
wearing glasses
having weight
can explain better to them

they don't tease or hassle
anyone anymore

anything is possible

I can go on and do
whatever I feel
stories you told us
about the other girls

when we went to Boodoree
one had done the CEW
a Koori lady
been sitting at home
fifteen years
and she got into *that*

Ren's Learning Story

loved that excursion

Booderee National Park
Never thought I'd like
the environment
Don't get into gardens
but after it was
"Wow, look at that"
notice plants how they live
always point out holes to kids
fallen trees on ground
I'll say "You can't take that
because that'll break down ..."
Good learning experience
especially when you have
little ones
can teach them
at an early age

deal with public too

how can I explain?
little things... like other day
boyfriend at pub with friends
getting drinks
guy started at them
pushed them down stairs

now this bloke had been drinking
going out with publican's daughter
come home told us what happened
one was scruffed up badly
so I rang up, "He was drunk.
Why were you still serving him?"

"Oh no he wasn't"
"So, he wasn't drunk?"
"Oh, he might've been,
he was only here 15 minutes"
I said "But he still left
with two cases of beer"

Publican started backing down
realised he was in the wrong
My friends were like 'Wow
can't believe way you handled'
Kept same voice

Nice, but also stern

Ren's Learning Story

even talking to my ex

used to always back down
we have a good relationship
but when we talk
he says "Oh, I gotta go
I say "No
your son is more important
than where you have to go"

I wouldn't say that before

could talk to teachers

personally
wasn't going in
doing work
going again
they were giving time
didn't feel you'd
get scorned at
for not knowing
didn't have to do it
in front of everyone either

could go talk quietly

if you didn't understand

teachers always showed
two or three ways
the whole class
not just the individual

doing group work

when you explain it
in your own terms
you think "Unreal
I really know that"
understand better
a confidence boost

Ren's Learning Story

women like you

able help others
them helping you
no one got upset
anyone falling behind
they'd turn around
try to help along

or just socialise
we all knew each other
knew everyone's business
this one's getting divorced
this one's going for custody

after the course
if we see each other
we always stop and chat
but think it was something
special for that six months

then you go
your own way

being silenced

all wrote a piece
on ourselves
I'm a mother
or this or that
cause lot of times I think
"Oh, my life's boring"
but when you wrote
mother sister niece
auntie ... provider
realise how many roles
get out there
play soccer
learn about bikes
I'm a father as well

Ren's Learning Story

Stereotypical Non-stereotypical

Big poster we did
I put wedding picture in non-stereotype
other girls wanted to put it in stereotype
had discussion got heated
Forget where it ended up

Never looked at a magazine like that
always "wish / had body like that"
look more get cranky
no wonder so many
anorexics around

Found one I like now
Good Medicine magazine
more informative
more natural

read books

never used to
just getting into it
started with something
I knew I would like
series on this Sydney hood

going to try
Roald Dahl
next

always wanting

to do a course
knew I wasn't ready to jump in
Gai and I egged each other on
At first "We're going to be
with a bunch of dummies"
Once we got into it
was lot better than we thought

Ren's Learning Story

school alright

tried secretarial course at tech
hated it at sixteen
seventeen didn't feel like
going to school everyday
it was just like school too
had to hand in note
if you weren't there
I quit that

just got work

at the bars
bank was good
taught me a lot
but then
when you have
children
they still want you
to work full-time
8.30-5.30
that's why
I gave that away

interview

easier you asking questions
than just asking me to talk

being part of the research
doesn't really bother me

I don't think

I'll see when it comes out

Finishing the tapestry

Uttering the words “I’ll see when it comes out”, Ren entrusts the woman to represent the story of her learning and echoes the woman’s own perception of her writing as research journey: ‘Let’s see where this takes us ... ‘

She has unravelled threads of each woman’s learning story from the myriad of hesitations, circumnavigations, repetitions, pauses and minor connecting words we use in speech to convey our thoughts and feelings, our experience. Taking time to re-search the transcript, each voice holding her in thrall, she has woven a tapestry of tales with the women, which she now starts to see as being both individual yet in some senses collective, representative.

She wonders if this weaving has equally fascinated you as reader. Have you been actively engaged, making your own observations, drawing your own conclusions about these tales?

The woman sits back quietly to meditate on the tapestry. She has already begun to learn from these tales, drawn and re-drawn as they are from the living. Now she must reconsider what is important, re-examine the threads, the ways they warp and weft together. She must enter into a new collaboration with her research and her readers. She must once again re-vision.

Chapter 8 Equilibrium Again

... the second equilibrium is similar to the first ...
(Todorov, Tzvetan, 1977, p 111)

Living Tapestry

When I think of the circumstances of Black re-entry women's experiences in higher education, I am reminded of a Negro spiritual from my childhood, "How I Got Over":

"I want to sing hallelujah. I want to shout the trouble is over. My soul looks back in wonder at how I got over."
(Johnson-Bailey, Juanita, 2001, p. 127).

The woman has co-created a tapestry of shared and individual learning stories with the women who have re-entered the career education course; their stories warp and weft with each other, as well as the woman's own story as an adult learner in quest of a higher degree. The stories are significant, woven as they are from the living:

... stories are the closest we can come to experience ...
A story has a sense of being full, a sense of coming out of a personal and social history ... Experience, in this view, is the stories people live ... (Clandinin, D. Jean & Connelly, F. Michael, 1994, p. 415).

Simultaneously she knows that these stories are a selection and arrangement of experience; that in the stories women tell there are many silences and submerged layers of meaning beneath the social surface. Juanita Johnson Bailey's childhood-remembered Negro spiritual presents a lived response to the violent trauma of slavery, which remains barely visible except through the celebratory joy of 'getting over'. At the same time the hymn limns the most difficult 'living through' we experience as humans; that of surviving and overcoming oppression. As the woman lives in, with and through the tapestry of tales, textures and patterns of social oppression emerge and recede, sometimes furling to the surface, crying out for further attention.

Dwelling in the tapestry

Whereas the woman has previously been immersed in the group interactions as well as the individual emphases and meanings the students have communicated in their stories, now there is a larger fabric to contemplate, with common threads and colours, yet variations in shade and texture, making up the whole. One of her fellow students, Genevieve Noone (2002, pp. 66-67) shares with her the notion of 'dwelling in' this phase of research:

you're not after explanation you're after illumination

it's actually not
writing anymore ...
it's more material ... being inside

that takes longer
so there's different
kinds of existential experiences going on here
involving different kinds of research

dwelling is a house
so you inhabit it
but it's also to stay
to linger

dwelling has
no start or finish
it's a place that you inhabit almost like a living between circumstance

The woman dwells in the tapestry. Through the active production processes of research the stories have also come to dwell in her. Dwelling now involves quiet meditations over time, sometimes in the less conscious recesses of her mind, while walking, gardening, cooking, sleeping: sensing possibilities as the immersion she has had while producing the stories coalesces in new ways. Laurel Richardson (1992, pp. 134-136) points out how her production of Laura May's life story created new knowledge and ways of being for her. In a similar fashion the women's stories of experience entwine with the woman's own to create a multifaceted tapestry that organically educates her anew:

Stories such as these, lived and told, educate the self and others
(Clandinin, D. Jean & Connelly F, Michael, 1994, p. 415)

The living texture of the tapestry, connecting knowledge to her world of experience becomes obvious by the time she drafts her first journal article:

Similarly, the production of the learning stories has entered my life and practice as a teacher in a deeply integrated way. The research writing process has so imbued the women's learning stories into my being that I regularly make connections between a segment of a story and current situations in my classroom and workplace. For example, when I am once again battling frustration through administrative and funding minefields to organize an excursion, about to swear 'never again', I am reminded of Gai's 'Just brilliant when we went'. In the staffroom I have pulled out a poem from Jo's stories to discuss the experience of maths fear and successful maths teaching methods (an area in which I have no prior expertise) with a head teacher of the discipline. Talking about building self-esteem recently with a student undergoing a difficult divorce settlement, I was instantly reminded of Kath's 'victory'.
(Evelyn, Debra, 2004, p. 108).

Sometimes dwelling in the research tapestry occurs in directly busy ways, linking conscious and subconscious levels, organic and industrial time frames. The writing of the journal article for publication is one such instance, where the rationale for producing poetic research narratives 'gels' in a new way. When she prepares a powerpoint presentation for her fellow PhD students, she finds that while researching, writing notes and fragments of thought for other chapters, she has furthered her social analysis of the tapestry, without concentrating on the task as such, and that this becomes focussed under the tight industrial time units of a strict deadline slotted between other work commitments.

Living conflict and learning: separating and connecting

Through this complex process of dwelling over time in meditative as well as busy ways the woman reflects on the tapestry of tales and begins her analysis. And in the midst of this active meditation, so 'near but yet so far' to the final stages of her thesis, the woman's relationship of ten years reaches

breaking point; or she reaches breaking point with her relationship. A few days before the Christmas festival, she walks out of her home, her partnership and family for over a decade, in distress, at the end of her emotional tether.

This may come as a surprise dear reader, for there may have been little indication of problems in this area of her life. Like some of the women in her study, there may be subtle suggestions but little more. Has she, like them, protected her relationship and partner from public scrutiny? Was she also protecting herself from the truths of her relationship, maintaining the secrecy of that labelled 'private', no matter how troubling the actual living became in the domestic sphere? Perhaps she surprised herself, but the themes of this particular resolution were there in her life, her story, even if only in spaces between words.

Now in order to complete her research journey the woman must answer Virginia Woolf's cry for a 'room of one's own'. Through all the turmoil she thinks she will write: takes her computer and files to her friend's unoccupied house where she and her son have refuge until the woman can find more permanent accommodation. But the room for her computer is a box in which she would have to sit sideways to work. All the upset of prolonged conflict culminating in flight, the ensuing tears and fears, fights and estrangements, are no more of an impediment to her writing than the sheer practicality of space. For writing might also be a refuge at such times, as her supervisor points out when she emails her at the end of January to update on her current situation and progress. A refuge: to lose oneself in the thoughts of other thinkers and writers; just as some of the women's stories tell of education as a separate identity to which they retreat from the conflict in their lives. If only there was a room, a space for her body and mind to spread.

The demand for place and space has its own practical life, which in the end re-affirms the woman's choice to maintain paid work despite the time struggles this has entailed for combining study and family, and reminds her of the reasons she spends her working life supporting women's journey towards economic freedom. She searches for rental units and houses in proximity to

bus stop and town for her son's final HSC year and re-encounters lack of choice and the condescending manner of many rental property managers. She makes the mental leap from rental as option, bound up with her previous poverty, to purchasing a house, recognising the powerful freedom brought by being in secure, relatively well-paid work. She searches and inspects, searches and inspects, seeks a loan, deals with the necessities and vagaries of solicitors, agents, brokers, bank and vendors, while managing her own emotions and dealing with those of her son, ex-partner, two step-daughters and grandchild. She negotiates some small division of furniture and removals, with the help of friends, a process symbolically fraught by the arch tensions of a non-mutual separation. She begins the sifting, sorting, organizing, planning, purchasing and making do involved in setting up a life, trying to get the communication systems of phone and internet in place so that both she and her son can continue in this crucial phase of their studies.

Finally all the emotion and effort culminate in this moment, this writing, in a new study, a new room of her own, surrounded by boxes, books and bags of papers as yet unpacked. Writing her self once again: a summary, an abbreviation of anguish, despair and the revival of hope, experienced alone yet shared by so many women. And again, feminist teaching practice, including research practice, connects rather than separates this experience. For in advising her to write her way through her conflicts, her supervisor is following feminist learning principles that value emotions and emotional experience as central to learning (Kimmel, Ellen, 1999, p. 67). Furthermore, it is far from unusual for women to have to manage the emotions and practicalities of relationship breakdown before or during their academic commitments. For example, in Rosalind Edwards' research with thirty-one women returning to higher education in the UK, 25% of the students split from their partners over the period of their study. In the tapestry of tales we can see some of the women still managing the aftermath of such separations, while others are trying to pursue their goals despite partner reservations. Rosalind Edwards (1993, pp. 110-118) found that all but three of the women in her study mentioned that their partners were threatened by their study, seeing it as taking time and attention away from them, while about a third

mentioned their partners feared educational success would bring the women greater independence. The reactions of threatened partners were tangible, ranging from a lack of domestic and emotional support, through to anger and even violence. As a result, many of the women in her study tried to either involve their partners or separate their study from home life, not allowing it to intrude into family talk or time. Although Rosalind Edwards (1993, pp. 130-133) found that women also often connected their learning with family, particularly with children, too much close connection of education and family caused conflict with partners, creating pressure for the women to separate the two aspects of their lives.

It is not surprising then that alongside physical and mental space, many women seek emotional support from their peers during study. The woman feels overwhelmed at times by the need for social support. Although she has not had collegiality with her peers and supervisors continuously, she has gradually developed some trusting networks and a comfort level through her working visits to campus and PhD schools. Ironically, just as she glimpses the importance of the social in the women's learning, with analysis burgeoning in her mind, her own serious isolation becomes a more immediate, urgent and consciously uncomfortable reality. She has less money to travel the distance and afford the accommodation of staying in Armidale, yet feels swamped by her isolation. And again her story, like so many women's stories, is in parts individual, in parts shared:

After 12 interrupted years of external study while I cared for my four children and worked, occasionally for money, I wrote in my first PhD journal "Doing a PhD will suffocate me if it is done in isolation, my life will implode on me and I will drown"... (de Carteret et al, 2004, p. 7).

The solution to such social isolation is not to preclude postgraduate study by distance education, which remains an important access option for adult students, but to better support students with social contact, whether by email and phone contact with supervisors, student chat or email trees, through

video conferences, as well as arranged opportunities for face-to-face meetings, with financial assistance wherever possible. When such opportunities for social contact occur they are invaluable, as borne out also by Rosalind Edwards' study (1993, pp. 96-97), showing that women returning to higher education valued the relationships they developed with other students highly as a support to their learning. While the woman separates much of her study from family and paid work, and in the end separates completely from her partner, at the same time her study makes new relationship connections. For example, although thin-skinned and vulnerable, she makes the effort to meet in Sydney with fellow students when her supervisors organise to attend a public lecture and have a 'mini-school' for students to talk about their progress. As she settles into listening to others, presenting her own work, and perhaps most importantly of all, chatting over meals and coffee, she re-centres herself on her postgraduate journey. She learns so much from this experience with the other postgraduate women, even in this very brief snatch of time, that she re-organises her schedule to stay another night. Inspired by the two-day get-together in Sydney, the woman attends a conference on creative qualitative research in Melbourne. The social contact feeds her: listening to presentations, talking over breaks, swapping contact cards, thinking about the connections and contrasts between her own research interests and other topics and approaches. She is rejuvenated.

The tapestry of shared and individual tales has also drawn the woman into making connections between the private and public worlds of friendship, work and study to extend her knowledge. The stories of learning in the subject *Women and Cultural Studies*, particularly in relation to the module purpose on Australian Aboriginal history, are so powerful that she shares them with her friend and colleague who teaches the subject, asking if she will be interviewed about her teaching practice. As a result the two women tease out one particular thread of social justice in the course together, in a hectic process studded with time conflicts between work and family, to present a paper for the Adult Learning Australia Conference. This is an incredibly expansive experience for both women, boosting their sense of self-potential beyond the limits of their often draining, underfunded, economy-driven workplace.

