Introduction

Women's organisations provide significant learning opportunities for their members. Those opportunities often extend outwards into the wider community through the activities of the organisations and their members. This thesis examines the way learning opportunities arise in women's organisations, the way women benefit from them and how the learning extends into the community.

My original purpose in beginning my candidacy for a doctoral degree was to create a history of women's contributions to the field of adult education in Australia. I had discovered that the only relatively broad history of adult education (although confined to liberal education and decades old) almost completely ignored women except for a few token mentions.[1] I very soon found that the field which comprises women in adult education is a vast, barely-researched area which would be impossible to cover in many volumes, much less one PhD thesis.

Paring down the field even to women's organisations, again little researched, remained too large, and so I chose to focus on a few of the many women's organisations operating in New South Wales, Australia. The thesis establishes the relationship of learning in women's organisations with, or outside, established theoretical boundaries, the way the organisations teach and the way their members learn. It also looks at the extent to which each of the selected organisations can be seen as a learning community. The examples given act as case studies to begin a conversation about the role and contribution of women to adult education in Australia. This thesis is overtly inspired and shaped by my own experiences as an adult learner and thus differs from a formal academic treatise based solely on theoretical discussion.

At the outset I must point out that this is a cross-disciplinary study which ranges across the fields of history and sociology, as well as adult education. Because of my own background in the humanities, as well as the particular content, I have elected to use the more flexible convention of footnoting rather than the author-date referencing system used in education. As well, I use examples based on my own and others' life experience through oral history interviews and personal conversations. I originally wrote a chapter on the history of women's organisations, focusing especially on those in the study, but space and lack of relevance to the research focus on learning did not permit its inclusion. Brief comments are included

[1] D. Whitelock, *The Great Tradition: A history of adult education in Australia,* St Lucia, Queensland University Press, 1974.

throughout, where relevant, on each organisation's founding. Publication which includes some of this work has begun with a paper on the CWA in a postgraduate conference at the University of New England in 2007.[2]

Each of the women about whom I have written in the thesis, some quoted from recorded interviews, has her own story of learning which contributes to the often unconventional way that women learn in their lives and as they participate in their organisations. In order to show *the ways* these women learn, I give examples of *what* they learn. My own involvement as a participant in the research and the impact my own learning journey has had on my thinking introduces an element of memoire in the thesis. 'The self-reflexive turn' in the academic field has meant that memoire and autobiography have become 'part and parcel of academic texts' according to Leona English in her introduction to the encyclopedia of adult education which she edits.[3] I begin with my own story to demonstrate the way that my unique journey set me on my path as an adult learner.

My Own Journey as an Adult Learner

There was more than one catalyst to my own learning journey, each in itself a deeply disruptive event. The first was the death of my sixteen year old daughter, Judith, from malaria in Papua New Guinea (PNG) in 1982. No parent is ever the same again after the loss of a child; there is an inbuilt expectation that children will outlive their parents and such a loss therefore brings profound change. Following the family's return to Australia I became ill and required major surgery, but before I was able to recover my husband decided to move the family to England, his country of birth. Five years later the marriage – which had always been difficult – ended, and I returned home to Australia as a single parent with my nine year old son. My self-esteem was virtually non-existent and I had no confidence even in my ability to support the two of us, although I was able to acquire a casual job in a fabric retail chain because of my skill in dressmaking, largely self-taught. This supplemented my social security payment, as well as some bridal dressmaking, but the nervous and emotional toll on me was enormous, particularly with no practical or financial support from my former husband for our son, and at one point I was hospitalised when my stress resulted in physical illness.

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2 Robyn Hanstock, 'Changing Women: The Country Women's Association of NSW as a Learning Site', *Bridging the Gap Between Ideas and Doing Research,* Proceedings of the 2nd Annual Postgraduate Research Conference, 3-6 July 2007, Faculty of Education, Health and Professional Studies, and Faculty of Economics Business and Law, University of New England, Armidale, NSW, 2008, pp.27-35.

3 Leona M. English (ed), *International Encyclopedia of Adult Education,* Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2005, p.5.

My first foray into adult education was a lay pastoral care course which I undertook with my church denomination, as I believed that I could use my own experience to help other women in similar situations. I felt quite unable to consider university, convinced that I did not have the intelligence to undertake such a demanding course of learning. It is not always easy to discern specific moments of enlightenment leading to change – 'epiphanies' – but perhaps mine was in a state school staff selection panel, where I was involved as Parents' and Citizens' Association representative. Some of the applicants were not, I felt, suitable for the position, and I remember thinking 'I could do this, I should be on the other side of this table'. By this time I had remarried, four years after my separation and divorce and, with the support of my husband, I applied to the University of Western Sydney for admission as a mature student but was rejected as their quota had been filled.

Undeterred (amazingly for me), I decided to improve my chances by enrolling in a Tertiary Preparation Certificate course with the Institute of Technical And Further Education (TAFE). I continued to write to the university requesting a reconsideration of my application, and I was accepted for mid-year enrolment after completing only one semester of the TAFE course. My two English teachers in that course had been unstinting in their assistance in essay-writing, so that I was able to gain a high distinction in history in my first semester of the Bachelor of Arts degree. Probably those two women were the ones responsible, more than any others, for showing me how to think and reflect on what I was learning. In effect they set me on the successful learning journey which has continued to this day. As well, they were responsible for my introduction to teaching at the TAFE college. I had returned to thank them after I graduated with my honours degree from Sydney University, to where I had transferred, and one of the women asked me to fill in for her during her long service leave. Consequently, feeling I needed further qualification, I enrolled with the University of New England as an external student and some time later I graduated with a Graduate Diploma of Adult Education & Training before moving into working towards a doctoral degree. Family commitments and work on this research have precluded further teaching for the time being.

This journey would not have been possible for the person I was before, a timid individual with no self-worth and no concept of my own abilities. It was not until my transformation in understanding – 'learning that I could learn' – that I was able even to imagine the possibility of ever standing in the Great Hall of Sydney University before the Chancellor to receive a testamur for a first-class honours degree in history. Such a possibility had always been something quite outside my frame of reference.

Throughout these formal education experiences, and in some cases before, I have also retained active membership in a number of women's organisations (although some of these do have a very limited number of male members): the New South Wales Embroiderers' Guild, Christian Women's Conventions International (CWCI) as a member of a Know Your Bible (KYB) study group, the Quilters' Guild and other smaller women's groups not included in this study. I have joined others for the purposes of this research. These organisations are places for friendship, fulfilment and, on reflection, much learning. Here I have learned – and continue to learn – specific skills in, for example, embroidery and also social skills, confidence, reflective learning and empathy with the needs of other women. These are all primarily experiences of women learning from women and with women and are all what is classified as 'really useful knowledge' – knowledge that is outside the realms of academia. This knowledge is, according to Barr, concerned with 'the articulation of problems, interests and desires (of) people other than academics'.[4]

My learning journey made me wonder about how many other women are out there who, like me, have changed their lives by realising their own abilities. It made me wonder about the extent to which research had been undertaken to explore and explain the place of women in adult education and, more specifically, the nature and role of learning within women's organisations.

Adult education and women

My first introduction to the study of adult education was through university instruction and course guides.[5] Along with this came basic general texts such as Brookfield's *Understanding and Facilitating Adult Learning,*[6] Foley's edited *Understanding Adult Education and Training* and what was to have been his third edition of that book but developed a life of its own, *Dimensions of Adult Learning.*[7] I have used the latter text, in which Foley sets out his definitions of learning types, as the basis for my argument about the way women learn in their organisations. The most important general text for me has been Jack Mezirow's

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4 Jean Barr, *Liberating Knowledge: Research, feminism and adult education,* Leicester, NIACE, 1999, p.45.

5 Graduate Diploma of Adult Education & Training, conferred March 2005 by the University of New England, Armidale, New South Wales.

6 Stephen D. Brookfield, *Understanding and Facilitating Adult Learning: A comprehensive analysis of principles and effective practices,* San Francisco, Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1986.

7 Griff Foley (ed), *Understanding Adult Education and Training (second edition),* Sydney, Allen & Unwin, 2000. What was to be the third edition of this book became the new and different Griff Foley (ed), *Dimensions of Adult Learning: Adult education in a global era,* Sydney, Allen & Unwin, 2004.

Transformative Dimensions of Adult Learning.[8] Paulo Freire's work is a foundation for many educators in all fields, as he is for Mezirow and for my own interpretation of transformation for women through learning.[9]

Merriam & Caffarella's *Learning in Adulthood* has also been a basic guide to adult learning in the ways it varies from school education.[10] All of these texts apply generally to both men and women as learners and do not discuss their differences as a rule, although Merriam & Caffarella devote three pages to women's different styles of learning as proposed by Belenky and her colleagues.[11]

In women's learning the seminal text must be Belenky et al, *Women's Ways of Knowing.*[12] As I typed I censured myself for using such an inappropriate adjective for the feminist subject of this book, but a search for a synonym revealed an all-too-appropriate dictionary definition of 'providing the basis for future development'– so the adjective stayed![13] Belenky and her three colleagues, Blythe McVicker Clinchy, Nancy Rule Goldberger and Jill Mattuck Tarule, interviewed 135 college women in the United States to discover the way they learned.

The authors describe their discovery of five different perspectives from which women 'know and view the world'. These are: '*silence*' – women's perception of themselves as 'mindless and voiceless'; '*received knowledge*' – women's conception of being capable of receiving and reproducing knowledge, but not of creating it; '*subjective knowledge*' – 'a perspective from which truth and knowledge are conceived of as personal, private, and subjectively known or intuited'; '*procedural knowledge*' – where women are invested in learning and applying objective procedures for obtaining and communicating knowledge; and '*constructed knowledge*' – women able to experience themselves as creators of knowledge, 'and value both subjective and objective strategies for knowing'.[14] The work has been useful to me in examining the way women learn in their organisations.

Belenky and her colleagues' book is frequently referenced in subsequent works by women on education and knowledge, such as Mechthild Hart's *Working and Educating for*

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8 Jack Mezirow, *Transformative Dimensions of Adult Learning,* San Francisco, Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1991.
9 Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed,* London, Penguin Books, 1996 (1970).
10 Sharan B. Merriam & Rosemary S. Caffarella, *Learning in Adulthood: A comprehensive guide (second edition),* San Francisco, Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1999.
11 Merriam & Caffarella, *Learning in Adulthood,* pp.146-8. For Belenky et al, see reference below.
12 Mary Field Belenky, Blythe McVicker Clinchy, Nancy Rule Goldberger & Jill Mattuck Tarule, *Women's Ways of Knowing: The development of self, voice and mind,* New York, Basic Books, 1997 (1986).
13 Bruce Moore (ed), *The Australian Concise Oxford Dictionary* Fourth Edition, Melbourne, Oxford University Press, 2004.
14 Belenky et al, *Women's Ways of Knowing,* p.15. Italics in original.

Life,[15] which examines the relationship for women of adult education to work, the environment and technology and decries the difficulties of child-raising and other life areas experienced by them in the capitalist system. Jean Barr and Elisabeth Hayes and her colleagues all refer to *Women's Ways of Knowing* as a foundational text – one which provided the basis for future development – in writing their own works focused on women and adult education.[16]

Jean Barr is a Scottish philosopher who later became an adult educator working with women outside universities. She writes that the main focus of her book is 'a re-appraisal of three research projects' which she carried out over fifteen years. The projects were all in women's education, the first with mothers in a community preschool project, the second with tutors in a *New Opportunities for Women* course in the Workers' Educational Association (WEA), and the third concerning women's relationship to science and scientific knowledge.[17] Barr states her aim as:

> in presenting the three case studies as historical events it is in the hope of contributing to our self-understanding as critical and creative adult educators and researchers.[18]

At the conclusion of her book, Barr urges future researchers to 'leave the internal debates of the academy in order to articulate urgent problems with people other than academics'. She argues that a deference to 'academic, abstract knowledge ' fails to produce really useful knowledge that leads to an understanding of human experience and the way through to changing the world.[19]

Jane Thompson is another British writer, well-known for her work on women and education. However, as with Hart, the focus of her radically left-wing and feminist research on working class women means that her subjects differ from the mostly middle-class women in my study, although her work has still provided some useful reference.[20]

One more vital work on women's learning was a collaboration in a similar way to that of the authors of *Women's Ways of Knowing.* The book, *Women as Learners,* by Hayes and Flannery, starts out by claiming that it is 'intended to address the prevailing lack of information

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15 Mechthild U. Hart, *Working and Educating for Life: Feminist and international perspectives on adult education,* London, Routledge, 1992.

16 Elisabeth Hayes & Daniele D. Flannery, with Ann K. Brooks, Elizabeth J. Tisdell & Jane M. Hugo, *Women as Learners: The significance of gender in adult learning,* San Francisco, Jossey-Bass Publishers, 2002

17 Jean Barr, *Liberating Knowledge: Research, feminism and adult education,* Leicester, NIACE, 1999, p.4.

18 Barr, *Liberating Knowledge,* p.17.

19 Barr, p.163.

20 Jane Thompson, *Women, Class and Education,* London, Routledge, 2000.

and understanding about adult women's learning and education'.[21] Hayes and Flannery attribute inspiration to Belenky and co-writers, stating that they found their work 'moving and intellectually exciting'. Where the earlier, groundbreaking, work of Belenky and her colleagues differs though, is that it examines the 'knowing' of women in formal educational institutions. The work of the authors of *Women as Learners* covers women's learning in 'multiple settings', whether in formal education or outside institutions in the community or even the home. In this respect I have found this work to be an invaluable reference in my own research and learning. My finding concurs with that of the researchers, that mainstream literature on adult education offers limited attention to women's learning and that it fails to explore the different and various environments in which women learn.[22] Daniels writes of her then recent PhD research that women's learning is 'an ongoing and integrated process that must be understood within the everyday contexts of women's lives'.[23] Of feminist scholarship, including that to which I have referred, Daniels writes further:

> What these studies reveal is that how women learners think about learning does not always concur with commonly held notions of expectations and aims of learning.[24]

In this thesis I present case studies of activities in women's organisations 'as historic events' in a similar way to Barr, who I mentioned earlier. I aim to illuminate the learning taking place in the members and through them to outsiders who are connected in some way to the organisations or their members. The organisations themselves function as learning communities through the sharing of knowledge from the core activities and between the members.[25] Wenger goes further by defining a community – that is, any group with a shared meaning, not only geographical – as a community of practice with three aspects to define it as such: mutual engagement, a joint enterprise and a shared repertoire.[26] So either academic definition, whether learning community or community of practice, could be applied to the women's organisations in this study because of their shared interests and the learning that I will show as taking place within them.

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21 Elisabeth Hayes & Daniele D. Flannery, with Ann K. Brooks, Elizabeth J. Tisdell & Jane M. Hugo, *Women as Learners: The significance of gender in adult learning,* San Francisco, Jossey-Bass Publishers, 2002, p.xi.

22 Hayes et al, *Women as Learners,* p.2.

23 Jeannie Daniels, 'Negotiating learning through stories: mature women, VET and narrative enquiry', *Australian Journal of Adult Learning,* Vol.48, No.1, April 2008, pp.93-107(93).

24 Daniels, 'Negotiating learning through stories', p.97.

25 Sue Kilpatrick, Margaret Barrett & Tammy Jones, 'Defining Learning Communities', Faculty of Education, University of Tasmania, Australia, published online 2003, http://www.are.edu.au/03pap/jon03441.pdf Accessed online 27/7/07.

26 Etienne Wenger, *Communities of Practice: Learning, meaning, and identity,* Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, UK, 1998, pp.72-3.

My own observations of the operation of the women's organisations and my interviews, conversations and even some friendships have shown the value of engaging with non-academic women in the process of research into adult education. The 'academic, abstract knowledge' of that field, however, has produced difficulties in trying to fit learning in women's organisations into the 'boxes' of traditional adult education theory. The quilt whose photograph appears as the frontispiece of this thesis began life as a mind map sketch to clarify my thoughts about the way that women learn outside academia, yet using adult education theory to organise the learning. The story of the quilt and the way it helped to guide me through the maze to my own conclusions is in the Appendix.[27]

I have found only a few research papers and articles specifically relevant to my own research into women's organisations and the learning associated with them. The only doctoral thesis on women's organisations and adult education which I have found is based on research into associations in the United States with some comparisons with the Women's Institutes (WI) in Britain. However, it is substantially different from my own research.[28]

A thesis on learning in the suffragist movement in Canada is another of the few academic inquiries I have found into learning in women's organisations.[29] Also in Canada, a group of postgraduates collaborated on a publication which focuses on women's organisations as learning sites. The volume includes a paper on the foundation of the Women's Institutes in Canada, claiming it to be 'the oldest form of continuing education in Canada'. This and other work in the book provides a useful comparison with the Country Women's Association of NSW (CWA), which was founded at a later date with a somewhat similar purpose of assisting rural women.[30] In Australia, Emma Grahame has written a PhD dissertation on the Quilters' Guild, but her main theme is cultural and she deals only in passing with learning.[31]

Elizabeth Teather has undertaken research into the CWA in the 1990s and published a number of papers on the organisation. However, there is little relevant to the topic of learning because of her profession as a geographer. Nevertheless her work allows some insight into the

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27 See Appendix 2.

28 Patricia Moran, "Hide it Under a Bush, Hell No!": Women's Volunteer Associations as Adult Education Initiatives', unpublished thesis submitted to the Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies, Florida State University College of Education, 2007.

29 Lynette Plett, ' "How the Vote Was Won": Adult education and the Manitoba woman suffrage movement 1912-1916', unpublished M.Ed. thesis submitted to the Faculty of Education, University of Manitoba, Winnipeg, 2000.

30 Terry Crowley, 'Educating for Home and Community: The genesis of the Women's Institutes in Ontario', in Michael R. Welton (ed), *Educating for a Brighter New Day: Women's organizations as learning sites,* School of Education, Dalhousie University, 1992, pp.1-16.

31 Emma Grahame, ' "Making Something for Myself": Women, Quilts, Culture and Feminism', unpublished thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, University of Technology, Sydney, 1998.

contribution of CWA branches to rural communities and the effect of the organisation's lobbying of government at a national level.[32] Sue Jackson's research in Britain, 'Jam, Jerusalem and Calendar Girls: Lifelong learning and the Women's Institutes (WI)' is the nearest equivalent to my own research, although it does, of course, differ in the detail, as I will discuss later.[33]

O'Brien has provided the largest amount of recent scholarship on women's church organisations in Australia in her book, *God's Willing Workers,* and in her other articles. The book is a history of women and religion in Australia and is an important secondary source on the activities of women in the Christian Church.[34] She has written specifically on the Mothers' Union (MU) of the Anglican Church, an organisation included in this research. In an earlier paper, O'Brien discusses identity in MU and the ambivalent status of its members as negatively-viewed ageing women yet personally empowered by their membership. This paper provided useful insights for this study.[35]

In addition to the print media discussed above there are relevant texts in movies and television, some of which are fictional, some fictionalised and some documentary. The movie *Calendar Girls* is based on the fundraising efforts of the members of a branch of the Women's Institute who posed nude for a calendar to raise funds for cancer research and subsequently travelled to the United States.[36] The more recent British television sitcom series *Jam and Jerusalem* is 'a comedy of women, village life and Madeira cake'. It is a thinly-disguised portrayal of the WI, a spoof which strongly reflects the pejorative stereotype of women's organisations and their members held by many. While the series does not overtly mention the WI, the BBC website page on the program features a link to the WI website.[37] An Australian television series by Purple Pictures has also been made on CWA in NSW, *Not All Tea and*

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[32] Elizabeth Kenworthy Teather, 'The First Rural Women's Network in New South Wales: Seventy Years of the Country Women's Association', *Australian Geographer,* 23(2), November 1992, pp.164-176. Other papers include: 'CWA at the Crossroads', in Margaret-Ann Franklin, Leonie M. Short, Elizabeth K. Teather (eds), *Country Women at the Crossroads: Perspectives on the lives of rural Australian women in the 1990s,* Armidale, University of New England Press, 1994, pp.134-9. 'The Country Women's Association of NSW in the 1920s and 1930s as a Counter-revolutionary Organisation', *Journal of Australian Studies,* Vol.41, 1994, pp.67-78. 'Mandate of the Country Women's Association of NSW', *Australian Journal of Social Issues,* Vol.31, No.1, February 1996, pp.73-94.

[33] Sue Jackson, 'Jam, Jerusalem and Calendar Girls: Lifelong Learning and the Women's Institutes (WI)', *Studies in the Education of Adults,* Vol.38, No.1, Spring 2006, pp.74-90.

[34] Anne O'Brien, *God's Willing Workers: Women and religion in Australia,* Sydney, University of NSW Press, 2005.

[35] Anne O'Brien, 'Militant Mothers: faith, power and identity in the Mothers' Union in Sydney, 1896-1950, *Women's History Review,* Vol.9, No.1, 2000, pp.35-53.

[36] Tim Firth & Juliette Towhidi, *Calendar Girls,* Nigel Cole (director), Touchstone Pictures, 2003. DVD released 2004.

[37] Jennifer Saunders, *Jam and Jerusalem,* British Broadcasting Corporation, 2008.

Scones, and this will be discussed in Chapter Five.[38] Prior to all of these was the American movie *Educating Rita,* widely considered to be a classic example of the transformative value of further education for women, and which was used as the basis for a critical assignment in my own adult education training.[39]

The secondary sources to which I have referred mostly include academic comment and some dissertations I was able to locate on women's organisations or related topics in women's issues. They relate mainly to theoretical discussions of learning itself, and almost never refer to education and learning within women's organisations or their history. Conversely, those written by academics on the history of organisations in New South Wales (such as Teather and O'Brien) do not deal with learning.

Late in my research I discovered the work of a group of researchers who dispute the conventional categorisation of learning by adult education theorists. Colley, Hodkinson and Malcolm argue that learning is complex and cannot be separated into discrete divisions such as are applied by these theorists.[40] This was a breath of fresh air to me as I was struggling with applying the categories of learning to that which I found had taken place in the women's organisations I had studied. Neither the hardline divisions set by Griff Foley nor those of other writers would work for me in the very different conditions I had seen.[41] From the formality of attaining Teacher Accreditation in the Embroiderers' Guild, through an executive workshop in Zonta[42], to the hurly-burly (sometimes) of a CWA conference of more than a thousand women, or even Mothers' Union members serving tea in the Family Court, the spectrum of learning is vast, yet many authorities might classify most of it, if not all, as informal. As I present the details of my research in the later chapters I will engage further with the theories of these and other academics as they relate to, or diverge from, the environment of these organisations.

Social capital is a relatively recent theory which has enlightened understanding on the contribution voluntary organisations make to the community. Although not specifically based in adult education theory, it is useful to highlight the learning which may take place both in the

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38 Carmel Travers, *Not All Tea and Scones,* Purple Pictures, 2007.

39 Willy Russell, *Educating Rita,* produced and directed by Lewis Gilbert, Columbia Pictures, 1983. Coincidentally, Julie Walters stars in both this movie and *Calendar Girls.* The movie was included in an assignment to assess educational techniques in the discontinued course coordinated by Dr Bob Boughton, PDLD 472 *Teaching and Training Adults,* School of Professional Development & Leadership, University of New England, 2003. This course was part of the Graduate Diploma of Adult Education & Training, regrettably no longer offered by the University of New England.

40 Helen Colley, Phil Hodkinson & Janice Malcolm, *Informality and Formality in Learning,* Learning and Skills Research Centre, Lifelong Learning Institute, University of Leeds, 2003. Their work is discussed in more detail in Chapter One.

41 Foley (ed), *Dimensions of Adult Learning,* Introduction.

42 Zonta is a women's service organisation founded in the United States. It forms part of the research in this study and will be discussed throughout the thesis.

members themselves and in the benefiting community. The seed research for this is that of the American academic, Robert Putnam, who has informed many who came after him, including myself.[43] Rosemary Leonard and Jenny Onyx's work, with its fascinating title, has been especially helpful.[44] Oppenheimer also writes on social capital and the importance of the networks of trust formed in the communities in civil society, especially through voluntary action.[45]

Class is a social issue which is deeply involved in women's organisations, especially in those organisations which promote leisure activities as a foundational aim. These groups have always attracted, and will continue to attract, middle and upper class women as a majority of members because of their greater personal freedom and financial security.

Along with class the issue of working women is changing the structure and restricting the membership of women's organisations. Many organisations are currently making changes in the way they meet, holding meetings and offering classes on Sundays and in the evenings in order to accommodate the needs of working women, but few of these busy women are joining the organisations which I have researched.[46] The CWA conference at which I was present in 2007 was attended by more than a thousand women. As I looked across the audience, it appeared almost as a sea of grey heads.[47]

In attempting to classify types of organisations such as voluntary, service or leisure organisations I came up against the difficulty of separating them according to purpose and not finding boundaries. Melanie Oppenheimer has written at length on volunteering and voluntary organisations, and argues that there is no distinction between them, they are all similar in essence with a voluntary aspect and they are all non-profit organisations.[48] Oppenheimer writes of volunteering, that it is 'unpaid help, in the form of time, service or skills', and that 'it plays an important part in our cultural, social, political and economic lives. Volunteers are the lifeblood of our local communities in our cities and especially in the bush'.[49]

The core activities of the organisations do allow limited differentiation, but service, leisure and volunteering all occur to some degree across the range of organisations examined in

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43 Robert Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The collapse and revival of American community,* New York, Simon & Schuster, 2000.

44 Rosemary Leonard & Jenny Onyx, *Social Capital and Community Building: Spinning straw into gold,* London, Janus Publishing Company, 2004.

45 Melanie Oppenheimer, *Volunteering: Why we can't survive without it,* Sydney, University of NSW Press, 2008, pp.8-12.

46 This observation has been made by most of the women I have interviewed for the study.

47 CWA Annual Conference, Jindabyne, NSW, 29 April-3 May, 2007.

48 Personal conversation, 27/2/09.

49 Oppenheimer, *Volunteering,* pp.5-6.

this research. Some of them are clearly service-oriented in their work for the community, such as Quota and Zonta, both of whom refer to themselves as 'service' organisations. Their focus is to provide volunteer labour for fund-raising and other projects aimed at community groups and needs, or for their chosen overseas projects. Organisations like the Embroiderers' Guild are more overtly leisure-oriented, providing opportunities for women to get together, share skills and enjoy social contact. However, members volunteer within organisations which might arguably be termed leisure organisations to hostess meetings, work in the libraries or serve on promotional stalls at shows. As well, they serve as stewards at shows such as the Sydney Royal Easter Show or community agricultural shows and there are other crossovers in defining them. For example, the Community Quilts group in the Quilters' Guild has always provided quilts to areas like the needy, hospital patients or residents of institutions like Ronald McDonald House. Furthermore, a significant number of women in the Embroiderers' Guild and the Quilters' Guild, so-called leisure organisations, have gone on to professional careers in teaching embroidery or quilting. Some of these women have risen to international recognition by writing books and freelance articles for magazines or selling their work. Locally, many have opened shops to supply quilters, embroiderers or craftworkers through having learned their skills in an organisation. Organisations like the CWA are less clearly defined and offer both service to the community as well as leisure activities for members in activities like needlework and craft or art and photography. Therefore, because of the mix of activities in each I do not distinguish the organisations separately for the purposes of this research, except for Quota and Zonta, both of which claim themselves as service organisations.

Early in my research I discovered that there was a plethora of women's organisations, both historically and those still in existence, far more than I imagined there would be even in the state of New South Wales alone. The challenge was to select a sufficient range of examples to explore the ways in which learning is practised and experienced within such organisations. Therefore I chose to examine a number of secular and church organisations that provided both similarities and differences in their aims and activities. All of the organisations included retain a membership which consists mainly of women who are middle class and of Anglo-Celtic origin, although there are, of course, exceptions.

The secular organisations I have researched include Quota International, Zonta International and the CWA. Among the more leisure-oriented are the Embroiderers' Guild NSW Inc. and the Quilters' Guild NSW Inc., as well as smaller groups such as the Quilters and Patchworkers of New England and the Women's Club.

The church organisations I have selected include Mothers' Union of the Anglican Church, Presbyterian Women's Association, Catholic Women's League, Women's Home League of the Salvation Army and CWCI (formerly known as Christian Women Communicating International but now abbreviated for general use to its acronym for convenience). The latter is known as a parachurch organisation as it is interdenominational and a service arm to the church as a body. These Christian organisations fall within my own sphere of interest as a practising Christian in a mainline denomination. The interview responses of women in these organisations sometimes differ markedly from that of women in secular organisations because of their emphasis on spirituality and their own commitment to their faith and thus provide an element of contrast.

There are two umbrella organisations on which I touch only briefly as the majority of organisations in the study retain corporate membership in one or both of them. They are the National Council of Women (NCW), which is more than one hundred years old and has been lobbying government and the United Nations for justice for Australian women since the suffragist era. The other is the Pan Pacific and South East Asia Women's Association (PPSEAWA) which also has a long history of lobbying governments as a representative for women and their organisations.

Most of the work I have found specifically written on women's organisations in Australia is actually the histories of organisations published by themselves, and I will refer to these later in the thesis. As I stated at the beginning of this introduction, the history of the field of adult education as a whole has been shamefully neglected by academics in the area. Furthermore, the story of the role and contribution of women to adult education in Australia has scarcely been written and pays little attention to the contribution of women educators. I hope that this dissertation will add significantly to this neglected area, albeit not in the area of institutional education. Time and space did not allow me to research the entire contribution of women to the history of adult education in Australia as I originally wished to do, but the significance of learning in these women's organisations I have selected to research is engaging in its breadth and depth. While I may not have been able to find much useful work in academic sources, I did find a significant number of sources elsewhere, of both primary and secondary material.

Sources

Two main sets of primary sources have been used. These are the documents and printed materials produced by the various organisations, and a series of interviews with women who are or were members of the organisations.[50]

I have made significant use of those organisational newsletters which I have been able to access easily. Some of them are quite professional in their presentation and take the form of magazines, some produced in full colour and of considerable length. Most significant in this regard are those of the larger organisations, particularly the Country Women's Association's bi-monthly magazine *The Country Woman* (in its early years represented as *The Countrywoman*). The Quilters' Guild NSW Inc. also produces a full colour magazine, *The Template,* but in its case mainly to better reproduce images of members' quilts. The Embroiderers' Guild NSW Inc. circulates a significant magazine-format newsletter on high-quality paper, *The Record,* but this is not in colour. Other organisations included either produce smaller or online communications and, as well in the case of the two major organisations Quota and Zonta, members receive copies of the internationally-distributed US-produced magazine.

In addition to the range of journals and newsletters, some of the organisations that I have researched have published books or brochures on their histories or on their featured skills. One or two of these are substantial hardback volumes. In addition to print media, many of the organisations maintain a website, some more extensive and updated more often than others, and these are valuable sources of information as well as showing the way that the organisation presents its image to the public. Some are largely password-protected for members only and I have been unable to access these areas where I do not hold membership, for example with Quota and Zonta, who both charge considerably higher membership fees than all of the other organisations. The Women's Club in the City of Sydney also charges joining and membership fees which exclude all but those women with a high income. It differs from most of the organisations in that new members may only be invited through personal reference from an existing member and the club does not permit any advertising or self-promotion.

I have also made use of contemporary newspaper and magazine reports as well as the minutes of meetings and other documentary materials retained by the organisations. These documentary, print and multimedia materials provide an insight into the way the organisations

[50] See Appendix 3 for more details on the research design adopted.

are run and often include a great deal of educational matter. They give details of activities and show the way that the executive of the organisation communicates with its members.

The other central and vital sources have been the interviews generously given to me by women who were or are members of the selected organisations. Merriam and Simpson describe research as a 'process of discovering reality structured from human experience' and their view is borne out by the evidence I have gathered from these members of women's organisations themselves.[51] In the interviews the women speak about their reasons for joining and their involvement, give their views, however biased, of the organisation, and what they regard as the benefits of their membership. Interviewees were also asked to reflect on the way they feel they have learned through their membership or have encouraged others to learn.

The remembered experiences of this small number of women are certainly not regarded as representative in any way. Rather, they provide a testing ground for exploring different experiences and understandings of the nature of learning within different women's organisations.

The voices and memories of these women are central to the way this thesis has unfolded. Sadly, at the time of writing three of these women have passed away, but I feel especially privileged to have been able to place their thoughts on record about education in their organisations and their own learning. One of them was Mrs Marie Cavanagh, who was the amazingly knowledgeable and much-loved curator of the wonderful collection belonging to the Embroiderers' Guild NSW Inc., and other members of the Guild were delighted to have this record of her thoughts.

Another prominent woman who I was fortunately able to interview before her death was Miss Jean Raddon, who was a very valued early member of Christian Women's Conventions International (now CWCI). She was responsible for the foundation of CWCI's educational arm of Know Your Bible (KYB) study groups, now spread worldwide, and remained active in teaching, writing and mentoring until her death in her eighties.

The third woman who has passed away was Mrs Beverley Pavey, a retired businesswoman who was the much-respected and loved President of the National Council of Women and who was also associated with the other umbrella organisation, Pan Pacific and South East Asia Women's Association (PPSEAWA). My interview with Beverley was not recorded because of the unsympathetic environment, but my notes state her own view that

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[51] Merriam, Sharan B. & Simpson, Edwin L., *A Guide to Research for Educators and Trainers of Adults (Second Edition),* Malabar, Florida, Krieger Publishing Co., 2000, p.5.

there has been a lack of studies on women's organisations. She went on to say, in what I am sure is a verbatim note:

> Commercial structures like companies are clear, but women's organisations come from the heart, they are people bouncing ideas off each other, amorphous, changing, responsive to current issues, not locked in, so there is a difficulty of analysing and recording.[52]

I have been personally challenged and encouraged by the way this research has introduced me to this relatively new field of oral history with its ability to bring recognition to women's role in society in a fresh, positive and often challenging way.[53] It has been a delight to get to know the women I have interviewed and to sense their excitement as they conveyed their feelings about their organisations. Because of this enthusiasm I cannot avoid the feeling that I need little other than their own words in the way of evidence to demonstrate their learning.

Voices and Style

Perhaps because of this component of oral history, I have employed a number of different voices throughout the dissertation. In the first chapter especially I have employed a more formal academic voice in my writing about theoretical foundations, concepts and approaches. Elsewhere the work is less formal as I have inserted my own experience and the testimonies of the women I interviewed. For similar reasons I have almost invariably referred to the women by their first names since that is the usual way they address each other in their organisations, except for formal meetings like conferences in CWA, when the title 'Miss' or 'Mrs' with the woman's surname is always used as a tradition remaining from earlier, more formal, times. The academic convention of surname only would be considered impolite by most of the women to whom I refer in this thesis but I have occasionally used a title with the surname such as, for example, the Presidents of CWA, who are always addressed in that fashion.

In the course of my research I remember one woman telling me that she believed my thesis would be easier to read than some of the other academic work she had seen which was

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[52] Conversation with Mrs Beverley Pavey at the NCW office in Sydney, 15/2/2006.

[53] I am personally indebted to Rosie Block, the Oral History Librarian at the State Library, Sydney, NSW, for the seminars and workshops she has presented which have helped me immeasurably in the practical tasks of recording interviews. I am also grateful to Rosie for her willingness to respond to emails and phone calls for help in sorting out problems. Along with my supervisor, Associate Professor Janis Wilton, Rosie has been a significant source of my instruction in the practice of oral history. My main reference text for the practice of oral history has been Beth Robertson's *Oral History Handbook Fifth Edition,* Unley, South Australia, Oral History Association of Australia (SA Branch) Inc. 2006.

'impossible for ordinary people to understand'.[54] I hope that this is the case since my informants are those who might normally be classed as ordinary – but are in my opinion extraordinary – women.

Thesis Structure

A theoretical background is necessary in order to demonstrate the way that I have perceived women's learning in their organisations. Therefore in Chapter One I introduce the concepts and approaches of adult education and its theories that underpin the thesis. In particular, attention is paid to key theories in adult education and feminist scholarship.

From this chapter onward I have commented one-by-one on each organisation beneath its heading to describe its operation, the way that it educates its members and how their learning takes place. The core chapters in my thesis investigate the nature and role of learning within the organisations included in the study. I focus on the way formal teaching and training in skills and procedures is used within the organisations in Chapter Two, showing how this has occurred in their history and at the present time. Non-formal learning is a category created by many adult education theorists, including Foley, to describe that type of learning which does not lead to accreditation and is not compulsory. This covers workshops and classes which can be taken by anyone, although some recommend prior learning, and some are open to non-members for an extra charge, and this area of learning is discussed in Chapter Three.

The next three chapters have been difficult to organise as they overlap with each other in many ways and cannot be separated in the neat way that many theorists would like. Informal learning embraces all learning which occurs outside that which is deliberately undertaken in a structured way.[55] In the first of these chapters – Chapter Four – I include learning from the many projects in which members are involved, as well as that which they have opportunities to learn from conferences, meetings, special events and guest speakers, as well as from publications.

Incidental learning, also termed tacit or implicit learning, is that which may occur at any time during the learner's activities, and in many ways it overlaps with informal learning covered in the previous chapter. In Chapter Five I discuss this learning, which also includes the emotional and spiritual learning and personal growth in any area of life. Incidental learning happens during workshops and classes, in conversations, and also in the friendships and

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[54] Conversation with a participant at an Embroiderers' Guild Newcastle Branch Monday meeting, 20/2/2006.

[55] Mohamed Hrimech, 'Informal Learning', in Leona M. English (ed), *International Encyclopedia of Adult Education,* Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2005, pp.310-312.

processes which develop out of the membership involvement. It can, in fact, come about through any aspect of the member's activity in the organisation and may involve the transformation of the individual which can be achieved through that learning. This learning theory is formally referred to as Transformative Learning and is discussed in this chapter. Here the testimonies of some women who have experienced transformations in their own lives through learning in their organisations are particularly significant.

Voluntary organisations always make an impact to a greater or lesser degree on the communities in which they are located, or even beyond. Chapter Six examines the way women's organisations influence their own and other communities. To this end it explores and illustrates the relevance of the theory of social capital to women's organisations and their relationships with their communities and the public arena. In particular, it argues that the social capital accrued by the activities of these women's organisations can have a transformative effect on the surrounding society, spreading the learning beyond the perimeters of the organisations.

I am drawing on my own research and experience to show the ways that women educate themselves and each other formally and informally. This learning and personal growth occurs across and outside the parameters of theoretical boundaries, through social engagement and activism, as well as throughout the spectrum of what some theorists might define as formal and informal educational situations.

It will become clear, then, that the many types of learning experienced by women in their organisations produce benefits that flow through to the entire life of each individual member, to her family, friends and associates both within and outside the learning community of the organisation, and to the wider community. I hope that this thesis, in putting on record the place and value of learning in women's organisations, will provide a significant offering to the conversation on the contribution of women to adult education historically and in the present time.

Chapter One

Theories, Concepts and Approaches

Adult education extends across many areas of life and is not limited to that which takes place in formal institutions such as TAFE colleges or non-government training organisations. Because of its history in activism and working class education, adult education as a category does not usually include formal education in universities, which had its foundation in the upper class. As well as formal teaching in situations outside institutions, adult education can include workshops and classes in community situations and even the incidental learning which occurs in day-to-day life.