Living conflict: re-connecting cultures

Just as dwelling in the tapestry has created new connections between the woman's knowing and her personal, social and political contexts, the stories of the women in CEW show how they achieve great success through making personal and political connections in feminist cross-cultural studies.

This learning however, like the woman's learning, does not occur without conflict.

Women and Cultural Studies, a core feminist subject in the course that bridges the personal and political to explore oppression, although contentious at times, is one of the strongest influences mentioned in the women's stories. In group discussion Lisa states how she liked the subject from the start despite controversy, while Gai explains that once conflict was overcome the subject "ended up one of the favourites". Classes encourage women to explore gender issues, through reflecting on their own lives, as well as through investigating issues relevant to women's lives in the past through to the present. While in many ways this is a successful approach, there can also be some trouble and pain along the way.

The women's stories show strong connections being made between personal experience and wider social issues. Ren re-affirms her self by considering all the social roles she plays and changes her reading preferences after looking at stereotypes in women's magazines; Kath decides she wants to be a non-stereotype and is motivated by a timeline of her life to change it in the future; Kate, Kathy and Lisa make strong personal connections through researching the achievements of particular women. On the other hand, raising feminist perspectives can cause conflict for women who are committed to very traditional views of gender, or those who start to change and challenge traditional patterns in their relationships. Conflict can also be inner pain for women recognizing the oppressions of their past, as with Kathy who expresses vehement abhorrence about looking at the timeline of her life, or Kate who is almost moved to tears by a reflection about her family

relationships. Lisa tells how her confidence in writing improved when she writes her own story from the heart, mentioning in passing that her fellow-student Gai cries when she reads it. As in the words of the spiritual, the depth of life trauma here is often a hint beneath the storyline of eventual success.

In approaching the oppression of indigenous Australians through invasion, genocide and racism since 1788, and developing strategies to assist in the reconciliation process, conflict often arises. Such conflict is illustrated by Gai's description: "But that first class was Bad". Pat Griffin (1997, p. 292) explains that facilitators of all kinds of social justice education should expect forms of conflict or resistance. She argues that these are understandable predictable responses by students encountering contradiction to previously learned ideas and values, so are:

... part of the legitimate questions and challenges students raise as they encounter both intellectual ideas and their own personal experience in light of material presented in class ... Having one's world view challenged or being asked to acknowledge unasked for privilege or understanding how one is discriminated against are painful and uncomfortable experiences. Resistance can come from members of both the agent and target groups. Helping understand their resistance and work through it is a vital part of social justice education (Griffin, Pat, 1997, p. 292).

Yet in the woman's experience classroom conflict and resistance to social justice education is an area for which many adult educators are drastically unprepared or under-prepared through their initial or in-service training. In her workplace over the past fifteen years, many staff have indicated that they either avoid social justice issues of race, gender and class altogether, minimize the time spent addressing them, or use lectures or other authoritarian teaching styles to effectively muzzle resistance. A vivid description of a lesson 'going wrong' by Jane Drurie (1996, pp. 137-139) shows some of the dynamics for which adult educators need to be better prepared and why some are reluctant to raise these issues:

I engage with her. Her argument is not one I feel comfortable with, having seen it being misused by those who would use any means available to halt immigration to Australia of people of different cultural backgrounds. Does my disapproval and frustration give permission for what happens next? Suddenly there is a voice of quiet authority from the back of the room. He has sat quietly through all the challenges and questions and comments from the men in the group but now he is taking this woman to task. I run my hands through my hair, calming myself. *How am I to understand this? How am I to respond?*

Educators for social justice in the United States, Lee Anne Bell, Sharon Washington, Gerald Weinstein and Barbara Love (1997, pp. 299-310), draw on research and experience to examine teacher trepidation about raising racism in the classroom. Inhibiting worries include anxiety about responding to bias, self-doubt about competency, fears about losing learner approval, losing control, dealing with strong emotions, disclosing personal information and negotiating authority issues, as well as a perception of institutional risk.

In the local context the approach to addressing issues of racism has been developed over a ten-year period by Isobel Fitzpatrick, the Aboriginal teacher of *Women and Cultural Studies*, who is referred to by first name in a number of the women's stories. Prior to 1994 staffing had followed the model suggested by the syllabus at the time, with most of the content being facilitated by one teacher, while Isobel acted briefly as Aboriginal guest lecturer, delivering the module purpose on Aboriginal history. This component represented a proactive anti-racist feminist stance, but had serious limitations in terms of time (Evelyn, Debra & Fitzpatrick, Isobel, 2004, p.3). When the possibility arose for Isobel to teach the entire subject this seemed a wonderful opportunity for students to develop awareness of cultural and gender issues in a more integrated way. In a local context where 2.6% of the population identifies as indigenous Australian (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2001b) a proactive approach to raising the profile of Aboriginal history and cross-cultural awareness in the women's course seemed well warranted. The sometimes torrid local history of racism and reconciliation, demonstrated in the public burning of the Aboriginal flag by mayor Greg Watson (South Coast

Register, 1982); and change by 2005 when the same public official said he was honoured to raise the Australian and Aboriginal flags with indigenous singer Jimmy Little (Shoalhaven City Council, 2005), shows some of the potential for conflict, as well as the potential for change.

In response to the challenge of change in her position from guest lecturer to module teacher, Isobel has developed a range of teaching and learning strategies with the aim of ensuring personal safety and respect for both the students and her self (Evelyn, Debra & Fitzpatrick, Isobel, 2004, pp. 2-5). She uses non-threatening but powerful narrative genres to convey information, protecting the women from the harshness of the material and using self-preservation measures to protect herself at the same time (Evelyn, Debra & Fitzpatrick, Isobel, 2004, pp. 3 -5). The strategies emerge from the course context where, as Isobel explains, the women share the need of “becoming aware, confident contributors”, as they frequently move from positions of silence to strongly verbalizing their viewpoints (Evelyn, Debra & Fitzpatrick, Isobel, 2004, p. 2). Isobel also describes how her change in responsibility for the class allows more resistance to be expressed, as well as more in-depth study and reflection on Aboriginal culture (Evelyn, Debra & Fitzpatrick, Isobel, 2004, pp. 1-3). At the Adult Learning Australia Conference 2004 in South Australia, Isobel further detailed the strategies she uses for facilitating the women’s learning. These include key issues of timing: considering the students’ readiness for the information, preparing them and reassuring them; pacing the lessons and timing them to ensure continuity; gaining the women’s trust by accepting them and what they have to offer with understanding rather than judgment. Finally, she outlines how she has to make a key decision in the context of each class about when is the best time to express that she is Aboriginal. This is often confronting for some students and sometimes also confronts a stereotype about what it is to *be* Aboriginal (Fitzpatrick, Isobel, 2004).

It is important to recognize that teaching about Aboriginal history and other social justice issues is complex and demanding, and that teachers deserve support for this work. Sometimes the woman sees Isobel emerge from

classes exhausted or disturbed by classroom dynamics and resistant attitudes, but has only extremely limited time to give for debriefing and support. As coordinator the woman herself is also often confronted by student reactions, including anger, in corridors, on college grounds, or in the classroom, as is the case with this research group. Insufficient time and weight is given to the need for staff support in educational workplaces where economic rationalization places ever-increasing demands on teachers (Blackmore, Jill & Angwin, Jennifer, 1997), yet this is particularly crucial for staff dealing with conflict. The need for support mechanisms and strategies is strongly argued by experienced teachers of social justice courses (Adams, Maurianne & Marchesani, Linda, 1997, p. 270; Bell, Lee Anne et al, 1997, p. 303; Griffin, Pat, 1997, pp. 279 –280).

The effectiveness of addressing social justice issues using teaching strategies that facilitate connection between the women's experiences and new knowledge of history and culture is clearly evident in the research narratives. Most of the women speak of their profound learning through the subject. Perhaps most moving of all are Kathy's stories, as she connects with her Aboriginal heritage, from which she has been separated for most of her life. She stresses how important it is to "know your background". At the same time, she reconciles her prior separation from her cultural roots with her deep love for her dying mother, who she blesses with her forgiveness. Lisa also reinforces personal connections through the subject, saying "showed where my family come from", but does not find the knowledge new, for she had heard "a lot more as well". Gai, in contrast, moves from a position of resistance to shock at "All the butchering ..." and then to actively seeking knowledge of "what the hell was going on in this place". She adopts a positive position where she thinks Pat O'Shane should be Prime Minister, so strong is her admiration. On the other hand, Kate connects the silencing of Aboriginal women to her own silencing, and finds great rapport and respect through her research on 'Mum Shirl'. Finally, Ren makes personal connections between the social injustices committed against Aboriginal peoples and all forms of discrimination, which she starts to pass on to her children: "they don't tease or hassle anyone anymore".

The advantages of employing a professional Aboriginal teacher to facilitate women's cultural learning are considerable. It is an act of social justice that Aboriginal teachers who choose to do so adopt more powerful positions as teachers rather than 'guests' on women's courses and other mainstream educational offerings. Such staffing arrangements encourage reconciliation, as Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal staff, Aboriginal students and non-Aboriginal students work together through controversial issues, creating collegiality and collective understanding. In this way, the personal and political mesh, as Isobel explains:

There is also mutual learning. It is not just about me sharing with them what I know. It's been wonderful for me too. When I just visited in there, they were foreign people to me: women of a variety of cultures and backgrounds. I didn't have awareness of their lifestyles or belief structures, and what I didn't know I didn't have to question. Now, I seem to question everything, so it's developed me as a person too. That room becomes a sharing room, and in order for those women to trust me I need to trust them. The trust that builds in the room is often unique (Evelyn, Debra & Fitzpatrick, Isobel, 2004, p.5).

At the same time, it is essential that all adult educators, not only Aboriginal staff or feminist staff, be prepared to support and address racism and other social justice issues. Connections made through learning like those made in *Women and Cultural Studies*, begin to break through official adult education discourses, which as Sue Shore (1998, p. 90) points out, often relegate social justice to a 'special context' that 'deals' with indigenous students, rather than claiming that we all have some responsibility for social change. It is essential that adult educators address racism as a form of oppression if we are to move towards any kind of socially harmonious future. Practical discussions of strategies and staff support mechanisms for teaching social justice issues could usefully inform university courses in adult education and training. In-service training courses in adult education would also be helpful in encouraging and supporting teachers to respectfully address important social issues of discrimination. Such methods seem mandatory if public education is to take policy commitments to equal opportunity, anti-discrimination and cultural diversity seriously. As Aboriginal Elder Evelyn Scott (2000, p. 192)

points out in the Australian context, it is adults, rather than young people, who need to learn more about Aboriginal history: research suggests that only 38% of all people recognize the connection between current disadvantage and the way Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people were mistreated in the past (Scott, Evelyn, 2000, pp. 192-3).

Living oppression: violence and trauma

Racism is one form of oppression addressed in the CEW course, arising from feminists working to establish education for women that addressed issues of oppression, and particularly gender oppression. It should not be surprising then, that women who undertake education as adults live oppression: the feminist slogan 'the personal is political' seems axiomatic. Oppression is always experienced through the person; at the same time, experiences of oppression are felt collectively, within and across social groups and communities. Oppression is violence and has violent effects on lives, robbing us of power. The consequences of oppression are often trauma, which must be survived, lived through, overcome and turned around, as those who live oppression try to regain power, resist and survive oppression and its traumatic effects.

During this particular course, the trauma of violence literally erupted in the classroom, as Gai describes in the group discussion, after she has raised student grievances about the Aboriginal history component of the subject *Women and Cultural Studies*. This is one of many critical moments in the woman's teaching career for which her postgraduate reading in adult education has not adequately prepared her:

Crunch

gauntly ill a
woman gravely
spits
venom at a
subject people
race

*I'm open to complaints
... listen*

sudden
reveal I
Raped
by Black man
and I'll Never
Ever Forgive

*Hear...
this silence*

she teacher
planted
fronting
feet
firmly
paddling

...listen ...

how respect
not belittle
truly touch
yet minister
wider infection
spreading

*shock of speech
less faces*

split decision
horror speak
words show
you know
acknowledge
her anguish

*...listen ...
in the moment
others murmur ...*

divulge
I too filled
Hate Hurt Fury
but a child
and my rapists
White men were

*...humming
in the moment
...gathers*

Can I despise
all their kind or
must confine to
those deserving
that perpetrate
such evil

*listen ...
thrumming
in the moment
...builds*

so many
we
suffer

*breaking
voices
tumbling
one
after an
other ...*

I too
me
too me
my
daughter I

*...listen ...listen
what's that
terrible
sound?*

The need to respond sensitively to critical incidents sparked by experiences of violence and trauma, like the need to address conflict, is frequently a part of adult education. Lee Anne Bell, Sharon Washington, Gerald Weinstein and Barbara Love (1997, p. 303) outline a useful approach of 'process in the moment' for adult educators committed to social justice teaching. This occurs at two levels: one is being aware about how students may be experiencing what is going on, and what is being triggered for them; the other is being self-aware, noting and trying to understand our own reactions to what is occurring (Bell, Lee Anne et al, 1997, p. 303). In this situation the woman understands that the hostility about race issues may be triggered by lack of knowledge and personal deprivations, and that the quieter students probably represent an alternative or opposing perspective in what is already a conflicted situation. When confronted by an unexpected personal disclosure of trauma, the woman feels shock, fear, sympathy and empathy, yet has to make a number of rapid decisions. The woman is aware that rape myths blame women and girls for the assaults made on them and continue to silence and shame those who are already traumatised, while removing the focus from the criminal behaviour of perpetrators (Ryder, Elizabeth, 2005, pp. 270-283). While the student presents as furious at Aboriginal men when disclosing her rape, her anguish is palpable. The woman cannot, as an adult educator, ignore the deeper layers of meaning which surround the experience of rape for many women, movingly expressed by feminist lawyer under the pseudonym C. Lee Wise (1999, p. 163):

a cruel paradox resulted from this cold and calculated act of aggression against me: I felt so trivialized and inconsequential that life and my existence in it no longer mattered. At the same time, I somehow, yet unjustifiably, mushroomed into the blameworthy party, feeling totally and exclusively accountable for allowing my own rape to occur ...

As an educator the woman can choose to protect her personal identity, in the classroom, yet on this occasion she must at the same time address the student's traumatic personal disclosure with deep understanding. The woman knows she must make a transition from empathetic knowing, to addressing the racism, which not only accompanies the woman's pain, but also probably underlies some of the initial group complaints. Rather than self-protection, the woman chooses instead to respond to the woman with empathy through self-revelation. This action is both scary and risky, but she sees it as the most honest and hopeful response possible at the time, for sometimes:

Asking students to engage experientially with oppression material requires that we be willing to take the risks we ask of them (Bell, Lee Ann et al, 1997, p. 307).

Pat Griffin (1997, p. 290) argues that disclosing personal information can be an important strategy, since it allows students to feel more comfortable about expressing feelings which are a natural human response to social injustice. However, she also warns that sharing personal information needs to be chosen and implemented wisely while staying in the role of facilitator, always with the purpose of helping students achieve a better understanding.

Once the woman commences on the path of self-disclosure many more of the students feel safe, as if 'given permission' to uncover traumas of sexual assault. So while the woman is aware that her choice might shock and upset some of the students and has been aware of the possibility of further disclosures, she is still disturbed and somewhat overwhelmed by the new wave of grief and anger which sweeps the room. She has more critical moments to process. She sees the distress of some of the class members, such as Gai, who comments in the group discussion "It was a shocker, that class, I'm thinking 'What the *hell* am I doin' here?'" alongside others who seem to sit in inert sympathy, such as Kath, "It showed there was a great issue for the group ... that there was a need". At the same time, she is responding to a large number of students in deep emotional pain, who have disclosed their experiences of sexual assault, some long-silenced, such as

Kathy, "That's the first time I've ever opened up to anyone about it ... I went home that afternoon and I sat there and I just cried and cried and cried".

So the woman is once again 'doing a swan routine': head held calmly but treading water madly beneath the surface; trying to keep abreast of shifting dynamics in the room, while meeting her responsibilities for the group's needs:

how allow
recognise
not diminish
yet simultaneously
take care
of all?

*hear the
harrowing ...*

check each
offer options
stay leave
counselling
support

*salute their
bravery*

so many
rapists such
*uneasy
resolution*

when comes to
crunch classrooms
seems no
absolute
rule guides
only

*heartbodymindspirit
... listen ...*

The events of that day were deeply disturbing, yet as Ren points out in the group discussion the number of women in the classroom who make revelations of sexual assault is representative. It is as if women have been so conditioned to accept the shame and blame for their own oppressions that even amongst themselves it is socially unacceptable to speak in public about the horrors of violence and trauma they have experienced, unless whispering in pairs. Women are thus often locked into keeping their oppression private, and we are often understandably shocked but less understandably embarrassed when a woman speaks of such things aloud, uninvited, out of turn. For no matter how we dress them up, violence and trauma are not pretty, sexy or demure; so we keep them quiet, but again no matter how we silence them they re-surface; insistently disruptive, sore, messy, ugly, brutal.

The fact that violent and traumatic experiences emerge in the stories of the women in this particular class should sadly not be considered unusual; yet such oppression is barely mentioned in most adult education literature. The submerging of women's oppression is reflected also in the wider prevalence of violence and trauma in social surveys and statistics, which are too often met with social amnesia. In one of the rare studies which directly sets out to address issues of violence for women literacy learners in adult education, Jenny Horsman (2000, p. 27) cites research showing that in Canada approximately 54% of girls under 18 have been sexually assaulted and that 29% of married women have experienced wife assault (Horsman, Jenny, 2000, p. 9), noting how under any 'normal' circumstance such research statistics should surely constitute a state of national emergency. Findings in Australia similarly indicate that domestic violence, sexual assault, child sexual assault, physical abuse and neglect all occur at alarming rates in this country, and that the majority of such crimes are gendered¹ (Australian Centre for the Study of Sexual Assault, 2005; Brown, David & Endekov, Zoran, 2005; Carrington, Kerry & Phillips Janet, 2003; Royal Women's Hospital 2005;). For example, the 1998 Victims of Crime Survey in Victoria, Australia, women were

¹ Violence also affects the lives of men and boys, but male violence occurs in different social patterns that need to be examined and addressed in detail.

10 times more likely to have suffered sexual assault than men (Royal Women's Hospital, 2005). By the age of 18, approximately one in three girls have suffered child sexual assault (Advocates for Survivors of Child Abuse, 2005). The Australian component of the International Violence Against Women Survey in 2002-3 found that 57% of the women surveyed had experienced at least one incident of physical or sexual violence over their lifetime and 34% had experienced this violence from a former or current partner (Australian Centre for the Study of Sexual Assault, 2005).

The social oppression of gendered violence is widespread. As Elizabeth Ryder (2005, p. 467) states of worldwide findings:

Two generalizations emerge from the surveys and research examining violence against women. First, the prevalence of male violence against women is alarmingly high. Second, the negative consequences of violence are debilitating and wide-ranging.

United Nations reports document that violence against women is a pervasive violation of human rights embedded in cultures around the world, which frequently remains unrecognised but desperately needs to be stopped (United Nations (1995, 1996, 2000). The United Nations World Conference on Women in Beijing, China also notes that low social and economic status can be both a cause and a consequence of violence against women (United Nations, 1995, p. 1), and that social factors such as being young or elderly, poor or destitute, living with disabilities, being indigenous, a migrant or refugee, living in rural or remote communities, being held in detention or in an institution, living in situations of foreign occupation or any armed conflict, can all increase the threat of violence against women (United Nations 1995, p. 2).

Successive studies of women in adult & higher education reveal the oppressive patterns of violence and trauma in women's lives. Mary Belenky et al (1986, pp. 11-13) interviewed 135 women in the United States who were participating in a diverse range of formal academic institutions or attending family agencies for information and assistance with parenting. While the researchers note that they did not intend to collect information on sexual

abuse, they explain that after so many women spontaneously identified sexual trauma as an important influence, the team began to survey the issue systematically (Belenky et al, 1986, pp. 58-59). They were startled by their findings:

Based on our data, sexual abuse appears to be a shockingly common experience for women. In our sample of seventy-five women, 38% of the women in schools and colleges and 65% of women contacted through the social agencies told us that they had been subject to either incest, rape, or sexual seduction by a male in authority over them ... Abuse was not limited to any particular epistemological grouping of women in our study, nor was it limited to any specific class, ethnic, or age group ... Our statistics on incest are particularly alarming. Among the college women, approximately one out of five women described a history of childhood incest. Among the high-risk women from the social agencies that draw clients from families in which drug and alcohol abuse and violence are commonplace, almost one out of every two women reported a history of incest (Belenky et al, 1986, p. 59).

Janet Parr (2000, pp. 2, 6) was similarly taken aback by findings of trauma in her study of mature women returning to education. She comments on her interviews with 49 women students from a range of areas and incomes who were attending colleges or universities in northern Britain:

Right from the start of the interviews, unexpected and unsolicited findings were emerging. All the hurdles which I had expected the women to have to negotiate in their return to education were there. In addition to this though, the students were talking to me about personal issues in their lives ... I use the word 'trauma' because of the powerful and painful nature of what the women were telling me. These experiences had clearly had a major impact on the lives of the students, and the effects appeared to be ongoing ... By the time the interviews had been completed, around half of the forty nine women had told me of painful life experiences which could be significantly linked with their return to learning as adults. I was surprised at the way these experiences tumbled out with no prompting and I was appalled at their frequency.

In her analysis of the interviews, Janet Parr groups the traumatic experiences linked to the women's return to adult education loosely, based on severity and timing in the life cycle, which is a common system of categorising trauma. She identifies these as first, "major life events, like divorce, serious injury, illness, loss of loved ones or redundancy"; second, "painful experiences in childhood, such as cultural racism or a controlling parent"; third, "painful experiences just out of childhood, such as teen pregnancy and restrictive through to violent relationships", and fourth, "mega trauma, such as physical and psychological abuse, beginning in childhood and continuing in different forms into and through adulthood"(Parr, Janet, 2000, p. 8).

Many parts of the stories shared by the women in the CEW course can be related to these categories of trauma. For example, the stories of Gai, Jo, Kath, Kate and Ren involve relationship breakdowns and periods of raising children alone. Gai seeks adult education when she loses her job and Lisa leaves work and moves to a new area of low employment in order to escape a "lot of family hassles". A number of the women also refer to various traumatic experiences in childhood. Both Kate and Lisa, for example, identify long-term emotional pain caused by dysfunctional relationships in their families of origin. Kate realises a pattern of emotional denial after a conversation with her mother: Similarly, a number of the women's stories refer to painful events just out of childhood. Jo relates how she was scared to death of maths at high school, Gai tells how she started her senior school year only to get thrown out of home, while Lisa got pregnant as a way to escape high school and family. In relation to the final category of 'mega trauma', which begins in childhood and continues into adulthood, there are indications of such violence and trauma in the stories of Kathy and Ren.

However, while such categorisations may be useful for gaining an understanding of the severity and duration of trauma, they can also be misleading, creating divisions and 'hierarchies' of trauma, for we can see that many of the women's experiences span a number of such categories. Gai, for example, has been thrown out of home and has had to fend for herself in the city as a teenager, has been divorced and lost her job, while raising a family.

Along the way she is given inadequate educational advice, which deters her from her career path for some time. Lisa has felt emotionally abused in her family of origin, become pregnant as a teenager and moved to an area of low employment. She has a number of children in her care, her husband is not entirely sure if he supports her move into education and she is part of a Koori family who no doubt suffer at least some effects of prolonged community trauma. Many of the women have in fact experienced multiple traumas in their lives. Kathy, as a final example, has experienced the major life event of losing her mother, and leaves school in her early teens to nurse her. In her childhood a complex form of racism has excluded her from knowing her Aboriginal family heritage, and she discloses that she also endured and repressed the mega trauma of sexual abuse from around the age of seven. She has lived through an ectopic pregnancy that was never fully explained or understood. Furthermore, there are hints of, at the very least, a restrictive relationship in her marriage, and possibly even a violent one.

In addition, there are many subtleties in the women's stories that cannot be easily categorised. Gai speaks of being thrown out of home as a teenager, but such an event does not occur without a preceding line of events and set of relationships, which she chooses not to reveal. Her statement about the consequences of these events similarly resonates with further meaning:

then I started
on the downhill slide

Reading between the lines of the stories there are indications that some have experienced abusive relationships as young women. Kath describes how everything seemed to be always her fault, while Lisa reflects that she let everybody walk all over her. For some of the women the tension is ongoing in their relationships with ex-husbands. In addition there are subtle indications of restrictive attitudes in some of the women's current relationships with partners. For example, both Kath and Lisa say that at first their husbands were unsupportive of their return to study. As in Toni Morrison's rendition of the storyteller at the beginning of this reflective journey, and as in her own very limited recount of conflict and relationship breakdown, sometimes we cut out "the bloody bits". This is one advantage of creative research genres: the

women's shared stories can speak more wholistically of their lives and as readers we are allowed to intuit, read between the lines and make connections, rather than merely divide and label into neat categories, which is rarely how we live our lives as social beings.

The multiple experiences of trauma in women's lives are part of a social canvas which is much wider and more complex than Jack Mezirow's concept of individuals having either a single 'disorienting dilemma' or a series of them, that lead to transformative learning in adulthood (Mezirow, Jack 1991, p.168). This is illustrated in a United Nations table of violence experienced by women during the lifecycle, based on the work of Lori Heise (1994):

Gender Violence throughout a Woman's Life

<i>Phase</i>	<i>Type of Violence</i>
Prenatal	Sex-selective abortions, battering during pregnancy, coerced pregnancy (rape during war)
Infancy	Female infanticide, emotional and physical abuse, differential access to food and medical care
Childhood	Genital mutilation; incest and sexual abuse; differential access to food, medical care, and education; child prostitution
Adolescence	Dating and courtship violence, economically coerced sex, sexual abuse in the workplace, rape, sexual harassment, forced prostitution
Reproductive	Abuse of women by intimate partners, marital rape, dowry abuse and murders, partner homicide, psychological abuse, sexual abuse in the workplace, sexual harassment, rape, abuse of women with disabilities
Old Age	Abuse of widows, elder abuse (which affects mostly women)

The mature aged women in the course have negotiated and survived difficult and deeply painful traumatic events across their life spans, which are mediated by other aspects of identity such as race, culture and class. They are working women; so have achieved this survival while being employed in either or both the paid or unpaid workforce, raising children, managing households, and undertaking the myriad of tasks that this entails.

What can be seen as women's personal 'transformations' in adult education, are part of a life history of traumatic events as well as everyday events that involve change, adaptation and learning. This learning predates the women's re-entry to education, and continues afterwards, as we can see from the women's accounts of how they came to the course, and how they connect and use parts of their formal adult education later in their everyday lives. In this respect the woman is reminded of the relevance yet paucity she has found in Knowles' theory of andragogy, for in suggesting that adult educators draw on the experiences of learners, there is a huge silence about the experiences of oppression that frequently form part of learner experience, and a huge gulf between encouraging such teaching practices and the real complexities of dealing with violence and trauma in the lives of learners that are too often begging to be seen, heard and spoken.

Surviving oppression: resisting silence

Jenny Horsman (2000, pp. 27-28) outlines three modes through which the social realities of trauma and violence are silenced and diminished, drawing on the work of Kali Tal (1996, p. 6): mythologization, disappearance and medicalisation. The first of these, mythologization, reduces a traumatic event to a set of standardized narratives that come to represent a "story" of trauma, and turn it from a frightening, uncontrollable event into something controlled and predictable (Tal, Kali, 1996, p. 6). This process of myth making can be seen in many instances of widespread social trauma and violence. For example, repeated catchphrases such as 'stolen generations' start to be used in ways that mask and diminish the experiences of individuals, families and

communities of Aboriginal people in different times and locations, as in the following quote from Andrew Bolt of *The Herald Sun*:

The 'stolen generation' can no longer expect us to believe them without question ... too many Aborigines, including famous names, are falsely said to have been 'stolen' by racist white officials (Harrison, Jane, 2005).

It is personal stories, oral histories and creative art works such as the play *Stolen* by Jane Harrison (2005) that disallow the distancing effects of mythologisation, and maintain the depths of meaning in people's experiences:

It rained the day they took my son. I stood there getting soaked to the skin and watched the back of the big black car and his face, so little...
Shirley, Stolen

What do you do when you meet your mother for the first time in twenty-six years? Shake her hand? Give her a hug?
Jimmy, Stolen

Myth-making can be seen operating in relation to many forms of systemic discrimination and violence. Examples include commonplace clichés used such as 'just another domestic' or 'why doesn't she just leave him?', which continue to diminish the terror that often accompanies domestic violence. This terror is partly revealed in the findings of a 1993 Canadian survey, that a third of all women subjected to battering at times feared for their lives (United Nations, 2000, p. 2) and Australian research by Jenny Mouzos & Catherine Rushforth (2003), which found that the majority of female homicides in Australia during 2000-2001 occurred when women were killed by male partners or ex-partners.

The second social silencing mechanism is medicalisation, which delineates those who experience trauma as 'victims' who suffer from an 'illness', which can be 'cured' through medicine and psychiatry (Tal, Kali, 1996, p.6). Medicalisation individualises what are social diseases for women generated by sexism, racism, ableism, ageism, heterosexism and poverty. This is not to say that those who have experienced trauma and violence do not need and deserve individual care and support, but to recognise that to reduce these

experiences to individual medical conditions experienced by 'victims' and not recognise that these experiences are part of social patterns of oppression, serves to further isolate individual women and silence their experiences. For example, Helen Dempster, a worker in a women's shelter, explains how the diagnosis 'Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder' can be useful because "it has really validated and acknowledged the experience of a lot of women", but on the other hand, ignores the context of social experience: "as women, just leaving class and going to your car in the parking lot in the dark ... There is no "post", you are always having to be alert, so it isn't like you've experienced trauma and there is no danger that you will be traumatized – you've come home from Vietnam and that is not going to happen anymore" (Horsman, Jenny, 2000, pp. 38-39). Empowerment for women survivors of trauma and violence lies both in honouring their personal experiences, as well as in making connections between the personal and political aspects of those experiences.