There is a rich and varied theoretical literature about the way this learning may come about and it is this literature, and the concepts and approaches it offers, that is the focus of this chapter. Emphasis is placed on those theories which, in the body of the thesis, inform the conceptual framework for evaluating the role and nature of learning within women's organisations. Conversely, outlining these theories provides a basis for arguing that learning in women's organisations cannot be contained within standard theoretical boundaries. This then leads to a discussion of insights provided by feminist perspectives, and the ways in which a combination of adult education, sociological and feminist theories drive the analysis of women's perceptions of their learning. This chapter lays a foundation for illuminating the research findings reported in the remainder of the work.[1]

In more recent years there has been research into the validity of theoretical categorisation of learning and a report published on the research. The results of this research have considerable bearing on my own concern about the difficulty of applying in/formal boundaries to learning in women's organisations, and so I discuss it in this and further chapters.[2] Another writer of interest whose work I discuss below is Wenger, who sees learning as socially-situated, although not suggesting his ideas as a replacement for existing theory.[3] However, I begin with the outline of conventional adult learning theory.

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[1] See Appendix 3 for further discussion on the cross-disciplinary methods used in this research.

[2] Helen Colley, Phil Hodkinson & Janice Malcolm, *Informality and Formality in Learning: A report for the Learning and Skills Research Centre,* Lifelong Learning Institute, University of Leeds, 2003, p.65. Available online http://www.lsneducation.org.uk/user/order.aspx?code=031492&5rc=xoweb for access to pdf. file. Accessed online 17/1/2009.

[3] Etienne Wenger, *Communities of Practice: Learning, meaning and identity,* Cambridge, U.K., Cambridge University Press, 1998.

Education, Learning and Training

The collaborators of Malcolm Knowles, in the introduction to a revised edition of his original 1973 key text, *The Adult Learner,*[4] define education as 'an activity undertaken or initiated by one or more agents that is designed to effect changes in the knowledge, skill, and attitudes of individuals, groups, or communities'. They contrast learning as an emphasis on 'the person in whom the change occurs or is expected to occur'. So, they argue, education focuses on the educator as an 'agent of change', but learning is 'the act or process by which behavioural change, knowledge skills, and attitudes are acquired *by the learner'* (my emphasis).[5] While these definitions are simplistic and were indeed given only as an introductory remark in the reference quoted, they serve to briefly illustrate the field of my investigation, that of women as educators and learners within their organisations. Many theorists would dispute such simplification, however, and argue that the educator cannot be separated from the learner because of the two-way communication which takes place.[6] In addition, it is undeniable that any worthwhile teacher is on a continual trajectory of reflection and learning.[7]

Training is often referred to as being somehow different from education, but Bell sees the separation of the two as a dichotomy without justification because of the equal satisfaction a worker can obtain from acquiring work-related skills as any student of the arts or sciences.[8] Wenger sees training as one half of the twin goals of building a learning community and training newcomers.[9] Thus, the necessary practice of learning skills and procedures also leads to the beginning of the process of bonding with the organisation and fellow members.

In a work on lifelong learning and the identity of the learner, Eraut is quoted as seeing learning as 'the transformation of understanding, identity and agency'.[10] My contention is that learning promotes agency to a special degree in women by promoting and enhancing self-esteem and confidence. In this study of women in their voluntary organisations, I examine

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4 Malcolm Knowles, *The Adult Learner: A neglected species,* Houston, Texas, Gulf Publishing Co., 1973.

5 Knowles, Malcolm S., E.F. Holton & R.A. Swanson, *The Adult Learner: The definitive classic in adult education and human resource development,* (5th edition), Woburn MA, Butterworth-Heinemann, 1998, pp.10-11.

6 T. Fenwick & M. Tennant, 'Understanding Adult Learners', in G.Foley (ed), *Dimensions of Adult Learning: Adult education and training in a global era,* Sydney, Allen & Unwin, 2004, pp.55-73.

7 Stephen Brookfield, *Becoming a Critically Reflective Teacher,* San Francisco, Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1995, p.187.

8 Bob Bell, 'The British adult education tradition: A re-examination', in R. Edwards, A. Hanson & P. Raggatt (eds), *Boundaries of Adult Learning,* London, Routledge, 1996, pp.152-168 (152).

9 Wenger, *Communities of Practice,* p.249.

10 Clive Chappell, C. Rhodes, N. Solomon, M. Tennant & L. Yates, *Reconstructing the Lifelong Learner: Pedagogy and identity in individual, organisational and social change,* London, RoutledgeFalmer, 2003, p.4.

education by the organisations of their members, and learning, in different ways, by the women themselves. I interpret education as that opportunity for learning which is provided in a structured way by the organisations themselves, and learning as that which takes place in the lives of the organisations' members, whether as the result of organised classes, or incidental learning which has occurred as the result of interaction in social situations.

Training, while not really separate from education, as stated previously, is used in a specific way in this thesis. I define it as the provision of opportunities to acquire skills and procedures relevant to the core activities and ethos of the organisation. All of the women's cultural organisations and guilds in this study incorporate an educative function, both historically and in their current aims, but not all of them are formal teaching. Some of these organisations offer what I will define in the next chapter as formal teaching courses associated with their identity to their members, such as courses on needlework skills by teachers qualified according to the Embroiderers' Guild requirements for instructing members of that organisation.

Learning Communities

The training offered by the organisations to members, whether as formal courses, workshops or other methods of provision, confirms the identity of the organisation and, through the instruction, embraces and draws the participating members into what is in essence a learning community. Kilpatrick, Barrett and Jones define a learning community in a way that is appropriate for this study:

> Learning communities are made up of people who share a common purpose. They collaborate to draw on individual strengths, respect a variety of perspectives, and actively promote learning opportunities. The outcomes are the creation of a vibrant, synergistic environment, enhanced potential for all members, and the possibility that new knowledge will be created.[11]

This aspect of the organisations as learning communities is one which encourages the fluidity of learning opportunities and causes them to resist categorisation. So, members may personally feel part of a learning community by becoming an accredited tutor, but they could also acquire this sense of belonging at a monthly meeting or by volunteering as a hostess at the organisation's headquarters.

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[11] Kilpatrick, Sue, Margaret Barrett & Tammy Jones, 'Defining Learning Communities', Faculty of Education, University of Tasmania, Australia, published online 2003, http://www.are.edu.au/03pap/jon03441.pdf Accessed online 27/7/07.

Such experiences can transform the outlook of members, and to confirm this I also investigate the place of transformative learning, a theory developed by Jack Mezirow and since given a prominent position in the theory of adult education.[12] In my view, the outworking of this particular theory is evidenced to a large degree in women's learning in voluntary organisations.

However, before looking at Mezirow's concept of transformative learning in some detail, there are other aspects of adult education theory that play a significant role in this thesis either in their own right or as the groundwork on which Mezirow developed his approach.

Lifelong Learning

Lifelong learning is a concept of education which has been widely debated in the public domain and by academics in recent years. At its basis, it is the process of learning throughout the lifespan, in whatever form, whether formally or informally. In the eyes of some critics within adult education circles the concept has more recently been hijacked by governments as a surreptitious means of creating a population of workers and consumers prepared to fit the agenda of economic rationalists. As a consequence of the economic rationalist view, community courses on what is loosely termed 'leisure learning' are decreasing and the majority of adult education is aimed at skill creation for employment – in other words, education must make a monetary profit in those terms.[13] The value of personal growth and contentment seems not to be viewed as an asset to the community by economic rationalists.

Chappell and his colleagues, in writing on lifelong learning, argue that 'the boundaries between the sectors of education are breaking down, particularly between formal and non-formal education and between education delivered at different sites and locations'.[14] They also discuss the issue of identity and the concept of the self, as no longer fixed as was formerly held, but rather 'configured as a contingent and constructed concept, one that is subject to continual social and historical transformation'.[15] So, they argue, education 'invariably involves an element of self-formation and change', indeed it is a 'vehicle' for self-change.[16]

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12 Jack Mezirow, *Transformative Dimensions of Adult Learning,* San Francisco, Jossey-Bass, 1991, *passim.*

13 See Joce Jesson & Mike Newman, 'Radical Adult Education and Learning', in Griff Foley (ed), *Dimensions of Adult Learning,* pp.251-264(253). Also Roger Boshier, 'Lifelong Learning', in L.English (ed), *International Encyclopedia of Adult Education,* London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2005, pp.373-8(375).

14 Chappell et al, *Reconstructing the Lifelong Learner,* p.25.

15 Chappell et al, p.28.

16 Chappell et al, p.10.

Foley's Four Divisions of Adult Education

In his attempts to broadly define the boundaries of adult education, Foley writes that 'Learning is central to human life – as essential as work or friendship…all human activity has a learning dimension. People learn, continually, … in many different settings'.[17] He goes on to list and define four broad areas of learning: formal education, non-formal education, informal learning and incidental learning.

1. Formal Education

As Foley defines it, formal education is 'organised by professional educators, there is a defined curriculum, and it often leads to a qualification'.[18] In addition to government institutions such as TAFE colleges there are many commercial providers of adult education, independent colleges or institutes which operate for profit and award their own or standard certificates or diplomas on the successful completion of their courses. One example is Certificate IV, an award indicating competence achieved in many different areas such as, for example, childcare, automotive engineering or information technology. The formality of language in the TAFE website contrasts with the warm introduction of the community college director quoted in the next category:

> TAFE NSW is Australia's largest training provider, and it is among the largest in the world. The letters 'TAFE' stand for Technical and Further Education, and, for hundreds of thousands of people each year, it also stands for high quality, accessible training. ... We offer relevant training and education in a way that makes sense in today's world. TAFE NSW courses and education programs are delivered flexibly – online, by distance, face-to-face, or by a combination of methods.[19]

Those TAFE courses are today geared almost exclusively to workplace training, and leisure and lifeskills courses are considered to be unimportant to the authorities controlling formal education. Even as far back as 1989 Rachal is quoted as stating that,

> Without question, the workplace is the engine that is changing the nature of adult education, and technology is its fuel.[20]

Many courses for women have also been discontinued, one example being the Commercial Needlecraft Course offered for many years. This course provided many women with the skills

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17 Griff Foley (ed), 'Introduction: The state of adult education and learning', in Griff Foley (ed), *Dimensions of Adult Learning,* pp.4-5.

18 Foley, *Dimensions,* p.4.

19 TAFE NSW website, https://www.tafensw.edu.au/about/index.htm Accessed 29/07/2008.

20 Quoted in Merriam, S.B. & R.G. Brockett, *The Profession and Practice of Adult Education,* San Francisco, Jossey-Bass, 1997, p.112.

needed to run their own business and was the initial means of acquiring skills for many of the women now tutoring in the Embroiderers' Guild. A number of women to whom I have spoken during my research have lamented its passing as one aspect of the subtle loss to women's independence taking place even now, a generation beyond the second-wave feminist movement.

2. Non-formal Education

According to Foley, 'This sort of learning occurs when people see a need for some sort of systematic instruction, but in a one-off or sporadic way'.[21] An example might be a single class or short course on garden design or bonsai in a community college. Such a course would be classified under this formula as non-formal and not leading to a qualification or award. Hunt writes that community education, such as that offered by a community college, 'generally involves a blurring of traditional boundaries, such as those between formal educational institutions and their surrounding communities'.[22] This blurring tends to render Foley's classifications problematic, in that community colleges, for example, sometimes offer formal courses also offered by TAFE colleges, such as a competence-based Certificate IV, along with non-formal courses like, for example, Italian for Basic Conversation, a 6 week evening course held in a local high school.[23] Despite the duality of formal and informal, a community college website demonstrates the congenial approach to the potential applicant as opposed to the more formal language of the quote from the TAFE website above:

> It's that combination of ideas exchanged, warm relationships, common purpose and new skills that brightens your life. With a Nepean Community College course you can create that little patch of sunshine in your life this winter learning a new language, computer skills, health and well being skills or any of the range of arts and crafts.[24]

In addition to community colleges, many volunteer non-commercial organisations in society, often known as non-government organisations or NGOs, offer some kind of education, and Muhamad's description of them demonstrates their importance:

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21 Foley, *Dimensions,* p.4.

22 Cheryl Hunt, 'Community Education', in Leona M. English (ed), *International Encyclopedia of Adult Education,* London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2005, pp.131-6.

23 Nepean Community College website, http://www.ncc.nsw.edu.au/BOSC_Home.html

24 Introduction to Nepean Community College website 'Brighten Your Days with Community College…', http://www.ncc.nsw.edu.au/index.htm accessed 29/7/2008.

> the education of adults historically owes its presence to sponsorship by independent organizations such as NGOs. They continue to play a key role in adult education, as providers and participants in decision-making processes.[25]

Muhamad writes further on such organisations and the value of their role in society, where they 'carry out a broad spectrum of activities', citing Kless in stating that 'NGOs are a transformative force in promoting more equal, participative and sustainable development in various sectors of social life, including education'.[26]

Most women's organisations, included in the classification of NGOs, regularly hold classes, and have done since their foundation in Australia. However, I see these organisations as operating very differently from those covered by traditional adult education theory. One aspect is the social networking which occurs as so much a part of the operation, including within workshops and classes. This means that it is not really possible to strictly apply Foley's classifications to their operations, a point on which I will elaborate later.

3. Informal Learning

Informal learning occurs, according to Foley, 'when people consciously try to learn from their experience. It involves individual or group reflection and discussion, but does not involve formal instruction'.[27] Such an exchange may take place in a workplace environment, or by an individual inspired by a newspaper article. In an organisation like the Embroiderers' Guild, women in a workshop might discuss an embroidery technique and debate a better method of applying it than that which is commonly used before reaching a consensus (or not, as the case may be). Once again, I see a departure from Foley, depending on what exactly he means by 'formal instruction'. A workshop in the Embroiderers' Guild may be a Judges' Accreditation or perhaps a face to face class in the Practical Teaching Skills Course.[28] It is highly likely that either of these formal events, both of which lead to a qualification in the Guild, could involve 'individual or group reflection and discussion' during the course of the day, thus completely disintegrating the formal/informal boundary. A study undertaken into the validity of boundaries between formal, non-formal and informal/incidental learning concludes

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25 M. Muhamad, 'Non-Governmental Organizations', entry in L.English (ed), *International Encyclopedia of Adult Education,* pp.429-34.

26 Muhamad, 'Non-Governmental Organizations'.

27 Foley, Introduction, *Dimensions of Adult Learning,* pp.4-5.

28 'Judges Accreditation' and 'Practical Teaching Skills Course 2009', *The Record,* No.488, November 2008, p.9.

that 'all learning situations contain attributes of in/formality'. I discuss this study at greater length below.[29]

4. Incidental Learning

Foley writes that this learning 'occurs while people perform other activities … is incidental to the activity in which the person is involved, and is often tacit and not seen as learning – at least not at the time of its occurrence'.[30] Brookfield writes that 'adult learning (is) a phenomenon and process that can take place in any setting'.[31] Adults learn as they carry out familiar tasks in the workplace or in the home, in conversation with friends and colleagues or in leisure pursuits such as television viewing or sporting activities, usually without any conscious decision to learn.[32] Thus, this learning is *incidental* to the primary activity and without deliberate intention on the part of the learner; in fact, one could be said to be engaged in such learning throughout the day-to-day business of living. One of the foremost – and foundational – authorities of adult education, Edouard Lindeman, wrote in 1926:

> the resource of highest value in adult education is the learner's experience. If education is life, then life is also education. Too much of learning consists of vicarious substitution of someone else's experience and knowledge. Psychology is teaching us, however, that we learn what we do, and that therefore all genuine education will keep doing and thinking together … Experience is the adult learner's living textbook.[33]

Such learning really is the greatest volume of the learning of any adult, whether they participate actively in formal learning or not. In my view this is the kind of learning which most often takes place in the social milieu of women's organisations as they discuss shared interests and take part in group activities. It can occur in formal teaching situations just as easily as in a group morning tea, again dissolving the boundaries drawn by academic theorists. In the quilt which I created as a part of my process of planning for the changes taking place during my candidature, I have depicted learning as a journey, with paths crossing each other, converging and diverging as experience changes directions and moves the learner along. The act of designing the quilt, as well as discussion with another quilter, actually gave me hitherto

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29 Helen Colley, Phil Hodkinson & Janice Malcolm, *Informality and Formality in Learning: A report for the Learning and Skills Research Centre,* Lifelong Learning Institute, University of Leeds, 2003, p.65. Available online http://www.lsneducation.org.uk/user/order.aspx?code=031492&5rc=xoweb for access to pdf. file. Accessed online 17/1/2009.

30 Foley, *Dimensions,* p.5.

31 S. Brookfield, *Understanding and Facilitating Adult Learning: A comprehensive analysis of principles and effective practices,* San Francisco, Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1986, p.4.

32 Foley, Introduction, *Dimensions,* p.5.

33 Edouard Lindeman, *The Meaning of Adult Education,* Montreal, Harvest House, 1961, pp.9-10.

unrealised insights which added to the written thesis, which I see as incidental learning for both my friend and myself – but another may view the process as being in a different category of learning.

Blurring Boundaries

Colley, Hodkinson & Malcolm, in their report for the Learning and Skills Research Centre in the United Kingdom, dispute discrete categories in learning and argue that 'it is not possible to separate out informal/non-formal learning from formal learning in ways that have broad applicability'.[34] Colley et al suggest that the differentiation is politically-driven for some writers, especially in the case of non-formal and informal, which they see as interchangeable. They argue that 'it is high time to step outside the frames of this contest between formal and informal learning, in which each set of protagonists exaggerates the weaknesses of the opposing case'.[35] In developing their argument, Colley and her colleagues 'pursue the idea of formality and informality as 'attributes' of learning in practice, through an exploratory analysis of a range of different learning settings and processes'.[36] These 'attributes', the writers contend, may appear in any learning situation because 'learning is complex' and differences cannot be 'boiled down' to two or three types.[37] In the course of their research they attempted to distinctly define boundaries as used by different writers. Instead of Foley's four definitions, Colley and her colleagues write:

> Within the literature we have analysed, it is possible to abstract a list of 20 main criteria that different writers have used to distinguish the boundaries between formal and informal learning.[38]

In a similar vein to Colley et al, Fenwick writes of the interactions of systems in human experience, even the body itself, as being 'unpredictable and inventive'. 'The key to a healthy system – able to adapt creatively to changing conditions', she writes, 'is diversity among its parts, whose interactions form patterns of their own'. Expanding on this idea of human creativity and diversity, Fenwick argues that 'Learning is ... continuous invention and

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[34] Helen Colley, Phil Hodkinson & Janice Malcolm, *Informality and Formality in Learning: A report for the Learning and Skills Research Centre,* Lifelong Learning Institute, University of Leeds, 2003, Executive Summary: Major findings #2 in Introduction.

[35] Colley et al, p.6.

[36] Colley et al, p.31.

[37] Colley et al, p.29.

[38] Colley et al, p.28.

exploration'.[39] Her ideas are exciting in the context of the many and varied ways women learn in their organisations. She states:

> Knowledge cannot be contained in any one element or dimension of a system, for it is constantly emerging and spilling into other systems. ... Such studies of objects, people and learning as co-emerging systems are helping to challenge our conceptual subject/object splits. They refuse the notion that learning is a product of experience and show ways to recognize how learning is woven into fully embodied nets of ongoing action, invention, social relations and history in complex systems.[40]

While Fenwick is focusing mainly on experiential learning in the context of her paper quoted here, her comments on the fluidity of knowledge and learning and their resistance to being put in theoretical boxes are singularly apt for my purpose. While workshops and classes, especially in the Guilds, may be what Foley might classify as non-formal learning, an enormous amount of what goes on in these events spills over into adjacent 'boxes' and, as Fenwick argues, cannot be contained.

Wenger's work is interesting in the way it is more appropriate to the context of women's organisations as learning communities outside the realm of conventional educational institutions. He writes of the way he defines education:

> Education, in its deepest sense, and at whatever age it takes place, concerns the opening of identities – exploring new ways of being that lie beyond our current state. Whereas training aims to create an inbound trajectory targeted at competence in a specific practice, education must strive to open new dimensions for the negotiation of the self. It places students on an outbound trajectory toward a broad field of possible identities. Education is not merely formative – it is transformative.[41]

These ideas on education by Wenger are directly relevant to the way women's organisations create themselves as 'communities of practice' which also exist as learning communities for their members. Wenger does not define a community of practice in a distinct way, as he sees it as informal and pervasive, ranging from a family unit right through to the broadest sense of community – as 'an integral part of our daily lives'.[42] It is, he says, 'more than just a node of interpersonal ties; it reflects a shared history around which these ties are organized'.[43] In the case of the Quilters' Guild then, the community of practice involves a community of women who choose to identify themselves as quilters, but there are also others on the periphery of the

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39 Tara Fenwick, 'Inside out of experiential learning: Fluid bodies, co-emergent minds', in Richard Edwards, Jim Gallacher & Susan Whittaker (eds), *Learning Outside the Academy: International research perspectives on lifelong learning,* Abingdon, Routledge, 2006, pp.42-55(48).

40 Fenwick, 'Inside out of experiential learning', p.48.

41 Wenger, *Communities of Practice,* p.263.

42 Wenger, pp.6-7.

43 Wenger, p.298.

organisation who have loose ties in some way. I will discuss this aspect of community in later chapters. For Zonta women, their focus as a community of practice is to advance the status of women worldwide through their projects.

For the purposes of this study of learning in a few selected women's organisations it is not necessary to focus for long on the pedantics of academic theory. What is most important is to determine how and what women *do* learn in the course of their involvement in their chosen organisations. In the chapters that follow I will discuss whether I have been able to adhere closely, or at all, to the boundaries set by theorists such as Foley, or whether the outcome of my research concurs with those who see only blurred boundaries – or none at all.

As I explore each organisation and the kinds of education which occurs within them, I will examine the learning of the membership more closely. In a conversation with me, Mrs Lynn Hewitt, a former president of the Quilters' Guild of NSW, described groups within that organisation as often functioning as 'support groups' for the members for personal needs as well as the accepted purpose.[44] Such learning, or personal growth, might also be described as emotional or spiritual learning, and leads to the idea of transformative learning.

Transformative learning interests me greatly, and I see it as occurring to a considerable extent within women's organisations. It often happens as a result of incidental learning, but can also be the life-changing element for a person participating in a formal adult education course. Although originally propounded by an individual academic as an idea growing partly out of the work of Paulo Freire and his *conscientization* (consciousness-raising) concept, the theory has expanded to become a movement with many followers.[45] Before expanding on the ideas of Jack Mezirow and his work on transformative learning, however, I will briefly mention the foundational theories of Paulo Freire, whose life's work on liberatory education has made a profound difference to the educational possibilities for people in the developing world, and has remarkably influenced adult education – indeed all education – as a whole.

Paulo Freire

Paulo Freire was a Brazilian educator and theologian who is best known for his work *Pedagogy of the Oppressed.*[46] He introduced the concept of liberatory education, bringing freedom to the individual, and thence through to society, through a process of *conscientization*

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44 Personal Conversation, 21/6/2006.

45 J. Mezirow & Associates (eds), *Learning as Transformation: Critical perspectives on a theory in progress,* San Francisco, Jossey-Bass Publishers, 2000, *xi, xiii.*

46 Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed,* translated by Myra Bergman Ramos, London, Penguin Books, 1993. Twentieth anniversary edition of first publication by Continuum Publishing Co., 1970.

– consciousness-raising or critical consciousness – and *praxis* – action and reflection on one's situation which brings about the desire and action to change. Freire terms traditional education, which he deplores, *banking education*, where the individual is required to memorise facts and processes without bringing about any change in her thoughts and ideas. Conversely, he writes that '(l)iberating education consists in acts of cognition, not transferrals of information' and that this education is 'the practice of freedom – as opposed to education as the practice of domination'.[47]

Freire's revolutionary ideas have been picked up by academics in many strands of current thought, in particular feminist writers, whose work is applicable to this thesis and is discussed later in this chapter, although his earlier writings do not address the issue of gender at all. He is writing from the perspective of an academic from a developing country whose society differs from that of academics in, say, the United States or Europe and he was, in fact, forced to go into exile in the United States because of his radical views. Change, or the need of it, is not limited to impoverished illiterate people such as those Paulo Freire was working to educate, however, as many 21st century thinkers are putting forward, and have been for some time.

A radical feminist thinker, Kathleen Weiler, writes that 'We are living in a period of profound challenges to traditional Western epistemology and political theory'.[48] She writes of the relationship of feminist theory to Freire's concern for liberation from oppression through education:

> feminist educators often cite Freire as the educational theorist who comes closest to the approach and goals of feminist pedagogy. Both feminist pedagogy as it is usually defined and Freirean pedagogy rest upon visions of social transformation; underlying both are certain common assumptions concerning oppression, consciousness, and historical change.[49]

Thus, this feminist view agrees with Freire that change is needed in society to improve the position of an oppressed group, in this case women in a world which continues to be patriarchal at heart. In individuals this change often comes about as a result of consciousness-raising, a process brought about when the individual learns reflection and critical thinking. So, the critical thinking engendered by a feminist view, or a Freirean one, can bring about a call for justice and an end to discrimination against other minority or marginalised groups in society, including the aged and people with disabilities, ethnic and gay groups and people of colour.

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47 Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed,* 1993, pp.60&62.

48 K. Weiler, 'Freire and a feminist pedagogy of difference', *Harvard Educational Review,* Vol.61, no.4, Nov.1991, pp.449-474(449).

49 Weiler, 'Freire and a feminist pedagogy of difference', p.450.

That justice should include access to education. The transformation which can come about through the application of Paulo Freire's educational theories can occur in all areas of society, and his theories were originally aimed at transforming society rather than the individual, although his first approach was to his students as individuals to be the catalysts of change. Weiler writes that Freire must be understood in the context of the political and economic situation of the developing countries in which he taught and wrote.[50] His influence, however, has been wide ranging and his work has informed that of many educational philosophers and theorists. Of most significance for this thesis is his influence on Jack Mezirow, an adult educator in the United States.

Jack Mezirow and Transformative Learning

'As adult learners we are caught in our own histories' Mezirow writes. 'Approved ways of seeing and understanding, shaped by our language, culture, and personal experience, collaborate to set limits to our future learning'.[51] The habits of thinking which inhibit learning can be transformed through reflective learning which, according to Mezirow, involves

> assessment or reassessment of assumptions. Reflective learning becomes transformative whenever assumptions or premises are found to be distorting, inauthentic, or otherwise invalid … To the extent that adult education strives to foster reflective learning, its goal becomes one of either confirmation or transformation of ways of interpreting experience.[52]

Within this transformative learning process, Belenky and Stanton identify the value of community organisations (my own were the Parents' & Citizens' Association and the providers of the church pastoral care course identified in the introduction) who generate 'action projects':

> People develop their skills for critical thinking and separate knowing in the context of action projects. Combining the practices of dialogue, building on strengths, a problem-solving approach, and a commitment to action unleashes the developmental processes that transform individuals and their communities.[53]

The women's organisations examined in this thesis demonstrate Belenky & Stanton's views as they reach out with their action projects into and beyond their own communities to develop and build others in need, thus stretching already blurred boundaries. Organisations such as those in this research demonstrate the truth of Belenky and Stanton's statement that 'Educational

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50 Weiler, 'Freire and a feminist pedagogy of difference', p.451.
51 Mezirow, *Transformative Dimensions of Adult Learning,* p.1.
52 Mezirow, *Transformative Dimensions of Adult Learning,* p.6.
53 Mary Field Belenky & Ann V. Stanton, 'Inequality, Development and Connected Knowing', in Jack Mezirow & Associates, *Learning as Transformation: Critical perspectives on a theory in progress,* San Francisco, Jossey-Bass Publishers, 2000, pp.71-102(99).

institutions are not the only social institutions that regularly sponsor the development of voice and mind among adults'.[54] The organisations I have researched have, as Belenky and Stanton write, 'created a caring community where people feel deeply connected to one another'.[55] The bond which joins individuals in such communities is transformative in both individuals and their wider associations, a theme which I will develop in Chapter Six.

Radical Adult Education

Another key concept that informs this thesis is radical adult education, and it is the concept that motivated the work of Paulo Freire. Radical adult education occurs within political and social movements, usually informally as a result of the activism within the movement, but the organisations often offer non-formal courses to their members. Jesson and Newman write that radical education is associated with radical social action and is 'learning by people acting collectively to bring about radical and emancipatory social change'.[56] They expand on this by stating that learning radical action 'is about how the whole group learns collectively through action to achieve change'.[57] In an unpublished doctoral thesis, Boughton has written of the extensive education available to workers in Sydney in the early twentieth century through the Communist Party.[58] Research has also taken place on the role of women in socialism and the Communist Party, extending back to the radical era of the 1890s.[59] Arguably the most well-known radical education has taken place in the women's movement, both the 'first-wave' from around the 1890s and the so-called 'second-wave' of the 1970s.[60]

Learning happens in many different areas of social action, including the environmental movement, trade unions and political struggle, as Foley has written.[61] Radical action takes place even in the church in areas such as the Movement for the Ordination of Women, an

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54 Belenky & Stanton, p.96.
55 Belenky & Stanton, p.97.
56 Joce Jesson & Mike Newman, 'Radical Adult Education and Learning', in Griff Foley (ed), *Dimensions of Adult Learning: Adult education and training in a global era,* Sydney, Allen & Unwin, 2004, pp.251-264 (251).
57 Jesson & Newman, 'Radical Adult Education and Learning, p.253.
58 R.G. Boughton, 'Educating the Educators: The Communist Party of Australia and its influence on Australian adult education', Bundoora, Victoria, unpublished PhD thesis, La Trobe University, 1997, *passim.*
59 Two researchers who have written on women in the Communist Party in Australia in Australia are J. Damousi, *Women Come Rally: Socialism, communism and gender 1890-1955,* Melbourne, Oxford University Press, 1994, and J. Stevens, *Taking the Revolution Home: Work among women in the Communist Party of Australia 1920-1945,* Fitzroy, Melbourne, Sybylla Co-operative Press, 1987.
60 See Marilyn Lake, *Getting Equal: The history of Australian feminism,* Sydney, Allen & Unwin, 1999. The dates I have given are indications of eras only. In fact 'second-wave' is a misnomer as women continued to campaign between those two eras.
61 Foley, *Learning in Social Action,* London, Zed Books, 1999, Introduction, pp.1-13.

activist organisation, and an opposing group, Equal But Different, promoting the special place of women in the church outside of ordination. This study does not cover such overtly radical organisations, but radical adult education also contributes to the way women have learned, and continue to learn, in other women's organisations within the church, and outside it. Political lobbying takes place in a number of the organisations in this research, particularly the Country Women's Association. Quota and Zonta both have a voice at United Nations level, as does the Anglican Church organisation Mothers' Union. The National Council of Women, an umbrella organisation to which all three of these organisations belong, actively lobbies government at all levels. Such lobbying, in my view, can be classified as radical education in the learning it engenders, and I will expand on this later.

Radical action can also be seen in quilt shows, whether staged by the Quilters' Guild or small groups. This occurs when exhibitors show quilts which make statements about political or social justice issues such as Aboriginal rights or the environment. Clover and Stalker have written widely on the use of quilts to express radical views like sexual abuse and calls for justice for the oppressed.[62] A foundational element of this action is imagination, and Clover writes of its use in the arts and crafts which women are using to 'educate, empower and demand visibility and justice'. She writes of a project in which older women constructed a symbolic quilt called 'Crying the Blues' which would become 'a politically active aesthetic practice' to draw attention to social problems caused by government cutback and closures of care facilities for seniors.[63] Stalker is quoted as saying of an exhibition of quilts themed around domestic violence:

> The quilt challenge shows adult education at its best – working to create a better world by raising awareness and stimulating action to end a situation that affects thousands of people in New Zealand. It is particularly rewarding to see the quilts travelling around the country during 2007 doing their important work.[64]

Participants in social action campaigns gain considerable learning during activities like the quilt and the exhibition described above. Apart from the practical skills such as learning to communicate with legal and government bureaucracies, and skill in relating to mass media, group members gain personal confidence. Foley also writes of the other dimension of learning which relates to Freire's *conscientization* and Mezirow's theory of perspective transformation.

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62 See for example Darlene E. Clover & Joyce Stalker, *The Arts and Social Justice: Re-crafting adult education and community cultural leadership,* Leicester, NIACE, 2007.

63 Darlene Clover, 'Sewing Stories and Acting Activism: Women's leadership and learning through drama and craft', *Ephemera,* Vol.5(4): 629-642, 2005.

64 'Content May Offend: A quilt exhibition', http://www.waikato.ac.nz/news/index.shtml?article+615 Accessed online 15/7/2009.

This learning dimension led to the environmental campaign participants in Foley's study being challenged to alter their 'understanding of the world' through informal learning that is 'significant and empowering'.[65] Radical learning often leads to self-directed learning.

Self-Directed Learning

Self-directed learning, also known as autodidactic learning, is consciously and deliberately initiated by the learner as a process of self-improvement. Merriam and Caffarella describe it as 'a process of learning in which people take the primary initiative for planning, carrying out, and evaluating their own learning experiences'.[66] They also contend that self-directed learning can take place 'both inside and outside institutionally based learning programs'.[67] The activity of learning may or may not have been instigated by earlier transformative learning but the process continues as either formal or informal learning. The learning may be by an act as informal as seeking information on the internet or joining a local library, or it may be as formal as a planned program of research on a specific field. However undertaken, though, the learner initiates and controls the educational journey. Brookfield writes of the paradigm shift which took place among adult educators after Knowles in 1975, and Tough even earlier, carried out important research showing that adults were capable of significant learning projects without professional direction. He writes:

> Knowles, Tough, and others have helped to dispel the false dichotomy whereby institutionally arranged learning is seen as rational, purposeful, and effective and self-directed learning in informal settings is viewed as serendipitous, ineffective, and of a lower order.[68]

Often the learning which takes place among members of women's organisations can be self-directed. A member of the Quilters' Guild, for example, may decide to construct a quilt in an unfamiliar technique for which there is not currently a workshop available. She may then consult her own collection of reference books and magazines, borrow a book from the Guild library, or even search the internet for instructions and guidance. Such a learning activity could be classified as self-directed.

Many feminists, especially the women in the first-wave women's movement which achieved female suffrage, have been self-directed learners. Detailed accounts of their activities

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65 Foley, *Learning in Social Action,* p.39.

66 Sharan B. Merriam & Rosemary S. Caffarella, *Learning in Adulthood: A comprehensive guide* (2nd edition), San Francisco, Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1999, p.293.

67 Merriam & Caffarella, *Learning in Adulthood,* p.253.

68 Stephen D. Brookfield, *Understanding and Facilitating Adult Learning: A comprehensive analysis of principles and effective practices,* San Francisco, Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1986, pp.148-9.

have only been included in mainline recorded history because of the entry of women into academia and the creation of a theoretical background to women's history.

Feminist Theory

Within this context, and adopting a feminist approach, one of the aims of this thesis is to introduce into the history of adult education those women whose achievements have been ignored by historians and to explore the learning strategies that apply specifically to women and to women's organisations. In writing the thesis I am using feminist theories of social justice, equity and ethics to examine the way in which women's organisations in Australia operate and their reasons for establishment. Because the study is an interpretive one which includes narrative history, it is essential to indicate the methods used to analyse women's strategies, activities and relationships in their organisations. The methods I have used to throw light on the way women work together in these bodies are, firstly, feminist theory, which is imperative where the subject being examined is women. However, of equal importance is adult education theory in order to interpret the dynamics of the teaching and learning taking place in the activities of women's organisations, the main aim of the dissertation.

As a participant through my own membership of the organisations, in some cases for many years, I have included my own observations of the organisations and their activities. Stanley & Wise write of their view of the importance 'the personal' as a tool in the research process, in feminist work especially, and relate a story of Virginia Woolf's experience of a women's guild. They tell how she felt 'irretrievably cut off', unable to empathise with the women or share their view in her position as a 'benevolent spectator'.[69] So, in inserting my 'self' into both the research and the written work I am a participant and not a spectator, as well as redressing the balance of earlier androcentric research and writing. Therefore, of the reasons for feminist theory and a specific women's history, an early feminist historian has written:

> Women's history is a strategy necessary to enable us to see around the cultural blinders which have distorted our vision of the past to the extent of obliterating from view the past of half of humankind… Women's history asks for a paradigm shift… (o)nly a history based on the recognition that women have always been essential to the making of history and that *men and women* are the measure of significance, will be truly a universal history.[70]

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69 L. Stanley & S. Wise, 'The Research Process', in L. Stanley & S. Wise, in *Breaking Out:Feminist Consciousness and Feminist Research*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1993, pp.150-196(166).

70 Gerda Lerner, *The Majority Finds Its Past: Placing women in history,* New York, Oxford University Press, 1979, p.180.

Another writer in the United States has observed that '(a)dult education suffers from gender bias. Historians of the field have marginalized or written women out of the historical narrative'.[71] The situation does not differ in Australia. Sue Shore, an academic in the area of training adult educators, writes:

> Women make up over 75 percent of the Australian adult community education (ACE) sector as workers and learners. However, much of the literature ignores this fact, painting a gender-neutral picture of adult learning and adult learners as implicitly male (and white).[72]

Shore goes on to discuss the way government social policies continue to perpetuate silences, and questions how she may 'give voice to these silences', quoting bell hooks' criticism of the 'white-supremacist, capitalist, patriarchal state'.[73]

In their positions as educators within women's organisations there is a double risk of women's silencing, particularly in the case of volunteers, who are often undervalued or even dismissed, in spite of the importance of their work. Oppenheimer writes of 'considerable female volunteering in religious settings' as being 'largely unrecorded and unacknowledged'.[74] Lyons, whose publication is the first to describe the 'third sector' in Australia, notes that non-government, non profit-making organisations are 'generally overlooked', yet are 'a lot more important than most people realise'.[75] Many of the volunteers in such organisations are women, making any long-overdue study of their contribution as educators especially meaningful (although not all who teach in third sector organisations are volunteers, some are paid for their work out of class fees). Marilyn Lake writes, in an accolade of the historian Kay Daniels, that

> Kay developed a theoretical argument in support of a new feminist history, which would show that women's past experiences were integral to the basic social processes and relationships that comprised history. If women were absent from traditional accounts of the past, it was the history that was the problem, not women.[76]

Lake writes of the understanding that she gained as a postgraduate student in the 1970s of 'the difference that a feminist framework of analysis might make to our understanding of the past',

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71 Jane M. Hugo, 'Adult Education History and the Issue of Gender: Toward a different history of adult education in America', *Adult Education Quarterly,* Vol.41, No.1, Fall, 1990, pp.1-16(1).

72 Sue Shore, 'Women in Australian Community Education: Challenges to policy and suggestions for academic practice', *Convergence*, Vol.XXX, No.1, 1997, pp.24-33(24).

73 Shore, 'Women in Australian Community Education', p.26.

74 Melanie Oppenheimer, *Volunteering: Why we can't survive without it,* Sydney, UNSW Press, 2008, p.66.

75 Mark Lyons, *Third Sector: The contribution of nonprofit and cooperative enterprise in Australia,* Sydney, Allen & Unwin, 2001, pp.xi, xii.