The third way in which trauma and violence are silenced is disappearance, which is a refusal to admit to the existence of a particular kind of trauma, usually achieved by undermining the credibility of the victim (Tal, Kali, 1996, p. 6). We can clearly see the disappearance process operating in conjunction with myth-making, in the newspaper quote about Aboriginal children stolen from their families. The methods of mythologization and disappearance are constantly used in relation to rape, implying that those brutalised either asked for or deserved the assault, wanted or enjoyed the assault, or fabricated or exaggerated the assault, and that rape occurs between two strangers, despite the fact that vast majority of sexual attacks on women are perpetrated by acquaintances, friends, relatives or partners (Ryder, Elizabeth, 2005, pp 470-472). Disappearance can also be seen in the media promotion of 'false memory syndrome' in relation to child sexual assault, which completely "removed the person who experienced the violence from view", and strove to shift compassion to those accused of carrying out the violence (Horsman, Jenny, 2000, pp. 29-30), while directing blame towards 'unreliable' children and adult survivors of sexual assault, along with their 'manipulative' or 'misdirected' therapists, many of whom were, not surprisingly women, given

that child sexual assault and the helping professions are both heavily gendered.

Making room for women's voices to speak of trauma and violence, or to write of trauma and violence, within curriculum, with teachers and with each other, as well as with counselling professionals, is liberating. Jenny Horsman (2000, p. 327) suggests a number of ways to make violence and trauma visible in adult education: through posters, referral information, guest speakers, success stories, visits to local women's services, and so on. She explains that the goal is to "create a climate that recognizes the presence of violence in many learners and instructors lives, but declares violence unacceptable" (Horsman, Jenny, 2000, p. 326).

As course coordinator there are a number of ways to practically address the social context of trauma in the women's lives. In course information sessions, she encourages the women to consider their current life situations and commitments, and whether these will allow them to manage adding course requirements to their workload. So, for example, sometimes women with pending issues such as major court cases or memories of childhood abuse will defer enrolling until another semester when these are less consuming. However, some women, such as Kath and Ren in this group, decide to manage these events during the course and do so successfully, finding that study in a supportive atmosphere alleviates their stress and lifts their spirits. It is important that the women themselves make decisions about whether this is 'their time' for enrolment, and that their needs for flexibility and assistance to complete the course are recognised by staff.

During the course there are also a number of actions that can be taken to support women in the light of trauma and violence. Organising a visit from the counselling service early in the course allows students ready access to support or referral if needed, as shown by Ren's comments about knowing where to go for help. The TAFE counselling service is also an essential resource for students who need additional assistance with considering their career options and pathways, or managing anxieties, which frequently arise

around particular educational requirements such as deadlines, talks and presentations, interviews and exams, as, illustrated in Gai's story of her extreme anxiety prior to a first aid test.

There may also be a need for coordinators to liaise with consultants for disabilities. One case was 'Ruth', a woman who had endured sexual abuse in her childhood, migration, a teen pregnancy and the forced adoption of her child in her youth. Her school education had been severely disrupted, not only by her attempts to distance herself and block out her tormented home life, but by deafness in one ear which prevented her from hearing much of what teachers were saying. When Ruth returned to the women's course in mature age, she turned her head constantly, straining to listen. Talking to her in a break, Ruth had shared some of her story. A microphone (used by the teachers) and headset (worn by the student) from the Teacher Consultant for the Deaf, finally allowed at least this one impediment to be removed from Ruth's learning. In the atmosphere of the women's program, which is usually highly supportive, the embarrassment of wearing the equipment, which was a fear for Ruth, was also quickly overcome. Dealing with disabilities that affect learning, and having a range of support options for students, from reader/writers, note-takers, physical adjustments and equipment, time adjustments for examinations and tutorial support, as well as understanding of the disability, all have enormous positive impacts on students' education.

Awareness of other community services and referral to these is equally important. It is essential for the coordinator to have time available to keep in touch with the students through informal 'chats', as well as by responding to formal requests for assistance and following up on absences. Ironically, as part of the economic rationalist approach to education, the government has officially removed course coordination from the NSW TAFE Teacher's Award, despite the fact that this support is critical to maintaining student welfare and attendance. For just as the women may choose not to foreground all the traumatic and violent experiences of their lives during research, such events may not always emerge in a collectively open way as occurred in this

particular class. Students may only speak in private conversations about their private experiences. This sometimes occurs in one-to-one work in the classroom, or during contact outside the classroom, sometimes in planned appointments, but often at unpredictable times when students arrive distressed, or become upset by particular incidents which can be either course-related or related to events occurring in their wider social experience. For example, Ren does not directly consult with the woman as coordinator initially about problems she is experiencing, but uses the resource of the counselling service of which she has been made aware. Ren later consults with her privately about the issues, asking her to liaise with a class teacher so she can complete one subject flexibly in order to also attend therapy in the meantime. The importance of a range of social supports, both formal and informal, for women who have experienced violence and trauma, cannot be underestimated.

Multiple traumas in the past and sometimes a combination of current life events and adult responsibilities can also result in women choosing to stop their studies, or being unable to complete the course. The women who completed the course discuss this issue when they share stories, with Kath wisely observing of those who dropped out, “I just don’t think they were ready, it wasn’t the time for them” and “Later on they’ll come to it”. Ren agrees with her “I think they will, I reckon they’ll come back later I think, because it *does*, it brings up a lot of *personal* stuff, and I just don’t think they could handle the emotional, *and* the academic side...”. Course coordinator and teachers play a significant part in ‘keeping the doors open’ for the future, as Kath and Ren suggest. This keeping future possibility available for attending the women’s course, or perhaps some other form of adult education, is also an important redress for the violence and trauma endured by many women on the basis of gender, race, culture and class. As coordinator, the woman sometimes spends considerable time supporting students who do not manage to complete the course. For example, her journal entries for this particular group include many hours spent with a woman who eventually dropped out of the course:

iron imprint
on her
forehead
steel sheet
in her brain
can't eat
throat just
won't swallow
kids tug
desperate
can't take
strain

It is a matter of social justice for women who have been subject to violence and do not manage to complete the course that this does not equate with 'failure', especially given how many have and still are negotiating trauma. Jenny Horsman (2000, p. 322) provides a number of reasons as to why the expectation that trauma survivors move rapidly through time-limited training can be unrealistic. These include the exploration of control by starting, stopping and restarting a course, as well as emotional or physical injury and continuing problems, which are frequently the aftermath of trauma, including in the long-term. It is important, as she points out, that adult educators do not fall too easily into judgemental attitudes, no matter how frustrated they may feel at times. For example, Jack Mezirow (1991, p. 172) in describing transformative learning, pathologizes learners' failure to meet his expectations of transformation, as "self-deception and neurosis". He uses 'Roberta' as an example, who after a special re-entry program for women explored and quit options including volunteering and college, and did not take up a job after her husband's business failed, saying that she had learned in her course not to do what others expected of her, but what she wanted (Mezirow, Jack 1991, p. 172). Yet 'Roberta's' choices could well be seen alternatively as early explorations of control in her life. Furthermore, educators need to recognise that adult women live with the pressure of a range of issues, including trauma and violence, multiple relationships and responsibilities, which may at times intervene and at times take priority over work or study.

Again there are ways that the woman can help avoid course withdrawals being an entirely negative result. In discussions with women who are leaving a balance needs to be found between encouraging and giving support for them to continue and recognising sometimes that circumstances are insurmountable at this point for a particular woman, showing understanding for her situation, including the possibility of return at a later time. Another strategy is making a point of greeting women who have left the course just as warmly as those who have completed it, when she encounters them by chance, which is fairly often, even in a relatively large rural community. Sometimes if women have to leave the district part way through the course for personal reasons, a transfer to another campus can be arranged. On other occasions a woman may have completed a sufficient amount of the course to gain a Certificate in Work Opportunities for Women, which can be achieved by changing the student's enrolment. All of these strategies allow doors to remain open for women if they wish to return to adult education at some later time. Even if this never transpires, then at the very least the partial experience of the course can be associated with respect and positive feelings. And of course, a significant number of women *do* manage to return and complete the women's course, or some other form of training. Kate, for example, mentions in the group discussion that she had attended a course information session previously but did not enrol at that time. Many other students have returned to the course after withdrawing some years earlier, completed and continued on to success in their chosen paths.

Gendered experiences of violence and trauma thus need to be recognised by adult educators working with women during all stages of a course. As Jenny Horsman (2000, p. 27), points out, violence is falsely conceptualised as 'abnormal' in complete contradiction to its statistical occurrence. The woman takes as her practice instead, that violence and trauma are an abhorrent aspect of the presently 'normal' range of women's oppression. As Jenny Horsman says, it is crucial to recognise violence against women as a widespread social iniquity, which causes terrible trauma despite the strength of its survivors (Horsman, 2000, p. 23). Reflecting on her own experience of

postgraduate study, her ability to be honest about some aspects of her traumatic experiences with her supervisor, particularly at times when they block or completely stop her progress, and her supervisor sharing aspects of her own painful history of gender oppression, has allowed her a comfort not available when she struggled through her first degree, and has undoubtedly helped to facilitate her learning. As Lisa says:

women teachers and women
you've shared same things
same issues to deal with

Like to know
they know what's inside you
they've been there too

Allowing space to break silences and connect with women's experiences of trauma and violence is an essential part of career education for women in a climate where oppression remains a common denominator.

Taking trauma and violence to task in adult education

Rather than being a silenced, hidden undercurrent, which can only ever surface in haphazard ways in and out of classrooms, thus serving to further isolate those already isolated and victimized, the social patterns of trauma and violence against women can be directly addressed in special access programs as part of coursework. The woman has attempted this in various ways at particular times and locations, depending on the available options. She has invited guest speakers from the local services for sexual assault or domestic violence; she has included a short but highly successful component on self-defense for women, and staff have included information and visits to the local Women's Health Centre. However, such efforts have become increasingly difficult and sometimes impossible in the increasingly restrained atmosphere of funding cuts, which affects both the time available to organise visits, the ability to pay for guest speakers, and the ability of guest speakers from increasingly understaffed community services to attend courses during

their working hours. Managers are also often reluctant to sign for excursions, especially if there are any costs involved, and where they are not strictly codified as part of the curriculum. The restructuring of the women's programs into narrow competency-based modules in line with government policy makes it almost impossible to include self-defense as part of the women's learning.

However, all of these methods could easily be included formally in the course curriculum, following exemplars of such courses in higher education. *Women and Cultural Studies* could be expanded to a three-hour core module, which included addressing issues of violence and resistance. A physical self-defense component could be incorporated into the course, building on the existing introduction to assertiveness in the subject Access to Careers. Guest speakers and visits from community services can be specified as an integral part of learning in curriculum documents. There are plenty of models of successful courses in this field in higher education, on which to draw and modify for regional contexts. Barbara Schulman (1999) provides an overview of a course on 'Violence, Culture and Resistance in U.S. Women's Lives' that she has designed and taught successfully. She provides a list of sources including cross-cultural references which "do not sensationalize the practices of foreign 'others'" Schulman (1999, p. 169).

Jocelyn Hollander (2005) also outlines a college self-defense course in the United States, which she structures to teach about violence against women, placing an important emphasis on women's widespread resistance to violence. She introduces evidence of individual resistance shown by research on the high number of successfully resisted sexual assaults and the range of strategies women use to avoid and escape domestic violence (Hollander, Jocelyn, 2005, p. 779). In addition the course examines collective resistance, which has changed the context of violence against women in law, in community attitudes and in the provision of prevention and support services (Hollander, Jocelyn, 2005, p. 779). The classes begin by undermining the myth that women are passive in the face of violence:

Indeed, every incident of violence involves women's resistance, because inherent in the concept of violence is the idea that it is unwanted ... This sense of 'no', even if it is not verbalised, is the kernel of resistance. Resistance is most obvious when it is physical, such as yelling, kicking or running away. But it can also be cognitive (as when women think about alternatives and strategize about how to stay safe) or emotional (as when women protect some core part of themselves even if they choose to submit to an attack to prevent themselves from further injury)... As a result, it is a mistake to characterize women who are victims or survivors of violence as weak or passive. They actively resist violence, using whatever resources and strategies are at their disposal to avoid it ... and escape from it when they can. These actions indicate not passivity, but strength and courage (Hollander, Jocelyn, 2005, p. 781).

This particular course includes guest speakers from services who emphasize prevention and resistance along with information about violence, and self-defense, which takes the discussions into the wider world of activism and introduces possibilities for action (Hollander, Jocelyn, 2005, pp.782-784).

Given the frequency of gendered violence and its consequences, options for self-defense training for women and girls could be considered a requisite part of education at all levels. As Carrie Rentschler (1999, p. 152) says, feminist self-defense is "physical education for everyday life". Her courses use the 'the ethic of least harm', that is: defenders should do only what is necessary to get away from an attacker and out of an attack situation. She teaches women and girls about awareness of surroundings, carrying the self actively and confidently, the ability to choose response strategies to threats and violence, including using the voice to demand and make a scene, changing fear to power, physically fighting back when necessary, using surprise and strikes to vulnerable parts, getting help to recover from violence, and sharing information with other women (Rentschler, Carrie, 1999, pp 153-4). She also discusses the importance for women of unlearning the passive responses to violence against them that are repeatedly depicted in the media (Rentschler, Carrie, 1999, pp 153-4).

Education which includes assertiveness and self-defense for women and girls could play an important part in breaking cycles of violence against women both in the private spheres of home and families and in public workplaces, educational institutions, on the streets and at other social venues. Research suggests that women who have participated in self-defense training are more likely to say that their resistance was successful in fighting off attack (Brecklin, Leanne & Ullman, Sarah, 2005, pp. 738 – 762). However studies also indicate feminist principles need to inform such training, stressing that women are never to blame for the violence against them, or for violence which they are not able to avoid or resist successfully (Brecklin, Leanne & Ullman, Sarah, 2005, pp. 738 – 762).

In taking violence and trauma to task in adult education, it is important that we create a safe environment for all. We need to recognise that not every woman will have been directly affected by these issues, and that while it is essential to make the issues visible it is equally important that there is room for new learning, growth, and topics which allow women space away from trauma to develop and learn. This is probably best achieved by addressing the issues rather than ignoring them, as part of wider learning opportunities, alongside learning about women's survival and resistance including self defense, to create possibilities for individual and collective change over generations. Social relationships of safety are crucial to such change.