76 Marilyn Lake, 'Kay Daniels as Feminist Historian', in *Women's History Review*, 12(2), pp.149-151.

and of the way that Daniels encouraged her students 'to see women's experiences as central, not marginal, to the past'.[77]

However, it is important not to perpetuate the myth of women as invariably victims of men's oppression, although it is true that women have been, and often continue to be, complicit in allowing their silencing and subjection to roll on unchecked. Oldfield discovered an example of women's complicity in these omissions, when beginning her research on the first-wave women's movement in Australia. She writes of her sadness at the gaps in the history she uncovered because 'so many quite prominent women did not think their experiences important enough to commit to paper, and much of what the others left has been destroyed'. Fortunately there was one woman who recognised the importance of keeping records and who was present at the time of a 'joy meeting' when women celebrated their franchise in 1902.[78] That woman was Rose Scott, and her life and activity within women's organisations is well-documented.[79] Scott knew of the problem that women faced, and still do in the writing of history, and Oldfield describes how she told the men also present at the meeting that 'their names would live 'not only in the history of Australia, but in that of the world', while the names of the women would be forgotten'.[80]

This consideration of feminist issues in research brings into play another debate – that of postfeminism and 'the death of the feminist'. Am I therefore approaching this argument too late? Have all the battles been won and the victorious warriors gone home? Not according to Hawkesworth, who titled her paper: 'The Semiotics of Premature Burial: Feminism in a Postfeminist Age'. She sees these 'recurrent pronouncements of feminism's death' as indicative of the community's desire to rid itself of a 'perceived danger in need of elimination'. According to Hawkesworth then, the death and burial of feminism in the public mind would 'erase the activism of millions of women around the globe who are currently struggling for justice'.[81] Weiler argues that the limitations of feminism in the Western tradition, which led to its criticism and rejection by women outside that tradition, can be overcome by acknowledging the variety of competing groups under the rubric *feminisms,* 'thus acknowledging both

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77 Lake, 'Kay Daniels'.

78 Audrey Oldfield, *Woman Suffrage in Australia: A gift or a struggle?,* Melbourne, Cambridge University Press, 1992, p.*xiii.*

79 The definitive biography is Judith Allen, *Rose Scott: Vision and revision in feminism,* Melbourne, Oxford University Press, 1994.

80 Oldfield, *Woman Suffrage in Australia,* p.*xiii.*

81 M. Hawkesworth, 'The Semiotics of Premature Burial: Feminism in a postfeminist age', *Signs,* Summer 2004, Vol.29 Issue 4, pp.961ff.

competing discourses and the significance of other categories and locuses of power'.[82] Two of my informants tell of the work of Quota for widows and their children in India, whose very lives are threatened or even lost by extreme discrimination.[83]

Other recent writers also discuss the current status of feminism, the differences within it and its activity, particularly that of the young feminists in the 'Third Wave', who differ considerably from those feminists termed 'Second Wave'.[84] So it is obvious that feminism is alive and well and I am thus exonerated from the charge of trying to 'resurrect a corpse' to challenge the omissions of some historians. Barbara Merrill writes of advantages to be gained through feminist action, in a challenge to academic feminism she terms 'dialogical feminism', that radical feminist adult education 'is distinctive within the field of adult education', bringing to the forefront through social action the voices of marginalized women.[85] Many women's organisations are located in this category of radicalisation, such as the Union of Australian Women, the Women's Electoral Lobby and the organisations to which the suffragist women belonged, but space does not permit their inclusion in this research.

Although women still experience some of the silencing and inequities of the past in spite of many improvements, in Australia they have full access to educational opportunities today, whether in dedicated institutions, as self-directed learners using libraries and the internet, or through other avenues. Most women today, apart from personal circumstances, also have opportunities for full expression with the demolition of public/private divide in western society, although this is not the case in many other societies. Advances in technology have brought about many of these freedoms, as well as another method of record-keeping, that of oral history, which I have been able to utilise for this research.

Oral History

As I have said, in the realm of adult education arguments have been put forward for some time that learning is socially situated and does not necessarily take place in a formal teaching institution. Thus, while learning can often be an individual activity, it also frequently

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82 Weiler, K., 'Rereading Paulo Freire', in K. Weiler (ed), *Feminist Engagements: Reading, resisting, and revisioning male theorists in education and cultural studies,* New York, Routledge, 2001, pp.67-87.

83 Interviews with Gloria Cook, 10/7/2007 and June Young 11/6/2007.

84 B. Merrill, 'Dialogical Feminism: Other women and the challenge of adult education, *International Journal of Lifelong Education,* Vol.24, issue 1, 2005, pp.41-52.

85 A.E. Kinser, 'Negotiating Spaces For/Through Third-Wave Feminism', *NWSA,* Vol.16, Issue 3, 2004 pp.124ff.

results from group processes, many of them informal.[86] In this research I have made use of oral history to reveal firsthand accounts of women's experiences of learning within the branches and groups of their organisations. Paul Thompson, considered to be a trailblazer in the oral history movement, writes that '(a)ll history depends ultimately upon its social purpose'.[87] In this extract from his longer work, he writes of the 'creative and co-operative nature of the oral history method', and the way that historians work with their informants, 'as field workers … sharing experience on a human level'.[88] I have found in my own use of oral history as a research method that I have often become one with the informants in a sense, a participant in the research to a far greater extent than I would have expected. This has been especially the case in my membership of some of the organisations such as CWA and the Embroiderers' Guild of NSW. Oral history has done much to overcome the silences of many marginalised communities, and of women. Perks and Thomson write of the way that oral history includes 'within the historical record the experiences and perspectives of groups of people who might otherwise have been 'hidden from history' '.[89] They go on to argue that,

> Interviews have also documented aspects of historical experience which tend to be missing from other sources, such as domestic work or family life, and they have resonated with the subjective or personal meanings of lived experience.[90]

I have written above of the paucity of research on women and adult education and on learning in women's organisations in particular. These omissions demonstrate how much women's own voices can contribute to establishing a written record of such experience. If, as some of my research seems to be indicating, these organisations may be in the process of giving way to a different era in the social lives of women now obliged to work to contribute to the family support, it is even more vital that their voices be heard before it is too late. If it is not too late already for the revitalising of women's organisations, which have seen a decline in numbers in recent years, the value cannot be underestimated of a discussion of their place in assisting women to learn and to grow.

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86 Andrew Gonczi, 'The New Professional and Vocational Education', in Foley, *Dimensions,* pp.19-34, *passim.*

87 Paul Thompson, 'The Voice of the Past: Oral history', in Robert Perks & Alistair Thomson (eds), *The Oral History Reader*, Abingdon, UK, Routledge, 2006, pp.25-31(25).

88 Thompson, 'The Voice of the Past', p.30.

89 Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson (eds), *The Oral History Reader: Second Edition,* , p.ix.

90 Perks & Thomson, *Oral HistoryReader,* p.ix.

Learning outside institutions

A number of academics have written about the way that learning takes place outside a formal institutional situation such as occurs in 'my' organisations. Welton discusses the work of Habermas and his ideas about knowledge, one of which is that of emancipatory knowledge, in which an individual seeks to achieve 'emancipation from domination', whether from domination by nature or by other groups or individuals. 'For Habermas, then,' Welton continues, 'knowledge is the outcome of human activity motivated by interests that guide and shape their learning processes'.[91] It is easy to deduce from this the way that groups of women in, say, an Embroiderers' Guild workshop learn from tutors and from those around them, thus improving their skills in needlework. At the same time they may be developing social skills in communication and even developing teaching skills by helping a neighbour in the group. A member's educating capacity often extends beyond group meetings and workshops to sharing skills with friends, neighbours and family members. Finally, one cannot underestimate the educative value of casual conversation carried on within such a workshop or meeting, even if unrelated to the primary purpose.

So, my own knowledge gained to write this thesis through social interaction with other members and my participation in workshops and meetings has placed me inevitably as a player within my own research and transformed my work and my 'self' in a very different way than if I had relied solely upon organisational records. I feel personally emancipated and empowered by this participation, by the friendships made and the learning achieved in the process of the research.

Cranton cites Mezirow's argument that '"Emancipatory learning often is transformative" '.[92] Emancipatory learning may be seen as transformative for women in a greater way than for men, especially for those women who have been subjected to domination by a father – or a husband or partner in a difficult marriage or relationship. The discovery of their own intellect, abilities and strengths can be life-changing to a radical degree for many women in, from a feminist viewpoint, removal of patriarchal control, a topic on which innumerable volumes have been published and which formed the basis of suffragist activism. This activism was the instigating factor for the establishment of numerous women's

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91 Michael Welton, 'The Contribution of Critical Theory to Our Understanding of Adult Learning', in Sharan B. Merriam (ed), *Selected Writings on Philosophy and Adult Education,* Malabar, Florida, Krieger Publishing Company, 1995, second edition, pp.173-185.

92 Patricia Cranton, *Understanding and Promoting Transformative Learning: a guide for educators of adults,* San Francisco, Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1994, p.16.

organisations in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, all of which educated – in a transformative way – both their members and the wider society.[93]

The elements of discrimination that still exist against women call up the issue of justice, a concept which is also embodied within any discussion on emancipation. Karl discusses the importance of women mobilising together by forming associations, not only for their own emancipation but also for national liberation in some third world countries. 'Non-governmental women's organizations', she contends, 'become very involved in lobbying the government on issues of concern to women'. Political education campaigns by women's organisations are vital in raising awareness of women's ability to participate and even to lead, and a successful candidate 'open(s) the way for other women, especially …if supported by …women's organizations and grassroots movements'.[94]

As it is seen by many of its practitioners today, adult education is a vast field. Women have greater opportunities of leadership in the formal areas of the discipline, although equality of promotion remains a long way off. Community colleges, TAFE and private commercial institutions are by no means the extent of adult education. However, the contribution of women in formal adult education is so vast that it could not possibly be covered in a single thesis, and was the reason for my decision to narrow my field of inquiry to this group of women's organisations.

The scope of adult education within organisations is still broad, but more easily dealt with in a single project such as this. Foley has written of education through social action and, in particular, the personal growth which can occur in such situations as neighbourhood houses, 'the women come to see themselves, and to be seen, as competent people with something to contribute to society'.[95] Along with personal growth comes the learning of values such as justice and the idea of caring as a virtue, a prominent feature in many women's organisations. Later chapters will show how this works in these organisations, but some of the ideas are briefly outlined below.

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93 Susan Magarey, *Passions of the First Wave Feminists,* Sydney, University of New South Wales Press, 2001, p.49.

94 Marilee Karl, *Women and Empowerment: Participation and decision making,* London, Zed Books, 1995*,* pp.77-8.

95 G. Foley, *Learning in Social Action: A contribution to understanding informal education,* London, Zed Books, 1999, pp.54-5.

Learning and an ethic of care in feminist theory

Education is necessary in order to transmit the idea of justice down through the generations, according to O'Neill. She links justice and virtue, seeing virtue necessary as a positive act of rejecting injury, indifference and neglect rather than a neutral state of being. I see the function of many women's organisations as promoting O'Neill's ideal of a social fabric built with confidence and trust through reformed and renewed 'special relationships, shared cultures and shared community'.[96] Furthermore, I contend that justice and virtue may be learned through participation in organisations whose constitutions, as well as their members, hold these values and share them in community. These values will differ according to the nature of the organisation; a middle-class Christian women's organisation may hold different values to that of a Muslim women's organisation. A neighbourhood house women's group in a working class area with many unemployed households will differ from both of the former.

While it may be argued in today's social ethic that men are equally capable of, and willing to, care as are women, Beasley and Bacchi write that 'whatever their individual circumstances regarding receiving care, men have a significantly lesser involvement in giving care than women'.[97] Although their writing is dense and their argument not always easy to follow, their suggestion for a new kind of 'care ethic' is interesting, in that they envision an ethical community which rejects the focus on a care which demands 'the fragility of the other' and instead encompasses the whole community broadly in interdependence and responsiveness to an all-inclusive 'other' which is not necessarily 'needy'. However, such an ideal seems to me to be a Utopian dream quite outside the realm of the possible in our strongly individual-orientated Western society. That is, unless every individual in every community is willing to learn the importance of unselfishness and an ethic of care.[98]

Many women's organisations include – even major on – a care ethic within their philosophy, not only the Country Women's Association. Quilters' guilds universally, not just in Australia, routinely undertake projects to make quilts for hospitals, hospices, trauma victims and other recipients, not all of them needy. Members of Quota and Zonta clubs demonstrate care in carrying out fundraising and charitable acts in the community, and across the globe, for those in need.

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96 O. O'Neill, *Towards Justice and Virtue: A constructive account of practical reasoning,* Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1992, pp.202-3.

97 C. Beasley & C. Bacchi, 'The Political Limits of 'Care' in Re-imagining Interconnection/Community and an Ethical Future', *Australian Feminist Studies,* 2005, Vol.20, no.46, pp.49-64.

98 Beasley & Bacchi, 2005.

There has been considerable debate on whether care is a specifically feminine virtue, a debate which is important in the consideration of the place of care in women's organisations and, in regard to this study, the resultant education which may or may not take place as a consequence. Margaret McLaren argues that 'virtue theory can contribute positively to a feminist ethic', and discusses the contributions of various debates in depth. She especially engages with the argument of Carol Gilligan, the feminist philosopher, who propounds the view that care *is* a specifically feminine quality.[99] A further interesting debate on the subject, found in the same collection of essays as McLaren, is that by Barbara Andrew, who uses the fascinating title: 'Angels, Rubbish Collectors, and Pursuers of Erotic Joy: The image of the ethical woman'. The basis of her essay is a critical engagement with Virginia Woolf's image of the Angel in the House, an 'ideal' of the perfect, submissive woman such as that extolled in the American cult of True Womanhood.[100]

Andrew uses the term 'rubbish collector' to describe the action of feminist philosophers of 'picking through the refuse of philosophical systems and ideas' in order to find 'what might be recyclable'. In such a process of reassembling ideas, she writes, we resemble artists who find new ways of putting together collected things, so that a new feminist ethic can be created from the ideas of masculinist philosophers of the past. In conclusion, Andrew suggests that women need to be freed from the shackles of confusing love with subjection, to grasp hold of moral agency and create 'new myths', myths in which we imagine ourselves to be 'creators of found art and pursuers of erotic joy'.[101]

Women's Organisations and Creativity

Andrew's suggestion of feminist philosophers as artists and women as creators leads me to think of creativity which, in my view, can be an integral part of personal development, as well as an educative process. That process, both as development and as education is, I would argue, further enhanced by the communication within the group, whether they are creating a collaborative project (for example, a group friendship quilt) or whether they are individuals working on their own projects within the group. Perrin writes, in a colourful narrative that is part of a collection of essays on creativity, that:

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[99] M.A. McLaren, 'Feminist Ethics: Care as a Virtue', in P. DesAutels & J. Waugh (eds), *Feminists Doing Ethics,* Lanham, Maryland, Rowman & Littlefield, 2001, pp.101-117.

[100] Barbara S. Andrew, 'Angels, Rubbish Collectors and Pursuers of Erotic Joy: The image of the ethical woman', in DesAutels & Waugh, *Feminists Doing Ethics,* pp.119-133. P.119-133.

[101] Andrew, 'Angels, Rubbish Collectors and Pursuers of Erotic Joy'.

> the relationship of art to reality lies in the creative act itself. It's not in the images or other results produced. The creation of images is part of the learning process, not something carried out after it. …The response of others adds to the meaning. When readers and viewers make their own meanings, they are also involved in the process.[102]

Thus, women in creative guilds or in organisations like the CWA are engaging in a unique form of education which is promoting their growth, not only as community members but, more significantly, their growth *and* their education as individuals. According to Clover and Stalker, creative activities contribute to learning and enhance community involvement:

> The arts and crafts are key components of culture and have been important tools of adult education for many decades. Engagement with and through symbolic, aesthetic media ... stimulates dialogue, critique, knowledge/learning, imagination and action by developing spaces of resistance, choice, accommodation, debate and control. Moreover, while art, as Theodor Adorno once suggested, cannot solve many social dilemmas, it can solve one problem: the loneliness of spirit.[103]

The authors go on to build on these claims and argue further that arts and crafts build community and work towards social justice. They conclude their introduction to a special journal edition on the subject with the contention that arts/crafts have the potential to 'create a better world'. Other authors in the special edition of the journal above argue for the arts as leading to transformation of individuals and communities.[104]

In a brief paper included in a university department newsletter, DuVernet argues that creativity contributes to spiritual wellbeing and healing. Writing of the value of her own area of textile education in schools, she states that her doctoral research developed:

> out of my belief in the value of textile education in providing an opportunity to quieten and focus the mind on the God-given power of the creative self to heal and change one's personal situation.[105]

While I cannot agree with DuVernet's contention that creating necessarily allows the possibility of changing one's personal situation, I would argue that the process of creating and the peace of mind it often brings promotes an ability to accept and live within a difficult situation, for example the terminal illness of oneself or a loved one. Creativity is often

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[102] P. Perrin, 'Revysed I's', in J.Brockman (ed), *Creativity: The Reality Club 4,* New York, Simon & Schuster, 1993, pp.149-163.

[103] Darlene E. Clover & Joyce Stalker, Guest Editorial, 'Social Justice, Arts and Adult Education', *Convergence,* Vol.XXXVIII (4), 2005, pp.3-7(4).

[104] Clover & Stalker, 'Social Justice, Arts and Adult Education', p.7. All articles in this special issue focus on the arts.

[105] Louise DuVernet, 'Connecting the Disconnected Through Textiles', in Sophie McGrath (ed), *Newsletter of the Golding Centre for Women's History, Theology and Spirituality*, Australian Catholic University, Vol.8, No.1, April 2009, pp.3-6.

considered unimportant, something revealed by a noted radio interviewer while promoting a forthcoming program. She expressed interest that her guest, Sir Ken Robinson, had written that creativity is undervalued and ignored in Western society, especially in the education system.[106] After subsequently listening to the interview, I obtained Sir Ken Robinson's enthralling book, in which he emphasises the importance of creativity to the individual and to the group, which he refers to as 'the tribe'. 'Finding your tribe', he says, referring to others with similar passions, 'can have transformative effects on your sense of identity and purpose'.[107] This is the reason that the guilds, especially, can inspire passion in the women who belong to them, through their membership of their own learning community.

Creativity has become more widely discussed since conversations have broadened with the insights of feminist scholarship, although it is only one of the many aspects of learning which have become visible since then. Research into feminist concepts like gendered learning will assist in broadening adult education research as a whole, and will bring new understanding to the different ways women learn: from men, from each other, and within different situations. Hayes argues that researchers must develop 'a more sophisticated understanding of the concepts we have begun to identify as central to women's learning', along with 'a more holistic understanding'.[108]

Women and their Ways of Knowing

There is a depth of wisdom in women that grows with the years and springs from life itself, and not from the halls of academia or other conventional sources of learning. Jean Barr writes of her regret at her former dismissive attitude to this as an academic:

> my somewhat arrogant blindness to ways of knowing other than those valued and given recognition in seats of learning – in the mainstream. As if knowledge which springs from everyday life and which is directed to some useful purpose is not therefore knowledge and as if the only theory that deserves the name is described in books.[109]

Barr goes on to elaborate on this knowledge 'from below', as she calls it, knowledge and way of thinking which 'does not fit within the narrow parameters of our culture's dominant notions

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[106] Margaret Throsby promoting an interview with Sir Ken Robinson in *Morning Interview* on *Mornings with Margaret Throsby,* ABC Classic FM, 15/6/2009.

[107] Ken Robinson, *The Element: How finding your passion changes everything,* Camberwell Victoria, Allen Lane/ Penguin Group Australia, 2009, p.114.

[108] Elisabeth Hayes, 'Creating Knowledge About Women's Learning', in Elisabeth Hayes & Daniele D. Flannery et al, *Women as Learners: The significance of gender in adult learning,* San Francisco, Jossey-Bass Publishers, 2002, pp.217-245.

[109] Jean Barr, *Liberating Knowledge: Research, feminism and adult education,* Leicester, NIACE, 1999, p.33.

of rationality and intelligence'.[110] Belenky et al write of the view, in their example by the health profession, that women's ways of knowing were competent and trustworthy. They tell of the joy and relief experienced by women who discovered a clinic where their knowledge was respected. 'What these women needed and what the clinic provided', they write, 'was confirmation that they could be trusted to know and to learn. Given confirmation, they felt they could "just do anything".'[111]

This knowledge women have and learn, gained largely through life experience, is dismissed too often as 'female intuition' or 'old wives' tales' and would rarely, if ever, be considered worthy of footnoting in an academic work! The idea for the first sentence I wrote in this section should be credited to an unknown and unnamed elderly woman with whom I conversed briefly while waiting at the railway station on the morning of writing this. If I could have spoken longer with her I would no doubt have uncovered a great deal more wisdom than I could learn in a text on adult education. This woman might have once been an academic for all I know, but whether or not, she and others like her have been ascribed with agency by feminist research and theory, not simply 'objects of knowledge' for academic research.[112]

Damousi argues that feminism has moved 'beyond homogenous notions of power and oppression towards a more complicated understanding of the racial, ethnic, class, and gendered forms of political identity'.[113] Feminism no longer holds the unified position it did in the early years of the second-wave and this is reflected in some of my findings with regard especially to class in the organisations I examined. Stalker urges researchers to beware of 'shallow, tokenistic acknowledgement of feminist agendas', and to move toward 'in-depth theoretical analyses which acknowledge the social construction of women's realities and oppression'.[114] As a researcher into women's organisations I see the necessity of taking Stalker's advice to heart. As a means of gaining first-hand insights into these experiences, I have conducted oral history interviews with women who are, or have been, involved in women's organisations and have agreed to discuss their memories and their views.

Conclusion

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110 Barr, *Liberating Knowledge,* p.33.

111 Mary Field Belenky, Blythe McVicker Clinchy, Nancy Rule Goldberger & Jill Mattuck Tarule, *Women's Ways of Knowing: The development of self, voice and mind,* New York, Basic Books, 1997, p.195.

112 Barr, p.36.

113 Joy Damousi, 'Left-Wing Feminism', in Barbara Caine (General Editor), *Australian Feminism: A companion,* Melbourne, Oxford University Press, 1998, pp.183-188.

114 Joyce Stalker, 'Women and Adult Education: Rethinking Androcentric Research', *Adult Education Quarterly,* Vol.46, No.2, Winter 1996, pp.98-113(110).

In collecting and evaluating research on the practices of women's organisations in Australian history I am drawing from adult education, feminist and philosophical ideas, as well as some sociological theory, to demonstrate my thesis that the learning opportunities offered in women's organisations are significant, cover a vast area, and cannot be confined within the boundaries set by conventional adult education theorists. In this chapter I have laid the foundation for the research findings in the following chapters which all show the variety of ways in which learning occurs in women who are members of organisations. The conventional theories which delineate boundaries between learning areas are useful as a framework for investigation into this learning in women's organisations to begin. However, this research will show that a flexible approach is of greater advantage to the researcher in this corner of the vast field which comprises women's learning.

The organisations in the study are not conventional educational institutions, but they do offer formal teaching and training in their skills, procedures and ethos to their members. By learning what is offered the women thus involve themselves as members of and participants in each learning community, a process which will be examined in the following chapter.

Chapter Two

Teaching and Training

Formal Education and Learning in Women's Organisations

Most women's organisations set out in a deliberate way to educate their members to become a part of the organisation as a learning community. This varies, with some undertaking major programs as a central focus of their constitution, while other organisations with a different aim are less deliberate in the teaching and training they provide. I will show here the extent of the teaching and of the training in skills and procedures that takes place in the selected organisations. Also formal, and thus situated in this chapter, is the process of application and selection for the scholarships and awards made by some organisations to their members, and sometimes to outsiders who have a link in some way with their outside communities. However, there is an overlap here in categorisation as the awards can involve the organisation's outreach into the wider community, which is discussed in Chapter Six.

As has been shown in Chapter One, formal education – or learning from the standpoint of the learner (who is *being* educated) – has been perceived by most theorists until recently to include only that which takes place in formal education institutions. As Foley defines it, formal education is 'organised by professional educators, there is a defined curriculum, and it often leads to a qualification'.[1] Merriam and Caffarella define formal learning as that which takes place 'in educational institutions'.[2] Brookfield, a respected authority in adult education theory, states that formal learning occurs in 'formal settings' and 'structured environments'.[3] Boshier, in an adult education encyclopedia entry, states: 'Formal settings are age-graded credential-awarding schools, colleges, universities and similar settings under the control of a Ministry of Education'. He argues further that those he claims to be non-formal education settings (such as women's organisations) are relaxed about pre-requisites and outcomes.[4]

I dispute Boshier's claim with regard to women's organisations, as my research has shown most of them to be not at all 'relaxed' about the task of educating their members and leadership. Some are very strict and are tightening their regulations further for those in leadership who are providing education to members. So, while I use the terms formal education and formal learning, and apply them as that which is requisite and/or followed by an award on

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1 Griff Foley (ed), 'Introduction: The state of adult education and learning', in Griff Foley (ed), *Dimensions of Adult Learning,* pp.4-5.

2 Merriam & Caffarella, *Learning in Adulthood,* p.21.

3 Stephen D. Brookfield, *Understanding and Facilitating Adult Learning,* p.166.

4 Roger Boshier, 'Lifelong Learning', in Leona M. English (ed), International Encyclopedia of Adult Education, Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2005, pp.373-8(374).

successful completion, I apply it to a different kind of institution to that with which the theorists link it.

Women's organisations use formalised training to prepare their members for leadership and to impart skills relevant to their own ethos, such as the needlework techniques used in the Embroiderers' Guild. Included in this is also the formation and dissemination of rules and regulations to control and provide cohesion within the meetings and activities of the general membership. So, while it is clear that the definition of formal education put forward by Foley and by others of his colleagues does not comfortably fit the structure of a voluntary organisation because of its nature outside the realm of a 'formal educational institution', formal learning leading to qualifications is required of members in many situations. Some of the teachers and tutors may not have university degrees or other further education qualifications, but they are highly skilled in the areas in which they are offering instruction and able to pass on their skills to members.

Therefore, the fact that many, if not most, of those performing educative or training functions in these organisations under scrutiny may not be professional educators is another point of departure from the theorists. However, they are either accredited by the organisations themselves or are well-versed through long membership and experience in the relevant field. Some of the tutors in both of the Guilds examined in this thesis have become professionals in their fields through their membership and the training they received from their Guild or from other similar institutions.

However, for my own purposes I am classifying as 'formal' those courses which are rewarded with a certificate by the organisation concerned, or which are requirements to hold a position within the organisation, for example training for an executive position. In those organisations included in the study, the one most focused on what I define as formal education and learning is the Embroiderers' Guild.

The Embroiderers' Guild NSW Inc.

Aspiring teachers in the Embroiderers' Guild are required to undergo formal accreditation by a panel before they are permitted to tutor classes, workshops or correspondence courses. The same applies for judges, who must meet the requisite criteria before being accepted as judges of work submitted for competitions like the Margaret Oppen Prize, which is awarded annually. All this is reflected in the statement of aim on the website, through which this Guild identifies itself as an educational body and a learning community:

'The Guild aims to encourage the art of embroidery while maintaining a high standard of design and technique in embroidery.'[5]

The Embroiderers' Guild was founded by Margaret Oppen in 1957 in Sydney as a branch of the London Embroiderers' Guild, a status which was maintained until 1971.[6] Jean Vere, an early leader in the Guild, recalled that the growing membership made the per capita fee to the London Guild intolerable and so the decision was made to form a separate Embroiderers' Guild in New South Wales.[7]

Margaret Oppen, who was an artist, had lived in England between 1949 and 1954 and was a member of the London Embroiderers' Guild, as well as taking classes at the Royal School of Needlework during that time.[8] Out of that experience in Britain Margaret Oppen demanded a high standard of embroidery from the very beginning of the Guild in NSW. The British Embroiderers' Guild had been founded in 1906 as the Society for Certificated Embroideresses by sixteen graduates of the Royal School of Art Needlework. Entry requirements were stringent and only qualified teachers with an embroidery diploma were admitted. After a break during World War I the society was reconvened as the Embroiderers' Guild in 1920 but remained restricted in entry until 1934, when the entry examination was dropped. However, the commitment to education and standards of excellence remained, and links with the City & Guilds of London Institute began in 1935. A Diploma for Judges in embroidery was also awarded a year later. The brief history of the British Guild included on its website shows the prominent emphasis which has always been placed on education by that Guild and which influenced the daughter organisation.[9]

By 1980 the activities of the NSW Guild, now quite independent of the parent body, had expanded considerably to include some teaching in formal institutions. As well, tutors were already travelling beyond the Sydney metropolitan area and even overseas to provide classes, such as a trip undertaken to Darwin by Roma Field and another member, Mrs Jeanette Kerr, as Jean Vere writes:

> The cultural role that the Guild is fulfilling in today's society is exemplified by weekend schools, tutorials at New England University, Toowoomba and Bathurst Colleges of Advanced Education, assignments for the Arts Council,

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5 Embroiderers' Guild NSW Inc. website, www.embgdnsw.org.au/ accessed 8 May 2008.

6 'Guest Speaker in March – Mrs Jean Vere on The Embroiderer's Guild, New South Wales', *The Record,* No.201, May 1980, pp.10-13.

7 Jean Vere's speech to the Embroiderers' Guild monthly meeting in March 1980, original script in the Guild archives, reprinted in *The Record,* May 1980, no.201, pp.10-13.

8 Susan G. Wood, 'Creative Embroidery in New South Wales, 1960-1975', unpublished PhD thesis, RMIT University, 2006, p.84.

9 'Embroiderers' Guild Centenary 1906-2006: A Brief History of the Embroiderers' Guild', http://www.embroiderersguild.com/about/eguildhistory.pdf Accessed online 12/3/2009. (UK Guild).

> Craft Association, Craft Council ... invitations interstate, to New Zealand, and British Columbia, as well as regular visits to country groups and the large and vital branch in Newcastle.[10]

Heather Joynes taught at the Guild Summer Schools at the University of New England in Armidale, NSW, in the last years that they were held there.[11] She said of the schools and her experiences teaching with Pat Langford, one of the earliest members of the Guild:

> I learnt so much from Pat not only about embroidery but about teaching because ... the year that I did the City & Guilds (1970) I went to Armidale as one of the tutors at the Summer School, and I hadn't really taught anybody anything. I learnt a great deal from Pat about teaching – about teaching specifically embroidery and design ... Well I went up to Armidale with the Summer School for two or three years. And that was always a very interesting experience, because we worked all year on what we were going to do up there.[12]

Teacher training in those early years was limited to the kind of informal passing on of knowledge to which Heather refers above. However, no doubt the practical experience of the Summer Schools was a great preparation and helped to increase teaching skills. At the time the University of New England had a strong component of adult education, and there was a wide range of topics in the Summer Schools held for the general public.[13]

Formal training in the Embroiderers' Guild began when Heather Joynes, along with Prue Socha, undertook the City & Guilds of London course in embroidery by correspondence. They did the course in response to a suggestion by Margaret Oppen as the only course leading to qualifications in Australia was one devoted mainly to weaving and printing, with a small component of embroidery, at East Sydney Technical College.[14] Heather explains:

> I felt that I couldn't devote three years to doing something that I wasn't really interested in doing, embroidery was a very small part of it – you know – and it didn't really suit us at all, so that's how we came to do the City & Guilds here – and we were the first people to do it here in Australia. It was a great trial really, 'cause we worked on this for just over twelve months and then we had to send our work to England by a certain date – so we had to send it air mail which the Guild paid for ... [15]

Arrangements were made for examinations to be sat in Sydney to avoid the candidates having to travel to London, but Heather recalls with some amusement that the examination was a

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10 Jean Vere's speech, March 1980.

11 Unfortunately no record of these Summer Schools could be located in the University of New England archives at the time of my research.

12 Interview with Heather Joynes, 6 October, 2005.

13 Bob Boughton, 'Adult Education's Hidden History: Interrogating the 'Great Tradition' ', *Communities of Learning, Communities of Practice*, Proceedings of the 43rd Annual Conference of the Adult Learning Association of Australia, Sydney, 2003, pp.31-40.

14 Interview with Heather Joynes, 6 October, 2005.

15 Heather Joynes, 6 October, 2005.

surreal experience for Prue Socha and herself as the only candidates at the old Marcus Clark building, then partly a department store but now occupied by the Sydney College of TAFE:

> – and then we had to sit three exams here in Sydney, which was at the old Marcus Clark's building. And I can remember there were just two of us – Prue Socha and myself – in this *huge* room with thousands of desks ...and one young man – he was the invigilator (laughs), and I can remember sitting there waiting for him to give us the paper (laughs) and he said to us: "Why are you doing this?" And Prue and I thought: Well might you ask![16]

The procedure of obtaining the qualification seems to have been indeed 'a great trial', as Heather says. That no doubt led to their wondering, in response to the invigilator's question, why they had undertaken such a lengthy and challenging course of action with its conclusion in such bizarre surroundings. They were, however, both successful in their examinations and went on to teach in the Guild for decades – at the time of writing Heather, in her eighties, is still teaching.

The City & Guilds of London course and qualification was held in such high regard in those early days that Betty Tate, a creative embroiderer at the Newcastle Branch of the Guild, was permitted to teach even though she had completed only the first part of the course without attaining graduate level. She told me that she decided to do part one of a City and Guilds embroidery course while living in Scotland when her husband, a Royal Navy chaplain, was away at sea 'and that was very interesting 'cause it covered all the additional side of things, taking it a step further and bringing it more up to date, so I enjoyed it.'[17] Betty was only able to do the first part because she moved away from where the course was held, but after returning to Australia she attended classes at the Embroiderers' Guild with Pat Langford and Prue Socha in Sydney.

Effie Mitrofanis, who is a professional freelance author/designer/tutor, is a teacher in the Embroiderers' Guild who has published several books with another soon to come.[18] This writing of instructional books is something which a significant proportion of tutors in both of the Guilds have done, and is part of the educative strategy since the books are stocked in the Guild libraries and sold by the Embroiderers' Guild in their members' shop. Effie was too busy meeting a publisher's deadline for a recorded interview but sent me an email answering a few questions. In response to my query "What does the Embroiderers' Guild mean to you?" Effie wrote:

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16 Heather Joynes.

17 Interview with Betty Tate on 20/2/2006.

18 Books by Effie Mitrofanis include *Casalguidi Style Linen Embroidery,* Kenthurst, NSW, Kangaroo Press, 1996 and *Needleweaving and Embellished Treasures,* Bowral, NSW, Sally Milner Publishing, 2005.

> Since 1972 I have been a member of the Guild and haven't stopped stitching since, as outlined in my resumé. I wear many hats in the Guild – member, tutor, consultant to the committee, director and assessor of two courses by distance, mentor and co-ordinator of Advanced Traditional Techniques and Proficiency Certificate, writer.
>
> Guilds in New South Wales and all states of Australia and New Zealand have been a major part of my life since I qualified as a Tutor 1980, and taught part time until 1991 when I commenced teaching and writing full time.
>
> The Guild plays a big part in my life as embroidery is my hobby as well as my profession.
>
> A magnificent collection of all types of embroidery and a well-stocked specialist library is available for us to read about and see.[19]

Effie's commitment to her craft (in the finest sense of the word) and her professionalism is evident from the above quote, and it is also clear from her impressive resumé. In addition to her High Distinction in a Master of Visual & Performing Arts from Charles Sturt University, Effie has completed two Proficiency Certificates and is now a course coordinator for that and other courses in the Guild. She has undertaken further study and research in a number of countries, including the United Kingdom, Italy and Greece, and has published in many Australian and overseas publications as well as her own five, soon to be six, books.[20] Any suggestion that her teaching, or that of the Guild of which she is a major part, is less than the highest standard of formal education in its field is, to my mind, presumptuous and inaccurate.

Formal accreditation of teachers is acquired through successful completion of the Practical Teaching Skills Course, which has been designed and run since 1997 by Chris Bennett, an adult educator who is a member of the Guild and has a Masters Degree in Adult Education. The course is offered both in-house and by correspondence and covers a wide range of training in teaching skills, including communication, lesson planning, and presentation and marketing.[21] Judges' Accreditation requirements are more rigorous, and candidates must hold accreditation as a teacher, as well as being able to demonstrate broad knowledge of the field of embroidery and attending a final interview with the Judges Accreditation Committee.[22]

Once the tutors have acquired their accreditation there is a wide range of courses to be taught which the Guild offers to members, along with the teachers' own specialisations. The first formal course which can be taken by new and/or unskilled members of the Guild is *Introduction to Embroidery – Stitches and Techniques,* formerly the *Basic Course –*

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19 Correspondence from Effie Mitrofanis, 18/1/09.

20 Effie Mitrofanis M.A., Curriculum Vitae, sent to me by her via email 18/1/09. A complete list of books to date by Effie Mitrofanis is included in the Bibliography.

21 Embroiderers' Guild NSW Inc., *Education and Exhibition Calendar 2007,* p.21.

22 *Education and Exhibition Calendar 2007,* pp.21-2.

Introduction to Stitches and Techniques.[23] This correspondence course consists of ten lessons of five hours each year, spread over two years. A Certificate of Completion is awarded on successfully finishing the course.[24]

Fig 2. Thesis quilt section showing some of the techniques taught in Embroiderers' Guild courses. Guild logo used by permission.

There are also a number of separate correspondence courses on various embroidery techniques, for which successful students are also awarded a Certificate of Completion. The Proficiency Certificate, which is focused on one particular embroidery technique chosen by the candidate from a selection available, is rewarded with its own specific certificate on successful completion. The transformation of one candidate's life through gaining this certificate is described in Chapter Five. In her correspondence from which I have quoted above, Effie Mitrofanis included a list from the formal teaching program that highlights the progressive development of skills:

- Introduction to embroidery, 2 years – basic level.
- Embroidery by Design/Intermediate Course, 2 years – intermediate level.
- Advanced Traditional Techniques, 1 year – The aim of the course is to facilitate and guide participants to achieve a high standard of knowledge, understanding and skill in one technique.
- Proficiency Certificate, 2 years – This course is designed to enable a candidate who is already proficient in a technique to demonstrate their ability to work independently at a high level of proficiency in areas of

[23] Reference to change of name in *The Record,* No.478, November 2007, p.17.
[24] *Education & Exhibition Calendar,* p.19.

> Technique and Design. The Course involves intensive and self-directed study.[25]

Following these courses, a member who wishes to advance further may take additional specific courses by distance, move on to Tutor Accreditation with a Practical Teaching Skills Course and, if desired, take the Judges' Course leading to that accreditation.[26]

It is obvious, therefore, that a decision to work her way through even a few of the qualifications offered by the Embroiderers' Guild NSW Inc. would take a member several years and intensive work to complete. Displays of members' work mounted around the walls of the Headquarters, always themed and changed monthly, reveal the intricate detail of the work and the high level of skill attained by many members.[27]

The Quilters' Guild of NSW Inc.

The Quilters' Guild provides a number of courses in quilting techniques, although fewer in number than the Embroiderers' Guild, but the craft is more limited in techniques than embroidery, by its very nature, in any case. Some women maintain membership in both Guilds, and many of these would be those who embellish their quilts with embroidery, for example art quilts, or those created in the style of the crazy quilt, popular in Victorian times and revived in recent years.[28] Opportunity for accreditation is provided for teachers in the Quilters' Guild but is not compulsory, although preferred. At present there is some controversy about the issue and it is likely that it will become compulsory at some point in the future.[29] Therefore some who are teaching, especially those engaged by quilt shops, are not accredited to teach by the Quilters' Guild at the present time.[30] The Guild magazine, *The Template,* states of its program:

> Teacher accreditation is not a training program, but rather recognition of proven skills of present and future teachers. The Guild now offers three programs of teaching accreditation to Guild members.[31]

The three programs, taught by experienced quilters in the Guild, vary according to the skill level of the candidates. The Guild does not train the candidates in teaching practice as does the Embroiderers' Guild but simply assesses the candidate's skill levels in quilt design and

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25 Personal communication from Effie Mitrofanis by email, 18/1/2009.
26 Effie Mitrofanis email.
27 Displays are rotated monthly at the Guild headquarters, 76 Queen Street, Concord West, NSW.
28 See books on crazy quilts by Judith Baker Montano, such as *The Crazy Quilt Handbook: Revised 2nd edition,* nd. Original publication 2001, Lafayette, California, C&T Publishing.
29 Conversation with a member of the Quilters' Guild Executive Committee at the monthly meeting, 17/08/2008.
30 Telephone conversation with Lyn Hewitt, former President of the Quilters' Guild, 18/6/2008.
31 Amanda Daly, 'Accreditation', *The Template,* Vol.26, No.3, June 2008, p.9.

construction to award the qualification. Program A is for novice teachers, Program B is a 'fast tracking version' for teachers of traditional quiltmaking and those with established careers, and Program C for specialist teachers who focus on a particular type of quilting technique, perhaps pattern drafting, or applique, for example.[32] There is a sub-committee in the Quilters' Guild which is assisted by already accredited teachers to assess candidates, according to a recent article about one of the Guild's teachers.[33]

My concern about the failure to train specifically in teaching skills is that some women may be very highly skilled at their craft but not naturally gifted to pass on their knowledge. Of course the reverse may apply, that some may be good teachers but not highly skilled in their craft – both situations may produce mediocrity and frustration in the learners.

The fact that a high standard of workmanship is considered important, however, even outside the Guild, is reflected in a note in an issue of *The Template* congratulating 'those shops that currently employ accredited teachers, thus ensuring a high level of competence'.[34] An earlier rebuke from the organisation's then President in 1994 shows a similar expectation:

> I was very disappointed with the standard of most entries in this year's Royal Easter Show, which I judged. 600,000 people filed through the Arts and Crafts Pavilion. **600,000!** [original emphasis] It is embarrassing that the public think this is what we do and that what they see is of an acceptable standard.[35]

Curiously, accreditation is also not required for judges in the Quilters' Guild (although that may change in the future), and they can be chosen at will for exhibitions, although they would almost certainly be accredited teachers according to Maree Gebhardt, who is responsible for Quilt Valuation, which itself must be classified as a formal activity.[36] This process is necessary for insurance purposes for exhibitions and for personal insurance or sale of a quilt. Quilt Valuation is done by a team of three trained members for sale and insurance purposes. The valuers, who have undertaken a twelve month training period under the tutelage of experienced valuers in the Guild, issue certificates of valuation for the quilts submitted (with payment of a fee).[37]

The Quilters' Guild has many activities, including workshops, classes and community quilting days, and these are discussed in following chapters as they are all less formal. I discuss quilt shows in a later chapter, but comment here that the experience of entering a show and

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32 Daly, 'Accreditation'.
33 Amanda Daly, 'Accreditation and Guild Challenges', *The Template,* Vol.26, No.4, September 2008, p.29.
34 'Calling all Patchwork & Quilting Teachers', *The Template,* June 2006, Vol.24, No.3, p.7.
35 Margaret Wright, 'Hello there ..... from the President', *The Template,* June 1994, Volume 12, No.3, p.4.
36 Telephone conversation with Maree Gebhardt, 18/6/2008.
37 Maree Gebhardt, 'Quilt Valuation', *The Template,* March 2007, Vol.25, No.2, p.20, June 2008, Vol.26, No.3.

competing with other quilters is extremely conducive to striving for excellence – in other words, a learning experience.

Country Women's Association (CWA)

The most prominent training tool used by CWA is the *Procedures Manual,* which sets out in detail the way that meetings are to be conducted, how reports are to be submitted by officers and requirements for carrying out every other conceivable activity in the organisation. The manual also includes forms to copy for official activities of the organisation and its branches, or for submission of entries for competitions, and it is formal training in the sense that its use is a requirement. CWA is the most regulatory of all of the organisations included in my research and many formalities are required of branch officers and members, all of which are covered in the manual.

I have included discussion of this handbook in this chapter as its hard copy distribution is restricted to the executive of branches and groups.[38] The manual must be viewed as a training strategy by the organisation to create conformity and a means of each branch identifying itself as a recognisable part of the Country Women's Association.

The manual consists of a thick loose-leafed folder, held by each branch secretary, which is continually updated with additional or replacement pages, and is now also available as a download from the password-protected, members-only, section of the CWA website.[39] In addition, members must also abide by the rules contained within the constitution, itself contained in a publication of forty pages.[40] Interestingly, an information section about the manual online states that it is provided to members holding the positions of State Office Bearers, Group President, Secretary, Treasure and Representative, or Branch Secretary. The article then goes on to state that 'Manuals will only be sold to Groups/Branches for the use of those holding the positions noted above, and are not available to the general membership'.[41] However, any ordinary member can access and download the manual from the website, which seems contradictory.

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38 Country Women's Association of NSW Inc., *Procedures Manual,* ' Introduction'. www.cwaofnsw.org.au Accessed online 5/4/08.

39 The full manual available for download by members at www.cwaofnsw.org.au Accessed online 5/4/08.

40 *Constitution of the Country Women's Association of New South Wales: Regulations and Rules,* CWA of NSW, Potts Point NSW, 2004.

41 *CWA of NSW Procedures Manual*, accessed from www.cwaofnsw.org.au/membership/downloads.do Accessed online 13/3/09

The organisation was incorporated by its own Act of Parliament in 1931.[42] Unfortunately there is not space here to include the history of the organisation since its founding because of the concern at the difficult conditions experienced by rural women, with the first President, Grace Munro.[43] The CWA now consists of a membership of more than 11,000 in NSW, just over half of the 1946 membership of 20,518.[44]

The structure of CWA is quite complex, with the membership broken up into groups and branches covering a geographical area. Each group consists of a number of branches, some numbering just a few, others having more than twenty branches within the group, located in towns or suburbs within their area. Each branch elects its own officers, who then represent their field of interest and present reports at quarterly group meetings. Each group of branches then elects a representative to attend meetings and report to the Executive Committee, which meets at Head Office in Sydney. All of the reports to the group meetings must be sent by the group secretary to Head Office, where State committee meetings are held regularly for each field of interest, including cookery, handicraft, international and others.

While CWA has many valuable aims and activities, there are often difficulties in persuading women to take office, partly because of the onerous requirements of the paperwork which must be submitted to Head Office. This was the case in my own personal experience soon after joining when I found myself 'railroaded' into the position of Group Handicraft Officer. My position as a Group Officer was an inevitable consequence of what I was later told was the 'fatal mistake' of enquiring about the nature of the tasks of the position during an Annual General Meeting. After a year, during my candidature for this degree, I was compelled to resign because of the amount of work involved in regular attendance at ordinary and committee meetings, written reports and preparation of members' work for judging. The election of the incoming officer to replace me was equally problematic until a woman with little experience for the position agreed reluctantly to take it on. There is no training for positions such as this unless the outgoing officer is one who is willing and able to offer it.

Judges are required to undertake training as well as refresher courses for CWA, but information about the requirements is not readily accessible. I interviewed a member of the

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42 Country Women's Association of New South Wales Incorporation Act, New South Wales State Parliament, 1931. *Constitution,* pp.5-6.

43 I have included more details of the history of CWA in 'Changing Women: The Country Women's Association of NSW as a Learning Site', paper presented at *Bridging the Gap between Ideas and Doing Research,* Proceedings of the Second Annual Postgraduate Research Conference, Faculty of Education, Health and Professional Studies, and Faculty of Economics Business and Law, University of New England, Armidale NSW, 3-6 July, 2007, pp.27-35.

44 Twenty-Fifth Annual Report and Balance Sheet, CWA, Sydney, 1947, p.77.

organisation who was a handicraft judge and she told me about the process as she remembered it:

> I'm a judge as well, and I got through the CWA – it takes you three years to get a judge's badge. You actually sit for an exam, it takes you a whole day to actually sit for exams, and every year you have to go – it takes you three years to get it, and then every five years you have to go back and do it again, and if you don't do it they take your badge away from you.[45]

An undated duplicated *Judging Book* of between 45 and 55 years old, a copy of which was given to me by a member whose mother was a CWA judge, makes it clear that excellence was expected in the past, as it is today.[46]:

> The method of judging each exhibit on its merits and marking it with points accordingly, has been adopted by most countries in "Craft Exhibitions".
>
> To improve the appearance of an Exhibition, all entries which do not secure 50% of maximum points should not be shown, thus eliminating work of a poor standard.
>
> Prizes should never be awarded for work gaining less than 75% of total marks. Work gaining between 50% and 75% is sufficiently recognised by being shown. Points for judging various types of crafts are listed on the following pages, with suggested proportions of marks for a total of 100.[47]

At the 2007 CWA conference Handicraft Exhibition I participated as a 'White Glove Lady', a role also filled in exhibitions held by both Guilds. Such a helper wears white cotton gloves to handle items for those who wish to inspect an exhibit more closely or to see the back of the work. I found the standard of the work to be extremely high and I had to confess to envy at the skill displayed. My own embroidery had been rejected at the preliminary Group level judging because the judge, a woman renowned for her attention to detail, noticed that a tiny stray thread was just visible inside the framed work and could not be removed in time to resubmit the piece. A telephone conversation with Elizabeth Furner, State President of the Handicraft Committee, revealed how strict the standards are to qualify as a judge.[48]

Candidates who wish to qualify as judges for Handicraft exhibitions must first demonstrate their wide knowledge of different crafts and an ability to judge, before attending a Judging Techniques Day. They are asked to identify up to seventy items of different handicrafts (in CWA anything worked with a needle is classified as handicraft). The candidates

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45 Interview with Mrs Sandra Fox, Embroiderers' Guild NSW Inc. (Newcastle Branch), 20/2/2006.

46 Personal correspondence with Mrs Ethel Finney, Castle Hill branch member, May 2008.

47 Country Women's Association of NSW, 'Judging at Exhibitions', *Judging Book: Some Notes on Compiling Schedules for Handicraft Exhibition,* CWA State Handicrafts Committee, undated c.1960s, p.3.

48 Telephone conversation with Mrs Elizabeth Furner, CWA State Handicraft Committee President, 24/6/2008.

are later required to sit an exam paper where they are asked to describe techniques and identify a specific craft shown to them.[49]

A panel of judges is always required to award marks to within two to three points of each other, and when a judging candidate goes for her final testing she must judge to within two or three marks of the examining judges. If successful she is awarded a Proficiency Certificate, after which it is preferred that she accompany other experienced judges for the first year. At the conclusion of that year the novice judge is re-assessed by observation then, in order to keep her badge, she must pass another assessment after two years followed by attending a Judges' Refresher Day every five years. With the pace of 'fashion' in new and revived crafts, the women must show they are keeping up-to-date in order to retain their badges. Judging accreditation in the CWA is not interchangeable with other Guilds such as the Embroiderers' Guild.[50]

To obtain a Tutor's badge, candidates are required to conduct a class in the specific technique in which they wish to teach. They must organise the class, supply handouts and any other necessary paperwork as well as samples of the finished work to show the technique to the class, at which a committee member attends as an observer. The school is to last one or two days and students are given a questionnaire to assess the aspiring teacher's performance at the conclusion.

Standards for the cookery exhibits, sponsored at the Annual Conference by *The Land* newspaper, are likewise high, although differing from handicraft in that a judge's badge is never revoked and there is currently no reassessment or holding of refresher days. Mrs Morna Wilson, President of the State Cookery Committee when I spoke to her, told me of the way judges are selected for the competitions. Candidates must first have participated in cookery competitions themselves and preferably have experience stewarding in shows. The State Cookery Committee holds an annual seminar where they select recipes for *The Land* Cookery Competition, held each year at the annual conference. This major cookery competition is sponsored each year by the rural newspaper, *The Land,* and competition is vigorous for the trophies.[51]

At the cookery seminar the quality, cost and keeping qualities of recipes has been discussed before the year's recipes are chosen for compulsory use for competition entries. Judging candidates must have attended the seminar, after which they sit a theory exam of 25

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[49] Telephone conversation with Mrs Elizabeth Furner.
[50] Mrs Elizabeth Furner.
[51] Telephone conversation with Mrs Morna Wilson, CWA State Cookery Committee President, 24/6/2008.

questions as well as a practical exam, judging in front of a panel of two judges to demonstrate their skills. At the last session before her conversation with me, only four passed out of fourteen candidates, but Mrs Wilson told me that a failed candidate had said to her that she realised afterwards that she did not have the skill required but was willing to try again. Some women do reapply up to three times before successfully gaining their badge or giving up.[52] Those women who eventually succeed through persistence are probably self-directed learners who work at gaining experience through further participation in competitions and conferences.

At the 2007 conference at Jindabyne, NSW, I was impressed with the appearance and presentation of the exhibits, especially the cake decorating, all of which (to me) showed superior skill levels. In order to be accepted for entry into the main conference competitions, both handicraft and cooking entries compete at branch, group and state level first, using the compulsory standard recipes published in *The Country Woman* magazine/newsletter. They are then judged again at the conference, although the cooking entrants have, of course, prepared a fresh entry each time. Keeping quality is important because most entries have had to be carried by car, train or bus for several hours before arrival at the conference. It is then at least a day before judging takes place and three or four more days before the items are sold to conference delegates and observers (the latter are members who are attending the conference but are not permitted to vote or to speak on the floor of the meeting without permission by a vote of the delegates).[53]

The activities of the CWA are so complex and varied that a work devoted entirely to the organisation would be required to cover them in any detail. A history has been written but the organisation has changed since its publication.[54] Branches and groups themselves have individual awards and educational activities, many of which are not even reported in the wider organisation's magazines and newsletters, mostly because of space considerations. Government grants and subsidies, as well as support for rural women and their families by commercial organisations, are also reported as part of the Association's activities on its website, further expanding opportunities for members and their communities.

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52 Morna Wilson.

53 The information in this paragraph has all been gained through my personal experience of attending the 85th Annual CWA Conference at Jindabyne, NSW, 30th April – 5th May, 2007.

54 Helen Townsend, *Serving the Country: The history of the Country Women's Association of New South Wales,* Sydney, Doubleday, 1988.

Mothers' Union (MU)

MU is a worldwide organisation of women within the Anglican Church, founded in England. It is strongest in African nations but still holds regular international conferences. The vast majority of members are mothers, but there are a few exceptions, and there is an element of regulation, as one of my informants, the wife of a former Bishop of Armidale, NSW, told me:

> Mothers' Union ... (is) a marvellous organisation, with marvellous objects, ... but there were lots of rules about it – you have to join, become a member, be admitted, do certain things, which was nothing wrong with it, it was marvellous, but those who didn't want to do that, or even who weren't mothers ... [55]

But not being a mother does not necessarily exclude women from MU, as Betty went on to say: 'I know two single women who held office in Mothers Union because they were keen on the objectives and they took part'.[56]

As with many organisations, MU is dwindling in membership because of cultural change and women working outside the home.[57] At the time of my research in Armidale there were only a few elderly members there and the branch was not expected to last beyond their membership.[58] The Sydney Diocese differs in that it is more active, with parenting programs, hospital and (women's) prison visiting, and a support group in children's courts, although the majority of the members are still elderly. MU in Sydney has the additional advantage currently of a shopfront in a busy central city arcade owned by the Diocese, so that it has a public presence and passing trade for the greeting cards, baby clothes and gift items it sells to raise funds for the Parenting training program and for caring activities such as serving refreshments in the courts and hospital visiting with gifts for mothers and their babies.

There are some younger members who are mostly involved in playgroups for babies and preschoolers in the division of Mothers' Union known as 'Caritas: Friendship in Action'. Caritas groups are considerably less formal than official branches of MU and require no qualification for membership, except for the Group Leader, and are thus open to membership and involvement of families outside the church.[59] MU has a wide variety of programs, as

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55 Interview with Mrs Betty Chiswell at St Peter's Cathedral, Armidale, NSW, 1/8/2006.

56 Betty Chiswell.

57 This observation has been repeated to me over and over again as I have spoken with members of each of the organisations, including MU, where I heard it from both Mrs Betty Chiswell and from Mrs Christine Jensen, President of MU in the Sydney Diocese and wife of the Anglican Archbishop of Sydney, Dr Peter Jensen.

58 Mrs Betty Chiswell interview and my own observation.

59 *What Is It: An information handbook about Caritas – part of the Mothers' Union,* Mothers' Union Australia, 1993 (no place of publication given).

revealed by the section of the quilt shown on this page. The piece was constructed from a printed tea towel sold by MU some years ago and given to me by another member unused.

Fig 3. The Mothers' Union is involved in a wide variety of programs.

The Parenting Education Program run by MU for young families was begun by Jan Livingstone in 2003 when she was Australian MU President.[60] Training facilitators for this program is the main way that formal training takes place within the organisation. There is, however, some printed matter and preparation for tasks such as working in the children's courts and hospital visiting that also falls under the formal training heading. At the courts members provide refreshments for parents and relatives accompanying children and young people who have been charged with offences, victims and their families, and the legal fraternity. This service offers comfort to stressed and grieving people and training is required because of the highly sensitive nature of the process. As well, the court has strict rules about the limits on members' service and their contact with those attending court.[61]

The introduction to the course manual for the Parenting Program reveals the source of the training material and the fact that it is funded entirely by Australian MU members, although the executive hope that government funding may become available:

> For several years now, the Mothers' Union in the UK has trained members to facilitate parenting groups in a variety of settings. MU Australia is most grateful for the intellectual property, research and experience that has been given to us most generously from the Mothers' Union in the UK.[62]

The course material was adapted for Australian conditions by Ian and Kate Pearse, an Australian couple who are both adult educators and who undertook the Facilitator Training in

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60 Personal conversation with Mrs Mary Coyne, former editor of *Mia Mia*, in-house MU magazine, 27/10/2006.

61 Personal conversation with Mrs Hilda Weatherly, Court Work Convenor, 9/5/2008.

62 Jan Livingstone, Course Introduction, Ian & Kate Pearse, *Parenting Education Program,* Sydney, MU Australia, 2004, unpaginated.

the UK before bringing the course here.[63] The learning by participants in the course is discussed in the following chapter.

Salvation Army Women's Home League

The Salvation Army's groups for women began in the early twentieth century in Australia as Women's Home League. However, with the growth of informality in the culture and so many young women working outside the home, some individual groups are unhappy with the name, which they feel is outdated. As a consequence each group is now permitted to use a different and more contemporary name of their own choice if they wish, while remaining under the Home League umbrella, which itself is under the supervision of Women's Ministries, now broadened to cover differences in age and culture of the women under its oversight.

Major Coral Hodges, who has the oversight of Women's Ministries for the Eastern Territorial Division, explains in an interview the way training of group leaders within the organisation takes place by correspondence:

> Working With Women (is) an introduction to leadership, and we send out this course for anyone who wants to take on any kind of leadership for Home League or Women's Ministries and there's an expectation before they can do anything with leadership that they have to go through this Working With Women Course.[64]

The workbook of the Working With Women course opens with three basic fundamentals of Women's Ministries, The first states the mission of Women's Ministries, which is to:

- Reach women and the family with the Gospel
- Nurture them in the faith
- Provide an interesting program of activities that will lead to personal development and enriched family lives.[65]

The 'Women's Ministries Strategies' listed below the mission statement indicate the expectation of learning in Home League and other ministries within the Salvation Army:

Worship: To learn more about God and grow spiritually.

Education: To learn new skills and enlarge our thinking.

Fellowship: To share in times of involvement and friendship.

Service: To discover the fulfillment of serving others.[66]

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63 Ian & Kate Pearse, Course Introduction, *Parenting Education Program,* MU Australia, 2004.

64 Interview with Major Coral Hodges at the Sydney Headquarters of the Salvation Army Eastern Territorial Division, 13/8/2007.

65 Lt Colonel Annette Wilson (concept), *Working With Women: An introduction to leadership,* Sydney, Salvation Army Australia Eastern Territory, nd., p.3.

The purpose of Women's Ministries again suggests learning by the members. The four points show the purpose to be to:

- Promote a happy wholesome family life
- Nurture Christian beliefs and values
- Encourage women in personal development
- Enable women to give service to others.[67]

The contents of the course include principles and qualities of leadership, programming and planning, counselling and caring and how to commence new groups. As the booklet consists of only 27 pages in B5 format it is obviously very limited in scope and depth. There is no bibliography and no references are included to more in-depth texts, except for those to Bible passages. The very brief and simplified section on 'Counselling and Caring', which does not clearly differentiate between spiritual and psychological counselling, is of particular concern. This is because the workbook does not recommend seeking professional help in serious situations, although it does direct that the Corps Director of Women's Ministries should be advised of the leader's intention to speak with a woman on a sensitive issue.[68] It may be that the seeking of professional help in such situations is a tacit understanding since the Salvation Army has its own Counselling Service with qualified counsellors, but in my view this should be spelled out in the workbook.

Major Hodges describes the process involved in the introduction to leadership course, how the answers to the questionnaire are included in the book, and how the applicant needs to be able to demonstrate that she understands 'the Mission of the Army (and) the purpose of the Home League or Women's Ministries groups'. As well, there are further requirements for aspiring treasurers:

> they (also) have to do a finance course for women who are involved in looking after finances for either Home League or Women's Ministries. ... and then they have a questionnaire they have to fill out – one for specifically to do with Home League because that operates differently to Women's Ministries – and they have to fill that out and some exercise sheets that they have to do, and then do a journal process and that just gives them an idea of how to do the books.[69]

This course consisted, at the time of the interview, of a stapled A4 document which provided 'guidelines' for those proposing to take responsibility for handling finances in a Home League or other Women's Ministries group. The course, also conducted by correspondence from

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66 *Working With Women* workbook, p.3.
67 *Working With Women*, p.5.
68 *Working With Women,* pp.14-18.
69 Interview with Major Coral Hodges.

Headquarters, includes instructions on how to complete a 'Finance One Summary Form' and also includes specimen forms filled in with fictional examples. The attached questionnaire is preceded by a page with the correct answers in red, to be memorised and/or copied by the applicant.[70]

As with the workbook directives, however, this document also states that activities must be carried out in consultation with Corps leadership, in this case including the overall Corps Treasurer. Thus there is a safety net for major decisions on spending, including that 'Approval from Divisional Headquarters must be sought for any individual purchase exceeding five hundred dollars'.[71]

Presbyterian Women's Association (PWA)

This organisation is similar to Women's Home League in that its formal training consists mainly of some training for leadership. PWA distributes a very small booklet to executive officers of branches giving guidelines for the organising of the branch. In a recorded interview a State PWA leader, Jean Ferrington, tells me a little about the inception of the booklet:

> I suggested that we do a SWOT analysis ... where every branch went through – looked at themselves in the light of Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats. Now every branch in the state was asked to do that; we got the replies back and we collated them and what was happening – they were saying over and over again – "We haven't got leadership – you know – leadership's a problem".[72]

The state executive of PWA took action after the SWOT analysis results were received by organising a leadership conference, led by a high school principal who was, according to Jean Ferrington, a 'dynamic person', and attended by women from the metropolitan area. Later conferences were held in country areas as well. Jean continues with further background of the booklet:

> following (those conferences) they said, "Well look, we need to put a little guidelines book together for office bearers, because you'll come to an annual meeting and look 'Who'll take on this job? And everybody looks down or looks up or looks anywhere but the front." And so we went through the different

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70 Salvation Army Australia Eastern Territory, 'General Guidelines for Women's Ministry Finance', Sydney, August 2005.

71 'General Guidelines', p.1.

72 Interview with Mrs Jean Ferrington, 19/9/2006.

> offices, and wrote out the format, and the responsibilities, even down to meeting formats.[73]

Much later in my research I met a branch president of PWA who supplied me with a photocopy of the six page B5 booklet, *Guidelines for Office Bearers,* which includes points of guidance for branch presidents and their responsibilities in the position.[74] There are also instructions on how to present worship and devotional segments in the meetings and their format as a whole. The responsibilities of the branch secretary are laid out but the the copy given to me did not include any guidance for the branch treasurer, in spite of the fact that funds must be raised and collected to be forwarded to the State Office for distribution to the various committees, such as the Presbyterian Women's Missionary Union (PWMU) and Dorcas, which provides support for the needy locally.[75] The organisation has a Christian Education Committee but the teaching emanating from it could not be classified as formal.

Catholic Women's League (CWL)

My experience of interviewing three executives of CWL showed how close to women's hearts an organisation can be and how strongly they feel about its potential to educate and encourage women. The interview includes the State President, Mrs Catherine McGrath, the Sydney Diocesan President, Mrs Moya Potts, and the paid Executive Officer, Ms Christine McKirdy. The task of transcribing the interview was made challenging by the group situation and the enthusiasm of the women about their roles in the organisation. It is marked with tears, laughter, much interrupting and talking over each other and even all at once! However, their reminiscing and opinions, sometimes strongly expressed, are a rich source of information, albeit biased by their deep love of their faith and their organisation.

Catholic Women's League appears to have a strongly formal structure, a feature also present to a marked extent in CWA, Quota and Zonta. Moya Potts, especially, referred constantly to by-laws and the constitution, as did the two Quota women to whom I refer below. The CWL women all spoke of their struggle with diminishing membership, young women who have no time or patience for formal meeting structure and their own attempts to make the organisation more amenable to that group.

Moya comments on this disquiet and the organisation's efforts to adapt, that 'we haven't got that younger force coming through, though we're developing projects to initiate

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[73] Jean Ferrington interview.
[74] Personal conversation with Mrs Barbara Jarvis, 17/11/2008.
[75] *Presbyterian Women's Association of NSW: Guidelines for office bearers,* (nd.)

that ongoing'.[76] However, they see the formality of the structure as a sticking point with young women. 'We have a constitution from our national body, our State constitution, our Sydney Archdiocesan By-laws, and – structured through that, the executive officer position was moved and created at a Council meeting because of the fact that we are diminishing numbers'.[77]

When I ask the women about the ageing and shrinking membership base and if they could adapt to changes in society, Moya replies that they are nevertheless willing to 'look at new agendas':

> coming out of our national 2002 conference and following on from that was a grant that was received from national – the national office – and through that, throughout Australia, was a Train the Trainers Program – a computer course for our members, ... We in Sydney held a two day session at St Patrick's Business College for our members in computer courses. We have since eighteen months ago – twelve months ago – held another course here over two – three days in our office with the computers set up in here.[78]

This course proved to be successful, with members aged between sixty and eighty years old participating, often benefiting others in the process. One participant was a grandmother who was bringing up her ten year old grandson, and she followed up the course by purchasing a computer and connecting to the internet.[79] Out of that course the organisation, through the grant received, on a state level has developed the Catholic Women's Leadership Development Project. Catherine McGrath expanded on the way that CWL is reaching younger Catholic women outside the organisation with this project: 'We're hoping that by providing them with some leadership skills that they will go on to develop themselves and in the community and then maybe come back to join the Catholic Women's League'.[80]

Christian Women Communicating International (now known only as CWCI)

CWCI is an interdenominational parachurch organisation which runs conferences and special meetings for women. It is also the parent body of Know Your Bible Groups, a women's Bible Study organisation which began in Australia but now operates in other countries as well. The groups usually meet weekly, not necessarily under the auspices of a church, and the members of the group follow a detailed study guide in which they must write their answers to questions for group discussion. Cecily Jackson, national president of CWCI, told me of the way she sees education taking place in both the parent organisation and the KYB groups:

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[76] Interview with Moya Potts, Sydney Diocesan President, Catholic Women's League, 19/06/2007.
[77] Interview with Moya Potts, CWL interview.
[78] Moya Potts.
[79] Moya Potts.
[80] Catherine McGrath, State President, CWL interview, 19/06/2007.

> Higher up the ladder where we train leadership skills, it sort of starts at the top of the national management board, has a conference every three years and trains the regional boards in every aspect of their particular roles, and gives them general leadership skills, public speaking skills – that type of thing – and then they in turn go on to train the committee members and the KYB leaders, in similar sorts of things.[81]

As with the other Christian groups in the study, most of the learning in CWCI takes place on an informal level during meetings and discussion times. Training in leadership is the only formalised education taking place, and is rewarded with permission to lead, rather than certificates or formal qualifications to my knowledge. A leaflet introducing the KYB Bible Study groups lists the publication *Guidelines for Know Your Bible Leaders,* an introduction to each study on CD, contact with Area Coordinators and an annual seminar for extra training, all as 'Help Available' for group leaders.[82]

Quota International

Fundraising and sponsorship of hearing programs for children is a major focus in Quota International. Mrs June Young, an international office bearer in the organisation, speaks at length about her involvement in community organisations and emphasises the importance of adherence to organisational regulations: 'Now if you go into a club, that's a good club, that's being run by the guidelines, you'll have people in that club that open that vision within the first twelve months.'[83] Her friend and colleague, Mrs Gloria Cook, who has also held international positions in Quota, elaborates on her similar views on the importance of keeping close to regulations. Gloria emphasises the importance of rules to enhance the smooth running of society and its organisations, using the example of a session she chaired on by-laws and resolutions:

> I was the International Chairperson of the International By-laws Committee at the International Convention in Calgary ... so I know a bit about by-laws. And I tell you this, by-laws should be used as guidelines to make everybody's experience in an organisation a satisfactory experience.
>
> Robyn: *So that requires that the members be educated about what the by-laws are and what they mean?*
>
> Well, everybody has a copy. ... But wherever any group of people, Quota or anyone else, meets on a regular basis, you have to have a few rules. ... in every club, not only Quota here, but in every club and in every organisation, there are

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81 Interview with Mrs Cecily Jackson, National President of CWCI at the time of interview, 7/2/2006.

82 'Know Your Bible: Bible Study For Women'. Promotional leaflet published by Christian Women Communicating Intl in Australia Inc (CWCI), Punchbowl NSW.

83 Interview with Mrs June Young, 11/6/2007.

> *some* people who know the value of the by-laws – and who hold them sacred as I've just said. Not as a weapon, but as guidelines and sometimes you've got to give and take a little bit without breaking the rules, but just bend them gently ... Commonsense must prevail because if – if whatever is there is not to the best good of the most people, then let's go about altering that. And we've got policies in place on how you go about altering the by-laws and you have to do it by a two-thirds majority vote and all that sort of thing. ... you know, in every club there's someone who cares about the by-laws, … "I don't want to have anything to do with by-laws ... " well, we just say: "Okay, but someone else is here and if we get into trouble, we'll expect her to help us get out of it".
>
> And very often, they're the people that cause the trouble, because they want to do this and they want to do that, and they want to do something else, and you know, there are certain rules which say you can't do that.[84]

Gloria goes on to talk about her career as director of a pre-school in Armidale, and the way she taught young mothers that children – and all of society – must have rules to live by, and that with rights go responsibilities:

> when you have rights, you have responsibilities that go with them and you can't really separate the two. And I think that's where our society is perhaps not going the right way at the moment. ***I know my rights!*** Yes, but what about your responsibilities? ***What do you mean, responsibilities?*** They go together.[85]

The remarks in bold indicate where Gloria speaks emphatically, tapping the table to reinforce her words. She is, as were many of my interviewees, enthusiastic about her organisation and about the importance of maintaining the values for which it stands. At one point in the interview Gloria reflects on what she realised as she spoke was a shortcoming of too-narrowly defined by-laws which restricted the outreach of the organisation. She had been telling me about a home for destitute women and children in India and how Quota was prevented by the by-laws from operating a similar facility in Australia:

> We can't have it in Australia, which is interesting, cause we're not deemed third world, but with what's going on up in the Centre[86] at the moment, one does wonder, doesn't one, one may look at the by-laws and remove the word 'developing country' um, you know, that's when we have to look at our by-laws and see, ah, okay, are these by-laws really providing something that's fair to everyone? Are we using our commonsense here or could we be using a program here up in Central Australia to do something that we really ought to be doing?[87]

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84 Interview with Mrs Gloria Cook in Armidale, 10/7/2007.

85 Gloria Cook.

86 Gloria is referring here to the extreme disadvantage suffered by many Aboriginal communities in the Northern Territory and Central Australia, which is colloquially termed 'The Centre' by Australians.

87 Interview with Gloria Cook.

Individual Quota clubs do assist local needs, as I reveal in later chapters. However, I have not found formal training in Quota to extend beyond that about which Gloria and June have spoken.

Zonta International

The theme of Zonta is 'Advancing the Status of Women Locally and Globally', (in some places it appears as Advancing the Status of Women Worldwide) and the contact I have had with the Zonta Club of Armidale, NSW, especially, has borne out the truth of this claim to an impressive degree.[88] A Zonta Area Director, Rosemary Johnson, told me that Zonta differs from other service organisations such as Quota, because all actions undertaken must fit this Zonta goal in order to be an approved activity for clubs to undertake.[89]

Fig 4. Zonta focuses on women's status worldwide. The aircraft depicted is that flown by the female aviator, Amelia Earhart, on her last flight.

The extent of formal training in Zonta focuses on leadership, although some leaders begin their training in other organisations. Rosemary Johnson has belonged to ITC (International Training and Communications – formerly Toastmistresses) for many years as well. This is an international club training in public speaking and leadership, and it was in this organisation, and not Zonta, where Rosemary learned those skills. She says that she has, however, used them and polished them in Zonta. She has learned chairing meetings and strengthening club outcomes by training people in both clubs, but really brought them to Zonta,

[88] In particular I have appreciated the friendship, assistance and encouragement from Mrs Helen Gee and Mrs Isabel Pollard, both of whom have held various Executive Committee positions in the Club over many years.

[89] Unrecorded interview with Mrs Rosemary Johnson, Zonta Area 8 Director and member of District 24 Board at the time of interview, 11/7/2007, Armidale, NSW.

applying all skills there, learning and sharing them with other women. "We have even introduced procedures into our businesses which I learnt from Zonta".[90]

Correct techniques of meeting procedures are vital, according to Rosemary, who said: "Knowing procedures to use effectively can prevent arguments and personal attacks, and makes for a happy, achieving club or group". New executives on Zonta at all levels of Boards have a Training Day annually and usually 'learn more about Zonta than they ever knew.'[91] Another leader in Zonta who is also a lecturer at the University of Sydney, Dr Mary Jane Mahony, speaks of her experience as an adult educator with what she termed 'formal' education in Zonta:

> Well, I've done formal things. We have every year what's called the area workshop – four or five clubs get together, often I'm asked to run a workshop of some kind – I've run different kinds, as the one who is a teacher I'm an easy person to ask to do these things. But the last time it was actually – it was facilitating, 'cos I was President and had been around a long time I knew a lot anyway about things – but it was really about 'How to Run a Zonta Club'... I was taking what I'd learned and passing it on.[92]

It is interesting that Mary Jane Mahony refers here to being asked to do things because she is a teacher. Gloria Cook from Quota says the same thing in her interview, that:

> When there's something that really needs to be done, and something where you want success, it's very often the teachers who are asked to come do it.[93]

The same format, of Training Days, takes place in all Zonta Clubs, and a group of clubs in the country had a similar day later that year. No doubt there are many other teachers in Zonta who are also asked to take a significant role in such events. In response to my question on whether there was interaction between clubs, one of the presidents of another Zonta Area told me:

> Yes, yes – and just – on Saturday actually – we had a training day where the various office bearers from Zonta Clubs from what we call Area 8 – so it was Moree, Gunnedah, Coffs Harbour, Port Macquarie, Armidale joined together, that was about 25 women, and we had a day of education, a training day, educating ourselves, really about Zonta, I suppose, but there was also a lot of sharing.[94]

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90 Rosemary Johnson.
91 Rosemary Johnson.
92 Interview with Dr Mary Jane Mahony in her office at the Cumberland Health Sciences Campus, University of Sydney, on 16/2/2006.
93 Interview with Mrs Gloria Cook, 10/7/2007.
94 Interview with Mrs Helen Gee, President at the time of Armidale Zonta Club, 31/7/2006.

Not all of the organisations have leadership training as does Zonta. Although most are incorporated, two organisations are constituted differently and have different training needs.[95] As well as these locally-situated training sessions in Zonta there is a biennial world conference, which was held in Melbourne, Australia, in June 2006. These conventions include many business sessions and workshops, and are used to formulate and review new by-laws and programs, as well as workshops on new and existing programs.[96]

Scholarships and Awards

I am including the awarding of scholarships in this chapter because of the formal process involved in selection of the successful candidate/s, and because the scholarships are often used to further the successful candidates' formal education in other institutions. However, the section could just as well be included in the accounts in Chapter Six of women's organisations reaching out to their communities because these awards go to community members as well as to organisation members. I did not learn of any awards or scholarships in any of the church organisations studied, perhaps most of all because of their limited financial resources. However, the Guilds, Quota and Zonta award scholarships which can make a considerable impact on the life of the winner, her organisation and, in some cases, the wider community. CWA awards a number of smaller 'educational grants', as they now call them. As well as meeting further education costs, the scholarships are used for travel to conferences or for research, as well as for development of techniques and skills, as will be discussed for each organisation below.

Scholarships and Awards in the Embroiderers' Guild

For some members in the Embroiderers' Guild the change brought about by membership is significant, if they are the chosen recipients of Guild scholarships. These awards have been made so that the winners will have resources to study or to travel overseas to further their knowledge, whether to London or to another country to study a new technique, perhaps ethnic embroidery. Mrs Helen Marsh, who was employed as the Guild Secretary for 23 years, told me about some of the recipients:

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[95] CWA was formed by an Act of Parliament, not incorporated, as stated earlier, and uses its *Procedures Manual* for training purposes. The Women's Club was formed as a legally-constituted company and uses professionally-skilled women who do not require training for leadership. For example, a member who is a chartered accountant acts as Treasurer.

[96] Handbook of Zonta 58th International Convention, 24-29 June 2006, Melbourne, Australia.

> Oh well, it was an idea of the committee a few years ago that they wanted to assist some members to study – to further their embroidery, and that could benefit the Guild in the long run with what they'd learned. And part of the scholarship was that they were to give a lesson in what they learnt, and also give a talk at the members' meeting and – um – write up about what they've learned as well. So June Fiford Rowan went and studied goldwork overseas. Sue Gude furthered her studies with her Japanese embroidery – Judith Langdon learnt about the – Peru, and what they're doing there, as well. So, there's been some interesting people – ah – Effie furthered her study as well. Yes, there's been some interesting things that they've learnt – yes.
>
> *And if they do win a scholarship are they required to come back and teach?*
>
> It's part of the scholarship. They have to speak at a members' meeting, write an essay on the subject and give one lesson to students as well.[97]

Some scholarship winners have published instructional books on their skills in the open market, and Effie Mitrofanis, the inaugural winner of the Jean Vere Scholarship, is now one of the leading teachers in the Guild, having designed and run the original Correspondence Course and others later, as discussed earlier.[98] Many other scholarship winners have also written articles featuring projects they have designed with step-by-step instructions for readers, published in commercial magazines which are on sale in newsagents and needlework shops, thus demonstrating the way that learning usually has a flow-on effect to learning by women outside the organisation.