The changes she has suggested for the CEW course, and to education for women and girls more generally, require recognition of the social patterns of violence and trauma, from policy makers and planners through to those who educate the educators, to the educators themselves. These are difficult times in which to contemplate such changes. As Jenny Horsman notes in 2000 (p. 321), everywhere she has travelled talking about her research she is "reminded that the current directions in education are the opposite of those she is proposing". Funding cuts to education and training are limiting options for women to participate, making them more expensive and less accessible; women on welfare are being stigmatised and pressured to return to work no matter what the conditions of the employment or the circumstances of their

families. Counselling services and disabilities services are being diminished, supports and resources are being reduced both in education and in the wider community (Horsman, 2000, p. 321). Educators are under increasing pressure to work more, achieve more with less money and in less time, and often have diminished energy to respond to students, question and test out new practices or collaborate and pressure for change (Horsman, Jenny, 2000, p. 321). One could argue that educators themselves are suffering abusive conditions in the workplace causing great trauma (see for example, Clark Judith, 2003). However, as is the way of violence and coercion, resistance and subversion are also always possible, and the woman would argue from experience, mandatory for health and survival.

Resistance can simply start with speaking out about the trauma and violence in learners' lives, and the impact of this on our lives as educators. Such speaking out can begin and occur either informally or formally, and at any level that we are able to have a voice, whether in breaks or at staff meetings, professional developments, course planning, curriculum planning, at senior staff and training division gatherings, or through our unions. As the woman writes she becomes once again impassioned about her work, both as an adult educator and an adult education student, realising that her research, writing and publishing can also play a part in breaking the silence surrounding gender oppression. Voicing the lived stories of trauma and violence we encounter in our work and our lives, and speaking out in support of education which "honours the whole person", as Jenny Horsman (2000, p. 321) says, are political acts of breaking silence.

Getting Over: re-writing violence and trauma

The woman began her journey a number of years ago, with references to a personal history of violence and constant vulnerability to repressed memories, officially described in the medical discourse as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, with traumatic dissociation and flashbacks (Rothschild, Babette, 2000, p. 65), which barely submerged her living truths. Now as she nears the end of her research journey, and tries to write the final chapter of her thesis,

violent memories of abuse re-commence and knock her down and out like a virus. Trauma has certainly interspersed her journey all the way, but like the women in her study, and like the Negro spiritual, many of the words she would have used to describe the worst sufferings remain unspoken, subliminal. Now, the most fearful battle of all overtakes her: in, though and for her mindbodyheartspiritsoul. She is swamped with feelings, aching memories in her body, flashbacks in her mind, waking nightmares in her dreams, as if to stop her progress, spiralling fear and grief in her heart, as if to ensure failure and finish her off altogether; or to finally finish her healing, ensuring success. For an entire month the outcome of the battle is unsure; it could be either.

The woman cannot believe she is in this place. Just as many of the women's shared stories indicate they have endured prolonged personal struggles to work through trauma, often with professional support, so too has the woman striven toward surviving and overcoming the oppression of her past. She has worked painfully, doggedly, responsibly through eighteen years of repressed memories of abuse perpetrated from her earliest childhood to young adulthood, calling on the aid of counsellors, while managing the demands of her life as a mother, worker, student, partner, friend, and community member. Yet once again the woman is faced with horrific trauma: the torment of torture, despair and grief seemingly insurmountable.

And as she begins to type out these truths, to break her silence, her shoulders clench and ache, her fearful bladder seeks relief, her eyes well with tears, her stomach revolts, every nerve ending twitches, so painful and long have been her punishments to never speak of this, to hide the shame of her abusers, to cower from their revenge. She seeks guidance and support, closing her eyes and fingering the pages of the Bible, perhaps no longer an acceptable academic text in many quarters, but exactly what gives her the strength to "get over":

... You must demolish them and break their sacred stones to pieces.
(Exodus 23:24)

The woman has been wracked for days on end, desperate for aid, on the phone to her counsellor, journaling page upon page of self-help:

They rape me with a crucifix. It's excruciating and they say things in Jesus' name like they are praying and it sends me nuts, spiralling rage and I can't control it. I must control it or they will control me. I want to kill them I am in agony. They are going to kill me – they will kill me and I think, "I don't care if they kill me". But something in your body doesn't want to die. When it is right there, cold glint of psychopath eye in front of your face, sharp point of the sword at your throat, you get terrified. You think, "I don't care – do it you bastards", but then something happens and you do care. Terror.

The form of abusive terror the woman survived and continues to live through does not appear on United Nations lists and the voicing of it has barely started to break through in public discourse. The organised satanic ritual abuse she suffered is still very much in the throes of being 'disappeared', 'mythologised' and 'medicalised' (Tal, Kali, 1996, p. 6). One tiny part of this silencing is the bitterly ironic twist that Hollywood films such as *The Exorcist* completely reverse the truth of the abuse she suffered, representing it as self-inflicted. Like so many who live and re-live the violence of oppression the woman has borne someone else's shame and been forced into silence.

And though she could bite off her tongue rather than hit the letters on the keyboard, her fingers tap to name the plague of ritual abuse or organised sadistic abuse, which has afflicted her, and others in this world. Ritual abuse or organised sadistic abuse is described in the following way:

Ritual abuse usually involves repeated abuse over an extended period of time. The physical abuse is severe, sometimes including torture and killing. The sexual abuse is usually painful, sadistic and humiliating, intended as a means of gaining dominance over the victim. The psychological abuse is devastating and involves the use of ritual indoctrination. It includes mind control techniques which convey to the victim a profound terror of the cult members and of evil spirits they believe cult members can command. Both during and after the abuse most victims are in a state of terror, mind control and dissociation (Advocates for Survivors of Child Abuse, 2002, p. 3).

The woman had no desire for a surprise ending, dear reader, and she is truly sorry if she has disturbed you. Just as we are shocked and alarmed by the recent emergence of sadistic brutality at Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq, with horrific acts being perpetrated by seemingly everyday military personnel who look like they could be our neighbours or our neighbour's grown up children, we do not wish to believe or think that the terrors of organised sadistic abuse could be perpetrated on children by adults so close to home. But again, just as violence too often erupts in our lives, the trauma that is its aftermath will continue to burst into public discourse. As Kali Tal (1996, p. 247) points out, the stories of trauma survivors are always intensely political as well as personal, whether telling of the Holocaust, Vietnam or Rape. In the end, if we fail to listen to and speak out about the shocking pain of violence and trauma in people's lives, we tacitly condone oppression and allow it to continue.

So the woman writes on through the almost-failure of every nerve ending, taking one step toward stopping the plague of organised satanic child abuse. She finds new parallels between the stories of the women in her study and her own story, for like Lisa, who re-establishes her relationship with Jesus, the woman too needs knowledge and power beyond secular education, to be completely strong and free: "Just have to love him, and he loves me". So the woman breaks another silence, speaks her truth, and tells her story, which is individual but also part of many women's truths. The acts of abuse against her were orchestrated evil which people may well wish to deny; yet it is mere foolishness to ignore that acts of orchestrated evil and violence against women, children and men abound in this and so many other forms, alongside spontaneous and random acts of violence. The words of the Negro spiritual remind us of one such form of oppression, and how heartfelt are our human voices when we lift them in relief, joy and praise at overcoming:

I want to sing hallelujah. I want to shout the trouble is over.
My soul looks back in wonder at how I got over.

Chapter 9 Equilibrium Another Angle

... but the two are never identical ...
(Todorov, Tzvetan, 1977, p. 111).

Tracing Threads

Did I Miss Anything?

Everything. Contained in this classroom
is a microcosm of human experience
assembled for you to query and examine and ponder
This is not the only place such an opportunity has been
gathered
but it was one place
(Wayman, Tom, 2003).

The woman has dwelled inside the tapestry of tales, sensing underlying textures and sighting patterns of oppression, speaking of the violence and trauma that too often underpin women's lives. She began her journey seeking deeper knowledge about the processes of learning the women experienced in the Career Education for Women course, to which this painful canvas is both background and central, but there are also other important issues to consider in response to her questions: What did the women learn and how did they value their learning? How did the women learn and what did the women-only environment mean to them? Once again she analyses the women's stories in good faith, knowing she can only estimate what each values most. She is well aware that she cannot entirely judge what has been said to please her or what has been left out. The tapestry of tales is not without knots and wrinkles. The woman knew from the outset that she could never tell the story once and for all, so she tries to find a way to trace the most significant threads through this social tapestry.

Tracing social threads: searching method

The woman has caught glimpses of social themes in the stories of women's learning, both individual and shared, and inextricably interwoven with her own story as woman, learner teacher, researcher. Now she must contemplate again to trace these threads more thoroughly, seeking more specific answers to her questions. She has been immersed in the individual emphases and shared meanings the women have communicated, as well as her own journey, and now there is a larger fabric, with common threads and colours, but also infinitely subtle variations in shade and texture making up the whole. She must find a way to trace the threads in the tapestry, although she knows that the parts of the picture will never equal more than the whole, and that you, dear reader, will enliven the tapestry with your own perceptions.

There are many tools available for analysis: systems of notation, cards, computer databases, all of which she can use to record, sift and sort her research 'data' into 'categories'. Yet the woman prefers to think of these learning stories as a weaving, something organic and human, simultaneously flawed yet perfect, created and creative. For her raw materials are not the physical and metaphysical objects of science, but the stuff of human life. She does not want to cut, dissect and disassemble; instead to trace the threads and textures. What method can she use?

She tries making a written 'map' or 'table' of the stories on her computer, to record the titles and various meanings in each of the smaller stories, which in turn form the larger individual stories of learning. She loosely categorises the various meanings within each mini-story, using different colours to help her see threads. As she works, it becomes obvious that each of the stories can be seen as having many categories, or multiple codes and therefore colours. These multiple colours overlap, weaving in and out of other meanings and codes. She thinks she would prefer cardboard and coloured marker pens, something that retains the quirkiness of individual human touch rather than impersonal, uniform typeface. However, she perseveres on the computer, for

the ease of changing words and colours. She tries as best she can to trace the hues, tones and textures of the social threads she sees in the tapestry without oversimplifying their complexity, so she can share her insights. In this way she works to present one interpretation of a multi-faceted tapestry.

What the women learnt: re-visioning the self

While the emphasis in each of the women's stories about what they learnt in the course varies, depending on the expectations and experiences they bring to the course, each woman strongly re-evaluates herself through her learning. Gai most values what she learnt about applying for jobs, academic work and computers, which she notes "was whole purpose" of her attendance, in line with her strong focus on career change. However, she also discusses gaining a new confidence to "ask anyway, if they say no, they say no – so what". Jo, Kate, Lisa and Ren give priority to their growth in self-esteem, although there are differences in what they stress as significant to them, and of course the academic knowledge and skills they have gained also feature strongly in their stories. Kate, for example, highly values finding a goal and how to achieve it through study rather than specific job seeking skills. Kath, on the other hand, first stresses the importance of being in a women only course. Kathy, who has had major disruptions to her education, gives greater weight to self-change through the academic content of the course, detailing at length the skills she has gained in maths, spelling, research, computers, First Aid and study skills.

Despite these individual differences of emphasis, the overwhelming theme that emerges from the women's stories is that the course has given them time, space and a supportive place for personal re-vision. The women's shared and individual stories tell of enormous gains in the women's self-esteem, confidence and their ability to meet their life needs. The majority of the group value highly the personal growth they have experienced. Ren states that she "got more out of that side of it, actually, than the academic side" and Lisa agrees "That's how I feel too" explaining "when I started the course I really wasn't sure about my personal life, but this made me *stronger*, I could

stand up and say, well this is how *I* want to live and this is what I'm going to do". Kath nods agreement, saying this is pretty much what she feels too. Later, Kathy also outlines a new-found confidence: "Yeah, like, before I wasn't game enough to say to Rob, now I'm gonna do this and I'm gonna do that, now I just *tell* him". When asked to contribute her experience, Kate places equal value on her personal and academic learning: "A bit of both. One thing that was really obvious, was getting permission to use the broken record technique" and mentions her self-esteem in relation to both aspects: "I've got confidence to think that I can go to Uni now, whereas before, although I wanted to, I didn't think I could ...".

The shared emphasis in the women's stories on a more positive vision of self is a theme supported by Karen Ritchie's study (1998) with three groups from TAFE women's access programs at Parkes NSW. The majority of participants in the courses enrolled with an expectation of increasing their confidence (Ritchie, Karen, 1998, p. 84), and valued this expectation being met, specifying higher self-esteem as a major positive outcome of the course (Ritchie, Karen, pp. 87, 92, 97). The words of the women in a tapestry of tales exemplify the empowering nature of such learning: Jo says "most positive thing was to be positive about myself"; Kate states that she knows now she is "not as stupid"; Ren also declares she is "not as dumb as I thought". All of the women place weight on the assertiveness skills they have learnt and put into practice, as illustrated by Lisa's declaration "now I'm the queen of my castle".

Frameworks for understanding women's re-visions

The personal growth embodied in the women's stories, their revised sense of themselves and their ability to achieve in the world, can certainly be viewed through psychological theories of adult education, such as that proposed by Jack Mezirow (1991) based on research with women. Mezirow (1991, pp. 160–161) outlines how what he terms 'perspective transformations' through learning result in an empowered sense of self, as well as practical strategies and resources for taking action through a more critical understanding of the

effects of social and cultural relationships on beliefs. The ways in which the women re-vision themselves could thus be seen as perspective transformations. Jack Mezirow outlines the process of transformative learning as: an enhanced awareness of one's beliefs and feelings, a critique of previously held assumptions, an assessment of alternative perspectives, a decision to negate old perspectives for new ones or synthesise old perspectives and new, and a desire to take action based on these changed perspectives (Mezirow, Jack, 1991, pp. 160-161). There are clear correlations between this process of transformation and many of the women's stories. For example, Kath begins to question her life; hating the timeline she has drawn up, wanting to change it in the future. She looks at a list of rights they have talked about in class, and knows that no-one has said before that she can and should have these things, but that this is what she believes, and will commit to. In class she discusses stereotyping with the other women, and decides with passion that she would like to be a non-stereotype in the future.

It is unsurprising that many of the women's stories 'fit' Jack Mezirow's theory of perspective transformation, since his work emerged from studying the experiences of women in special programs for re-entry to higher education in the United States during the 1970s (Mezirow, Jack, 1991, p. xvii, p. 168). The social context from which his findings emerge is thus, like the context of the Career Education for Women course, a feminist one. To end with an explanation that the women's stories 'fit' the theory of perspective transformation would therefore be almost circular, omitting any understanding of the social conditions from which this transformative learning arises.

In discussing the limitations of Jack Mezirow's theory, the woman's supervisor Margaret Somerville (2005) points out that he begins with women's experience of returning to higher education, often after trauma, and ends up with a generalised theory of transformation that makes these women's experiences invisible. The conditions of the lives of the women as gendered, classed, raced, abled, aged, cultured and so forth, and how these conditions underpin their transformations are obscured. There is also a serious lack of

understanding of the social conditions of women's lives. Jack Mezirow (1991, p.168) describes the women in his national study as "returning to college after a hiatus", rendering the contexts of their lives a vacant 'gap' or 'break' in a chain. Yet the women in her particular study have all been parenting between one and three children who are still of school age or younger when they enter the course; conditions that hardly qualify as a 'hiatus'. Compare Mezirow's notion of a 'gap' in life with descriptions from Veronica McAfee's award winning article about her experience of the CEEW course at a Sydney TAFE campus:

Some of us are already in the workforce or might have arrived from another country and need a little help understanding how to go about preparing to enter the workforce and how to build confidence...
Despite the fact that I have always worked from home – I am a caterer – I have for years felt quite removed from the workforce and I decided I might like to work with other people again, rather than in isolation ...
We were all different and we all had different expectations of the course (McAfee, Veronica, 2004, p. 8).