Funding for scholarships is drawn from the Guild's general income, but there is sometimes specific fundraising. Elvie Short, a Newcastle Branch member, told me that she had had two garden parties at her home to raise money for the branch's own scholarship fund.[99]

Scholarships in the Quilters' Guild

A highlight of the Quilters' Guild is the Guild Scholarship Program, which distributes financial support to one or more members for diverse uses, including overseas travel for study or to fund a significant quilting or publication project. As with the Embroiderers' Guild, the recipient is required to make a significant contribution to members of the Guild through reports, teaching and demonstration.[100] Emma Grahame, a PhD candidate at the time, was awarded a scholarship in 1993 to cover part of the cost of travelling to the United States to

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97 Interview with Mrs Helen Marsh, Guild Secretary, 27/02/2006.
98 See following chapter for discussion of these correspondence courses.
99 Interview with Mrs Elvie Short, Newcastle Branch of the Embroiderers' Guild, 20/2/2006.
100 'Guild Scholarship Program', *The Template,* September 2007, Vol.25, No.4, p.30.

present a paper to a conference of the American Quilt Study Group.[101] Grahame's paper discussed the effect of the 1988 Australian Bicentennial celebrations on quiltmaking and the consequent rise in interest in the craft. She writes:

> my argument was that the efforts quilters made to depict or symbolise Australia in some of their quilts can be read to reveal things about Australians' images of themselves at that time. ... Since the Bicentennial year, quiltmaking in Australia hasn't looked back and, thanks a great deal to the Quilters' Guild, has continued to develop in scope, public attention and ambition.[102]

Other scholarships have been awarded for quite different projects. Published details of the 2005 Sponsorship (or scholarship) scheme invite members to apply 'whether YOU are highly skilled or in early stages of developing quilting expertise'. Members of three years or more are eligible to apply for funding of up to $3000 and must be willing to contribute to members' expertise and provide regular progress reports to the Guild.[103]

A recipient of that scheme was Lyn Thrift, who wanted to make patchworked and quilted altar frontals and pulpit hangings for St John's Church in Stroud, New South Wales. She needed finance for the research and learning involved as well as for the materials required and her scholarship was awarded for that purpose. After Lyn Thrift's report to a monthly Guild members' meeting an illustrated article describes in detail the process of design and making of the items and the workshops and classes she ran to fulfil all of the requirements of the award. As a consequence of that scholarship the church gained the needed furnishings and many Guild members had the opportunity to learn about specialist quilting in the realm of church needlework.[104]

Scholarships in the Country Women's Association

Education Grants (formerly called scholarships) are a feature of CWA, although many of them are awarded to children living in rural areas and thus are not relevant to this study on adult education. The recipients gain directly through the award, but members also learn as they read articles and letters of thanks in *The Country Woman,* and see the benefits which accrue through the generosity of their organisation and its encouragement of learning within and outside its own ranks.

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101 Emma Grahame, ' "Making Something for Myself": Women, Quilts, Culture and Feminism', unpublished PhD thesis, University of Technology, Sydney, 1998.

102 Emma Grahame, 'Finding Friendship and Quilt Scholarship in America, October 1993', *The Template,* June 1994, Vol.12, No.3, p.31.

103 '2005 Sponsorship Scheme', *The Template,* June 2005, Vol.23, No.3, p.24.

104 Lyn Thrift, 'Guild Scholarship', *The Template,* June 2007, Vol.25, No.3, p.19.

Those grants which do apply to post-secondary students or to members of CWA include the Irene Ashton Memorial Education Grant, which is awarded to assist a student with secondary or tertiary education, and the Jean Martin Memorial Education Grant, for a student up to the age of 25 years in the area of the Arts.

Non-members are eligible to apply for the Jean Martin Grant, but the Cynthia Druitt Education Grant is only awarded to a current hospitality student who is a relative of a CWA member. The grant, of $2000, is sourced from the profits of the CWA Kiosk at the Sydney Royal Easter Show and the winner is 'encouraged' to participate in the Show Kiosk activities.[105] This participation would certainly be a learning experience in itself for the young person as the pressure of serving many thousands of customers is relentless throughout the two or three weeks of the Show.[106]

The scarcity and often poor quality of rural health facilities, and reluctance of health workers to work in rural areas, are an ongoing source of concern in the public eye. CWA attempts to make a small contribution to addressing the problem with the Cowra Medical Education Grant, whose specifications are:

> Applicants must have resided within the bounds of South West Group for the past 3 years, and be in their second year or above of a health related course. Applicants must agree to undertake work experience in a rural area, preferably within the South West.[107]

Through the CWA/Earle Page College Equity Scholarship rural students are also targeted, along with others with various disadvantages such as disability and non-English speaking or low socio-economic background. Indigenous students are also eligible to apply for this scholarship of $2000, of which four are awarded annually to University of New England students, for residential fees at Earle Page College on the campus.[108]

Earle Page College also hosts the CWA Country of Study weekend annually in February, just before the beginning of semester. During the scholarship presentation ceremony in 2008 Mr David Ward, the Master of the College, is reported as remarking that the scholarships were greatly appreciated and 'typified the fruitful relationship between the University and the CWA'.[109] A member attending the annual study school held at Earle Page

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105 Editorial article, 'Education Grants 2008', *The Country Woman,* Vol.49, No.02, April 2008, p.13.
106 Carmel Travers, *Not All Tea And Scones,* Purple Pictures, 2007.
107 'Education Grants 2008', *The Country Woman,* Vol.49, No.02, April 2008, p.13.
108 UNE – Scholarships – CWA/Earle Page College Equity Scholarship http://www.une.edu.au/scholarships/undergraduate/cwaepequity.php Accessed online 12/11/2008.
109 UNE website news, 'State CWA conference marks bond with UNE', 28th May 2008, http://blog.une.edu.au/news/2008/05/28/state-cwa-conference-marks-bond-with-une/ Accessed online 28/5/2008.

College photographed a commemorative plaque in the administration block of the college and sent a contribution to the organisation's magazine. The plaque reads:

> In recognition of the relationship established between the Country Women's Association of NSW and Earle Page College through the Annual International Study School. Four Equity Scholarships are funded from the Ruth Fairfax Fund for residents at the College.[110]

Another issue of the magazine includes a large colour photograph of the four scholarship winners for that year accompanied by Ruth Blanch, the CWA representative who presented the award.[111] Along with the weekend of the International Study School, the Earle Page Scholarships encourage and perpetuate the relationship between the University of New England and CWA.

The Phyllis Kindon Humanitarian Award is listed along with all of the educational grants, but it is awarded to a member who is a carer of 'a disabled or aged person'. No conditions are set on the way it may be used, although examples are given of covering the cost of respite care so that the member may take a holiday, or the use of the funds 'for the purchase of equipment to make the task of caring easier'.[112] The element of learning involved in personal growth and in the increased respect of the organisation in the community are evident in this award, albeit not overtly 'educational'.

In addition to the above grants there is a scholarship given by the State Handicraft Committee to a member to assist her to attend the annual handicraft school, where she may learn a new skill in embroidery or some other handicraft. Preference is given to country members for this scholarship, which consists of the school fees, two nights' accommodation at the Residential Club at CWA Headquarters in inner Sydney, and meals.[113] As well, the State International Committee has an International Scholarship Fund dedicated to women in Papua New Guinea:

> Our Association sponsors students (women) from Papua New Guinea to train at the South Pacific Community Training College in Suva, Fiji. Students study life skills to take back and pass on to their local communities. Skills include nutrition, domestic sciences and income producing activities.[114]

In 2005 two students from PNG were sponsored to attend the South Pacific Commission Community Education Training Centre in Suva, Fiji, one of whom was the daughter of an

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110 Elsie Webber, Moss Vale Publicity Officer, 'Plaque at Earle Page College', Branch News, *The Country Woman,* Vol.47, No2, April 2006, p.18.
111 'Branch News', *The Country Woman,* Vol.48, No.4, p.33.
112 'Education Grants 2008', *The Country Woman,* Vol.49, No.02, April 2008, p.13.
113 CWA website, www.cwaofnsw.org.au/committees/stateHandicraft.do Accessed 7/7/2008.
114 Contributions and Donations, *Procedures Manual,* November 2007, p.G 10-1-1106.

earlier sponsored scholar. After completion of their seven month study period the two women toured NSW to report to CWA members the results of their sponsorship prior to returning home to their communities in PNG. Both women, Priscilla Allam and Priscilla Okput, had received commendation awards from the college at the completion of their courses.[115]

Some of the larger more prosperous branches give scholarships themselves. The Australian Capital Territory is included within the NSW organisation of CWA, and a member of the Canberra branch told me at the conference I attended that her branch gives an annual scholarship.[116] Likewise, the Penrith Branch offers a small scholarship to a school child.[117]

There are many other grants available to country towns through CWA, some of the money initially provided by government or commercial organisations and channelled through CWA. Each year a proportion of drought funding is provided to CWA by the Federal Government for individual allocation to applicants by CWA. The supermarket chain, Woolworths, allocates one day's profit each year to drought funding through CWA and for Landcare projects. An article titled 'Drought Action News' in the grocery product specials brochure distributed in letterboxes states:

> Last year Woolworths Drought Action Day raised $4.7 million which meant the Country Women's Association could give much needed financial support to farming families. It also meant Landcare could start projects to help farmers prepare for the future. ... 100% of supermarket profits on Friday 15 February will go to the Country Women's Association and to Landcare.[118]

The proportion of the above amount allocated to CWA in NSW for distribution to farmers was $1.07 million, the remainder going to CWA in other states and to Landcare.[119] The most important learning aspect of this activity is the social capital it accrues throughout the entire country through the recognition of the company's respect of a women's organisation as trustworthy and capable of allocating the funds.[120] The people of Australia are also directed to widen their worldview by showing concern for farmers in rural areas and learning more about the source of produce. The company itself also no doubt has ulterior motives in raising its own profile by an act of caring.

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115 Andrea Pulford, 'Members meet International Scholars at CWA Club', 'Branch News', *The Country Woman,* Vol. 46, No.6, December 2005, p.24.
116 Conversation with CWA Canberra branch member, May 2007.
117 Conversation with Mrs Margaret Pope, 4/8/2008.
118 'Specials', Woolworths Supermarkets, dated 11th February 2008, p.11.
119 Judy Richardson, 'State President's Letter', *The Country Woman,* April 2007, p.2.
120 The issue of social capital is discussed in Chapter Six.

Quota International

The Quota International South Pacific Area Scholarship was won by Kirsty Gardner-Berry in the year 2000 and she used the money to travel to Milan to attend a conference. As an audiologist she had been aware of Quota's service focus on speech and hearing and asked the Liverpool club for assistance in raising funds for equipment for Liverpool Hospital, where she was working. The women told her about the scholarship so she applied and won. Kirsty is not a member of Quota and only attended a few meetings to begin with, but attributes a lot of her success and even abilities in public speaking to that beginning provided by Quota.[121] I have included a substantial amount about her work, the results of the scholarship win and the impact of Quota's support because of the far-reaching outcomes of the Quota Scholarship to the community at large and the wider learning which has resulted through the recognition and prevention of the disability of hearing loss, which in itself hinders learning in sufferers.

Mrs June Young talked for over an hour of her involvement in Quota and other community organisations, in spite of having come out of hospital following spinal surgery only a few days previously. Her enthusiasm for community organisations was infectious, and she has served on international boards. She told me of her work in Quota for hearing projects, a field very close to her heart:

> We have a Hearing/Speech Scholarship which is run through the Universities each year. And that's a $7-10,000 scholarship and we award three of those each year .... Now, anybody doing postgrad work or like – Kirsty Gardner-Berry got it to go to Milan to speak on infant screening and we award three of those each year; each club puts in $100 each year and I think we've got enough money to keep that going for another 25 years even if we didn't put another penny in tomorrow.[122]

Kirsty Gardner-Berry is spoken of fondly and proudly as 'our Kirsty' by both Gloria Cook and June Young because of the influence she went on to have right through to government level in infant hearing screening. More of Kirsty Gardner-Berry's work and that of Quota is in Chapter Six, but there are other scholarships awarded by Quota, as June Young informed me:

> Most of our districts also have a scholarship, for speech and hearing. Last year in District 13 they had this little girl who's gonna be in Beijing (Paralympics) as a disadvantaged deaf runner, – so they paid her university fees and we all try to support anything we can for kids who are trying to get on with that.[123]

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[121] Email from Kirsty Gardner-Berry, 14/09/2008; telephone conversation 18/09/2008.
[122] Interview with Mrs June Young, 11/6/2007.
[123] June Young.

Further details of the Quota South Pacific Area Scholarship, which has been awarded since 1980, are on Quota's website. In 1980 an Australian speech pathologist, who was also a Past 38th District Governor in Quota, convinced members to instigate the scholarship, now a major award which has helped 'more than 40 scholars from Australia and New Zealand, including one who has pioneered a new method for infant hearing screening'.[124]

The process of virtual audiology, as devised by Kirsty Gardner-Berry after winning the Quota scholarship in 2000, makes diagnostic testing possible 'in remote locations worldwide'. The equipment is now supplied to country hospitals and clinics and staff are taught how to prepare babies for the testing that is run over the internet. Training and requests for assistance are also handled via the internet. The website adds:

> Kirsty now works for the Department of Health in New South Wales, where Quota clubs recently helped convince lawmakers to mandate universal infant hearing screening—the first such law in Australia.[125]

Following my contact with Kirsty Gardner-Berry she emailed me written responses to a number of questions I had sent her about the impact of the Quota scholarship on her life and work and the outcomes since. I asked her how the Quota International scholarship related to her trip to the conference in Italy and whether it was research for her Masters degree:

> I was studying for my Masters in Audiology, which included a research project on newborn hearing screening. I was fortunate enough to gain a scholarship from the Quota club during that time to attend the International Newborn Hearing Screening conference that is held in Italy every 2 years. The opportunity this trip provided me was 2-fold:
>
> - As an individual I was able to learn about the latest developments in newborn hearing screening internationally and use this to assist with my research project.
> - It enabled me to network with people in different countries and learn about approaches they had taken that I could bring back and share with my colleagues back in Australia.[126]

Newborn infant hearing screening is now funded by the state government for every baby born in NSW. Kirsty says that this came about through the efforts of a number of different people and groups, but she approached the Quota club of Liverpool for help early in the process of campaigning for it:

> They played a key role in getting a newborn hearing screening program going in the neonatal intensive care unit at Liverpool Hospital. There were three other

[124] 'Quota South Pacific Area Scholarship' http://www.quotaspas.org.au/pages/spas.html Accessed online 25/04/2008.
[125] Quota SPAS website.
[126] Email from Kirsty Gardner-Berry, 14/09/2008.

> hospitals that had begun to screen so collectively this placed increasing pressure on others to do the same and eventually generated interest at higher levels.[127]

Consequently Kirsty was invited by the NSW Department of Health to take part in a steering committee to investigate how to establish a statewide program in NSW. Funding was granted to begin screening in all hospitals in the state in December 2002.[128] Kirsty is now working on her PhD and her account of the impact of the Quota scholarship on her work and her personal life reveals the learning outcomes and the importance of such awards by women's service organisations:

> Firstly, I had to get used to public presentations and how best to promote awareness around a specific topic. I initially spoke to the local Quota group at one of their regular meetings, which was a smaller audience. I then moved on to present at their larger conference with a slightly different focus. The ability to speak in public has been integral in me being able to progress projects and to share what I have learned through my own research to the wider community. Starting this experience with a smaller, friendly group was a great way for me to learn and gain confidence in public speaking.[129]

While Kirsty has not maintained membership with Quota because of her extremely busy life, she told me that she likes to hear about what Quota women are doing and she continues to have a great respect for the organisation.[130]

Zonta International

Zonta clubs have a number of awards, perhaps the best known being the Amelia Earhart Fellowship, which is worth US$10,000 and may be used at any university or college offering graduate courses and degrees. The Zonta International website claims expansively of the winners:

> Their talents vary and their laboratories span the globe, but these amazing women do have a tie that binds.... As the world moves forward at light speed, Amelia Earhart Fellows aren't far behind, evolving their studies to address the many needs in aerospace-related science and engineering, and narrowing the gender gap in these traditionally male-dominated fields.
>
> However, women in science and engineering remain a distinct minority, representing approximately 10 per cent of professionals in these fields.[131]

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127 Kirsty Gardner-Berry.
128 Kirsty Gardner-Berry.
129 Kirsty Gardner-Berry, email 14/9/2008.
130 Telephone conversations with Kirsty Gardner-Berry, September 2008.
131 Zonta International website, http://www.zonta.org/site/PageServer?pagename=prog_ae_fellowships Accessed online 30/08/2008.

The Amelia Earhart Fellowship is awarded annually in memory of the pioneer aviator to women pursuing PhD/doctoral degrees in aerospace-related sciences and engineering.[132] Amelia Earhart was a Zonta Club member in the United States from 1928 until her disappearance in her aircraft over the Pacific Ocean in July 1937 and toured the country speaking about her achievements to meetings of Zonta and other organizations. The award in her memory was instituted in 1938 and has been issued to women worldwide since then.[133] A brief biography of Earhart states of her influence that 'She was determined to prove that women were capable of accomplishing as much as men. That determination led a generation of women to seek new horizons and new roles for themselves'.[134]

The requirements listed on the website for applicants for the Fellowship are stringent and exclude members and employees of Zonta International or the Zonta International Foundation. As well as providing references and transcripts, the applicant must:

- Be registered in an accredited PhD/doctoral program long enough to describe a well-defined research program in a qualifying area of science or engineering closely related to advanced studies in aerospace-related science or aerospace-related engineering....
- Demonstrate a superior academic record...
- Provide evidence of a well-defined research program ... as described in the application essay ...[135]

A small number of these fellowships have been awarded to Australian women, the first of whom was a woman from Victoria in 1962. The second Australian recipient of an Amelia Earhart Fellowship, in 1970, was Janet Jones, who was a graduate in theoretical physics from the University of Sydney and who also held a master's degree in mathematical cosmology from the University of New South Wales. These degrees were followed by a global career in her field and a business partnership with her astrophysicist husband.[136]

There is much other recognition to reward 'women of achievement' through Zonta. The Young Women in Public Affairs Award achieves learning in many ways: by informing the young women to whom it is awarded and the community about Zonta as an organisation, by demonstrating the value of public service to the community, and by recruiting young women as

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132 Information gleaned from Zonta International website http://www.zonta.org/site/PageServer?pagename=prog_ae_fellowships Accessed online 30/08/2008

133 Hazel King (ed), *Zonta in the Antipodes: A short history of Zonta District XVI,* no publishing details given, p.18.

134 Nancy Shore, *Amelia Earhart,* New York, Chelsea House Publishers, 1987, p.104.

135 'Amelia Earhart Fellowship Program', http://www.zonta.org/site/PageServer?pagename=zi_issues_programs_amelia_earhart_application Accessed online 25/09/2008.

136 Hazel King AM (ed), *Zonta in the Antipodes*.

current or future Zonta members. As well, the members of Zonta themselves are encouraged into a closer relationship with the generation of young women who are eligible for the award. In 2007 I was present at a Zonta dinner meeting in Armidale, NSW, when three young women received the Young Women in Public Affairs awards. Despite their youth, these recipients had already achieved an impressive amount in community service and gave talks which augured well for their futures. The overall winner was from Presbyterian Ladies College in Armidale and was elected Deputy Head Prefect for 2008, as well as being actively involved in service in the community. The Zonta Club press release laid out an impressive list of achievements by this young woman and the two runners up for the award.[137]

The Armidale Zonta Club also makes a 'Woman of Achievement' Award each year, again always to non-members who have contributed to the community in some significant way. One recipient was a woman who convenes a group for Wrap With Love, an organisation which oversees the making, collection and sending of knitted rugs. After collection these rugs, composed of knitted squares or strips, are sent for distribution to women and children in developing countries.[138] Helen Gee, president of Zonta Armidale Club at the time of interview, tells:

> This year we nominated Marcia Robinson, who's Regional Co-ordinator for Wrap With Love – you know the magnificent (organisation) – only she has assembled thousands and thousands of squares, as well as working with people at Autumn Lodge and this sort of thing.[139]

In 2008 the Woman of Achievement award from the Zonta Armidale Club went to Vivienne Gregg, a breast cancer survivor and former primary school teacher who had been diagnosed 13 years previously. The Zonta newsletter states of her: 'Vivienne not only was determined to be a breast cancer survivor, she also determined to utilize the experience for the benefit of others'.[140] Along with the support group she formed, Vivienne became an advocate for other women diagnosed with breast cancer, as well as joining the Cancer Council as a volunteer. A lengthy record of her ongoing achievements follows in the newsletter article, including her appointment as representative of rural regions to the Board of the NSW Cancer Council in 2005.[141]

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137 'Kiara Olrich – Zonta Young Women in Public Affairs Winner', Zonta Club of Armidale Inc. press release, 18 November 2007.

138 Wrap With Love Inc., http://www.artsandcraftsnsw.com.au/Wrap.htm Accessed online 3/10/2008.

139 Interview with Mrs Helen Gee, 31/07/2006. Autumn Lodge is an Armidale aged care facility.

140 Helen Gee & Wendy Berkley, 'Zonta Woman of Achievement', Zonta Club of Armidale Inc. newsletter, March 2008, p.8. Also published in the *Armidale Express* on 12 March 2008, p.7.

141 Gee & Berkley, 'Zonta Woman of Achievement'.

A local newspaper report in western Sydney covers the Nepean Valley Zonta Club's Awards Night, at which three women were presented with awards, which are obviously devised by the individual club and vary from those presented by the Armidale Club. On this night Sifuoa Misa was the recipient of the 2006 TAFE award for a mature-aged student 'who had overcome difficulties or obstacles to pursue her studies'. The Studies in Child Development Award went to a University of Western Sydney student who was researching cyber-bullying and had presented a paper at an international conference. The third award was a special Honorary Zontian Award to a businesswoman who had provided significant support to the Club.[142]

The scholarships and awards in all of these women's organisations succeed in fostering learning in their members and in the communities in which the recipients live, study and work. Their awarding also emphasises the value of learning to both members and the wider community.

Conclusion

Formal teaching and training varies widely over the organisations, with some of them focusing closely on ensuring that their members grasp the aims and objectives of their organisation, and others relying on the members to keep up-to-date with what is going on. In the case of the two Guilds examined in this study the formal teaching is largely responsible for the creation and maintenance of the organisations as learning communities. This also applies to the Know Your Bible study groups under the auspices of CWCI, as they exist as a community only for the purpose of learning about the Bible and Christian living. MU's training for leadership in the parenting program, for hospital visitation and for their court service, are valuable for the members in learning to adhere to formal guidelines, and valuable in providing an orderly and respected service to the community in times of distress. Those organisations in the study which I have not specifically mentioned here may include some kind of leadership training, but it is often 'on the job' learning by the person elected to a leadership role. As I have demonstrated in this chapter, only the Guilds issue any kind of formal certification for training undertaken, except for the judges' badge in CWA. Nevertheless, the training for leadership and the dissemination of rules and regulations to the general membership does bring about greater cohesion and better running of the organisations.

[142] Melanie Lees, 'Rewarding Women', *The Western Weekender,* March 2, 2007, p.14.

The formal learning opportunities provided by the women's organisations for their membership in this study are considerable. As I have shown, in the two Guilds a significant number of women have developed professional careers as a result of the teaching in their organisation and of the awarding of scholarships to further the knowledge of their skills. Women in the other organisations have benefited from the teaching, or the awards and scholarships they have received, even where not actually classified as a qualification. I have also shown in this chapter that other categories of learning, such as personal growth, can occur at the same time as formal learning in these women's organisations. I will continue to argue in following chapters that learning in women's organisations, while not adhering to theoretical boundaries as laid down in adult education literature, is nevertheless valuable and, in most cases, well organised for the members of these bodies.

Chapter Three

Workshops, Classes and Study Days

Non-formal Learning in Women's Organisations

Non-formal learning for the purposes of this research is that structured learning in which members achieve skills in workshops and classes offered by the organisations. The resultant learning increases skills and furthers the position of members in the learning community but does not lead to a qualification or award. Some of the organisations covered in this chapter offer specific learning opportunities which may not be obtainable from any other source.

However, as I have discussed earlier, in the context of this study there is a crossover, or grey area, between non-formal, informal and incidental learning, made more confusing by the fact that some academics classify as informal learning that which Foley defines as non-formal. To reiterate, Foley writes of non-formal learning:

> This sort of learning occurs when people see a need for some sort of systematic instruction, but in a one-off or sporadic way. Examples include workers being trained to operate a new machine, or environmental activists undertaking non-violent direct-action training.[1]

Colley and her colleagues quote a White Paper in which the European Economic Community presented definitions of learning, *Communication on Lifelong Learning,* published in 2001. The paper defines non-formal learning as 'an intermediate category' between formal and informal learning:

> located mainly in the workplace or community and voluntary settings; it is typically both structured by a trainer, coach or mentor and intentional on the part of the learner; but it is not usually certificated.[2]

In their book chapter in which the above EEC White Paper is quoted, Colley et al argue that the discrete definitions offered by theorists are untenable and point out the way those writers often use the terms non-formal and informal interchangeably. Pedantic theory proponents and government education authorities thus create a climate of confusion on which Colley and her fellow writers focus to emphasise their own contention that 'political dimensions, including power relations' are at the heart of attempts to classify and control learning.[3] They assert that

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1 Griff Foley (ed), Introduction, *Dimensions of Adult Learning: Adult education and training in a global era,* Sydney Allen & Unwin, 2004, p.4.

2 Quoted in Helen Colley, Phil Hodkinson & Janice Malcolm, 'European policies on 'non-formal' learning: A genealogical review', in R. Edwards, J. Gallacher & S. Whittaker (eds), *Learning Outside the Academy: International research perspectives on lifelong learning,* London, Routledge, 2006, pp.56-73 (57).

3 Colley et al, 'European policies on 'non-formal' learning'.

divisions in the definition of learning emanate from power-based political and ideological regimes, and obscure hidden hegemonic agendas. Their original project was carried out to 'map the conceptual terrain of non-formal learning'. The authors rightly claim that there is so much overlap between non-formal and informal learning that imposing definitions opens up possibilities of authoritarian control. There is a very real risk that hegemonic dominance in education could restrict people's freedom to pursue learning at their own levels of ability without shame or constraint.[4] Searle writes of the 'new capitalism' in which government funding for learning has been appropriated for the purpose of 'upskilling' the workforce – or potential workforce – with learning focused on those learners from whom financial gain can be achieved for employers and/or government authorities.[5]

In addition to workshops and classes in voluntary organisations, my definition of non-formal learning can be also applied to the situation where special speakers at meetings and conferences are confined to a theme. This is often especially the case in Christian organisations such as CWCI, as I will show later in this chapter. Deliberate efforts by the executive of the organisations to inform ordinary members of the aims, objectives and protocol of the body is included here. Workshops and classes in commercial shows, often taught by tutors from creative organisations, can also be classified as non-formal learning and become an adjunct of the organisation's learning community through the participation of members along with the general public.

All of the women in the organisations included in my research become members because of their interest in the activities of that organisation and, as they deepen their involvement, often an interest in the organisation itself. This enthusiasm, which I saw again and again in many of the members of women's organisations to whom I spoke, especially those in leadership roles, is what creates difficulties in the practice of academic theorists who try to put knowledge in 'boxes', as I discussed in Chapter One. Members of the organisations can learn in many different ways, often without even realising the extent of their learning, but also in ways that the theorists to whom I have referred above might classify as non-formal learning, such as those that are offered by CWA.

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4 Colley et al, 'European policies on 'non-formal' learning, pp.56 &70.

5 Jean Searle, 'Learning in the new work order', in Edwards, Gallacher & Whittaker (eds), *Learning Outside the Academy,* pp.183-201.

Country Women's Association of NSW (CWA)

CWA could be likened to the Women's Institutes (WI) in Britain by noting the matching stereotypical view of middle-aged women who sew and bake, or by taking even a cursory look at the websites of both organisations.[6] However, there are ways in which the two differ markedly. One of the principal differences is education, as the WI has its own institution, Denman College, which is an accredited college of adult education. While some of this college's courses are formal accredited study and lead to a qualification, the majority are non-formal short courses on a wide variety of topics of general interest. The web page, 'About Denman College', claims 6000 students from all over Britain attend approximately 500 courses a year.[7] The college is residential and many of the courses are held over several days. Jackson has conducted a study on the Women's Institutes, but its focus on the learning of women attending Denman College rather than in the wider arena of the scattered branches means that it differs from my research discussed here.[8] However, it is nevertheless the closest study I have been able to find to my own among the very few involving women's organisations.

In Australia, CWA has no similar institution to WI's Denman College, although it does hold a limited number of classes and also has a Residential Club at its headquarters, used for accommodation by country members visiting the city. This Club might therefore also have limited comparison to The Women's Club, another organisation in this study to which I refer later in this chapter. The latter, however, is an elite organisation which is a company limited by guarantee, so the fact that both offer accommodation for members in the city is about where the resemblance ends. WI does act in Britain on behalf of rural women but my perception is that CWA's emphasis is stronger in its advocacy activity for people in rural areas, especially for women and their families.

Education in a non-formal context at CWA headquarters, organised by the executive, is mostly limited to a short craft course held once annually on the headquarters premises, and a Winter Craft Week which involves coach trips and overnight stays at the Residential Club or elsewhere. Workshops and classes are sometimes held in individual branches of CWA, organised by their own officers, in addition to the annual handicraft school held at headquarters in Potts Point in the inner city of Sydney. Limited special techniques are taught (in 2007 only

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6 The website of CWA in the scope of this study is http://www.cwaofnsw.org.au That of the Women's Institute in the United Kingdom is http://www.thewi.org.uk

7 Women's Institutes website page 'About Denman College', http://www.thewi.org.uk/standard.aspx?id=209 Accessed 8/08/08.

8 Sue Jackson, 'Jam, Jerusalem and Calendar Girls: Lifelong learning and the Women's Institutes (WI)', *Studies in the Education of Adults,* Vol.38, No.1, Spring 2006, pp.74-90.

two) at this annual event by CWA tutors, who also travel throughout the state holding workshops for branches who request them in remote areas.[9] Almost all other activity which takes place on site at headquarters is administrative. Most other non-formal education which does occur in CWA is organised separately by groups and /or branches.

A report on the Winter Craft Week in June 2005 details the stops on the Tuesday coach trip, which included craft shops, Hornsby CWA rooms for morning tea, and a factory outlet centre. After dinner at the Residential Club an informal knitting workshop was held. The two following days were taken up with workshops and classes with a trip to the Quilt Show at Darling Harbour or a Harbour Cruise to finish the week on Friday.[10] In 2007 the winter craft activity was a two-day bus trip to the Southern Highlands of NSW. The only teaching activity reported in the very brief account of the trip is a Trapunto class.[11]

The curriculum of the craft school was more extensive in the early years of CWA, according to an article in *The Countrywoman in New South Wales* in 1939. The State Handicraft Committee reports that the Keera House Winter School at Dee Why will be held from '17th July onwards. Whether there will be one or two fortnightly sessions will depend upon the number of applicants.'[12] The fee for instruction was five shillings weekly, with further subjects two shillings each. Classes were to include weaving, dressmaking, toymaking, quilting, spinning, block-printing and designs for book covers, speech-training, glove-making, twine-seat weaving, cane basketry, floral art and tapestry. Keera House, where the schools were held with participants living in, was the CWA holiday home at the seaside for country women and their children and branches sponsored members to the schools.[13] The Lithgow branch is reported as having sponsored a member who passed on the skills learned: 'as a result we are being instructed in handicrafts, which we hope later will benefit our funds'.[14] A Summer School as well is mentioned in the report from Narromine Branch in 1939, having been attended by a Miss Bullock, who started handicraft classes on her return from Keera

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9 State Handicraft Committee report, *The Country Woman,* Vol.48, No.03, June 2007, p.23.

10 Merle Beechey and Barbara Reichert, 'Winter Craft Week', *The Country Woman,* Vol.46, No.4, August 2005, p.26.

11 Elizabeth Furner, 'State Handicraft Committee Handicraft Report', *The Country Woman,* Vol.48, No.4, August 2007, p.23. See Glossary for an explanation of this technique.

12 'State Handicrafts Committee: Keera House Winter School', *The Countrywoman in New South Wales,* June 1, 1939, p.18.

13 Helen Townsend, *Serving the Country: The history of the Country Women's Association of New South Wales,* Sydney, Doubleday, 1988, pp.66-7.

14 'Branch Gleanings', *The Countrywoman in New South Wales,* 6th January 1939, p.14.

House, when many members 'availed themselves of the opportunity to learn glove-making, etc.'.[15]

The flow-on effect of CWA education to the wider community is evident from a report from the Handicrafts Committee in the issue of the CWA magazine of August 1947, less than two years after the end of World War II. Then a male participant travelled a great distance in order to receive instruction:

> The three most popular crafts for this year have been weaving, glove-making and leatherwork. All the classes for these have been fully attended, and there have been no slack periods. An interesting feature of the weaving classes has been the attendance of so many partially disabled people, both civilian and ex-service. An appeal was made by the Lone Guides' Section of the Girl Guide Association for help for their crippled members, and one girl was able to come to the craft rooms for lessons, and arrangements are being made to teach another in her home. Another interesting visitor was Mr Jones from Central Australia, who came to inspect our looms, and obtain information so that he could teach the aborigines.[16]

The report goes on to list a number of branches also holding handicraft classes, and details of a loan exhibit being sent to branches in remote areas, as well as a description of the CWA exhibit at that year's Royal Agricultural Show (now known as the Sydney Easter Show). Roma Field is reported as having taught more than 700 pupils in the Craft Room, mostly in glove-making. Miss Field's instruction was also to members of other organisations and included the necessity for her to travel:

> A special class for the War Widows' Guild was taken for some weeks, and another for the Methodist Deaconnesses. A class of nine members was instructed in slipper-making at Mittagong, and two weeks were spent at Mudgee during the Mudgee-Coolah Group Craft School. Also visited many branches for Handicraft Days, Shows, etc.[17]

The CWA magazine also promoted learning opportunities for its members outside its own organisation. One of these was the Memorial College of Household Arts and Science at Kirribilli, a harbourside suburb of Sydney. An article, written by Dr Mary Booth, the founder of the college and also of The Women's Club and other organisations, argues that in spite of the many careers open to women 'her most likely lot will sooner or later be that of home maker'. Booth continues that the course offered by the College provides a 'liberal education' for young women, one year for home life, two years for a career outside the home requiring such training:

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15 'Branch Gleanings', 6th January 1939.

16 'The C.W.A. Handicrafts Committee: Extracts from the Annual Report Presented at the Annual Meeting, June 17, 1947', *The Countrywoman in New South Wales,* August 1947, p.18.

17 'C.W.A. Handicrafts Committee', *The Countrywoman in New South Wales,* August 1947, p.18.

> It includes the study of the liberal arts, and fosters an interest in current events, so that the students will desire to make their home happy social centres to which their friends will pleasantly gravitate and so restore family life to its supreme place in the life of the nation.[18]

Earlier in the article Booth refers to the Second World War, ended only two years previously, and the damaging effect that it had on family life. While not decrying the importance of varied careers increasingly open to women, Booth is calling for a balance which retains the traditions of home and family.[19] Her interest may have lain in the fact that she was a proponent of eugenics and was involved in promoting household health and welfare.[20]

Education in CWA in those years was not limited to domestic matters. Oppenheimer writes:

> The CWA ran classes for women on public speaking and the conduct of meetings. Through the voluntary sector, the war opened up hitherto unheard of opportunities for women.[21]

Oppenheimer quotes a CWA officer who writes that this education was brought about through the necessity of women to take the place of men away fighting the war. These opportunities then, according to Oppenheimer, began the 'revolution' for women through volunteer work.[22]

More recent issues of the CWA magazine show that learning outside the organisation such as that Mary Booth encouraged, although in different ways, continues to be encouraged. At the height of the public debate about genetic modification a note on Agricultural and Environment, one of the areas of focus for learning and action in CWA, stated:

> Members are urged to educate and inform themselves on both sides of the debate about the issue of GM canola – CWA has no official position on this.[23]

The same section of the magazine carries a transcription of the Queen's Commonwealth Day message, notification of a Belgian television documentary in the making in which members may have wished to participate, as well as an information package on ageing and disability from the Benevolent Society. Members are thus well served with opportunities to learn and to widen their worldview, and in so doing to enhance their lives.[24]

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18 Mary Booth, 'Training for Home Life', *The Countrywoman in New South Wales,* July 1947, p.22.
19 Mary Booth, 'Training for Home Life'.
20 Roe, Jill, 'Booth, Mary (1869-1956) OBE', entry in Australian Dictionary of Biography Online, http://www.adb.online.anu.edu.au/biogs/A070350b.htm Accessed online 7/4/09. Further biographical information also in *Australian Women* Biographical entry, http://www.womenaustralia.info/biogs/IMP0100b.htm Accessed online 6/11/2008.
21 Melanie Oppenheimer, *All Work No Pay: Australian Civilian volunteers in war,* Walcha, NSW, Ohio Productions, 2002, p.89.
22 Oppenheimer, *All Work No Pay,* pp.89-90.
23 'News from Head Office', *The Country Woman,* Vol.49, No.2, April 2008, p.8.
24 'News from Head Office', April 2008, pp.8-10.

An important learning opportunity in which CWA joins with government and other bodies are Farm Safety Field Days. These are rural events which are open to the public and government-run by WorkCover NSW in conjunction with a number of organisations and unions, including CWA. The aim of the events is described as being 'to demonstrate practical solutions to common hazards that farmers face'.[25] CWA has a representative on the committee, the Farm Safety Solutions Campaign Reference Group, and it is probable that many CWA members who own and/or work rural properties would attend these days as learning opportunities in the context of their organisation membership as well as to fulfil their professional need as farmers.[26]

Possibly the most significant opportunity for members to learn within the organisation is through the Country of Study program. CWA's major educational event, the International Study Weekend, is held on campus at the University of New England in Armidale, NSW. For decades CWA has organised this annual weekend at UNE, focusing on the study of a different country each year. All members, including those who do not attend the weekend, study the same country within their own branch of the Association for the entire year.[27] The country of study is chosen democratically by branches submitting their choice of country, with the country winning most votes being selected for the following year.

Within the definition of non-formal learning in this chapter, the weekend can be seen as a non-formal educational activity in that a large part of the content consists of lectures about the chosen country and is followed up throughout the year by International Days and other competitive activities related to the country. It is a structured mix of lectures and social activities organised around a central theme with an expectation of learning for the women who choose to attend, and who may have been subsidised financially by their branches. The women representing their branches are subsidised with the expectation that they will share what they have learned on their return from the study school.

The Association's International Officers are especially encouraged to attend and pass on their learning at the school to the members of their groups and branches, thus extending the learning well beyond those who attend the Study School. A Study Guide on the chosen country is supplied to each conference participant, is also available for sale to members afterwards, and features a considerable amount of information for participants to take back to their groups. The country of study in 2007 was Malta, and chapters in the guide include an overview of Malta, as

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25 'Farm Safety Field Days', *The Country Woman,* Vol.47, No.2, April 2006, p.30.

26 'Farm Safety Field Days'.