Jack Mezirow's theorisation of the women's experiences thus 'disappears' the most basic material conditions of the women's lives and work, let alone their more silenced experiences of oppression, trauma and violence.

Similarly, the social context of the programs which lead to the re-visioning of women's lives become invisible in the theory of transformation. In the original publication of his research, Mezirow explains detailed approaches taken by the researched women's programs to building confidence, exploring goals and supporting the women through re-structured entry requirements, child-care, women-only classes in school hours, with women-focussed content, childcare provision, and specially selected staff (Mezirow, Jack & Marsick, Victoria, 1975, pp.18-41). Yet when he theorises his findings in subsequent publications, the crucial role of feminist-structured programs in producing transformations through learning are omitted. The term 'transformative learning' itself implies an almost passive learner who is acted upon, whereas the changes that take place in the women's courses are sought after by the women themselves, actively planned by women for women, and actively

participated in by women as students in order to achieve their re-vision of self and society. As Mary Belenky and Ann Stanton (2000, pp. 72 -73) note:

Although Mezirow's important theory provides an elegant, detailed description of one important endpoint of a long developmental process, it does not trace the many steps people take before they can "know what they know" in the highly elaborated form he describes... Focusing narrowly on the endpoint of development as Mezirow does may be problematic for a theory that commands so much attention from adult educators.

Like the ghostly spectre of feminist achievement in adult education literature, the women who re-visioned themselves in education based on feminist re-visioning of the world, have almost been 'disappeared' from view, in a process of erasure that is all too familiar, as discussed in Chapters 2 and 4.

Mary Belenky and her co-researchers (1986) provide an alternative psychological framework based on research with women in the United States, from which to view the remarkable personal growth expressed in the stories shared by the women in her own study. Mary Belenky and co-authors (1986, p. 15) outline the development of self, voice and mind, where women's ways of knowing often shift from positions of 'silence' or 'receiving knowledge', which is reproduced from external authorities, to actively 'constructing knowledge' which is contextual and self-created through both subjective and objective strategies. Such development can be seen in many of the women's learning stories. For example, Kath tells of being obedient in school and looking to authority figures, being married young and becoming dependent, in contrast with her final speaking up for herself in court to the point of having a powerful lawyer tongue tied, and her reflection that she had "started to see in assertiveness things weren't always my fault". Her new knowledge is founded in a re- visioning of self: "because I see myself in a different light". Similarly, we can see the tentative development of voice in Jo's stories, as she describes how she would never ask for help at school, but sit back and struggle with problems on her own. In the course she gains the confidence to ask, both the teachers and other students, and if she doesn't like something, she speaks up.

Jo gradually re-visions herself as someone who *can* achieve, if she sets her mind to it.

The study by Mary Belenky et al (1986) is grounded throughout in the lived experiences of the women who participate in the research, as they explain the broad categories of women as 'knowers' (Belenky, Mary et al, 1986, pp.23-152). They also include a detailed, insightful chapter on the effects of family life and the politics of talk on their categories of women as knowers (Belenky, Mary et al, 1986, pp.155-189), including an illustration of differences made by social class on the life chances of women enduring similar dysfunctional family behaviours (Belenky, Mary et al, 1986, pp.160-162). They discuss what is helpful and what hinders self-esteeming knowing by women and provide useful concepts for 'connected teaching' (Belenky, Mary et al, 1986, pp.190 – 229), which they believe facilitates this process:

educators can help women develop their own authentic voices if they emphasize connection over separation, understanding and acceptance over assessment, and collaboration over debate; if they accord respect to and allow time for the knowledge that emerges from firsthand experience; if instead of imposing their own expectations and arbitrary requirements, they encourage students to evolve their own patterns of work based on the problems they are pursuing. These are the lessons we have learned in listening to women's voices (Belenky, Mary et al, 1986, p. 229).

Indeed, feminist principles such as these are adopted in the practice of women's courses like CEW; however, there are limitations to this individual, psychological lens on women's development of confidence. While the authors do discuss "the multitude of obstacles women must overcome in developing the power of their minds" (Preface p. 3), we are left without an analysis that draws together the social frameworks of these obstacles. For example, the psychological emphasis provides some useful descriptions of what kinds of family behaviours are healthy and unhealthy for women's self-development, without any thorough critique of the shocking levels of emotional abuse and violence within families and in wider society, that influence self-development

for so many women in the study so negatively. We are also left with only a very general sense of how to address social oppressions in the content of education as well as through the method of teaching:

In considering how to design an education appropriate for women, suppose we were to begin by simply asking: What does a woman know? Traditional courses do not begin there. They begin not with the student's knowledge but with the teacher's knowledge. The courses are about the culture's questions, questions fished out of the "mainstream" of the disciplines. If the student is female, her questions may differ from the culture's questions, since women, paddling in the bywaters of the culture, have had little to do with posing the questions or designing the agendas of the disciplines (Belenky, Mary et al, 1986, p. 198).

This is a radical idea indeed, and is one of the starting points for women's programs such as CEW, although the feminist underpinnings of the course go further. Learning in the course certainly starts from the position 'what does a woman know?' as Mary Belenky et al (1986) suggest, but learning is also prompted by questions such as that asked by Adrienne Rich in 1979 (p. 240) 'what might a woman need to know?' Feminist teaching and learning programs have emerged and evolved as practice in hand with theory for well over thirty years, developing contextual replies to such questions.

Jane Thompson (1995) describes the growth of such courses through feminist activism in Britain, which has strong parallels to the Australian context:

Feminist commitment helped to establish what became quite widespread alternatives. For example New Opportunities for Women, Second Chance, Fresh Start, Women's Studies Programmes, Training in Non-Traditional Skills and Women's Science and New Technology initiatives... Both curriculum development and teaching-learning methods underwent a sustained process of transformation ... Our own experience in consciousness-raising and study groups, tied to our distrust of patriarchal knowledge, institutionalised authority and leadership, led to the conviction that democratic and collaborative learning relationships were more likely to enhance the self-esteem and confidence of women than traditional, didactic and tutor-dominated methodologies... Some have chosen, in this respect, to pay tribute to the inspiration of Illich (1973) and Freire (1972) ... But in terms of

women's studies and women's education, we were already building up our own ideas and ways of working, based on the importance attributed to personal knowledge by the women's liberation movement, the commitment to collectivism, the deconstruction of traditional forms of authority and wisdom and the linking of our developing theories to transforming practice and social change (Thompson, Jane, 1995, pp.126-7).

The links between the Career Education for Women (CEW) course, and the feminist inspired courses that Thompson discusses, are made clear by Wendy Richard's research (1988) on the TAFE New Opportunities for Women (NOW) program, the predecessor of CEW. She explains how the NOW course was based on feminist analysis of a gender-segregated workforce, where women workers were often classed as unskilled or semi-skilled, suffered high unemployment and the effects of changing technologies on many traditionally feminine areas of work, as well as educational discrimination which prevented them from entering technical employment (Keski, Pia, 1982, p.1).

What and how the women learnt: social re-visioning

As a course influenced by feminism, which has traditionally hired teaching staff with a demonstrated commitment to social justice for women, the content in many CEW modules is not only structured to draw on women's knowledge, but to extend this knowledge; to start with what women know, and build on this with what they might need and want to know. Teachers on the course do listen and build upon what women already know, as Mary Belenky et al (1986) suggest, but they also need an understanding of social forces, forms of oppression and resistance, if they are to help women make connections between their individual experiences and the experiences of others, as well as the social systems of disadvantage and privilege which shape them. Lee Anne Bell (1997, p. 4) explains how social justice educators need theories of oppression to "emphasize the pervasive nature of social inequality woven throughout social institutions as well as embedded within individual consciousness".

A feminist understanding of various forms of oppression and the ability to make links between them is crucial to facilitating discussions about both the individual and shared aspects of self which link to gender, class, race, sexuality, ability, age and so on. We might need to consider “What does an Aboriginal woman know?” for example, and how does this differ from what a descendent of European immigrants might know? We might need to consider what an Aboriginal woman from Orient Point knows and how this is similar and different from the knowledge of an Aboriginal woman from Alice Springs. We might need to know what a woman who has immigrated or sought refuge from another country might know. Equally, we might need to discuss what a woman who has had a work injury and is fighting for compensation knows and needs to know. An adult educator working with women arguably needs feminist social theories as well as psychological ones, to build on women’s diverse and shared knowledge bases, if she is to facilitate both individual and group empowerment.

The joy of social learning and teaching based on feminism is that theory is a living entity – continually emerging and developing, being tested and refined by women individually and collectively. Teaching practice in feminist classrooms therefore honours women’s voices and experiences, as they interact with, add to and adjust theory, actively creating knowledge, just as in her thesis, the woman has added her voice to the discourse of adult education. So, for example, when directly addressing issues of self-esteem in *Access to Careers*, the woman uses the feminist ‘personal is political’ approach to the concept, allowing both individual perspectives as well as discussion of broader social themes. This approach contrasts with criticisms of self-esteem in school education for girls, for example, by Peter Renshaw (1990, p. 23), as overly focussed on the individual person, “without the need to confront larger questions of social conventions, social structures and the distribution of status and power”. In the course she starts with what the women understand by the term and they talk about ways their basic sense of self was formed when

young, as well as the numerous factors that influence self-esteem throughout our lives. The women consider whether we can have different self-esteem in relation to particular social situations. The answers to these questions about forming, building and maintaining a positive sense of ourselves and our ability to act in the world inevitably raise social questions about the major cultural institutions which shape and impact upon us – family, education, employment, relationships, religion, media, corporations, government.

Both students and teacher share strategies for maintaining individual self-esteem in the face of negative social odds, as an act of social resistance. While this is in some ways individual work, it is also achieved collectively with the support of other women, and it is important. A positive sense of self can be a crucial starting point for women to take control over their own lives and thus make social change. Recognising the oppressive forces which have formed or influenced negative self-concept, reclaiming our sense of ourselves by reshaping a damaged self-esteem, and maintaining it in the face of oppressive social beliefs and practices, which devalue us because we are children, because of our gender, because we are working class women, because we are mothers, because we are Aboriginal, because we are immigrants or our parents were immigrants, because we have different abilities, because we are single parents, because we are married or unmarried and so on, is thus an act of resistance which is both individual, and shared by other women, in the course and further afield. In this way, some of the limitations of the concept of self-esteem are laid bare, but possibilities of self-empowerment and group empowerment for women remain an option. Given the levels of violence and trauma in women's lives, re-visioning our selves is often an essential step towards survival and re-empowerment.

Peter Renshaw rightly points out that self-esteem measures are gender-biased toward more stereotypically masculine characteristics of confidence, independence and pride (Renshaw, Peter, 1990, pp.21-22), but to some extent this is the very point of tackling issues of self-esteem with women, because it allows them knowledge and opportunity to wrest back what has frequently

been robbed from them at a young age, or pilfered from their lives as they matured. Self-esteem measurements can also be delivered in ways that are empowering. The woman uses a short, tick-box questionnaire (from Adler, Ron & Towne, Neil, 1975), introducing it as a fun activity, with the proviso that the women should treat it like a magazine quiz, a light-hearted genre with which most are familiar, not taking any question too seriously, just ticking the boxes with their most immediate 'gut reaction' responses. If there are questions with which the women are uneasy or that they cannot relate to, these are discussed openly, and when they do the sums to see where they 'fit' in the descriptive categories she encourages them to consider how this 'sits' with their own judgement of their self-confidence. They talk about it. The measurement for self-esteem is not delivered as an absolute authority. Rather than 'received knowledge' as Mary Belenky et al (1986) would term it, the women's re-visions of self and society are active individual and shared constructions.

Feminist approaches to learning allow for responsiveness to the social needs of particular learners. Some individual women and some classes find the quiz, discussions and exercises related to self-esteem and assertiveness more important and useful to them than others. Usually the amount of actual class time spent on the topic varies between courses. Different responses are also apparent in the research. Kath and Ren mention in the group discussion how seeing their low scores on the self-esteem quiz was an impetus to change for them. Kath states how "to me that was a big eye-opener, wow, I've got the *lowest* score, and I thought, I've got to do something about this" and Ren says "Yeah, I was the second lowest" suggesting it would be good to re-do it, to see how much they have changed. Conversely, there is some confusion in the group discussion because some of the women don't even remember the quiz, but instead valued a table they filled in estimating their assertiveness.

This other measure which some of the women find memorable is an assertiveness table which students complete in order to visualise how confident they are to express their needs openly in different relationships. For

Lisa, this measure was a massive impetus to change in her sense of power when relating to her partner and family. Through sharing information about concepts of self-esteem and assertiveness, the course allows women time and space to think and revise: their needs, goals and relationships. For many women such an opportunity is a rarity.

Discussing the social factors that impact on women is an essential part of the women's re-visioned selves. They often share examples of negative labels which are attached to females perceived as having high self-regard: 'she thinks herself', 'she's got tickets on herself', 'she's up herself', and so on, and how these act to keep women in their place, alongside epithets thrown at women who are self-motivated or stand up for themselves: 'you're aggressive', 'she's a bitch', and of course, far more belligerent examples. Groups also consider whether there is a broader lack of tolerance for high achievers in Australian culture. Awareness of these social factors can allow women to challenge them in their own thinking and that of others.

Alongside the language that often distances women from a positive sense of self, other social structures are often raised. Some are gender based. For example, the conflicting demands of what are deemed 'good' behaviours for women are discussed in relation to cultural roles as daughters, mothers, spouses, grandmothers, daughters-in-law and friends. Groups often talk about the contradictions between denial of self to meet the needs and expectations of others and the concepts of high self-regard and assertiveness. Self-esteem raises issues of what is valued in our society, what receives lip service and what is undervalued, deemed worthless or made invisible. In this respect the women discuss mothering and the countless tasks they perform, as well as women's paid work, so often involved with caring for people and given little value and slim, if any, reward. Often groups discuss what 'counts' in their own value systems and how they maintain a sense of value for their work, often in direct opposition to what is socially rewarded and given status. Other social pressures discussed may be more specific to particular groups of women and their experience, for example racist language, beliefs and practices; the

process of migrating from one place and culture to a different one; the difficulties of learning and living in a new language; the lack of understanding and support for women who suffer disability, illness or injury; homophobic language, beliefs and practices.

Differences and similarities between cultural beliefs and practices are also raised, depending on the make-up of the group. Such discussions are often eye-opening for some of the women, who may have assumed, as Georgina Tsolidis (1990, p.57) points out, that ethnic minority cultures are more sexist than the Australian 'norm'. Through sharing experiences this myth is often exposed: for example, two Persian women share details of the Baha'i religion, for which they have fled Iran, explaining a faith which strongly promotes equality for women and all people. In another class a petite Filipina wife provokes peals of laughter as she describes her successfully assertive relationship with her older husband, and a widely-held stereotype is dissolved. Veronica McAfee (2004, pp. 8-9) describes how despite initial reservations, she developed cross-cultural understanding in the course:

Many of the women had not been in Australia for long, and came from countries including Thailand, Hong Kong and Malaysia. I have to confess I was a little anxious about how I might benefit from studying with women, some of whom were grappling with the disadvantage of English as a second language, when for me English was the last thing I had problems with. But the benefits of meeting people whom I would otherwise not meet turned out to be immense, and I learnt so much from them ... From feeling that some of the women may have been better off studying an ESL course, I became full of admiration for them and quite in awe of their determination to make sense of a variety of subjects in English to carve their way to a new business or to find a job in their new country. Their warmth and generosity made me a little ashamed that I had considered the less proficient in English might hold us back.

A number of objections are often raised about using the concept of self-esteem in relation to Aboriginal cultures, which are important to consider. Pat Dudgeon, Simone Lazaroo and Harry Pickett (1990, pp. 75-94), raise issues about the relevance of the concept for Aboriginal girls, given that Aboriginal people have a history of massive physical deprivation, decimation, dislocation and degradation since invasion, and that they may be receiving self-sustaining feedback from the Aboriginal community alongside denigrating feedback from white majority culture. However, it is possible in the classroom context to address Aboriginal social history as impacting on both individual and community self-concept, since in the course this links with learning about Aboriginal history in *Women and Cultural Studies*. A feminist approach to teaching and learning allows such conflicting cultural messages to be raised.

Personal histories in cross-cultural groups of women can provide a strong sense of sharing, both of experiences of trauma and violence and other cultural experiences and values. An Aboriginal woman explaining her family and community commitments and her values about meeting her own needs but also those of extended family relationships can often be a point of connection as well as difference with immigrant women from some cultures, who share a high degree of reciprocal responsibility and support in their relationships with a wide network of family. It can also be a connecting factor between women from a variety of cultures, who frequently prioritise the needs of their immediate family members, and particularly those of their children, alongside their own. When addressing the use of body language, raising variations in cultural meanings in non-verbal communication, such as traditional Aboriginal avoidance of eye contact as a sign of respect (Dudgeon, Pat, Lazaroo, Simone and Pickett, Harry (1990, p. 91), can broaden awareness of social difference across cultures.

Some Aboriginal women who attend CEW classes may be at least as interested in building positive self-regard as other women, due to the dreadful impacts of colonisation on personal, family and community history. Pat Dudgeon, Simone Lazaroo and Harry Pickett (1990, p. 76) themselves point

out that “Aboriginal people have roots and referents to some extent in both cultures” and that “culture is not static but in dynamic interaction with mainstream culture”. Perhaps for these reasons, the concept of self-esteem seems to have been as useful for the Aboriginal women in her classes as any of the women she has taught, which is, to varying degrees. So, for example, Kathy, who reconnects with her Aboriginality during the course, notes how she has more confidence thanks to her learning and other women’s support. Of course, remembering Kathy’s lively story of acquiring so much new knowledge, we can see that her re-visioning of self relies as heavily on her learning in a range of subjects as it does on directly addressing issues of self-esteem. This sense of social achievement in the course is an important aspect of the personal re-visions evident in so many of the women’s learning stories.

What and how the women learnt: social achievement

Through feminist teaching and learning in CEW women re-vision themselves through practical achievement, as well as through re-evaluating what they have already achieved in their lives. Studies consistently show that self-esteem rises because of achievement (Renshaw, Peter 1990, p. 28) a correlation that can also be seen in the women’s stories. In the course, self-esteem and assertiveness may be more or less focussed on as a specific topic, but building confidence through achievement is an approach that underscores the entire course curriculum. Pauline Lysaght (2002) provides evidence for this in her research using self-assessed intelligence profiles with CEW students. She records how the women assessed their intelligences differently over time as a result of the course participation:

When Denise constructed this profile initially she approached it tentatively. She had commented wryly in an earlier interview that, if she drew her profile, there would be very little to see. She assessed her leading strength as Spatial intelligence because of the skills developed during art classes ... The remaining intelligences were allocated little value and were viewed as areas of weakness....

In the fourth interview we looked at this profile again and Denise adjusted it slightly by using a pencil to shade in extra spaces in the Linguistic, Intrapersonal and Interpersonal domains ...she noted that she could see that there was room for improvement here and that this was becoming possible as she practised the skills involved in speaking and writing for assignments in her TAFE course ...

The final profile was constructed after Denise had taken part in work experience organised through CEW. She had taken the opportunity to work in a shop and had thoroughly enjoyed the interactions with both staff and customers. The differences in the contours of this profile compared with the earlier one are marked, reflecting an increase in self-confidence, as well as the capacity to identify and value particular abilities ... (Lysaght, Pauline, 2002, pp.9-11).

Like the participants from the women's course in Pauline Lysaght's research, the women's stories embody enormous personal growth through achievement in the course. While they differ in what they mention as most memorable to them in the course, we see them all dramatically re-evaluating particular aspects of their ability to learn, whether in maths, science, writing, reading and research skills, for example. Many of the women excitedly mention their success with putting assertive skills into practice. A revised sense of self is evident in Kathy's pride when she gains her First Aid Certificate, impressively sharing her knowledge with friends. Jo's glowing account of her work experience with the kids who absolutely loved her, and the stories of the profound influences the women gain from their excursions, all demonstrate this re-visioning of self and social possibility. The women learn both through their own achievements and those of other women in the course: students, teachers, women they research, women they meet on their excursions, past students. The impressive growth expressed in the women's learning stories demonstrates the importance of creating learning experiences and environments that respect both personal and social re-visioning.

All of the women's stories also show that they highly value their increased ability to access social power structures in diverse ways. As well as the many stories of increased confidence, the women frequently mention the importance of new knowledge in relation to careers. Gai learns how to use past skills

when applying for jobs and both she and Kathy value knowing how to create a resume. Jo, Kate, Gai and Lisa all mention the importance to them of exploring, discovering or deciding more definitely on their goals. Kate and Lisa talk about the importance of knowing specifically *how* to achieve their goals to get to higher education. Kath finds setting goals difficult because she has not had to take this approach in the past, and having young children at home limits her space for focussing on her self and study, but the process of putting her skills on paper in a resume and doing mock panel interviews builds her confidence. For Ren the subject combined with meeting a former Koori student on an excursion leads to a great sense of future options: that anything is possible for her.

The social politics of self-esteem are often justifiably criticised as being more concerned with gaining access to current power structures than changing them (Kenway, Jane, Willis, Sue and Nevard, Jenny 1990), yet the woman would not apologise for this approach in the course. Women want and need to learn these skills if they are to survive and hopefully thrive in the world as socially constructed. The alternative presumably would be for women with the least power to continue living in poverty, often economically dependent on the state or a partner, or working in the least palatable and most lowly paid occupations available to them, struggling to meet their economic needs, as well as frequently providing for their families, while presumably, demonstrating on the streets, waiting or working towards what – the revolution? This model of violent social change is rarely the priority of the women who come to the course or one that the woman would seek to impose on them.

In addition, the implied criticism that accessing rather than changing existing power structures is a limited approach ignores two important factors. First, it may be significantly easier to influence and implement social change as a woman from a position of relative personal and economic empowerment, rather than one struggling to survive, often with both the aftermath of trauma, and continual worry about bills, a roof over your head, food on the table, clothing and shoes on the bodies of you and those of your family. Second,

such criticisms ignore that women have already implemented huge social change by accessing both the paid workforce (Baxter, Janeen, 2000, p.105) and higher education (Carpenter, Peter & Hayden, Martin, 2000, pp. 366-367) in ever- growing numbers, finding ways to create new balances between private and public life, organic and industrial time and relationships. While recognising that gender disadvantage still exists and the need for further social change is crucial, we should also recognise the huge achievements in creating personal and social change fostered by feminism and women's own strong impetus toward positive change in relation to social power.

In this respect it is evident in the stories that a number of the women seize on various alternative feminist social messages offered in the course, as if relieved to be 'given permission' to transcend the conservative social constructions of gender which restrict their lives. Lisa comments how she tells everyone about this great course, which says she can 'let go' of the housework. Kate and Kath find great inspiration in a list of rights, which they say they will put up on their wall to affirm themselves, and which Kath clearly identifies as a contrast to the traditional social messages she has previously received. Kate states directly that she needed permission to say things more than once, and receives it in the course through learning the 'broken record' assertiveness technique. Ironically this 'technique' is actually a confident insistence on rights that even quite young children often employ, but which for many of the women has been eroded in various ways. One could consider, for example, the constant social use of 'the nagging woman' stereotype as just one of these erosions undermining women's confidence and ability to meet their own personal and social needs. Kate also identifies how she grew up not being able to say that she didn't know or understand, and could not say 'yes' or 'no' without guilt. This process of eroding women's rights and reversal through alternative learning activities is also present in Kath's story of finding out the positive ways the other women perceived her. Much of the erosion of women's self is also tied to the submerged or barely spoken stories of violence and trauma that permeate women's lives in a society that continues to oppress in terrible ways.

How the women learnt: social knowing

The woman's story of studying in social isolation and the benefits for her sense of self and learning when she manages to make social contact with her peers and supervisors, is a strong counterpoint to the CEW women's stories of learning, where the women generally praise the benefits of social learning. Social isolation is a major factor for many women employed in the sphere of home and family labelled 'private', and it is important to recognise that some of the changes in the women's confidence as a result of attending the course are due to breaking their social isolation through daily contact with other women, students and staff. Social learning is also mentioned as a major benefit when facing personal traumas, as keeping women coming to the course when they almost drop out. In an atmosphere based on feminist principles of mutual respect, the women help themselves and each other to re-vision.

In all the women's stories there is a strong sense learning as being both individual and socially shared. We can see this process in motion in the transcript as the women actively share stories in Chapter 5. So, for example, when Kathy speaks about her feelings "It helped my whole life, really, it helped ... it was just good being round the girls all the time ... cause that's what I needed " and the woman as researcher tries to encourage her to say more, Ren jumps in to assist with excerpts of Kathy's experience: "She was really nervous that first day". This allows Kathy more comfort to speak "Oh yeah, I feel heaps more confident". Ren urges her on with humour, agreeing "So do I", and Kath quips "Yeah watch out!", which gently allows the previously tongue-tied Kathy to add a few more words about her own experience.

Social relationships in the women only environment of the course both foster and facilitate learning. They can be both a practical and emotional aid to course participation: some women rely on shared transport or the supportive presence of a friend or relative in the course, as Ren mentions in her story. Social relationships sustain and influence learning both in formal and informal ways and settings, as we see with Kath's husband, who becomes the 'CEW

mechanic'. For most of the women, being with other women, working in groups, learning together and supporting each other is a huge benefit. Jo, for example, feels comfortable because "everybody would help each other", while when Ren explains a concept to another student in the group she thinks: "Unreal I really know that". The majority of the women found being in a women-only environment highly supportive. Kate expresses her appreciation of just sharing" with the other women. For Kath, finding she had a "lot in common" in a class of women, allows her to overcome her nervousness at beginning the course. Jo explains how the women pull her through when she considered quitting the course, while Kathy also finds that being with women allows her to speak openly.

While recognising that the supportive relationships formed between the women are an important part of how and why the women learn so successfully in the course, it is also important not to idealise these relationships. There are differences and conflicts at times, which need to be endured and negotiated. Jo gets annoyed when another woman asks lots of questions in Maths and interrupts her thinking processes. Lisa has a different viewpoint on Aboriginal history to some of the other women, as she has heard so much more from the oral histories in her family. Gai in particular finds that she has to re-learn how to interact in this environment, have patience and hold her tongue at times. Social learning requires the negotiation of difference: in the group discussion for example, we can see Gai and Kathy gradually 'working through' opposing reactions to sexual assault being talked about openly in the classroom, expressing their opinions and gradually 'hearing' each other out.

While the benefits of social learning are large, part of the social environment includes the need for personal space. There must be room for individual thought and learning at times, both inside and outside the classroom. Gai sometimes just wanted to go off alone to eat lunch, and enjoyed doing her "own thing" in maths research. Kate similarly enjoyed the space to continue researching at home. The need for individual learning and privacy is an

important social aspect of successful learning, as one of the woman's postgraduate peers describes:

There is also a solitary and silent place in this 'here'.
There are spaces here, in the cottage, to take refuge,
to be without, and without a shell.
(de Carteret et al, 2004, p.3).

Along with the social support of peers, all the women also discuss the helpful nature of social relationships with teachers during the course. Sometimes, as with Jo overcoming Maths fears, and with Lisa feeling that her women teachers can share experience and empathy with her, this learning relationship is enhanced because the teachers are women. More specifically, however, teaching on the course is based on feminist principles, summarised by Ellen Kimmel (1999, pp. 58-59) as including: acknowledgement of the power inherent in the teaching role; using practices that empower students in the learning process such as encouraging all voices to be heard and valued, working with different learning styles and making connections between personal experience and social-political reality, assuming that learning is a mutual process and respecting diverse cultural realities. In feminist teaching and learning frameworks knowledge is contextual and emergent, but always aimed at positive personal and social change.

The influence of feminist teaching practices on the women's learning is obvious in many of the learning stories, although often again with individual emphases. The women valued being able to ask questions, being encouraged to enquire and research independently as well as in groups. They comment positively that they had the power to ask for help from each other or teachers, either in class, privately or through study centres. Lisa clearly articulates how being praised, using suggestion rather than criticism and the consistently positive regard of the teachers meant that nothing got in the way of her learning. Kath identifies that the teaching staff seeming to *enjoy* their work

with the women, and *wanted* to help, as being important to her learning. Once again, this is not to totally idealise the learning/teaching relationships; there are conflicts, likes, dislikes and preferences between students and teachers as in any other learning environment, and as already partly discussed, these are particularly inevitable in social justice courses. However, feminist teaching practice encourages self-awareness on the part of facilitators and students and a process of working through difference with mutual respect wherever possible. Difference and conflict can sometimes be a positive impetus for self-revision, as we see when Kath discusses the transition in her thinking about the adult teacher role and how she could relate to this new mode of relating and learning. Women's preference for accessible relationships with their teachers apparently continues into higher education according to Rosalind Edwards' study (1993, pp. 93-95), where most of the women wanted and expected personal relationships with their tutors and lecturers to enhance their academic learning.

In terms of specific teaching and learning strategies, the CEW women vary in their views of what helped their learning. This can be linked to variations in learning styles and feminist teaching practices allowing for these, but also sometimes to variations in teaching for different subjects and skills. For example, Jo finds diagrams particularly useful for learning Maths concepts. Kate mentions 'listening then doing' in relation to writing, and Lisa similarly appreciates a 'hands on' approach generally. Kathy in contrast, promotes consistent attendance as one key to her learning success. Gai seems fairly confident about learning in most subjects, but finds having to sit an examination a huge impediment. Of course, interest and enjoyment and motivation also spark learning in a variety of ways in the stories of different women, and lack of interest similarly dampens enthusiasm. Teaching which allows for individual or small group topic choice rather than whole class democratic vote would seem to better maintain enthusiasm, based on comments by Jo, when she and Gai were "sort of over-ruled" on their choice of environmental sciences. Of course, social factors outside the course can also hinder student learning, as Kath mentions in relation to her court case.