27 CWA, *Annual Report and Balance Sheet:Financial year 2004*, No.83, Sydney, Country Women's Association, 2005, p.73.

well as its geography, history, culture and society, architecture and costumes. Recipes of the traditional cuisine in the guide include some dishes served at the weekend study school.[28]

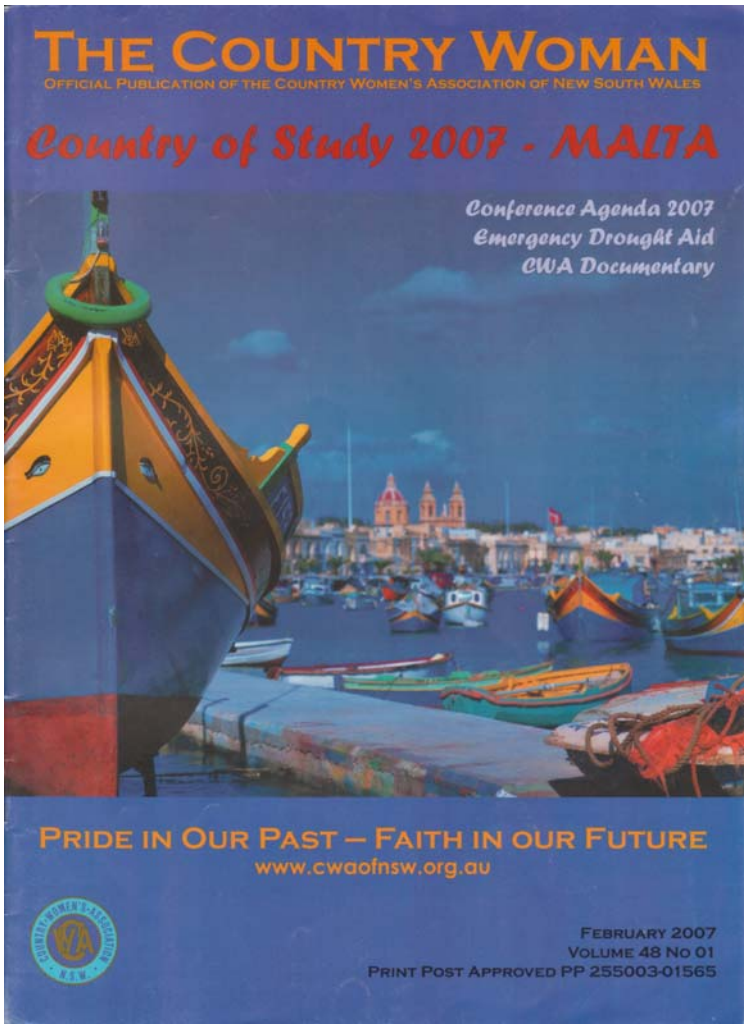

Fig 5. Cover of CWA magazine promoting country of study, Malta, in 2007.

Speakers from many walks of life are guests at the weekend, which is held at Earle Page College each year. Featured speakers in 2007, the 38th year of the Study Weekend, included Ms Joanna Pisani, the Consul-General of Malta, and other professional people of Maltese extraction. Aspects of Maltese life and culture were the topics of all of the speakers, and all included graphics and videos with their lectures. A succession of lecturers, whose country of origin was Malta, spoke over two days on various aspects of the country. The weekend began on Friday afternoon with instruction to a meeting of International Officers, who are responsible for co-ordinating the study in their own branches and groups. Later in the day a flag-raising ceremony to raise Malta's flag over the College for the weekend was

[28] University of New England Conference Company (eds), *Malta Study Guide,* Armidale NSW, 2007.

followed by a formal dinner. Conference participants were welcomed by dignitaries who included the Vice-Chancellor of the university, local dignitaries, and Ms Pisani, who was that evening's speaker. Mrs Brigitte Ward, the wife of the Master of the College, also spoke from her own experience of emigrating from Malta as a child.

Saturday's full program at the Country of Study weekend, which rivalled any university in intensity (and in one or two cases, boredom!), included seven lectures, beginning with a further lecture from the Consul-General. Lectures followed on Malta's politics, language, culture, history, anthropology and health. Australia's migration experience was included as well, along with a report on the *Maltese Herald*, a newspaper for Maltese people in Australia. Mrs Ward's planned menu and enthusiastic participation because of her Maltese ancestry and her birth in that country lent an immediacy to the weekend which enlivened it. The entire weekend inspired learning and understanding of the country of Malta. The church service held on Sunday morning featured a Bible reading focused on Malta from Acts chapters 27-28, the story of St Paul's shipwreck on the island.

After returning to their branches, International Officers report on the weekend. Each branch then prepares an International Day function, which focuses on the country of study and features a representative speaker. The Castle Hill branch engaged Mr Lawrence Dimech, OAM, the editor of the *Maltese Herald* in Australia, who also spoke at the Study School. These days typically include displays about the country and a luncheon at which appropriate food is served, depending on the planning of the individual branch. At the following year's conference books and dressed dolls on the country of study are submitted for judging. The learning engendered by the international study program can be seen in this member's interview response:

> It's not put down as teaching, but we study a different country every year – and in doing that we've found out all sorts of information and pass it on ... and the idea of studying the different countries is that you know something about the other countries. You can help those people settle into Australia – and also you have a better understanding of what's going on in the world, ... (if) there's something going on in the papers.[29]

This gathering of information about the countries, to which the member above refers, is enhanced by the preparation of a book on aspects of the country studied, which is then forwarded to Head Office to compete in a State competition.

Books entered for the annual competition are to be 'more than a scrapbook' according to the Conditions of Entry. Members compile a book together as a branch on the country of

[29] Interview with Miss Wendy Macallister of Castle Hill branch, 11/10/2006.

study and must comply with the format set by the Association, which awards prizes at the Annual Conference. Dolls in the national costume of the country of study, usually dressed by individual members but submitted according to branch and group divisions, also compete at this event and contribute to the learning process.[30] The winning dolls are displayed in a glass cabinet in the meeting room at headquarters, and those branches who have been able to retain their rooms display their entries there. Most members research carefully in order to dress the doll as accurately and closely as possible to the national costume of the country being studied for that year.

The branches participate enthusiastically in the program and members are continually learning about the world and communicating with their communities in the process. The South West Rocks (NSW) branch held a poster competition on Malta for the senior students at the local primary school, which attracted 93 entries. The posters were displayed at the International Day in the local community hall and the day was attended by representatives of other CWA branches, members of local organisations and the Federal Member of Parliament. The writer concludes: 'everyone had a very informative and interesting time learning about Malta'.[31]

The focus on international issues continues with CWA's membership, along with many of the other organisations included in this study, in relevant international umbrella organisations. In the case of CWA the international organisation is Associated Country Women of the World (ACWW), which has consultative status with the United Nations. ACWW is an international organisation of women who work together to support needy women worldwide, especially in the poorer nations of the developing world. CWA has corporate membership, as do similar organisations overseas such as the Women's Institute (WI) in Britain and Canada. A recent ACWW report on international relations and the importance of international understanding commends the Country of Study program:

> By our taking an interest in, and studying in depth, a new country each year, I believe this is a small way we can maybe obtain a different point of view about the people who create and maintain their societies. The cultural, religious, political and social aspects of which we learn may encourage us to understand how and why these nations have survived. A small seed sown in just one ear, especially through our involvement with the local school children, may just encourage another person to be mindful of the needs of others and to assist in some small way, to care for another.[32]

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30 'Country of Study 2007', *The Country Woman,* Vol.48, No.01, February 2007, pp.18-19.

31 Betty Hargraves, 'South West Rocks Branch', *The Country Woman,* Vol.48, No.05, October 2007, p.31.

32 Ruth Shanks (South Pacific Area President of ACWW), 'South Pacific Area Report', *The Country Woman,* April 2008, p.6.

Egypt was chosen as the Country of Study for 2009, and the guest speaker at the Study School at the University of New England demonstrates the way the organisation takes action at a local level to encourage members to learn about and reach out to women in other cultures. Mrs Aziza Abdel Halim AM, President of the Muslim Women's National Network of Australia, spoke on the role of women in Egyptian society, thus informing the members present about the cultural, religious, political and social aspects of her people and encouraging inclusiveness towards Muslim immigrant women.[33]

Because of CWA's corporate membership in the global body of ACWW, women in the branches collect 'Coins for Friendship' for its work with women in developing countries. CWA members are encouraged to join ACWW as individuals as well. The funds thus raised are used for such projects as clean water, support for women producing food and, in a shocking recent report, sun shelters for women in India breaking stones.[34]

At a local level, a number of members of CWA also retain membership in the Embroiderers' Guild, which also has an international focus in the many ethnic embroidered items in its collection. Coincidentally, the Guild has also had a link in the past with the University of New England, where its Summer Schools were originally held.

The Embroiderers' Guild NSW Inc.

The Embroiderers' Guild holds workshops and classes almost every day of the week – in fact on most days of the year – at its headquarters in Concord West in inner suburban Sydney, where paid staff are employed as well as volunteers. In addition to those classes the Summer School, originally held at UNE, is now also held at the headquarters. There are travelling tutors as in CWA and a flourishing correspondence program serves the approximately two thousand members. In the correspondence mentioned in Chapter Two, I asked Effie Mitrofanis if she sees the Embroiderers' Guild as a learning community. Her response was positive:

> I definitely see the Embroiderers' Guild as a learning community. The constitution of the Guild clearly states that education is the first priority of the Guild. Education in the Guild is taught at many levels as follows:-
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> (a) In a group situation (city and country) where more experienced members help new and less experienced members at all of their meetings.

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[33] 'Study School to immerse delegates in Egyptian culture', UNE News and Events, http://blog.une.edu.au/news/2009/01/27/study-school-to-immerse-delegates-in-egyptian-culture/ Accessed online 28/1/2009.

[34] ACWW Press Release, May 2008, ACWW website news, www.acww.org.uk Accessed 8/08/08.

(b) Where accredited Guild Tutors travel to the groups with special techniques and projects are presented and taught as 2 day workshops.

(c) At headquarters where workshops are continuously given.[35]

A significant opportunity to learn can be found in the collection of needlework items held by the Guild. Marie Cavanagh was the custodian of this collection for many years until her sudden death in September 2007 and was responsible for building up much of it. The collection, which contains many hundreds of items dating from as far back as the 17th century, forms the basis for many workshops and provides inspiration and material for research to the members and is an invaluable resource for embroiderers – and social historians.

Marie Cavanagh told me of the way a tutor could use the Guild Collection to run workshops, sometimes as a series of workshops, focused on items, whether singly or as a group:

> Ann (Baker) was a tremendous historian ... she used maps so we looked at the place in the world. So, say it was Tashkent, we looked at Tashkent and she'd say, so how has the embroidery been influenced by its geography? And of course we found out wonderful things – for instance – ah – looking at Austria and Hungary and how much influence there'd been in that particular region on the embroidery from Spain ... I found that fascinating, that series of workshops.[36]

The learning thus gained by participants in that series of workshops extended well beyond the realm of embroidery to political and geographic history. Heather Joynes tells of her early efforts to persuade Roma Field, considered a doyenne of needlework by both the CWA and the Embroiderers' Guild, of the value of an embroidery collection to the Guild, as an aid to study and gaining skills. Miss Field voiced her opposition, commenting "We're not a museum, you know". She changed her view through Heather's encouragement and brought in pieces of her own work, now much treasured as exemplary needlework, for the Collection.[37]

Workshops based on the Guild Collection continue to be held, such as that in the 2007 Summer School led by tutor Carolyn Sullivan, who has also been an executive in the Quilters' Guild as well as teaching in both Guilds. 'Research and Sampling from the Guild Collection' began with a visit to the Collection Room, where the participants chose an item from a selection of members' donated work from the 1960s through the 1980s. They were then required to create a piece of their own inspired by that piece The rubric for the class encourages the prospective student of its ongoing value:

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35 Correspondence from Effie Mitrofanis, 18/1/09.
36 Marie Cavanagh, 27/2/2006.
37 Interview with Heather Joynes, 6/10/2005.

> Rather than going home with a piece of work started, you will leave with lots of ideas for many pieces of work, as well as design skills that you will be able to use for future embroidery.[38]

For the above Summer School in 2007, the theme centred around the Guild's history on its 50th anniversary, and focused on the theme of mirrors as it reflected on the activities and the personalities throughout the years since the Guild's foundation.[39]

Summer School is a highlight of the year, as it has been since it was held at UNE from 1969 through until the mid-1970s.[40] Cochrane notes the first 1969 summer school in creative embroidery, and that the attendance of South Australian embroiderers at the next in 1970 'prompt(ed) them to organise their own in later years'.[41] Summer Schools at the Guild Headquarters are always focused on a specific theme, such as 'Money Bags' in 2001, where each workshop involved the creation of an exotic bag. I attended 'Elizabethan Dragonflies' with Jane Nicholas, but I regret that I have yet to complete all of the intricate three-dimensional dragonflies on the silk evening bag![42] The title of this particular Summer School is interesting in considering the issue of class and personal wealth in membership of women's organisations. In most of the eleven different workshops the fee was almost one hundred dollars, and the often high cost of materials to construct the featured item was usually additional. While this amount may seem small to a working woman with her own disposable income, to a woman with a growing family and a mortgage it could well be prohibitive, a possible reason (along with working outside the home) that there have been few young women in Guild workshops I have attended.

Participating in a workshop can be challenging, as not every student works at the same pace – or has the same ability. Tutors take workshops centred around their own designs, and assist participants in creating their own version of the featured design. Several years ago I took part in a workshop led by Adele Richards on her stumpwork (three-dimensional embroidery) design of an Eastern Spinebilled Honeyeater (an Australian native bird). Some of us in the workshop, including myself, were unable to complete the work and fell quite far behind, yet others were finished by the conclusion of the class. Some members may never complete the work, and it was some time before I found the time to complete my own embroidery.

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38 'Research and Sampling from the Guild Collection', *Summer School 2007: Mirrors on the First Years: The Guild in Action 1957 – 2007,* unpaginated.

39 *Summer School 2007: Mirrors on the First Years.*

40 'Guild History', *Year 2000 Embroidery Exhibition,* promotional booklet, Embroiderers' Guild of NSW Inc.

41 Grace Cochrane, *The Crafts Movement in Australia: A History,* Sydney, University of NSW Press, 1992, p.125.

42 *2001 Summer School, Money Bags,15th January to 2nd February,* promotional booklet, Embroiderers' Guild NSW Inc.

Carolyn Pearce's elaborate creation, the Dolls House Workbox[43], is so complex and detailed that she runs subsequent workshops entitled 'Finishing a Carolyn Pearce Project' for people who do not complete the items quickly and struggle outside the workshop.[44] The complexity of the piece, however, is in itself a learning opportunity as Carolyn's forte is her love of, and skill in, many different stitches. Completing her projects, whether this or another such as *The Embroidered Patchwork Bear* or *The Embroidered Village Bag*, both of the latter published in book form, provide a means of expanding the worker's repertoire of stitches as well as creation of a beautiful object.[45]

The Dolls House Workbox project was the overall winner of the embroidery competition at the Embroiderers' Guild Jubilee Celebration at Homebush Bay, and was subsequently displayed at an international conference I attended in Sydney in 2007.[46] That particular project is also very expensive to make and this restricts those who are able to attempt it. During various Embroiderers' Guild workshops I have attended I have noticed, both from observation and overheard conversations, that most members who participate are women who can afford to indulge in leisure pursuits of their choosing.

While the terminology seems to be interchangeable depending on the writer, in the Embroiderers' Guild workshops are usually focused on creating a specific item, and classes are intended to build skills. Jean Draper, a visitor from the UK, ran a series designated as 'Master Class' in 2008, following on from a class in 2007:

> for experienced, innovative embroiderers who are used to working in an independent, innovative manner. The use of line to visually enhance and strengthen work is explored ... [47]

For Master Class 2 with Jean Draper the stated aim is 'to encourage serious embroiderers to acknowledge and celebrate their individual skills and talents, as well as encourage them to begin or continue to develop work independently and to a high level'.[48]

My interviewees have all told me of the diversity of the learning they have gained through being members of their organisations and the activities they have undertaken in those organisations. In the workshops and classes in the Guilds this has been especially the case, and

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43 The argument about the inclusion, or not, of an apostrophe is a long-running one in the world of miniaturists. Most publications omit the apostrophe when referring to dolls houses.

44 'Guild Workshops and Classes' timetable, *The Record,* No.485, August 2008, p.3.

45 Carolyn Pearce, *The Embroidered Village Bag,* Malvern, South Australia, Inspirations Books, 2005. Also, *The Embroidered Patchwork Bear,* by the same publishers, 2006.

46 Hand & Lock Conference, Powerhouse Museum, Sydney, 5 November 2007. Reported in Helen Parsons, 'Fifty Years in Stitches', *Embroidery & Cross Stitch,* Vol.15, No.2, nd., pp.28-31.

47 'Workshop and Class Outlines', *The Record,* No.482, May 2008, p.4.

48 'Workshops & Class Outlines', May 2008.

has led to positions of leadership for many, including as teachers of the skills they acquired through their membership. An example is June Fiford Rowan, whose profile as a Summer School tutor in an Embroiderers' Guild brochure states that she learned many of the techniques of embroidery:

> after joining the Embroiderers' Guild in 1986. ... After attaining the Proficiency Certificate in 1991 (Distinction) June continued to develop and extend the technique into a style she calls "Non Traditional Gold Embroidery". June has travelled widely teaching this technique. [49]

June Fiford Rowan also has an interest in history, and she makes this a focus of her class promoted in the above Summer School brochure, basing her design on the work of a designer in the 1960s, even supplying a pack of old threads to those students who wish to purchase them for use in the class. Thus the learners in that class, comprised of two meetings of five hours each, were gaining knowledge of the history of embroidery and its proponents as well as accomplishment in the skill itself.[50]

Newcastle Branch of the Embroiderers' Guild

The Newcastle Branch of the Embroiderers' Guild numbers around 200 in membership, of whom probably half that number attend the weekly Monday meeting. It is the only separate branch in the State as all other entities attached to the organisation have a less formal status and are referred to as 'groups'. While the branch is a part of the Guild and some members do travel to Sydney to participate in workshops or other activities there, I sensed that the women view themselves as somehow separate and 'special'. They had much to say about how much they had learned from workshops and classes, especially from one particular teacher in the past, Merle Glover. Elvie Short responded, when I asked if she felt that she had gained an education from the Guild:

> Oh yes, oh yes. We learned techniques we would never, ever have done without the tutors here, Merle in particular.[51]

Another Newcastle member, Sandra Fox, gave a reason for joining the Guild as the access to well-known tutors like Avril de Havilland (who teaches goldwork). Because TAFE no longer teaches needlework as it did in the Commercial Needlecraft Certificate, Sandra feels that the

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49 'Know Your Tutors', *Summer School 2007: Mirrors on the first years: The Guild in action 1957 – 2007,* Sydney, The Embroiderers' Guild Inc., unpaginated.

50 'Metal Thread in the Sixties', 22nd & 23rd January 2007, *Summer School 2007.*

51 Interview with Mrs Elvie Short, Newcastle Branch, Embroiderers' Guild NSW Inc., 20/2/2006.

Guild offers the only opportunity to learn fine embroidery.[52] A circular email from the publishers of *Inspirations,* an Australian embroidery magazine, carried a brief biography of Avril de Havilland which shows her importance as a leader in the field:

> Although she originally trained as a pharmacist, Avril's embroidery hobby soon took over and she has accumulated extensive experience as an embroiderer and teacher. Born in Australia, she gained qualifications at the Royal School of Needlework, the London College of Fashion and the City and Guilds of London Institute. Now closely involved with the Embroiderers' Guild of New South Wales, she is the writer, coordinator and assessor of the correspondence course in Goldwork Embroidery.[53]

Avril de Havilland continues to teach at the Guild and was teaching a course on Florentine Embroidery in Silk and Gold over two Saturdays in October 2008. The rubric for the course describes the historical background of the work, so that not only the participants learn, but the readers of the newsletter glean some historical information, which could lead to further research if they choose to follow the lead, even if they do not attend the course.[54]

Yvonne Wilcock, who is also an accredited tutor, gave an insight into an additional value of workshops, in the questions from other members of the group:

> I find workshops – ah – the motivation from each other because the one that's next to you might ask a question about a stitch, a colour, or whatever it might be and I think: Ooh, I'm listening to that – as well! We learn from other people's questions – and we listen to the tutor's answer.[55]

Yvonne speaks about the members' common respect for Merle Glover's teaching in classes she held in Newcastle, and the way that good teaching reproduces itself in students: "The education and knowledge that we had learnt with Merle (was) the foundation of a lot of members of this Newcastle Embroiderers' Guild that we now can pass on". From her point of view as a teacher of workshops and classes herself, Yvonne expresses the joy she feels at passing on her knowledge, that "It's a wonderful feeling when they come back to you and show you their piece of work they've finished".[56]

The Newcastle branch of the Embroiderers' Guild held its first meetings in May 1964, and Margaret Oppen was the first speaker. In 1965 Roma Field taught Blackwork and Drawn Thread work and workshops and classes have continued since then, including those of the

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52 Interview with Mrs Sandra Fox at Newcastle Branch of Embroiderers' Guild, 20/2/2006.
53 Circular email received from Country Bumpkin, publishers of *Inspirations* magazine, 18/10/2008.
54 'Florentine Embroidery in Silk and Gold: Avril Ambrose de Havilland', *The Record,* August 2008, No.485, p.5.
55 Interview with Mrs Yvonne Wilcock at Newcastle Branch, 20/2/2006.
56 Yvonne Wilcock, 20/2/2006.

much-loved and respected Merle Glover.[57] I remember attending Merle's classes in Sydney in the late 1960s, and each member of the class would take a turn to go to the front to Merle, to sit beside her and be instructed in whatever project they were doing. I learned a little crewel embroidery from her, as well as blackwork, which I used to embroider the block I contributed to a Guild quilt presented to Princess Margaret.[58] The Guild's rooms were then located on one floor of Beaumont House in Elizabeth Street, Sydney, because Margaret Oppen had been a member of The Women's Club, which owned the building.

The Quilters' Guild

Clover argues, in a book chapter on quilting and adult education, that 'the contribution these aesthetic activities make to feminist adult education and research are still not fully understood nor explored'.[59] There are at least three probable reasons for this omission. The first, and most obvious, is that quilting and embroidery are considered to be feminine domestic pursuits, and as such are devalued in a male-dominated world. Despite the efforts of feminists, the public/private divide remains to a significant degree, and quiltmaking suffers the misfortune of belonging in the feminine private sphere. Another reason for the omission of aesthetic activities is that adult education itself has been downgraded to a one-sided, materialist focus on vocational education which rarely includes arts or leisure topics.

Third, and possibly most important, is that the arts are often not considered to have an educational contribution to make to society because of their perceived subjectivity. David Best argues against a biased view of the arts as subjective, contending that both creating and understanding works of an artistic nature require rationality and reason. He writes that 'It is widely assumed that the arts are merely for entertainment and enjoyment, from which nothing of significance can be learned'. He goes on to point out 'the powerful possibilities of learning from the arts ... (that are) of the *utmost* importance, for education and society generally' (his italics).[60] Brown writes of the dismissal of craftspersons within 'Western theory of knowledge' and the discrimination and disenfranchisement of the women, tradesmen and sometimes

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[57] Doreen Bull & Win Shephard, *Memories – 35 Years of Embroidery 1964 – 1999,* The Embroiderers' Guild, Newcastle Branch, 1999, p.1 & *passim*. This booklet contains many stories of workshops and classes throughout these years, space prevents me from including them here.

[58] Blackwork is a counted thread technique worked with black thread on evenweave linen. Drawn thread over areas of removed threads on evenweave linen.

[59] Darlene E. Clover, 'Tapestries through the making: Quilting as a valuable medium of feminist adult education and arts-based enquiry', in Darlene E. Clover & Joyce Stalker (eds), *The Arts and Social Justice: Re-crafting adult education and community cultural leadership,* Leicester, NIACE, 2007, pp.83-101 (83).

[60] David Best, *The Rationality of Feeling: Understanding the arts in education,* London, The Falmer Press, 1992, p.*xii.*

children who are the creators. Of the place of crafts in intellectual discussion he continues: 'The same history of unjustified discrimination has forced the crafts to the edge of theoretical self-denial in universities. It is a pressure they should resist'.[61]

Curtin University in Perth, Western Australia, is taking a stand against this attitude of dismissing the crafts by convening an annual postgraduate humanities conference which allows for expression of research in ways other than academic writing. The convenors accepted my own abstract describing the quilt I was making concurrently with this thesis.[62] A poster presentation of the work in progress was hung in an exhibition area during the conference, which I was unable to attend in person.[63] Another postgraduate student, who is using embroidery as one medium of expressing her theoretical viewpoint, exhibited a piece of embroidery as part of her presentation at the conference.[64]

The study of quilts has become an academic discipline and the Sydney Quilt Study Group currently manages the national Quilt Study Group, both of which have links to the Quilters' Guild, including a former President of the Guild, Karen Fail, as Convenor.[65] The Patron of the Group, Dr Annette Gero, is a quilt historian and has a collection of antique quilts, on which she has published, and speaks on the study of quilts internationally.[66] Dr Gero is a member of the Advisory Board of the International Quilt Study Center and Museum at the University of Lincoln-Nebraska, which has graduate programs in quilting and associated areas of study.[67]

The link with quilting in the United States is now one of academic study and of friendship, no longer one of necessity as it once was when most Australian quilters were women who had visited the US. A Quilters' Guild publication produced for a national tour of quilts relates how 'the pool of teachers has widened' through the growing popularity of the craft in Australia, so that it is able to carry out its own education in Australia rather than from the US, where the earlier tutors received their training and brought it back with them:

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61 N.C.M. Brown, 'Theorising the crafts: New tricks of the trades', in Sue Rowley (ed), *Craft and Contemporary Theory,* Sydney, Allen & Unwin, 1997, pp.3-17(17).

62 A story of the process of designing and making the quilt is included in Appendix 2.

63 Robyn Hanstock, 'Fabricating the Many Faces of Eve', Engaging place(s)/engaging culture(s), Faculty of Humanities, Curtin University, Perth, Western Australia, The Ninth Humanities Postgraduate Conference, 5-6 November, 2008. See Appendix 1 for the abstract as submitted.

64 Personal correspondence from Convenor, Dr Jan Baldwin, Curtin University.

65 http://sydneyquiltstudygroup.blogspot.com

66 Information about Dr Gero, and about her book which she has published in 2009, *The Fabric of Society: Australia's quilt heritage from convict times to 1960,* is on her website at www.annettegero.com Accessed 16/3/2009.

67 An account of the Quilt Study Centre and Dr Gero's association with it can be found in 'Bush Telegraph: Australia's Quilters Field the Call', *Australian Quilters Companion*, No. 26, 2007, pp.28-9. The website of the International Quilt Study Center, University of Lincoln-Nebraska, is http://www.quiltstudy.org/education_research/index.html Accessed online 16/3/2009.

> The influence of teachers has been very significant in spreading information about the techniques of quiltmaking and, more recently, about design and colour.[68]

Workshops and classes are held by the Quilters' Guild, although because of limited space not usually at its head office, which is located in the Sydney CBD. Workshops in 2007 included 'Creative Beading' where the participant would 'learn a selection of bead embellishment techniques and stitches to start creating a small sampler'. Two other workshops provided instruction in either machine quilting or using leaf prints and textile paints together to create a unique fabric for a quilt.[69]

A notice for 2008 workshops points out that participants must come armed with some prior knowledge. Basic sewing machine skills are required to be able to participate in a 'Scrap Bag Quilt', and 'Some garment construction ability required and sewing machine skills' for a quilted jacket with machine embroidery workshop. The notice urges members to book early as numbers are limited to 16, but a promotional reward offers a substantial reduction in the fee for both bookings if a new Guild member is introduced.[70] Other classes and workshops may be held by members in their local area or group.

Workshops are often promoted according to the reputation of the teacher as much as or more than the technique being taught. This is especially the case where the tutor has made and/or exhibited quilts in the United States, which is often revered as the 'home' of quilting. This honouring of certain teachers as being eminent because of their expertise happens in both Guilds in this study. It reinforces the status of the organisations as learning communities centred around their practice and leadership. One of them, Narelle Grieve, is an author of books and articles on quiltmaking, is a prominent member of the NSW Quilters' Guild, has been granted life membership, and is in demand as a teacher. A biographical note on her states:

> When Narelle took up quilting as an interest she discovered more than a pastime. She found companionship and an addictive enthusiasm for making quilts which she passes on to others through her teaching and public talks. She acquired her teaching qualifications in America and feels strongly that her workshops should give participants sound knowledge and satisfaction. ... 'While I was in America I went to as many workshops as I could'.[71]

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68 The Quilters' Guild editorial committee, *Colours of Australia: Directions in quiltmaking,* Sydney, Fairfax Press, 1995, p.9.

69 'Workshops', *The Template,* Vol.25, No.1, December 2006, p.15.

70 '2008 Workshops', *The Template,* Vol.26, No.1, December 2007, unpaginated.

71 Jan Irvine, *Australian Quilts: The people and their art,* The Quilters' Guild, Simon & Schuster, 1989, p.46.

Another of Australia's foremost quilters, Margaret Rolfe, was a pioneer in quilting here after encountering quilting in the United States. She has also published widely, is sought after as a teacher, and recalls her introduction to the craft:

> I started to learn the craft during a visit to the United States where I was taught the rudiments of the American approach. On returning to Australia I wanted to continue but there were no classes, almost no books and no help. ... Most of my learning had to come from experience – good old-fashioned trial and error. A friend returned from America with a similar enthusiasm, so we put a small ad in the paper and began what has become the Canberra Quilters. Others became interested in what I had learned and so the next step was to begin teaching....[72]

Margaret Rolfe's work demonstrates the way that Australian quilting has evolved into its own identity, in spite of the influence in its ascendance from the United States. One of her earliest works was a collection of patterns for quilts on an Australian wildlife theme, featuring animals, birds and flowers native to the country.[73]

A collection of workshops from the Quilters' Guild was published as a book in 1997. A group of tutors put into writing the techniques they taught in the Quiltskills workshops, along with diagrams and photographs of the work from beginning to completion. Margaret Rolfe writes in the foreword on creativity:

> I would like to challenge the idea that creativity is a state of being and, moreover, that it is either given or not given, like a light switch which is either on or off. I want to suggest that creativity is a journey, not a state. It is a process, not a product. ...
>
> If you think of creativity as a journey, you can also understand that the journey may well have been taken by people before you, so that there are those who are on a similar journey, but who are further down the track ... whose experience we can use to illuminate our own path. ... So it is with these workshops. They can be used as a step – even a first step – on a journey of creativity.[74]

In 1994 Quiltskills was advertised as a two-day event to be held at the Menzies Hotel in Sydney, with nine workshops run between 9.30am and 4.30pm each day. A Gala Dinner was held at the hotel on the first evening of the two days with a special speaker showing her quilt collection.[75] While Quiltskills has been in abeyance for a number of years, there are plans to revive it according to an announcement at a recent Guild meeting I attended.[76] While Quiltskills was held mainly for members of the Quilters' Guild, today there are shows which

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72 Irvine, *Australian Quilts,* p.80.

73 Margaret Rolfe, *Australian Patchwork: A step-by-step guide to piecing, quilting and applique,* Ringwood, Victoria, Viking O'Neil/Penguin Books, 1987 (1985).

74 Margaret Rolfe, 'The Challenge of Creativity', The Quilters' Guild, *Workshops from Quiltskills,* Sydney, J. B. Fairfax, 1997, pp.8-9.

75 'Quiltskills 94', *The Template,*Vol.12, No.3, June 1994, p.7.

76 Quilters' Guild meeting, 16/08/2008, Burwood, NSW.

are major events held over several days. These shows target any person (mainly women) who has an interest in any kind of what may be classed as domestic crafts, but especially needlework.

Craft and Quilt Shows and Retail Shops

The major shows are mainly held at least annually in major venues in capital cities, such as the Exhibition Centre at Darling Harbour in Sydney, and are promoted and staged by commercial event organisers. They form part of this thesis because they, along with quilt and needlework shops, associate themselves with the learning communities of all the associated guilds and organisations by focusing on their interests. However, the organisation and oversight is by an events company such as Expertise Events, which produces the Quilt and Craft Fair at Darling Harbour.[77] The shows last from several days to a week and include dozens of workshops and classes in embroidery, quilting and craft skills, as well as demonstrations by stallholders on the main floor.

Prominent proponents of skills, who are 'household names' and well-known to Guild members and magazine readers, teach the workshops and classes and promote their own books, kits and associated products. Often they will be internationally-known teachers from overseas, especially from the United States or Britain. There is a highly-charged atmosphere common to these shows and unique to them, and many thousands of women – and a few long-suffering males accompanying them – attend daily. Often branches and groups which are distant from the event will organise bus trips to travel to the shows and there are always long lines of coaches parked outside the venue. During the large shows hundreds of manufacturers, publishers and retailers hire space and conduct their business on the floor of the show. Many women, not only those from the country, attend the shows for the express purpose of being able to purchase supplies from as many different sources as possible in one shopping trip, as well as attending one or more workshops instructing in techniques.

In the same way that conferences and shows are closely linked to the two guilds discussed in this work, retail shops form an indivisible part of the learning communities in the crafts. Members purchase their supplies and equipment from the shops, and they also attend the workshops and classes they hold regularly. Often the shop owner will have opened the business specifically because of her own skill in needlework or quilting and will offer classes in the

[77] Expertise Events website located at http://www.expertiseevents.com.au/index.php Accessed online 7/10/2008.

techniques in which she excels.[78] Larger shops sometimes run classes by internationally-known teachers, thus not only acquiring prestige and increased turnover for the shop, but also providing learning opportunities for customers, who may come from outside the geographical area of the store. Such a business is Country Bumpkin, which began as a retail store in South Australia, and now holds a regular international convention, to which many of the NSW readers of its magazine, *Inspirations,* will travel. Tutors from Australia, Europe and the United States will teach classes and run workshops in quilting and embroidery right across the spectrum of techniques in those crafts.[79]

Presbyterian Women's Association (PWA)

Most of the church organisations in this study also include the creative pursuits of craft and needlework in their programs. A recent innovation of PWA is an annual craft camp, which they are using as a way to attract new and younger members, as Jean Ferrington tells:

> And recently one of our very new outreaches is with a craft camp – we're having our second one. We felt – you know we're trying to change our image and we're trying to attract our younger women. Craft is a big thing with women today and we have a craft camp at Stanwell Tops and last year was our first, as I said, and we had a hundred and eleven ladies um it's not only craft – we have Bible teaching segments throughout the weekend, and it went very well last year.[80]

Jean assures me that the motivation of Christian outreach is in no way covert, but that the brochures make it clear that devotional segments will be included:

> Oh, yes, yes – and it's not that it's an outreach that only we know about. We advertise it as outreach and we encourage the ladies who belong to our churches to bring along their friends – yes.[81]

An issue of the PWA magazine, SPAN, includes colour photographs, both on its cover and inside, of the activities of women at the camp.[82] Jean writes in her column 'Christian Education News' of the variety of learning, not only of the creative skills but also the weekend's theme "Making a Difference", where the speaker 'challenged us all with her explanation and

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78 An example of such an entrepreneur is Karyn Herbert, proprietor of In Stitches store in Armidale, NSW. She designs quilts for magazines and teaches classes in her store as well as offering fabrics and kits online. www.butterflyquilts.com.au Accessed online 16/3/2009.

79 Beating Around the Bush International Embroidery Convention, 4-9 October, 2009, *Inspirations,* issue 61, p.1, nd. Website www.countrybumpkin.com.au Accessed online 16/3/2009.

80 Interview with Mrs Jean Ferrington, 19/9/2006.

81 Jean Ferrington.

82 'Making a Difference', *SPAN,* Vol.46, no.1, March 2009, pp.15 & 18.

application of Making a Difference – socially, personally and spiritually'.[83] So, once again, the overlap of theoretical learning categories can easily be seen.

Women's Home League (Salvation Army)

There are many different courses offered for women attending the Home League, their outlines posted out to group leaders. Major Coral Hodges listed many when she spoke about education in her capacity as Director of Women's Ministry. The titles indicate that topics cover a wide field, from spiritual teaching entitled 'FROG' – an acronym for 'Fully Rely On God' through to tips on public speaking called 'Help, What Do I Say?'. Daily life support and leisure topics include 'How to Become Beautiful' and instructions on running a Gingerbread House workshop, the latter run at Christmas in many churches.

The Salvation Army is well-known for its ministry to the disadvantaged, and one of interest here is included under women's ministries, as Coral informed me about a program in NSW, 'Mentoring through ANYA', to teach disadvantaged young women life skills.[84] Following the program the women in leadership, who act as mentors over the ANYA weekend, are required to follow up the girls regularly 'so that the girls know that somebody cares about them'. Other teaching includes preschool ministry and activities, six-week small group focus teaching on parenting skills, budgeting and other lifeskills, as well as spiritual teaching and discussion groups. Coral states that the Army has a strong emphasis on education in women's ministries as well as in all of its other areas.[85]

CWCI

CWCI is an interdenominational ministry which offers a range of non-formal learning opportunities, all with an emphasis on the education of women in the Christian faith. According to the introduction on its website, CWCI Australia is:

> an international, evangelical women's ministry which began in Australia and is known among Christian women for its dynamic Bible teaching and relevance to life issues in the 21st century.

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83 Jean Ferrington, 'Christian Education News', *SPAN,* Vol.46, no.1, March 2009, pp.16-17.

84 Interview with Major Coral Hodges, Director of Women's Ministries for Eastern Territorial Command, 13th August 2007. The ANYA program is discussed further in Chapter Six.

85 Coral Hodges, 13/8/2007.

> CWCI conducts weekend and day functions, Know Your Bible study groups (KYB), seminars, dinners and speaking tours to outback Australia (Safari Ministry).[86]

The main area of teaching in CWCI is through its separate arm of Know Your Bible (KYB) study groups, which were started by Jean Raddon in 1972 after a demand for more Bible teaching from women who had attended conferences or had been visited by 'Safari' teams.[87] Cecily Jackson, national president of CWCI, shares her view of the educational value of both the parent organisation and KYB groups:

> Certainly Know Your Bible groups are educational – in terms of learning, not only about the Scriptures, but how they apply to one's – how one can apply them to one's life. Committee functions - listening to the speaker talking about things that are relevant to one's everyday life, is a form of education.[88]

Regulation of meeting format and rules of behaviour come close to the strictness of CWA control in some ways and impinge on the manner in which teaching occurs as well as who may participate in the group. For example, there is a ruling in KYB that children must not be in the meeting under any circumstances, but must be in the care of the Creche Supervisor. Some leaders, however, 'bend the rules' in order to keep a concerned mother as part of the group. One such was a young mother who had experienced a near cot death and could not bear to be parted from her infant for some months until the danger was past. The leader to whom I spoke told me that she preferred to disobey the ruling and allow the mother to keep her child with her rather than enforce the rule, which would have effectively excluded the mother from the group as well.[89]

Another ruling which leaders are required to strictly enforce is that any member of the group who has not completed answers to the study questions at home before coming must not participate in the group discussion. The same group leader referred to above confessed that she also broke this rule in her group of young mothers with babies and toddlers as she knew that they often did not have the time or energy to complete the study. She felt that barring them from discussion would have an adverse effect on their spiritual growth and probably even cause them to drop out of the group.[90]

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86 CWCI website introduction, www.cwciaus.org.au Accessed online 5/09/2008.