Despite such variation, nearly all the women positively compared the relationships formed with teachers in the course, and what they saw as adult teaching styles, to their prior experiences of learning at school. While the women in this study certainly do not share entirely negative memories of schooling, as do the working class women in Wendy Luttrell's United States study, there is certainly evidence that:

... what is most memorable about school is not *what* we learned, but *how* we learn it. Unspoken and unresolved *emotions* ... and the ethical and political dimensions of relationships make a difference in the learning process (Luttrell, Wendy, 1997, p. 122).

Social learning: connecting knowledge

Feminist programs, learning and teaching practices connect the personal with social and political reality, and the women's stories show them making personal connections with social experience and knowledge. Just as the woman writes her own story of adult education in a higher degree, many of the women in the study learn through the writing down of their own stories, reflecting on and making connections between their own lives and learning materials, whether through research, as with Kathy's knowledge gained about her ectopic pregnancy, or videos, as with her understanding of her Aboriginal heritage, or through handouts or hands-on practice. The women also frequently speak of sharing these personal connections with other women in the course, so that their self-knowledge becomes collective knowledge, and understandings in the social relationships between the students and teachers are broadened and deepened.

The women frequently speak of connecting their knowledge to their social relationships outside the course. Gai shares information about job seeking, Kathy and Ren take delight in showing their knowledge of First Aid in practical ways and in discussions with family and friends. Gai, Ren and Kathy all speak of passing on new knowledge and skills to their children, showing and teaching

them about ways of learning and thinking, from how to learn or research, to creating mind maps or using computers, to how to respect the environment and other people. It is also interesting that the 'connections' encouraged by feminist teaching practices are in some ways the antithesis of what is encouraged or accepted in many instances of higher education. Rosalind Edwards' study of women returning to university in Britain, for example, found that:

The ethos of the institution overall combined with a realization that particular sets of experiences that formed an important part of their identity were not really admissible, reinforced the sense the women had of being deviants within a system with the norms of the white middle-class bachelor boy student (Edwards, Rosalind, 1993, p. 86)

In the stories of the women, knowledge that connects the women, both personally and politically, through their social experience and with their social relationships often excites and is most highly valued. This is not to say that women do not also value other knowledge for its utility, or simply for the intellectual stimulation it provides, as we can see when Kath explains how she can produce a spreadsheet, or Gai tells of finding out about the abacus and Kathy's recounts how the carnations change in a science experiment. However, it is to recognise that women's oppression often necessitates their re-visioning of self and society through connecting knowledge, rather than separated knowledge. For it is often truly connecting knowledge in education, which takes women's needs seriously, holding social justice as both goal and method, that is most liberating for women, as shown in so many of the women's learning stories.

Similarly, in the woman's own journey seeking knowledge and power, it is learning that makes connections that truly inspires her. Knowledge that connects the personal and private with social relationship, the public and political; learning that blends and transcends organic and industrial timeframes, subjectivity and objectivity; learning that connects the academic and methodical with the inspired and creative, story with poetry; learning that

bridges and breaks down false divisions, between quantitative and qualitative, structural and post-structural, using language that embraces both clarity and complexity; it is this knowledge that liberates her to know and empowers her to make sense of her world.

Re-visioning adult education

The full liberating potential for connected knowledge in adult education as yet remains unrecognised. While adult education literature has in recent years started to move away from its traditionally narrow, psychological focus and examine the social contexts and social nature of adult learning, including implications for knowledge and power, feminist contributions still have a spectral presence. For example, Ronald Cervero and Arthur Wilson (2001, pp. 3-8) analyse and give examples of three separate conceptions of the political in past adult education practice and literature, naming them as: the political is personal; the political is practical and the political is structural. Such analysis simply ignores widespread feminist practice in adult education, and the literature that is available about it, where all three of these versions of the political are indivisibly connected. This exclusion is made more puzzling by the inclusion of some chapters authored by feminist women in the book. Similarly, adult education activist Griff Foley (2000, pp. 14-15) presents an adapted table outlining schools of thought in adult education and training, which simply omits feminist thinkers.

Although feminist teaching theories are sometimes slotted into the 'social transformation' category, part of the problem is that women's projects have spanned and transcended many narrow boundaries of disciplinary thought and practice. Unfortunately, rather than this being viewed as an enormous potential which can be drawn upon by all to achieve social justice, an agenda that has always been part of feminism's wider re-visioning, the crossing of academic borders and breaking of boundaries becomes another basis for exclusion. Ellen Messer-Davidow, (2002, pp. 19-20) analyses higher

education as a vast industry that produces, distributes and consumes knowledge discourses, which are controlled by disciplinary boundaries: fixing not just what and how we can study, but also establishing and maintaining hierarchies of power and control which “order the knowledge enterprise”.

Like the appearing yet disappearing women in adult education literature that accompanied the woman at the beginning of her search, feminist teaching and learning practices, founded on continuously evolving, contextual analyses of power and oppression, developed and successfully implemented and refined for well over thirty years, are still being left out of the larger picture produced by the academic industry. The special college re-entry programs for women in the United States on which Jack Mezirow based his research are just one example of the countless feminist programs which have been set up in various forms, making spaces for women to re-vision themselves in different social contexts, whether in women’s rooms or cottages on university campuses, or special programs such as the Certificate in Career Education for Women or Work Opportunities for Women. In the British context, Veronica McGivney (1998, p. 14) notes how:

Despite all the cuts and changes in funding, many women-only schemes and centres have continued, ... to provide a model of positive provision for disadvantaged women returning to education and employment ... They aim not only to help women learn and progress to higher levels of education, training or employment but also to help them understand their experience in a culture that habitually undervalues women; to recognise their skills and potential, increase their confidence and personal autonomy ...

Janet Parr (2000, pp. 127-128) found that for the women who re-entered study, education was linked with independence; was an act of resistance to the power others had over their identity.

Feminist teaching and learning practices, and the activism of the women who keep feminist programs operating through difficult times, have been creating both personal change and social change on a massive scale, yet remain ghostly presences in adult education literature. The knowledge gained is often still sidelined, barely discussed or drawn upon by the 'mainstream' of adult education, kept as an 'addendum' in a 'special interest' chapter. In the updated version of the American text *The Philosophical Foundations of Adult Education* for example, feminist theory and teaching practice rate a full four pages out of a total of two-hundred and eighty six, where they are classified as part of the radical adult education tradition which as " ... an obvious fact ... has had a limited impact on the practice of adult education in this country" (Elias, John & Meriam, Sharan, 2005, pp. 178-182). The process of writing women out of the historical narrative of adult education from the 1920s to the 1940s, outlined by Jane Hugo in 1990, continues today. Yet feminism stands historically as one of the most powerful forces in adult education at the end of the 20th century, continuing strongly into the 21st, against all the odds and threats posed by multiple forms of discrimination, global corporate economies, conflicting pressures from greedy or loving, sometimes oppressive and sometimes liberating social institutions, and the terrible impacts of trauma and violence on women's lives.

It is high time to re-write the adult education record, re-visioning to make highly visible the women who people it worldwide. It seems time also for women in adult education to re-form and re-vitalise feminist networks, collectively re-grouping to face the many challenges of achieving social justice, as well as to record their history so that the stories which might liberate us are not lost from view once again. On the other hand, it is also high time for mainstream adult education to start taking seriously the learning produced by the diverse and vastly innovatory feminist voices in the field. It is not good enough for men in adult education to see a work titled as her thesis is, and assume it has nothing to say to them. Adult educators face tough times, so coalitions between people of good will, working to bridge false divisions imposed and upheld by power and oppression, to achieve social justice, are long overdue.

Chapter 10 Ideal narrative

... the two are never identical ...
(Todorov, Tzvetan, 1977, p. 111)

Ending

Tell us what it is to be a woman so that we may know what it is to be a man. What moves at the margin. What it is to have no home in this place... to live at the edge of towns that cannot bear your company (Morrison, Toni, 1994, p. 28).

The woman began her journey many years ago, harbouring seeds of success and failure in her baggage, yearning to add the voices of one small group of women to the limited discourse of adult education and learn more of what they had to teach her about the successes and shortcomings of career education for women. The small number of students who committed themselves to her research could not keep a journal, so the woman wrote her own, telling stories of the many life hurdles she had to 'get over' to approach the answers to her research questions. She created a layered narrative, which was both ideal and yet never ideal, always disrupted, blending her voice with the voices of the women who were her students. She searched the academic literature of adult education in social isolation, at the margins, seeking and finding limited company along the way. She locked herself up with readings on method to explore the contexts of research and its frameworks, seeking logically compatible ways to proceed in her project. Eventually she found inspiration in feminist research as re-vision, opening up possibilities for creative, responsive research with and for people, rather than 'data'. She thought about making space for women's voices and visions, was reminded of the significance of safe place and solitude, creative haven and social contact for learning.

For a long time, however, the woman still felt fear. She sat blocked for a seeming age at the edge of academic writing, examining and re-examining the issues until she found a way to move forward by blending academic and literary genres, clarity and complexity, the personal and the impersonal. In

her writing she sought ways to allow the women who shared their stories in the research to talk together visibly and powerfully, so that you, the audience could sit alongside them as well as her, listening and learning from their social interactions.

Just when the woman thought she had all but arrived at a new resolution, she found herself in a tug of war with time, wrestling it back from a greedily globalising workplace, hungry to consume her life in pressured industrial units, in competition with the equally demanding social structures of education and family, which she must distance and connect with in turns, as a crucial part of achieving her career goals as woman. Finally, the woman created a tapestry of tales with the women who told of their learning, through using poetic and narrative techniques, scanning transcripts to give voice to the women's experiences in stories of learning. She thus tried to provide you, her audience, with opportunities for your own interpretations of infinite shades of similarity and difference, and give space for your own responses to what you shared in the stories, what was new or strange to you. The woman herself dwelled in the tapestry she has survived to create and created to survive, tracing textures and patterns of violence and trauma in the social canvas. Finally she teased out the social threads of feminist teaching and learning practices, as a primary means of education for social justice, re-connecting us with self, with history, with culture, with experience and each other, allowing us re-vision in a brief space without the forced and false divisions that oppress us personally and politically.

In 2003, one of the woman's talented students wrote a poem for the class magazine, characterising her experience in the course as a shared voyage in an ideal narrative. Re-reading Linda's poem as part of re-visioning her self, her work on the course with the women, and her journey, the woman realises that while nothing is ever perfect in this imperfect world, and in a society which rarely welcomes her as woman, nonetheless her vocation of crewing and co-steering the ship on which the women have sailed each semester, has offered some of the most enjoyable and satisfying work of her lifetime so far:

The Good Ship CEW

We were all thrown together
A rather motley crew,
We came aboard to sail this ship,
The good ship CEW
We came from many backgrounds,
Different values, different lives
How could we sail together
And ride the many tides?
Working as a crew
We sailed the ship just fine
We learned to work together
We had a jolly time
We sailed the Sea of Self Discovery
The Bay of Self Esteem,
We sailed a big wide ocean
Where things were never as they seem
And then the journey came to end
We wondered how we'd be
For we loved our ship and in it our life upon the sea
It was time to bring her home
To guide her back to port
We would miss our CEW lives just too much
Well, that is what we thought
Oh no you mustn't worry
A voice sang inside our souls
For back in port a better ship
Awaits us tied up to the poles
You will be Captain of this ship
And sail her well with pride
You will sail on many journeys
Your horizons will be wide
This new ship is the ship of life
She is named the same as you
And your journey now much better be
Because you trained on CEW
(Willis, Linda, 2003)

Ideal narrative II

... an "ideal" narrative ...
(Todorov, Tzvetan, 1977, p. 111)

Ending again

For our sake and yours forget your name in the street; tell us what the world has been to you in the dark places and in the light ... Language alone protects us from the scariness of things with no names (Morrison, Toni, 1994, p. 28).

She began her journey as a feminist seeking further knowledge and power in her world. Her feminism sprang from her own experiences of oppression, and bound her with empathy to all forms of oppression. Through her journey she finds that her private hell of organised sadistic abuse, its terrible silencing and victimisation, has echoes and parallels with many forms of oppression. Those who struggle to "get over"; to survive and thrive through oppression, like the women in her study, like herself, do so in a culture of disbelief, which denies, minimises and conceals their truths. As an adult educator and a higher degree student in adult education, she has sought instead to give voice to some of those many truths.

Just before she began her thesis journey, she wrote in a paper of seeking enlightenment through her academic reading in adult education, feminism and more broadly in the social sciences:

I want to see words about morals, words which define codes of fair behaviour and just systems for sexes, races, classes, ages, abilities; descriptions of struggles for good, words with ideals that speak of fairness and justice: words of action.

In response, her supervisor Margaret Somerville asked a question she could not answer at the time, but pondered in the recesses of her mind over time:

... but what happens when all that has been said and nothing - or little - has changed. What do you say then?

Now, nearing the end of her journey she is guided to a reply, although aware that passionate idealism may not be the fashion. What happens when the words to overcome oppression have been said before? You say them again. And again. You speak with others. You find new ways to speak them and audiences to speak them to. You open ways for others who are oppressed to speak and you listen to them. You speak, act and pray, alone and together. You speak and listen again, adding weight and volume, until such words cannot be silenced any longer. In doing so, you create change. You make sure change is noticed, recorded, not silenced, not disappeared from the record, not mythologised. You keep speaking and acting, you keep making change.

There is no better time than any 'once upon a time' for adult educators to take more control of their own stories, to step off the economic rationalist treadmill and break silences surrounding oppression, including their own, not once but regularly, loudly and strongly, as an antidote to the lethal discourses which conceal the deep needs of adults for social justice. Thus we continue to affect change in both the public and private worlds of learners and teachers. Such change needs to bridge false divides between people, theory and practice, personal and socio-political contexts; to build networks of resistance between feminists and other activists, between cultures and unions, between women and men of good faith in adult education, taking steps together towards re-visioning the future.

There is no present end to the journey. With grace, we have to author our own ideal endings. As Kali Tal (1999, pp. 247-248) reminds:

And a woman is raped every five minutes – in the time it takes you to read a few pages. There is no plot. There is only the passage of time, from moment to moment, and, in each moment, what we choose to do, choose to do, choose to do.

Ideal Narrative III

... equilibrium is re-established ...
(Todorov, Tzvetan, 1977, p. 111)

Ending over

Dear reader! In the beginning the woman worried about what you would make of her story and the stories of her students. She often fretted about you, her unknown travelling companions. Yet now you have accompanied her faithfully on what has become an epic. At last, she sighs, at last, we sigh in unison. The woman has found the confidence to speak as part of an ongoing conversation, as women so frequently do in feminist classrooms, co-creating knowledge, re-visioning themselves and the world. At last, release; knowing that whether you agree with, amend or contest what is written, you will breathe your own life into the words:

“Finally, ” she says. “I trust you now with the bird that is not in your hands because you have truly caught it. Look. How lovely it is, this thing we have done – together.”
(Morrison, Toni, 1994, p. 30).

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