87 Grace Collins and Jean H. Raddon, *Beyond Expectations: The Story of Christian Women's Conventions International,* Sydney, CWCI, 1977, pp.165-6. Safaris are conducted by teams of CWCI leaders who travel to remote areas to minister to isolated women (See ch.6).

88 Interview with Mrs Cecily Jackson, 7/2/2006.

89 Interview with a KYB leader who wishes to remain anonymous.

90 Interview with anonymous KYB group leader.

The KYB study involves the use of a printed booklet which focuses on a specific Bible Study, either one book of the Bible or a section of a book, covered over one or more quarters of the year. There are currently 29 study booklets listed, each one focusing on either a topic, for example *More of God's Women,* or a book of the Bible.[91] However, many more are listed as being translated into other languages, and back numbers continue to be available.[92] At the time of writing there are translations into 31 languages with 12 others currently in preparation.[93]

Cecily Jackson describes the format of a KYB group, and speaks of the way that some women who are not already committed to the Christian faith might be led to become practising Christians:

> Well, generally speaking, what has happened in the past is – as the person does the studies each week ... for each day there are three or four questions to be answered and so you write your answers to the questions and then you get together in a group and share your answers – and in that discussion time we have found in the past that people who aren't already Christians very often suddenly 'see the light' as it were, and become Christians through that sort of ministry. And then there's a class leader – a group leader – we don't call them classes any more – who at the end of the discussion time does a summing up of what the lesson's been all about.[94]

I ask Cecily to explain about the dropping of the term 'class'. "Was it", I ask, "that you don't want people to feel they're being educated – that the word class has a pejorative sense"? She responds that she had not linked the idea of education with Bible Study:

> I hadn't thought of it that way. But yes, I think the feeling was that class sounded too formal and regulated, whereas it can be fairly relaxed – a KYB group – yes.

Cecily's explanation of the aim of CWCI as an organisation demonstrates the way KYB groups are encouraging to women who either are drawn to the faith in a spiritual sense or are already Christians. Once more an overlap occurs as this quote may belong in the chapter on personal growth through organisational membership, but belongs here as well in its basis of learning achieved through a group activity such as a class (regardless of the terminology change to group by CWCI).

> Well I think that – basically, I don't think one can study the Scriptures without some sort of change coming about, because it's everything that we study is so related to how we are as people and how we relate to our Creator. Yeah, it – it's

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91 Study booklets available listed at http://www.christianwomen.org.au/resources.htm Accessed online 19/09/2008.

92 'Languages Currently Available', http//www.christianwomen.org.au/languages.htm Accessed online 19/09/2008.

93 'Global' link, http://www.christianwomen.org.au/global.htm Accessed online 19/09/2008.

94 Cecily Jackson interview, 7/2/2006.

> I suppose it is possible to read it all and just have it on an intellectual level, but certainly I have found that most people – I use the word 'grow' – which is probably a bit of Christian jargon but – they do grow in their faith and understanding of what life is all about as they study the Bible through the KYB method.[95]

At the time of the interview in 2006 Cecily told me that there were over 2000 KYB groups in Australia and the material was being made available to churches for use in mixed groups, although men may still not become members of CWCI – the material is simply made available for outside use in a mixed situation without a formal link to the organisation. As well CWCI has expanded considerably overseas. When I ask her to comment on the expansion of CWCI overseas, Cecily replies that it was at that time in about 36 countries and in many languages:

> It's been amazing how the Lord has opened the doors overseas. Just in November last year Margaret Jacobs, the Ministry Director, went to Africa and introduced KYB in Congo, Rwanda and Burundi. It was received with great enthusiasm and excitement and they wanted translations in their own languages and stuff like that, which is a huge task actually – to translate the books into any language.[96]

Cecily goes on to reflect about the African experience after initially not having thought of KYB as educational: 'I suppose it's a similar sort of thing (to Australian groups), it's a way of educating women in the Christian faith.' Through this learning many women gain personal growth as well as factual knowledge of the Bible, something they also achieve through CWCI conferences.

Major weekend conferences are held annually in each state in Australia, and that in NSW is held close to Easter, beginning on a Friday evening and ending on Sunday afternoon. Conferences are held at a Christian conference centre and are residential, although women who live nearby or who have other commitments may attend only for the day on Saturday.

The non-formal learning opportunities at these conferences are the elective classes which always take place on the Saturday afternoon and follow the theme of the weekend. The 2008 conference was entitled *Hosannas in the Everyday,* with the invitation to 'Come join us and celebrate Palm Sunday as together we explore a variety of expressions of praise and ways to live lives that give praise to God'. The elective sessions included:

- 'Being Jesus' Ambassadors 24/7 at home, at work'
- 'Depression – Why me Lord'
- 'Coping with Cultural Change'

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[95] Cecily Jackson.
[96] Interview with Cecily Jackson.

- 'Social Issues in the 21st Century – Do *I* need to care??'[97]

In 2009 the theme of the weekend conference was 'Growing Through Life's Challenges' and included electives on 'Growing through Grief and Loss' and 'Life in Transition'.[98] These conference electives may be taught as a class or held in the participatory nature of a workshop, depending on the leader and on the topic. However they are taught, the participants are engaging in a non-formal learning opportunity offered by their organisation, as well as other areas of learning such as personal and spiritual growth. So while the obvious category here is non-formal learning, again the learning cannot be theorised in a specific way.

Mothers' Union (MU)

Workshops have sometimes been held in MU, as Mrs Betty Chiswell, wife of the former Anglican Bishop of Armidale, tells me about her experience as a leader of MU and of other learning opportunities offered by the Diocese and available to MU members:

> I always had my eye on (people who had the capacity) and had contact with them and I'd run a workshop for speaking or for running a meeting – things like that, but a number of those people did ... Theological Education by Extension, TEE, - a lot of women took that opportunity to further their theological understanding and their ability to express their Christian faith to others.[99]

So these women in the Armidale Diocese were not only trained in the skills they needed to lead within their organisation, but were apparently encouraged by that training to learn further about their faith from a related church source. However, the members of MU in Armidale are ageing and Betty expresses her view that the branch would end with her generation. This means that all of that learning will be lost if Mothers' Union ceases to exist in Armidale Diocese. When I ask Betty if MU in Armidale was attempting to reach out to young mothers, and the very different problems they face, as is the Sydney Diocese, she replies:

> No they haven't been initiating things like that. It's really a holding operation in Armidale; it's not appealed to the young ones, I mean, Sydney's got numbers to set things up like that. The group here doesn't consist of more than 15 people at the moment, of which I am one of the younger ones, but it still perseveres because of its loyalty and there are young women interested in coming to some things, but younger women like much more informal things, (MU) was of the traditional business meeting type thing[100]

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97 Promotional brochure, CWCI Sydney Women's Weekend Convention, Friday 14th – Sunday 16th March 2008.

98 Promotional brochure, CWCI Sydney Women's Weekend Convention, Friday 6th – Sunday 8th March 2009.

99 Interview with Mrs Betty Chiswell, 1/8/2006.

100 Betty Chiswell.

During my research I attended a meeting for Sydney diocesan members, that is, for those members whose church does not have its own MU branch. All of the members present were elderly, some of advanced old age, so a similar problem exists in the Sydney Diocese, making the holding of workshops unlikely to be well attended. However, there are workshops and courses held, nevertheless, and Mary Coyne, who has held many executive positions in MU, and whose wide learning in the organisation is recorded in the chapter on informal learning, told me that one of the many learning opportunities she has had in MU has been doing the speakers' courses run by the MU Education Department.[101]

The MU magazine *Mia Mia* is, as are all of the magazines and/or newsletters issued by the women's organisations in this study, an educational resource as well as a means of informing members of the activities of the organisation. One educational resource advertised in *Mia Mia* is *Straight Talking,* an MU Australia Social Responsibility toolkit, which is intended to educate members in an appropriate response to social issues in the community.[102] The magazine review defines social responsibility as the way that '(i)ndividuals and communities can engage with social issues by influencing people in power, and their policies, structures and systems to achieve change'. Social responsibility, therefore, 'takes the values of prayer and spirituality' and should enable members and their organisation to:

- Translate prayer into action.
- Research and find ways to resolve worldwide inequalities.
- Articulate our concerns locally, nationally and internationally.
- Campaign and lobby against injustices such as poverty, all forms of violence, gender issues, international debt relief and parental rights.
- Improve local communities.
- Contribute to government consultations.[103]

In this instance members can learn at several levels by being informed of the resource available and the issues it represents. A copy of the manual, accompanied by a Power Point presentation on CD, was mailed to each branch of the organisation and I was able to obtain a copy.[104] By taking action to obtain the resource themselves after reading the review, individual members will learn at a deeper level. The manual contains a considerable amount of information about the way members can become active in opposing injustice in their communities and the wider

[101] Unrecorded interview with Mary Coyne, 27/10/2006.
[102] 'Reviews and Resources', *Mia Mia,* Vol.92, No.3, Spring 2008, p.19.
[103] 'Reviews and Resources'.
[104] Libbie Crossman (ed), *Straight Talking: Social Responsibility Toolkit,* MU Australia (no publishing details given), 2007. Adapted for Australian conditions from a British MU publication of the same name.

society, and includes many contact details and website addresses, as well as training for service and even guidelines for letter writing.[105] The preface of the book states its aim as being:

> To enable, support and empower members with the skills and confidence to engage in social responsibility in their communities.[106]

Although MU makes no suggestion that the publication be used in a group situation for a workshop or class, it could be used as such. Whether used in a group situation or not, I see it as non-formal education in that it is provided as a resource to all groups by the organisation to further its aims. If members of the branches receiving the publication choose to become involved they will strengthen the power of the organisation to oppose injustice. In this way, this can lead to the members making a difference in society through the transformative learning discussed in Chapter Six.

As indicated by the name, parenting is a high-profile concern of MU, and one in which social justice is a focus. The organisation operates a Parenting Education Program to promote their aim of "Sharing Christ's love by encouraging, strengthening and supporting marriage and family life".[107] The course follows the general ethos of parenting as reflected in the mainstream media, but with a strong Christian emphasis on spirituality. The authors who adapted the course material for Australian conditions write in the introduction that when they compiled the course they 'took into account how adults learn best and how groups operate to their maximum potential'.[108] *Mia Mia* reports on the program and its link with social responsibility:

> The Parenting Education Program is successfully growing across Australia. ... A Social Responsibility toolkit/Manual and DVD will shortly be ready for distribution to dioceses. In line with the UN policy of eradication of abuse and neglect of children, our focus for 2008 will be child abuse issues.[109]

An earlier issue had outlined the sessions of the Parenting Education Program, which were:

- The ways (participants) had been parented themselves and how this affected their own style of parenting.
- What to expect of children at different stages – their special needs and the challenges these could bring. With this went an exploration of healthy self-esteem and how to nurture this in our children.
- The importance in relationship building of listening and encouragement and ensuring that each child's individual needs for love are met.
- Exploring different discipline strategies.

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105 The Toolkit is also available online at www.mu.org.au/socresp.htm
106 Libbie Crossman, Preface, *Straight Talking,* p.1.
107 Ian & Kate Pearse (compilers of the adaptations for Australia from original UK material), *Parenting Education Program: An MU Australia initiative,* Sydney, Mother's Union, 2004.
108 Ian & Kate Pearse, Course Introduction, *Parenting Education Program,* MU Australia.
109 Cheryl Bainton, 'MU – The Big Picture', *Mia Mia,* Vol. 92, No.1, Autumn 2008, pp.16-17.

The fifth and final follow-up session included a candlelight dinner and focused on 'The importance of family celebrations' and 'How spiritual development contributes to family growth'.[110]

The program is a series of five sessions or workshops on parenting in which the looseleaf binder for leaders carries the headings:

Session One: Group Forming and Parenting Styles
Session Two: Childhood Development and Children's Self Esteem
Session Three: Building Relationships (Encouragement and Listening)
Session Four: Discipline Strategies
Session Five: Family Growth (Celebrations and Spiritual Development)[111]

The manual includes handout sheets for reflection by participants and is clearly referenced with quotes and attributions to leading secular and Christian child development authorities. The sessions appear to be intensive, with a large amount of material in the folder for each teaching period and the course ends with a family celebration for participants. As is to be expected from a Christian organisation, there is a strong emphasis on spirituality and faith but secular authorities are referred to and participants are given opportunity for discussion as well as reflection.

Professor Fiona Stanley, in an ABC television program on the physical and mental health of children in Australia, expressed her dismay that parenting was the most important task a person would undertake in their life, yet they were not trained for it.[112] Mothers' Union can thus be seen to be fulfilling a vital role in this respect, although it is regrettable that few get to hear of their courses.

The Women's Club

The Women's Club provides somewhat of a contrast to the other organisations in this study, as its stated purpose is simply to be a haven in the city to provide leisure for professional women. As such, it is elite, but education has nevertheless always featured strongly in its life. Members have participated in Learning Circles there for decades, including during the war years. Florence Earle Hooper writes from the records of 1944 in her story of the Club: 'the new tax on Incomes of Clubs does not affect us, for the Women's Club is educational, thanks to the Tuesday and Music Circle. So that is something to be proud of'.[113]

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110 Mary Clark, 'PEP at Wentworth Falls: 'Why should we be involved in Parenting Education'? '. *Mia Mia,* Vol.90, No.3, Spring 2006, pp.10-11. Wentworth Falls is a town in the Blue Mountains, NSW.
111 *Parenting Education Program*, Contents page.
112 *Risking Our Kids,* ABC 1, 7/10/2008, 8.30pm.
113 Florence Earle Hooper, *The Story of the Women's Club,* Sydney, The Women's Club, c1963, p.70.

Today there are many more Learning Circles, one of which, Philosophy, I was able to attend at the invitation of a member. The leader of the circle was Dr Nicole Helmy, who taught on Jean-Paul Sartre – 'something to whet our appetite on existentialism', she said. There were only five members at the Circle apart from myself, although I was told some regulars were absent. The group was held in the library, which was as opulently furnished as the rest of the club, with a group of polished wood tables and carved chairs with brocade seat cushions. There were not many books, though, only a few hundred, housed in glass-fronted wooden bookcases. I felt a sense that they were somehow fenced off from members, with more attention paid to the appearance of the room than their welcoming availability to potential readers and learning possibilities. While I was there during another visit I saw a large noisy group move from lunching together in the dining room to another room. They were, I was informed, the members of the Bridge Circle, probably the largest Learning Circle of the many held, and they certainly appeared to be enthusiastic about their activity.

The Learning Circles are comprised of a speaker, followed by a discussion within the group. The membership of each circle is usually between 12 and 20 women and the topics they cover range through film, philosophy, literature (the literary circle is the oldest), craft, music, travel and AAP – the members' fond acronym for Art, Architecture and Photography.[114]

In response to my own question in the Philosophy Learning Circle about creativity and my own view of its transformative effects, Dr Helmy suggested the work of Luce Irigaray, Hélène Cixous, and Foucault, mentioning the latter's idea of a person creating her life as a work of art. Certainly the ambience of The Women's Club presents an impression of a work of art, especially the foyer with its two spectacular original works by the Australian artist, Portia Geach, and the impressive lounge setting.[115] To complete the air of learning in the midst of luxury the current program, for both functions and educational activities, is displayed in gold frames on elegant side tables.

The two following organisations, who both designate themselves as 'service', also tend to include more prosperous women, especially those who are professionals or self-employed.

Quota International

During my research I was privileged to have interviews with two Australian women who have served Quota at an international level. One of these women, Mrs Gloria Cook, told

[114] Initial visit for the purposes of my research to The Women's Club, Sydney, was at the invitation of the Vice President, Dr Ann Eyland.

[115] Visit to The Women's Club, Sydney, 26th March 2008 as the guest of a member.

me of the ways that she educated members of the organisation in issues that were helpful in their relationships to other members and in everyday life. She also included in her leadership teaching about protocol in the running of meetings and of the organisation, saying she was told that 'there's not a Quota Club in our District that isn't having (discussion on) Protocol every meeting'.[116]

Discussions on protocol were intense at the foundation of Quota in Sydney in 1932, according to a brief history given by a speaker at an anniversary celebration in Sydney during a South Pacific area conference. According to Mary Walsh, the speaker at that celebration, Quota was the first women's service club in Australia, and it was agreed at the Inaugural Luncheon that 'the ideals, aims and objectives of Rotary were similar to those of the Quota organization though "the idea of service was quite modern in its application" '.[117]

> Over the next six months meetings were held weekly, the ideals and principles were scrutinized and studied. Members were called upon to give a five minute speech on the meaning of some part of the objects of Quota e.g. on the meaning of Service, or Fellowship or ethical business practice.[118]

Gloria Cook told me about other times she spoke in Quota meetings about issues that would affect members both within the confines of their club meetings and in their personal lives. Surely one of the most important of these must be conflict resolution, and my research over these organisations has revealed concerns over conflict in most of my interviews with women of all organisations. Of her instruction of Quota members, Gloria Cook recalled:

> Another one I was asked to do was 'Conflict Resolution'. And wherever you are, wherever there are women, you do have interpersonal relationship difficulties ... Quota had put out an article on 'Conflict Resolution' ... I found that what they put out was probably the best that I came across. And the main thing there is, you cannot resolve any conflict unless both parties are prepared to come to the table in good faith, to try and resolve 'the situation' taking the personalities out of whatever the difficulty is.[119]

Conflict resolution is a part of personal growth in an individual, and Mary Walsh stated in her address discussed above that 'self-improvement' was taken seriously by the founding members of Sydney Quota. They took turns in giving short speeches, an activity which allowed them to learn and improve skills in public speaking, as well as learning about the topic during research for the speech. Listeners then learned about the topic during the presentation, and from the

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116 Interview with Mrs Gloria Cook, 10/7/2007.

117 'Sydney's Fascinating History', from an address given by Sydney President Mary Walsh at the celebration of Sydney's 70th birthday at SPAM 07 (South Pacific Area Meeting). Text of the address given to me by Dawn Holland, President at the time of Quota International Sydney Inc.

118 'Sydney's Fascinating History', from an address given by Sydney President Mary Walsh at the celebration of Sydney's 70th birthday at SPAM 07.

119 Gloria Cook.

guest speakers, who included such notable women as Dame Sybil Thorndike. Edith Glanville was the first President of the club and was a League of Nations delegate. She was widely travelled and attended the International Conference for Women's Suffrage and Equal Citizenship in Istanbul in 1935. All of these activities were reported back to the club in what seem to have been very entertaining addresses to the members but would have been highly educational as well.[120] Although she was the first woman justice of the peace in NSW and the founder of both Quota and the Soroptimists in NSW (the latter another women's service organisation founded in the US) historical records contain little information about her.[121] The current members at the time of the retrospective address at the South Pacific Area Meeting would have also learned a great deal about the history of their organisation and about the achievements of the women in its past.

Zonta

The Zonta Club in Armidale has an ongoing program of learning opportunities for members through its activities and through its outreach into the community. Isabel Pollard, who has been a member of Armidale Zonta for many years, tells me of the sharing of knowledge with the club by another member:

> We had an amazing workshop on accessing the website, because Cherry, again, is very interested in computer and electronics, and she's teaching us all how to become (pauses) – we had a day at Armidale High School when we were taught how to access the website and so on, and navigating around websites – yes. We developed a DVD in conjunction with the Film and Television School to promote this e-girls program.[122]

The e-girls program was devised by Armidale Zonta to assist girls in high school and TAFE to become comfortable with technology before they reach the point of choosing a career. Projects such as e-girls are undertaken in order to further the Zonta aim to end discrimination of women in non-traditional careers like science and engineering. Isabel's fellow Zonta member, Helen Gee, who was the President of Armidale Club at the time, told me about the topic for their next meeting, which aimed to educate the women:

> Our next meeting is committee meetings, and that's a form of self-education, too. Every Zonta member is a member of a committee and the committees will

120 'Sydney's Fascinating History'.

121 This latter information on Edith Glanville was uncovered through a Google search which brought up an article in *The Australian* newspaper dated 25 April 2008. Accessed online 10/09/2008 at http://www.theaustralian.news.com.au/story/0,25197,23594423-21147,00.html Neither the Australian Dictionary of Biography nor the Australian Women's Archive include any information on Glanville, despite her high profile in her life time.

122 Interview with Mrs Isabel Pollard, 24/3/2006.

> look at the issues that we've talked about – the childcare, the workers, the mothers, we talked about adult people with disabilities and we've looked at aged care, because that tends to involve women, and we've looked at the soft play thing.[123]

Almost all of the activities in Zonta are about service to advance the status of women, and there seems to be little that could be classed as leisure activity, although those women to whom I have spoken obviously take great pleasure in the service they undertake in their organisation.

Conclusion

The non-formal learning opportunities in workshops and classes offered by these women's organisations can be seen to be substantial and covering a broad area within each organisation's area of specialisation. This is especially so in the numerous workshops held by the two guilds and in the shows and the shops with which their members are associated. The latter are a strong part of these learning communities and cannot be separated from them. The organisations other than the two Guilds differ in nature in the way they offer teaching and information and so their practice in what is defined as a workshop or class in the Guilds is not as clear. However, what I have discussed is non-formal learning which does not lead to an award offered by these organisations, and this also involves learning from the speakers engaged to speak at meetings and events. Non-formal learning could also include the learning by members who choose to attend special meetings held to inform members of their rights and responsibilities as members of a learning community, but both of the latter could also be classified as informal learning, covered in the next chapter.

The members of the women's organisations involved in this study quite clearly learn in different ways in the process of attending a workshop or a class, as I have noted throughout the chapter. I have discussed the work of academic commentators who have more recently researched ways people learn and have concluded that the distinct separation of areas of learning into the commonly-held categories is unsustainable. This is especially so in the case of the women whose activities in their organisations I have researched. In workshops and classes, many areas of learning occur other than those classified as 'non-formal', thus bearing out my contention that the ways women learn are fluid and not separated by distinct boundaries. These workshops include informal learning, discussed in the next chapter, because the women participating in them are attending to fulfil their desire to learn about a particular skill or area

[123] Interview with Mrs Helen Gee, 31/7/2007.

of focus. Thus the boundary is fluid and the chapter delineation is actually more for convenience and ease of reading than a precise demarcation.

Chapter Four

Finding Out More About It

Informal Learning in Women's Organisations

Informal learning comes about when an individual seeks to learn on her own initiative without necessarily attending formalised courses of study or classes. In the context of this study it also represents the group aim to find out about a particular topic, often in order to carry out the chosen field of service or to perfect skills. The type of learning defined as informal for the purpose of this study covers the majority of learning by far in these organisations.[1] I classify it loosely as informal learning here for convenience, but this seeking out of learning by women in their organisations is so diverse and widespread that it cannot be confined in any category.

I have written previously about the way that it is impossible to strictly apply adult learning theory to these women's organisations because of their vastly different structure to formal learning institutions. The crossover between definitions of non-formal and informal is especially evident in the case of the CWA Country of Study program because of the effort by the organisation to inform its members about the country in question as widely as possible. I have included the International Study Weekend in the previous chapter because of its more formalised teaching program which resembles workshop and class teaching programs, or even a university lecture situation on the Saturday. The members themselves, however, often go to great lengths as well to research every aspect of the Country of Study for the year, an informal learning activity for them.

There are many ways in which informal learning takes place in women's organisations: during the progress of the meetings themselves, while participating in projects, entering competitions between members or groups and branches, and while preparing for fundraising or service projects. As well, members can seek information from their organisation's library or the local public library for purposes involved in their membership, and they may learn from commercial magazines, media programs or from craft shows focused on their area of interest.

General women's magazines also regularly contain articles that could be relevant to organisation members. Whether the content of magazines is widely based or focused on one area, each one also forms its own community of interest. Thus a magazine may be inclusive of some organisations at times when an issue involving them is considered newsworthy or of

[1] I have discussed the theories of adult learning in Chapter One, including Foley's which I have used as a framework for my discussions.

general interest to readers. Susan Sheridan has written of the immediacy of women's magazines to their readers as a community in her book on the history of the *Australian Women's Weekly*:

> It 'packaged' this femininity in such a way as to address a wide variety of women in the companionable way that is characteristic of women's magazines, so that the readers have a sense of belonging to a club as well as having mentors and advisors to turn to. Its readers actively responded, sending letters, stories, competition entries and favourite recipes back to the magazine.[2]

As well as the learning gained by members from commercial magazines relevant to their organisation's activities, the organisations' newsletters and journals are also highly informative. This is especially the case with the Embroiderers' and Quilters' Guilds magazines and with the CWA magazine *The Country Woman,* about which I write below.

CWA

Informal learning is diverse in CWA because of the many different areas in which the organisation operates, among its own members and in the community. One way in which learning opportunities are frequently offered in branches is through guest speakers at meetings.

The Morpeth branch of CWA informed readers of *The Country Woman* in 2006 that a solicitor was to be the guest speaker at a forthcoming meeting, addressing them on 'Wills, Power of Attorney and Enduring Guardianship'.[3] Not all members will have sufficient interest in learning, or even a desire to learn, what they may see as a morbid subject or one that they feel they need not yet worry about, but the opportunity to gain information about a vital topic is thus presented through attendance at the meeting.

Opportunities to learn are offered through tours conducted overseas in the country of study for the year. An experience is related in *The Country Woman* by the members of a group who travelled to Denmark in the year that it was the CWA Country of Study. On the way there the remedy for jet lag pressed on them by their tour guide in Paris was 'to keep us walking, talking and vertical' while providing information about the city. Since the writers were able to relate the details the tour guide must have been successful in assisting them to learn about the area in which they were located![4] The members who were privileged to be able to afford the tour as part of their Country of Study year learned about several countries as well as Denmark,

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2 Susan Sheridan (with Barbara Baird, Kate Borrett & Lyndall Ryan), *Who Was That Woman:* The Australian Women's Weekly *in the postwar years,* Sydney, University of New South Wales Press, 2002.

3 Diane Burton, 'Morpeth Branch News', *The Country Woman,* Vol.47, No.4, August 2006, p.31.

4 Annette Forsyth and Patricia Irving, 'CWA Tour to Denmark – September 2006', *The Country Woman,* Vol.47, No.6, December 2006, p.28.

but the readers of the magazine are also granted vicarious enjoyment should they choose to read the article in their organisation's newsletter – in this year or similar articles in other years.[5]

Women belong to an organisation for many reasons, not always because of a desire to learn, and sometimes those women will attempt to hinder the opportunity for others. I have experienced such an occasion in community organisations. At the CWA branch of which I am a member I had returned, full of enthusiasm, from the 2007 annual state conference at Jindabyne. One of the older women said to me before the meeting: 'Please don't go on about the conference, dear, it's *so* boring!' I was quite shocked, but soon found that other members *were* interested to hear about the event which they had been unable to attend, and so I was able to express my feelings of excitement adequately in spite of her request – and help the other women to learn about the proceedings in the event they had missed out on. In any case, as a conference delegate whose fee had been supplemented by the branch, I was required by CWA to report back on the experience and on my findings.

While I have already discussed the Country of Study program in the previous chapter, it also involves considerable informal learning as the members seek information in order to stage their own International Days. The enthusiasm generated by the program often results in a spirit of competition between nearby branches to put on the best event. Representatives from each branch in the group are invited to share in the day, sample the food from the country, listen to the guest speaker and view the display. Consequently both the women who stage the event and the invited guests learn a considerable amount about the country of study while in a small way international friendship and understanding is promoted. Often the preparation of national dishes of the country is a learning experience for the women, as well as listening to the speakers and researching for the décor and overall presentation of the day.

One member told me how her branch's celebration had evoked a memory for her when another member brought some Danish china which had been given to her children. She said to me 'I remembered I had a (similar) plate as a young adult by seeing that. You learn from the activities, talks, etc., it's educational to belong to CWA'.[6]

During the year in which Mexico was the Country of Study I attended two International Day celebrations, in both of which the featured speakers were young women who had emigrated to Australia and made this country their home, but still had a strong attachment to their country of birth. Their talks were greatly enlightening about the differences in cultural

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5 Forsyth & Irving, 'CWA Tour to Denmark'.
6 Telephone conversation with Mrs Lyn Tunin, 18/8/2006.

activities, in educational opportunity, freedom and religious observance. The display of Mexican costumes and cultural artefacts was both entertaining and informative and it was gratifying to see the delight of these two young women at life in their adopted country.

The Country of Study program allows for plenty of flexibility and for personal preferences. Many times when I discussed learning with CWA members I was intrigued to notice the way that understanding dawned as the women realised that they were learning more and in more ways than they had thought they were. Joy Granger, President of the Tarcutta branch in the Riverina Group in southern NSW, reflected that she sees learning in CWA as 'quite extensive really, especially through the cookery, handicraft and international (country of study research)'.[7]

The CWA magazine/newsletter *The Country Woman* carries articles on the country of study each year in the February issue. In 2006 the magazine carried a report on Denmark, with brief entries on its location, population and geography. The article also listed information under headings such as government, sports, climate and economy. An English translation of the Danish national anthem followed, with its music and a map of the area. Included with the conditions of entry for the International Book and Doll competitions and the International Primary School Book competition were nine websites listed as 'a starting point for research'.[8]

Every *Country Woman* issue has several pages devoted to reporting activities in the branches, and the August 2006 issue has one page devoted to the International Days of five of the branches. The Moss Vale branch involved a local primary school, with a performance of Hans Christian Andersen's 'The Ugly Duckling', with posters created by pupils decorating the walls. Two guest speakers, Danish immigrants, spoke of their memories of their homeland and displayed Danish artefacts, including a piece of silk bobbin lace created from thread unravelled from a World War II British parachute which had been used to lower ammunition to the resistance fighters.[9] Therefore, as well as the learning about Denmark and history achieved by the CWA members and the children, an intergenerational bond has been created and/or strengthened.

Sometimes the activities of other organisations are promoted in the CWA monthly publication because of the similarity of their aims and objectives. In 1947 the YWCA had similar aims and objectives to CWA, although hardly so today. Thus the YWCA Residence Staff Training Scheme, which culminated in the award of a diploma, was promoted in a full

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7 Telephone conversation with Mrs Joy Granger, 16/12/2008.
8 'Denmark Report', *The Country Woman,* February 2006, Volume 47, no.1, pp.12-14.
9 Elsie Webber, ' 'Goddag' from Moss Vale', *The Country Woman,* August 2006, Vol.47, no.4, p.30.

page article for the benefit of CWA mothers who may have wished their daughters to undertake that training in 1947.[10]

The editor of the then-named *The Countrywoman* was clearly prepared to give space to higher education for women as another institution that was given prominent place in the magazine earlier that same year was the New England University College. This institution was an offspring of Sydney University whose Warden, Dr R.B. Madgwick, worked in the late 1940s to gain status for it as an autonomous university. One of the avenues that had been chosen to promote the fledgling institution was the CWA publication, demonstrating the regard with which the organisation was viewed and its ability to reach the university's target of rural families.[11] The writer of the article about the university college was its Deputy-Warden, who was shortly to hand over the reins to Dr Madgwick. He writes that one of the functions of the University of New England 'will be that of being "the power-house" for its region and for the rural community of New South Wales. ... a stimulus to the social, economic, political and cultural progress of the area'.[12] The relationship of CWA with this regional university, now for many decades an autonomous and respected institution, has continued with the hosting of the International Study Weekend at Earle Page College, one of the residential colleges on the campus, including the publication each year by the University Conference Centre of the weekend's study book. To mark the relationship, CWA awards four scholarships annually towards Earle Page College residents' expenses.

Embroiderers' Guild

There are many informal learning opportunities for members of the Guild, whether they visit the headquarters and library, belong to a group, or are individual members at a distance. The learning opportunities at headquarters are greater, however, primarily because of the library and the extensive collection of embroidered items in the collection and on display.

In correspondence with Guild teacher Effie Mitrofanis, I asked: "How do you feel you, and others you have taught, have learned in the Guild?" Effie responded by setting out the extent of resources available to members:

> The Guild provides the facilities and a connection to embroidery in the rest of the world and keeps us up to date with books, embroidery products, exhibitions

[10] 'Home Making – A Career: Y.W.C.A. Residence Staff Training Scheme', *The Countrywoman in New South Wales,* August 1947, p.19.

[11] Matthew Jordan, *A Spirit of True Learning: The jubilee history of the University of New England,* Sydney, UNSW Press, 2004, p.60.

[12] J.P. Belshaw, 'New England University College: An Experiment in the Decentralisation of University Education', *The Countrywoman in New South Wales,* January 1947, pp.13-14 (second of two articles).

> and every aspect of embroidery as both educational and as an art form. All these facilities are available to our members. A members only shop provides us with books, materials, threads and equipment at members' prices.[13]

Note that Effie refers to embroidery as an art form. Another Guild teacher who is also a university lecturer in art history, Sue Wood, argues that embroidery, in particular creative embroidery, is an art form and collaborative. She writes of her application of a theory of Becker's on 'art worlds', and quotes from his work. "According to Becker" she states, "an art world is 'the network of people whose cooperative activity, organized via their joint knowledge of conventional means of doing things, produces the kind of art works (which) that art world is noted for.' Works of art therefore are the products of joint activity".[14]

The education and training in skills which occurs in creative women's organisations, in this case the Embroiderers' Guild, is the means to create the art world of which Wood writes. She argues that the 'educational activities and exhibitions' which the founders of the Guild organised, and which continue to be organised, '(are) a means of educating participants and potential audiences about the conventions of creative embroidery'.[15] This education, and the learning which follows, also consolidates the organisation as a learning community and a community of practice.[16]

A current group within the Guild, the Lateral Stitchers, carries on the work of the founder, Margaret Oppen, and her colleagues in creating and disseminating works of art using fabric and stitches in place of canvas and paint or regular sculpture (although Oppen herself, as an artist, painted as well). An exhibition mounted by the Lateral Stitchers in State Parliament House in Sydney in 2007 and opened by the Governor of NSW, Her Excellency Professor Marie Bashir, demonstrated the veracity of their claim to be recognised as an art form and their rejection of the label of domestic craft. A report on the exhibition records Professor Bashir, who is an embroiderer herself and Patron of the Guild, as praising Guild members who exhibited 'for their talent and commitment to the cause'.[17] The late Marie Cavenagh, the Custodian of the Guild Collection for many years, told me of the way that the Lateral Stitchers use conventional historic pieces of needlework from the items in the collection as inspiration

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13 Personal communication from Effie Mitrofanis.

14 Susan Wood, 'Creative Embroidery in New South Wales, 1960-1975, unpublished doctoral thesis, Melbourne, RMIT University, 2006, p.65.

15 Wood, *Creative Embroidery,* p.65.

16 See my introduction for reference to Kilpatrick et al and their defining of a learning community, as well as Wenger's further defining of communities of practice.

17 'Reflections on a Golden Journey', August 2007, State Parliament House, Macquarie Street, Sydney. Reported in Helen Parsons, 'Reflections on a Golden Journey', *Embroidery & Cross Stitch,* Vol 14, No.12, nd., pp.32-4.

for their creative art works.[18] Items from this collection are often used in workshops and classes or displayed at Headquarters.

As well as the collection, the Guild holds a selection of study boxes containing samplers and instructions, which members may borrow to assist them in learning a technique. A small fee is charged to borrow the boxes, the idea for which emanated from those initiated by Louisa Pesel's 'model boxes' in the London Guild. She is also credited with being the inspiration for the London Embroiderers' Guild Collection and thus, indirectly, the Australian Guild's collection.[19]

As in other situations I have mentioned previously, the workshops in the Embroiderers' Guild constitute a major crossover between learning categories. They can, and should, be classified as non-formal learning because of the planned way they are offered by the Guild to its members. However, they also count as informal learning because they can be accessed in a one-off, casual way by members who want to learn a specific technique, who wish to make an item described in the list of workshops in each issue of *The Record,* or who enjoy sitting under the teaching of a particular tutor. This, another of my difficulties in categorising learning, is supported by the research of Colley et al in their argument that boundaries are inefficient in organising different areas of learning.[20] In addition to workshops there are also groups which simply meet together to work on their own projects, thus offering many varied opportunities for learning as the women socialise, an issue covered in the following chapter.

The Guild's monthly newsletter, *The Record,* provides another vehicle for learning. Although not produced in colour because of cost, *The Record* is printed on high quality paper and contains a significant amount of information. In the August 2008 issue, which I am using as representative of issues in the last few years, one full page is taken up with notices of workshops and classes in table form.[21] The back cover likewise carries a list of activities at Guild headquarters in table form, including the names of tutors and the hostesses for each activity/day. This schedule from the August 2008 issue indicates how busy the Concord West Headquarters are: there are only two days in the month on which there is no hostess and no activity and two others where there is a hostess on duty to greet random visitors but no activity. Many of the days list two or more activities, such as classes, workshops or meetings.[22] Further

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18 Interview with Marie Cavanagh, Embroiderers' Guild Custodian, 27/2/2006.

19 Sgygenda, Lynn, 'Louisa Frances Pesel', *Stitch with the Embroiderers' Guild,* (London), No.55, October/November 2008, pp.8-9.

20 Helen Colley, Phil Hodkinson & Janice Malcolm, *Informality and Formality in Learning: A Report for the Learning and Skills Research Centre,* Lifelong Learning Institute, University of Leeds, 2003.

21 'Guild Workshops & Classes', *The Record,* No.485, August 2008, p.3.

22 'August 2008 Activities – At Guild Headquarters', *The Record,* No.485, August 2008, p.16.

information is included in 'Diary Dates' for activities elsewhere around the state and nationally, and workshops and classes are outlined in greater detail elsewhere in the magazine. Most issues feature an embroidery on the cover and in this case the work, by a member, is an original creative embroidery which had hung in the Room Display for the previous month (displays of embroidery at the headquarters are changed monthly).

In many respects *The Record*, despite its glossy paper and professional presentation, is much more in the regular newsletter style than such publications by other organisations. More recent issues, especially, have a preponderance of news of recent and future events in the Guild and the embroidery world, rather than instructional articles relevant to members' interests.

An exception, however, was the lengthy and educational series by Effie Mitrofanis entitled 'Ask Penelope'. Effie began this column in February 2005 and wrote the last one (with a hint of a possible return) for the 50th Anniversary issue in July 2007.[23] This column varies greatly in its focus, such as the simple instructions on how to prepare an embroidery frame to avoid damaging the fabric.[24] Another time the reader is instructed how to knit a fringe to edge Mountmellick work, which is stitched with white thread on white fabric, with a brief note on the technique's initial creation in Ireland in the 1830s.[25] Sometimes the topic is devoted entirely to history, as when Effie, as 'Penelope', writes at length on Byzantine Embroidery in two consecutive issues of the magazine.[26] Each instalment of the column ends with the appeal to 'stitch with passion' over the signature of 'Effie Penelope'. At the 51st Annual General Meeting on 11th October 2008 Effie was presented with a Service Award. This was given 'for her invaluable contribution to the development and maintenance of our educational programme over many years'.[27]

A browse through the nine years of issues that I have in my possession reveals accounts written by members about trips overseas and visits to places relevant to embroidery or other items of interest. There are also obituaries of active members or tutors who made an impact on the Guild, some of whom influenced the development of the Guild. One such was Marie Cavanagh, who was Custodian of the Guild Collection from the 1980s until her death in

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23 Effie Mitrofanis, 'Ask Penelope', *The Record,* No.449, February 2005, pp.11-12; last column: No.474, July 2007, p.8.

24 Effie Mitrofanis, 'Ask Penelope', *The Record,* No.454, July 2005, pp.9-10.

25 Effie Mitrofanis, 'Ask Penelope', *The Record,* No.453, June 2005, p.10.

26 Effie Mitrofanis, 'Ask Penelope: Byzantine Gold: Part 1', *The Record,* No.470, March 2007, pp.6-7; Part 2, *The Record,* No.471, April 2007, pp.5-6.

27 'President's Report', *The Record,* No.488, November 2008, p.5.

September 2007. Even Marie's brief obituary contains elements of the organisation's history and an example of how one woman's life can influence many in her organisation and beyond.[28]

Reports from scholarship winners about their use of the funds to increase their knowledge are a mandatory requirement for the scholarship.[29] Pamela Spear won the Jean Vere Scholarship with her 'vision for the 'isolated' embroiderer – to share the magic of embroidery and experience the bonding of embroidering in a workshop situation'. She used the funds to upgrade her computer and purchase a digital camera for pursuing her research project on learning/sharing embroidery online. The completed project was submitted to Monash University for a Master of Education and was awarded a High Distinction. Pamela Spear writes that she was inspired by the Guild Correspondence Course she had undertaken years before and the detail she gives of her research and its outcomes is not only informative but also reveals the many possibilities open to readers for further learning themselves.[30]

Since the end of the 'Ask Penelope' column most articles have been either timetables and reports on available workshops and classes, or else news items by or about members. While there is much inspiration and encouragement for further learning in the latter, such articles are not directly instructional. The possibility of future variation to the 'newsletter' genre is foreshadowed by the editor's report in the first issue of 2009 that there are to be 'new innovations' in the *Record.* Additions would include a Stitch of the Month and a Month by Month project, thus creating new learning opportunities for members.[31]

The Quilters' Guild

The Quilters' Guild has considerably fewer members than the Embroiderers' Guild but is nevertheless active. During a visit I made to the Guild Head Office in the city Lynn Hewitt, a former President of the Guild, told me that the membership of the Guild hovers around one thousand. It drops off and then climbs again as members realise that they want to put a quilt in the show and so must rejoin as membership is a compulsory requirement to enter.[32] When I asked if she saw the Guild as a learning community Lynn replied that she definitely sees it as such. Every first Friday of the month a member shows her quilts and the members in attendance all ask questions and discuss the work, thus adding to the scope of their own

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28 Heather Joynes, 'Marie Cavanagh', *The Record,* No.478, November 2007, p.18.
29 See Chapter Two for more extensive discussion on Embroiderers' Guild scholarships.
30 Pamela Spear, 'Report on the Jean Vere Scholarship', *The Record,* No.459, February 2006, p.7.
31 Sandy Bell, 'Editor's Report', *The Record,* No.489, p.3.
32 Personal conversation with Mrs Lynn Hewitt, 7/5/2008.

knowledge of the craft. The city office is, according to Lynn, the 'information headquarters' where members, and others, telephone or email to ask advice on their projects.[33]

Membership is more fluid than in the Embroiderers' Guild, in that many members do not visit the Guild Headquarters because of the activity in the many quilt shops scattered around the state of NSW, which they are more likely to attend because of proximity to their homes. Another member involved in the conversation at the Guild office talked about the way quilting had become popular:

> Shops have increased the takeup of the craft and there is a growing awareness of quilting through the Quilt Show.[34]

The availability of thousands of beautiful cotton fabrics designed especially for quiltmaking and stocked in those shops also assists the growth of interest in the craft. During a class held in a shop the shared knowledge of colour and form, as well as the camaraderie of the group, often influences the selection of fabric in a work in progress. Because a range of fabrics is on the spot a new fabric may be purchased and added immediately from the selection available. In that way the communal sharing of knowledge and practical skills might be seen to be superior in a shop which holds classes than in the Quilters' Guild headquarters.

The major retail chains like Lincraft and Spotlight, however, are not seen as helpful because of the lack of skill of the majority of assistants, who are rarely quilters and are unable to advise about the range of fabrics and tools stocked. News filters back to the Guild that people are forever going into small shops asking advice because they cannot obtain it in the large chains. As well, because of this activity in shops and small groups many quilters are not members but benefit from the Quilt Show and other events staged by the Guild or by its members. This is a distinct drawback for the organisation as it struggles to find volunteers for hostessing at the city office or for editing *The Template.*[35]

Nevertheless, the sense of community is evident at Guild meetings, and members freely share knowledge and skills with each other before, after and during the course of the meeting. At a meeting I attended I had taken a portion of the quilt I constructed to visualise this research but felt that I was not working correctly (see Appendix 2). When I asked if anyone nearby could help it transpired that the woman sitting beside me at the table was a teacher in that particular technique. Her prompt assistance enabled me to remedy my mistakes immediately.

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33 Lynn Hewitt, 7/5/2008.

34 Conversation with Sue Hutton and Lynn Hewitt, 7/5/2008.

35 The above paragraph consists of the views of Sue Hutton and Lynn Hewitt in notes taken during the conversation with them on 7/5/2008.

In a thesis on quilting in Australia and the Bicentennial year, Emma Grahame writes of her entry into the world of quiltmaking in order to carry out her research. Her work majors on culture and feminism and thus differs from mine, but in a comment on learning relevant to my own experience at the meeting described above, she writes:

> Another aspect of the semi-domestic pedagogy of quiltmaking is the way in which the *practice* of doing the sewing is respected as a form of knowledge in itself, different and separate from the ways in which it might be written down. ... The real learning is done by *doing*.[36]

Most members continue to stitch at the tables provided throughout the meeting, and comments made in an undertone can be heard from time to time. Grahame describes in detail the obvious discomfiture of an eminent doctor who spoke at a Quilters' Guild meeting in thanks for the quilts which had been donated to a local hospital. He was clearly unable to understand the women's practice of 'sewing while listening' and did not seem to believe that they were truly listening to him, but Grahame affirms:

> I could tell that all his listeners *were* paying attention, but he could find no sign of it, being used to the undivided attention of audiences with nothing in their hands. ... this was quite a different public space than that he was used to. What the quilters did, though, was entirely usual and natural to them: it is what they do at Guild meetings, and at night in front of the television ... The motif of sewing-and-listening, listening-and-sewing, seems to me to stand for the sidestep of the public-private divide that quilters have enabled for each other.[37]

Emma Grahame concludes the anecdote by reporting that the doctor left soon after, clearly offended by what he perceived as the lack of attention from the women. As I read it I wondered why she did not run after him and explain the transgressive culture to set his mind at rest, or at least she could have written him a note later.

Many women who become expert quilters, even teachers, are self-taught, and some become fulltime professionals as do some in the Embroiderers' Guild. Grahame writes of this occurrence in the Quilters' Guild:

> Perhaps more important than the professional opportunities, however, is the setting up of a large network of self-education opportunities. ... quilters have produced a whole culture of co-operative and self-organised learning.[38]

Grahame's insight is interesting when considering self-directed learning and its implication of the isolated learner – when in fact self-directed learners can be actively involved in seeking others who are further along in the learning journey in the chosen subject. Certainly this is the

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[36] Emma Grahame, ' "Making Something for Myself": Women, quilts, culture and feminism,' unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Technology, Sydney, 1998, p.94.

[37] Grahame, ' "Making Something for Myself" ', pp.86-7.

[38] Grahame, ' "Making Something For Myself"', p.99.

case with the many women who attend workshops and classes wherever they can be found – at shows, in shops or at the Guild itself.

The Guild library is an opportunity for members to seek information, which I discuss further below. For quilting, therefore, the Guild offers opportunity for seeking information on the craft, but this is tempered by the many other avenues through which members and other quilters may learn about the craft, including shops, magazines and websites, whether that of the Quilters' Guild or of the many other commercial interests.

The Guild's newsletter, *The Template,* like the newsletters of the other organisations discussed here, plays its part in promoting and confirming the learning environment. It is normally published quarterly, although problems with obtaining a volunteer to edit the magazine-format publication have meant that it has not appeared in its usual full colour edition in December of either 2007 or 2008. In 2007 that issue took the form of four double-sided stapled A4 sheets compiled by the President but the next volunteer gave up the post of editor after only three issues. Problems continued and a sub-committee has now been appointed in place of an editor. In the conversation I had with Lynn Hewitt, she suggested that the colour magazine format was a deterrent to volunteers as they were daunted by the professional quality and felt unable to aspire to that standard. She told those who expressed those feelings "It's a newsletter, not a magazine!", but to little avail.[39] As its presentation is that of a magazine her words are possibly dismissed by many of her hearers. An interesting difference between the two issues briefly reviewed below is that the 2003 issue is subtitled 'Magazine of the Quilters' Guild of NSW Inc., while that of 2008 has changed to 'The Newsletter of the Quilters' Guild of NSW Inc., although there is no appreciable difference in appearance.

The content is certainly that of a newsletter in that it carries news about events and dates of workshops and meetings. The September 2008 issue lists only seven workshops, all on weekends, from mid-September until mid-January, the last of which was for children in the school holidays.[40] The calendar of events, however, is much fuller for the three-month duration of the issue, with much of the time until early December taken up with shows, meetings and competition deadlines, most not officially connected to the Guild but with loose association through groups or of interest to members.[41]

The September 2008 issue is especially impressive in this regard as it includes colour photographs of many of the more than three hundred quilts hung in the Quilt Show at Darling

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39 Conversation with Lynn Hewitt, 7/5/2008.
40 'Workshops 2008 – 2009', *The Template,* Vol.26, No.4, September 2008, p.8.
41 'Calendar', *The Template,* September 2008, pp.6-7.

Harbour, with all of the prize winners listed and the Best of Show featured on the cover. In addition to the dozens of photographs, this issue of the magazine has information about Guild Scholarships, teacher accreditation (including a biographical note about a newly accredited teacher), and quilt valuation. There are two pages of book reviews and a very lengthy and daunting list of requisite skills for each committee vacancy advertised prior to the annual general meeting. That for the *Template* editor numbers fourteen competencies – perhaps the reason for difficulty in finding someone willing to give up all that quilting time to take up the position![42]

While much of the textual content in this issue is direct information which leads to later learning opportunities, the photographs are themselves opportunities to examine the way other quilters work as well as providing inspiration for the reader's own quilts. Readers who had not attended the Quilt Show in which the photographed quilts had been hung could be inspired to create a quilt of their own to enter the Show the following year, or at least to attend.

Copyright affects any member who is tempted to take inspiration too far and reproduce any of the quilts featured, or any major elements within them. Another issue of *The Template* dated several years earlier deals with the issue of copyright in detail, informing members of the extent to which they are permitted to go and the restrictions on the sale or display of a copied quilt.[43] There are more human interest stories since this is not the issue following the quilt show, although there are still photographs of entries in the annual quilt challenge. Articles include reports from groups and a story about a weekend away and information on Ozquilt Network Inc., an organisation for art quilts which has international links.[44] The member profile in that issue is about Carolyn Sullivan, who is a tutor in both the Quilters' Guild and the Embroiderers' Guild, and is accompanied by colour photographs of several of her quilts.[45] Every copy of this publication carries learning opportunities for members as well as avenues leading up to learning opportunities through informing of workshops, shows and social occasions.

Quilters and Patchworkers of New England Inc.

Many of the members of this small regional organisation also retain membership in the Quilters Guild of NSW but are too distant geographically to be able to attend meetings and

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42 *The Template,* September 2008.
43 Dijanne Cevaal, 'Copyright and Mrs Quilter', *The Template,* Vol.22,No.1, December 2003, p.10.
44 Barbara Macey, 'Ozquilt Network Inc.', *The Template,* December 2003, p.29. www.ozquiltnetwork.org.au Accessed online 29/1/2009.
45 Erica Spinks, 'Member Profile: Carolyn Sullivan', *The Template,* December 2003, pp.14-15.

functions. Such regional organisations therefore provide learning opportunities for women in the area in which they live. The group has a strong identity in the large country town of Armidale and the surrounding area of the northern tablelands of NSW and holds an annual exhibition to raise funds for charity. During one of my attendances on campus at the University of New England I was able to record an interview with the longtime President of the group, Mrs Joyce Durey, who told about the way that expertise and information is freely shared:

> Within the group there are a lot of women there who are probably better patchworkers than I am, but …we all show each other what we've done; if anybody's got ideas on how that might be improved by somebody who's not so proficient in that, if they're a new person, they will throw their quilt on the floor and ask for advice and most of us sort of gather round to see whether we can help and give them ideas.[46]

Despite its lack of numbers, this group was host to a national quilt symposium along with The Quilters' Guild and others in the Australian Bicentennial year, 1988. A video was produced of the event, which was attended by international tutors.[47] It was held at UNE and commemorated with a book cataloguing the story of the undertaking and featuring photographs of quilts made by Australian participants.[48] That year, 1988, was the 50th anniversary of the year the university was established as a college of the University of Sydney, and so a wall hanging was commissioned to commemorate that jubilee and the occasion of the National Quilt Symposium and Exhibition. The commemorative volume of the events features the hanging on its cover along with a full-page story of the quilt and the university's history in the text.[49]

The commemorative catalogue is in itself a valuable educational tool, showing as it does a record of the event. The photograph of each quilt is accompanied by a brief note about the maker and the construction of the featured quilt, which in itself is highly informative to other quilters perusing the book. The editor writes in the introduction:

> Art historians tell us that patchwork quilts can vividly depict the development of a nation, or to be more specific the development of and attitudes of people in their environment. ... This book does not depict the historical development of patchwork quilting but rather presents in colour form, the state of the art in Australia 1988 – our Bicentennial Year. As such, it represents a useful milestone in the development of patchwork quilting in our country.[50]

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46 Interview with Mrs Joyce Durey, 28/03/2006.

47 The information about the production of the video is limited to: *Quilt Symposium 1988,* UNE Audio Visual, University of New England. The copy I viewed is in the holdings of the library of the Quilters' Guild NSW Inc.

48 Barbara Meredith (ed), *Australian Quilts 1988: A vision unfolding,* Armidale, NSW, Quilters & Patchworkers of New England Inc. in conjunction with the National Quilt Symposium, 1988.

49 Meredith, *Australian Quilts 1988*, p.6.

50 Meredith, p.4.

This event was not the first such exhibition that the small group had hosted, according to Meredith. Quilters and Patchworkers of New England had hosted the first National Quilt Exhibition in 1984, followed by another in 1986 'when the exhibition became 'International' with exhibits from New Zealand'.[51]

The 1988 exhibition included exhibitors from New Zealand, United States of America, Canada, United Kingdom and Europe, although only a selection of Australian quilts was included in the book because of the large number of quilts displayed in the three venues over the three weeks of the event.[52] The three venues were the university campus, where the workshops and lectures were held, the Armidale Town Hall, thus involving the local community as well, and the New England Regional Art Museum (NERAM). The 25 quilts exhibited by the visiting international tutors were housed at NERAM.[53] The whole event was a unique learning opportunity in the way it gave prestige to the craft of quilting in its association with the university, through the visiting overseas tutors and through the presentation of quilting as an art form at the Art Museum. As well, there was the involvement of the local community, the basic learning opportunity of the workshops themselves and the strong sense of community presented in the video.

Mothers' Union

Informal learning among members of MU occurs in the branches, through the magazine *Mia Mia* and through joint services and conferences. Mary Coyne, former editor of *Mia Mia*, spoke with me about her experiences in MU over the many years of her membership, a number of them at executive level. She says that the wisdom of the older women helped a lot when she first joined as a young mother, but she was able to bring her own secretarial and organisational skills to MU as well by becoming branch secretary. She used her skills to provide education to other members at the wider level of the organisation when she became Hospital Visiting Co-ordinator for the Sydney Diocesan Executive, arranging rosters for visits to maternity hospitals, speaking at branch meetings and giving ideas for gifts to take to patients, even including sewing instructions for those gifts.[54]

Mary told me of the 'steep learning curve' she experienced when she later became President of MU, when she was no longer 'behind the scenes' as she had been as secretary of

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51 Meredith, p.4.
52 Meredith, pp.4-5.
53 Meredith, *Australian Quilts 1988,* p.5.
54 Unrecorded interview with Mrs Mary Coyne, 27/10/2006. Mary checked my notes for accuracy and so I have entered some as direct quotes with her agreement.

the branch. Areas in which she learned included organisation, how to delegate and how to get along with people. Learning to use a computer came first, but then further learning was required with her election as editor of *Mia Mia*, for which she had to do the entire setting up. At the beginning of her position, Mary had to learn a new software program and the use of a Macintosh computer in four weeks. She reiterated "That was a steep learning curve!".[55]

Other learning of which Mary Coyne told me included the area of publication – in preparing, editing, producing/printing literature, buying and marketing; accounting skills; co-ordinating branches and networking in Deaneries; helping with programs; running a meeting.

Successful lobbying was a major addition to Mary's skills. There had been problems with the Diocese dropping the value of the rental subsidy paid to MU. She told me, "I lobbied every member of the Standing Committee and got a commitment not to increase the rent of the Diocesan property we occupied".[56] Lobbying in MU occurs at higher levels as well as between the organisation and its diocese, as members of the executive promote social justice for women. Decisions are made at conferences and as a result lobbying of governments takes place right through to United Nations level.

Mia Mia reports that the first Special Worldwide Regional Meeting of Mothers' Union was held in Toowoomba, Queensland, in March 2008.[57] This meeting, along with five others worldwide, replaces the former Lambeth MU Council.[58] The stated purpose of the meetings is:

> To provide an opportunity for MU leaders to meet together to practice and explore the spirituality of the Mothers' Union and to share experiences, celebrate diversity of cultures, build relationships, identify goals and to plan for the future.[59]

The highlights of the 2008 program, reported as intensive, include 'information spotlights' on the represented countries as well as insights into the organisation. The vision of the Trustees is stated to be 'a world where God's love is shown through loving, respectful and flourishing relations'.[60] Participants thus had the opportunity for informal learning about their own organisation, about the countries of residence of other attendees, and about the aspirations of their faith. The aims and hopes of the organisation are emphasised to the leaders to pass on to other members in the Mission: 'to demonstrate the Christian faith in action by transformation of communities worldwide, through the nurture of family in its many forms'. The listeners

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55 Mary Coyne 27/10/2006.
56 Mary Coyne.
57 'Growing Together', *Mia Mia,* Winter 2008, Vol.92, No.2, p.15.
58 In Chapter Six I write in more detail about an interview with Betty Chiswell, who attended Lambeth Council meetings and the MU World Conference.
59 'Growing Together', *Mia Mia,* Winter 2008, Vol.92, No.2, p.15.
60 'Growing Together'.

were encouraged by the speaker to 'reach out, listen and research and to take these goals back to their dioceses, branches and members'.[61]

The above article is followed in the magazine by a two page spread of colour photographs, with informative captions about the meeting participants, many of whom are in national dress. The magazine thus provides learning opportunities for readers about the meeting, as well as geographical and cultural information and personal stories such as the poignant one of a delegate whose mother died trying to save the family home during the cyclone in Papua New Guinea in November 2007. Another caption reports how medical supplies from MU for pregnant women are sent to South Korea and redirected over the border to North Korea.[62]

In her interview Mary Coyne told me something of the history of *Mia Mia,* whose name is an acronym for Mothers In Australia, which has been the Australian national newsletter/magazine for MU for almost a century. She states:

> *Mia Mia* has been published since 1917, it always contains something educational. We have recently reprinted a 1978 article 'How to bring up Parents' (of teenagers) and another on marriage breakup, educating people on how to treat the people involved and what to say. We even write on being single, society expectations and what churches can do to help.
>
> In 1917 the magazine was called MIANZ but sometime in the 1930s or 1940s New Zealand began their own magazine. Someone discovered that Mia Mia was the Aboriginal word for home, so that was adopted as the name.[63]

Each issue of the magazine carries a message from the President, as do all of the newsletters put out by the organisations in this research. These messages provide a cohesive element which furthers the organisation as a learning community, often by giving an overview of recent activities.

The magazine also provides feature articles, many of which suggest informal learning opportunities. For example, the Spring 2008 issue includes an article by the MU Education Officer, Carolynn Ford, which directs branches on how to set about devising a project to reach out into their community.[64] She writes, in an invitation to informal learning by branch members: 'If we are to effectively reach out to those outside our present membership, it is vitally important to discover the needs of our community'. She then goes on to list five steps to finding such a project:

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61 'Growing Together'.

62 'Spotlight on Toowoomba: Highlights of the Worldwide Regional Meeting in Toowoomba', *Mia Mia,* Winter 2008, Vol.92, No.2, pp.16-17.

63 Unrecorded interview with Mrs Mary Coyne, 27/10/2006.

64 Carolynn Ford, 'Hand in hand – taking the steps to good health', *Mia Mia,* Vol.92, No.3, Spring 2008, p.8.

(a) Discover the needs of your community.

(b) Which of those needs fit with the MU aim and objects?

(c) Which of those needs are being met already in the current MU branch activities?

(d) Which needs could the group consider meeting in the future?

(e) What are the next steps to enable the group to move forward?[65]

The aims and objectives of which Carolynn Ford writes are to be found in a box on the penultimate page of that and every issue of the magazine following the editorial, entitled 'The Last Word'.[66] The aim of MU is stated as 'the advancement of the Christian religion in the sphere of marriage and family life'. The objectives are:

1. To uphold Christ's teaching on the nature of marriage and to promote its wider understanding.
2. To encourage parents to bring up their children in the faith and life of the church.
3. To maintain a worldwide fellowship of Christians united in prayer, worship and service.
4. To promote conditions in society favourable to stable family life and the protection of children.
5. To help those whose family life has met with adversity.[67]

Organisational activities are all centred around the aims and objectives, and the magazine provides learning opportunities for the members to understand and carry them out themselves. In the Spring 2008 issue of *Mia Mia* the President writes to encourage members to read the articles and stories because they relate to the 'Aims and Objectives', thus reinforcing the importance of learning and carrying out the ideals of MU.[68]

The issue also has a mix of articles about projects of branches in Australia and of Mothers' Union in overseas countries. Many of those articles about MU in other countries are personal accounts written by members travelling overseas or located in MU in other countries. Jeanette Oala, an MU Provincial Trainer and Worker in Papua New Guinea, writes a diarised account of a tour of parishes she took, delivering food aid to cyclone-affected areas and visiting MU branches. The article provides readers with an opportunity to learn about the country of Papua New Guinea and its living conditions, the activities of MU in that country,

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65 Carolynn Ford, 'Hand in hand – taking the steps to good health', *Mia Mia,* Vol.92, No.3, Spring 2008, p.8.

66 The Aim and Objects of Mothers' Union, *Mia Mia,* Vol.92, No.3, Spring 2008, p.31.

67 These aims and objects remain unchanged on the inside back page of each issue of *Mia Mia.*

68 Deane Bray, 'From our President, Deane', *Mia Mia,* Vol.92, No.3, Spring 2008, p.5.

and the effects of a severe cyclone on people, especially mothers and children, in a developing nation. She concludes by expressing gratitude to Australian MU members:

> You can be assured that the people are comforted and that they appreciate your prayers, and practical donations. Please continue to pray for them as they settle back to normal life.[69]

Support of women and children in developing countries like Papua New Guinea is a focus of MU in its representation at the United Nations, and the issue of *Mia Mia* reviewed here carries an account of that representation at the 52nd Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) in New York. Members reading the account have the opportunity to learn of overseas needs as well as the strength of their organisation's network through the quoted statement issued to the Secretary General of the UN, which begins:

> Mothers' Union is a Christian membership-based organisation with 3.6 million members across seventy-eight countries. Motivated by their faith, members run grassroots initiatives that support marriage, family life and flourishing relationships within communities. Members lobby national governments and international bodies on issues encountered in their communities and this statement voices their experiences.[70]

The above article summarises the remainder of the statement, which 'went on to give an overview of the inequality of women even in 2008 and the need for funding initiatives that specifically promote women's equality'. It also discusses MU programs in developing countries in Africa and the way that MU is educating women to empower them. Through the work of MU:

> Women learners in these countries have taken more active roles in leadership and decision making processes and ultimately relationships have been improved within their homes and communities.
>
> Sheran Harper, MU Parenting Trainer from Guyana, told the Commission that "we have to work with women's organisations to keep families on the front burner, especially because Mothers' Union is one of the few worldwide organisations that work with the multitudes at grassroots level"
>
> In its recommendations to the Commission, Mothers' Union called on governments to direct their finances ... to promote women's equality and empowerment.[71]

The three ways MU called on the UN Commission to bring these finances into action was to achieve Millenium Goal 3 'by eliminating gender disparity in primary and secondary education', to finance programs promoting women's equality and to 'address the impact of

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69 Jeanett Oala, 'Travelling with Jeanette Oala: A visit to Uiaku Parish', *Mia Mia,* Spring 2008, pp.16-17.

70 'MU at the United Nations: The vision of Mothers' Union – a world where God's love is shown through loving, respectful and flourishing relationships', *Mia Mia,* Vol.92, No.3, Spring 2008, p.11.

71 'MU at the United Nations', p.11.

women's equality on government spending'. The article then calls on MU members worldwide to lobby their governments to address these issues – issues that especially affect the lives of women in developing countries, who often have little or no opportunity for education and empowerment. Readers are directed to the world MU website to gain information on the organisation's international policy work, including the entire UN statement.[72] The extensive reporting of activities in Australia and worldwide in each issue of *Mia Mia* demonstrates the commitment of MU leadership to keeping the members informed by providing learning opportunities and presenting the organisation as a learning community, whether it is explicitly voiced as such or not. Several of the organisations researched have a similar commitment to raising the status of women worldwide and encouraging members to learn about the issues involved, especially CWA, Quota and Zonta.

The remainder of the Spring 2008 issue of *Mia Mia* is filled with informative articles on MU and its members' activities. There is an account of a woman's struggle with her daughter's profound disability and subsequent death from cancer, along with her own battle with two episodes of cancer, articles on the work of MU branches in Australia and two pages of recipes. Book reviews lead the reader to further learning opportunities, as do the web addresses given. My own review of this issue of the magazine, unread until I began writing here, as well as my investigation of the international MU website for the first time, has educated me on the extent of the organisation's work worldwide. Other issues of *Mia Mia* are equally informative for members who take the time and effort to read them, which they often may not, as evidenced by my own neglect when the magazine arrived in the mail.

Mothers' Union in the Sydney Diocese issues a small newsletter to its members, *MU Inform.* This small eight-page publication contains more localised news and information of events, but also includes some reports of national and international news, similar to that which would appear in *Mia Mia.* MU Sydney also distributes the usual promotional pamphlets, as well as some which assist workers such as hospital visitors and new parents by informing them of facilities and resources available from MU. It can be seen, then, that the opportunities for learning are considerable from the literature, and even more so from active involvement and attendance at meetings.

[72] The URL of the world MU website is http://www.themothersunion.org/policy_international.aspx

Catholic Women's League (CWL)

CWL experiences the same problem as all of the other organisations except possibly the KYB arm of CWCI, in that the membership is ageing and younger women are not joining. Moya Potts, president of the Sydney Diocese section of CWL, tells how she had 'destructured' meeting formats in an attempt to encourage young women to join, as well as having diocesan members who are not required to attend meetings. In this it can be seen that the established membership who control the activities of the organisation are learning and adapting to changing customs and values in society at large.

Catherine McGrath, who had been elected State President six months before, tells how she had 'learned so much in the last six months' and the steep learning curve it had been for her:

> If you look at the constitution – it says the President of the State has to attend two meetings, conduct two meetings and four executive meetings. Doesn't say anything about what *else* you might have to do! Or what else you learn to do.[73]

The women go on to tell me the way they need to learn in order to fulfil their service, such as preparation for making representation on social responsibility issues. In the same way as Mary Coyne learned about lobbying at a higher level from her experience in MU, the leadership of CWL also learn this in order to fulfil the organisation's objective of campaigning for social justice for women and their families. The organisation lobbies parliament at federal level through their Secretariate and internationally to the United Nations through the World Union of Catholic Women's Organisations (WUCWO). They also maintain a Country of Study Program similar to that of the Country Women's Association, but associated with the ecumenical World Day of Prayer. This then requires branch and individual preparation and learning, as well as contributions to a collection to send a donation to that country, which in 2007 was Paraguay.[74]

Presbyterian Women's Association

As with every organisation, the act of attending a PWA meeting could be construed as seeking to learn in some way. Jean Ferrington speaks of the opportunities for learning presented by a meeting, even opportunities to learn about other countries: 'We always had a missionary aspect to our meetings, where we learnt about the missionaries and what their needs were – their practical needs and their prayer needs'.[75] As well as devotional talks and Bible

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[73] CWL group interview with Mrs Catherine McGrath, Mrs Moya Potts and Ms Chris McKirdy, 19/6/2007.
[74] Moya Potts.
[75] Interview with Mrs Jean Ferrington, 19/9/2006.

Studies, Jean tells of the way the women express their concerns about social issues to politicians through committees, which requires a deeper understanding of what is involved:

> It's very hard to get women to go onto a committee for this sort of thing. So many of them feel that they don't have the time or the expertise to handle some of these things, because – you've got to do a lot of reading. You've got to be aware of all the implications. To word a letter: Is it saying what you want it to say, and is it going to be received in the way that you want it to be? It's hard to get women interested in that.[76]

Another PWA member spoke about the way she had learned public speaking and chairing of meetings since she had become the President of a branch. She told me that she had learned a lot from the previous president, who had 'supported and encouraged' her in taking on the role.[77]

The magazine of PWA is *SPAN,* an acronym for Service, Prayer And News. It contains news of the service undertaken by the organisation as a whole and by branches through the committees. A recent issue has a report of the annual conference and a report from the Christian Education committee, of which Jean Ferrington is the Convenor.[78] There are informal learning opportunities in *SPAN* as in the publications of the other organisations, and its quality and appeal has been enhanced with the first issue of 2009 by using colour and higher quality paper. A report is included on the annual Presbyterian Market, which in 2008 raised funds to assist the Child Protection Unit produce resources for a program entitled "Survivors, Offenders and the Gospel of Grace". As well as informing members about preparations for the 2009 market, marking the 95th Anniversary, the report also includes a historical note that the proceeds of the first market, held in Sydney in 1915, were 'to support Presbyterian Deaconnesses in their work in health and education in the needy suburbs of Redfern and Woolloomooloo'.[79]

The second part of the article lists divisions of craft and cookery competitions held for the market, stating that the entries become the property of the market. However, no explanatory details are given, so that it is implied, but not explained, that the purpose of the competition is to procure goods for sale at the market. In this case a learning opportunity has been withheld, and the assumption of knowledge of the procedure would not be helpful to new members.[80] The magazine is nonetheless informative and provides opportunities for learning about the organisation, its activities and its relationship to society. An example is an article on an inquiry

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76 Jean Ferrington.
77 Conversation with Mrs Barbara Jarvis, 17/11/2008.
78 *SPAN: Service, Prayer And News for Presbyterian Women in NSW,* Vol.45, No.3, September 2008 (32 pages).
79 Margaret Barber, 'Presbyterian Market', *SPAN,* Vol.46, No.1, March 2009, pp.7-9.
80 Margaret Barber.

into "Freedom of religion and belief in the 21st century in Australia" by the Australian Human Rights Commission. The writer criticises the 'loaded' questions and the covert way it was carried out so that submissions were limited through lack of public awareness.[81]

Salvation Army Women's Home League

Mrs Beverley Masters, a retired health worker, attends the Home League branch in Blacktown, a suburb in Sydney's west with many disadvantaged residents. She told me about the activities of the branch and the way she prepares a newsletter which she distributes every four to six weeks to the members of the branch.

The Blacktown Home League numbers more than 50 women, not all of whom are practising Christians or members of the Salvation Army, and meets weekly. This group is the largest in Sydney's western suburbs. Before the meeting a small group of women meets together for handicraft of a variety of techniques, including needlework and glass painting, among others. Newcomers attend Home League for a few weeks and are then asked if they wish to join. Upon joining there is a small ceremony in which they are given a badge and they then pay one dollar per week to cover refreshments, materials and a birthday gift of a card and a handkerchief.

Since January 2008 the members of Blacktown Home League have been provided with lunch free of charge by a Work-For-The-Dole group, who had served a hot meal with fresh bread the day I spoke to Beverley. Thus a learning opportunity about catering for a group is provided for the unemployed outside the group as well as learning in the members themselves. Most of the Home League women are over 55, the only younger ones a couple of intellectually disabled women who cannot work. Beverley gave the usual response when I enquired about ages, that 'the younger women have to work'.

Occasionally the nearby Home League groups combine for special events. They planned to go on a bus trip to Bowral to see the spring flowers, and the previous event before my meeting with Beverley was a trip on the Nepean River paddlewheeler, the Nepean Belle, shared with Penrith Home League.

When asked how she felt she had learned, Beverley responded that she learns from the speakers, who have represented Christian organisations like the Bible Society and secular ones such as CWA or the husband of a member, a former train driver with a large model train setup.

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[81] Carrie Williams, 'Social Issues', *SPAN,* Vol.46, No.1, March 2009, pp.12-14.

He spoke about his career and about trains and models, possibly providing an opportunity for women to learn outside their usual frame of reference.[82]

CWCI

Conferences held by CWCI are deliberate teaching events but are less formal than Know Your Bible classes in atmosphere and content because of the entertainment factor, a guest speaker and solo and group singing. As well, they are one-off events as opposed to the weekly meetings of KYB groups in their class-style atmosphere. However, informal learning takes place in these situations because of the element of choice in attending, the mix of topics and themes throughout the events, electives and KYB classes, and because of the conversations that are carried on within or outside the meeting venues.

Jean Raddon, a former medical missionary to Nepal who worked with CWCI for 17 years and was the founder of KYB, agreed to an interview about her experience of the organisation. She was considered the 'grand dame' of CWCI and was greatly mourned when she passed away in October 2007. Throughout the interview she speaks passionately of her commitment to the importance of 'women teaching women', and of the place of the Bible as an instruction tool for daily living. During her younger years prior to her retirement she frequently spoke at CWCI conferences, on trips overseas and on 'safaris' to isolated places within Australia.

> When I talk about speaking, I was really teaching from the Bible and trying to get women – a lot of Christian women don't read their Bibles, I mean, I can think of my own church – I'm sure some of them don't read their Bibles from Sunday to Sunday and we really wanted to get people hooked on the Bible, and so it was great to be able to teach practical living from the Bible – you know, biblically, and I really enjoyed that.[83]

From those early experiences of speaking at conventions Jean formed the idea of Bible studies specifically for women. But the conferences continued alongside what was to become KYB and they are today attended by hundreds of women. The main annual CWCI conference is held over a weekend at a Christian Conference Centre and the same rules about excluding children as KYB apply, although there are usually a few young women who bring their breastfed babies. This organisation has less problem than the others with ageing as young women do join the Bible Studies, especially if the KYB group is run within a church.

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[82] Personal conversation, 16/9/2008.
[83] Interview with Miss Jean Raddon, 31/1/2006.

Quota International and Zonta International:

The members of both of these organisations learn through the service activities they undertake and are very similar in this respect. Women in Quota are knowledgeable about hearing impairment because that is the major focus of their service, about which I have written in Chapter Two and Chapter Six. Zonta members learn through activities like the assembly of birthing kits for women in developing countries delivering their babies with little or no assistance or facilities. What the women from both clubs learn is mainly dealt with in the next two chapters, as compassion and understanding are strong features of their learning, in addition to the factual learning of difficulties experienced by women less privileged than the members, who are often prosperous businesswomen. Preparation for fundraising involves research and thus is important informal learning, sometimes during an event, as Isabel Pollard from Armidale Zonta Club relates:

> One really exciting project was Art in the Garden, this was to fundraise. We had it in our garden here. We had it one Saturday afternoon – we put it in the paper – we had it one till five, we had the most incredible traffic jam on the hill, we had to stop…and had to ferry them up in a bus it was just chaos because we didn't realise how it would attract people – it really did attract people.[84]

Isabel goes on to speak of other fundraising and service activities, including her account of the way she has learned from the Birthing Kits project, especially as a former midwife:

> I think – just to sit here and put those kits together – it was such a rewarding experience – I mean – just to think it was going to help – knowing what it was like to have a baby in King George Hospital, and to think that in New Guinea they have a birthing stone, and that's all they have and they just throw an old dirty cloth over it, and there's nothing else for those women to have. And perhaps they attach a rope to beams in the shed for the women to hang on to when they're having their contractions, and I know that information because we publicised this ... in the paper, and a doctor rang me who'd been working in New Guinea for twenty years. And he said "This is the most exciting thing you could ever do". So I just found it very rewarding because it really made me think – we're doing something that's really practical that's going to help these women.[85]

The women went on to include girls from two local private schools in the assembly of the very basic kits and between them they have assembled thousands. I was invited to join a Birthing Kit Assembly Day at Isabel's home and found it an immensely rewarding experience. Reports on the women's activities, including this project, appear in the club's newsletter, in the local paper and in the international magazine *The Zontian.*

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[84] Interview with Isabel Pollard, 24/3/2006.
[85] Isabel Pollard.

The main publication of Quota is published only annually. The magazine *Quotarian* is published in the United States and distributed from there to Quota members throughout the world, including Australia. It is also accessible publicly as a downloadable pdf. file on the Quota International website, and copies for a number of years back are archived on the site.[86] The cover of the print publication carries the byline: "Quota International Inc. A Worldwide Network of Service and Friendship". A message of praise for members' efforts from the international president leads into the 26-page magazine comprised almost entirely of reports of club projects worldwide, with a significant number of mentions of Australian clubs, including Armidale, NSW, the club of Gloria Cook, one of my interviewees for this project.

In the pages of the regular column 'Projects that Shine', which features a series of competitions between clubs for excellence in service and other areas, Armidale is listed among the '2003 Quota Cares Month Competition Top Winners'.[87] Also from Armidale was Verna Stewart, whose obituary was featured in the 2007 issue. She was international president of Quota from 1998-9 and is noted for her commitment to humanitarian service, including her involvement in the Quota Home in New Delhi.[88] The project in New Delhi was mentioned by both Gloria Cook and June Young, another Quota interviewee. June, as South Pacific Area Director, attended the opening of the New Delhi home at the same time as Verna Stewart.[89]

The magazines and newsletters of Quota and Zonta are educational to the extent that they keep members informed of the activities of those clubs who have either contacted the editorial committee or whose projects have become known because of their newsworthiness. In this way they encourage and consolidate the organisation's network and maintain activity, as well as promoting the group spirit and striving for excellence, especially through the competitions.

Websites of the organisations and others in their learning communities

Websites of the organisations provide learning opportunities for members, and may draw new members who accidentally or deliberately access them. They do not usually contain the extent of information published in newsletters and magazines and are often not updated frequently. However, they usually carry links to associated organisations or commercial websites that are relevant to their focus. Some of the organisations are more sophisticated in their use of the internet than others, for example the Guilds, both of which have links to other

[86] Files of Quota publications are accessible from http://www.quota.org/qo/libr.htm#qm
[87] 'Projects that Shine: Winners Showcase', *Quotarian,* 2004, p.9.
[88] 'Quota Mourns Deaths of PIPs Marilyn Blake and Verna Stewart', *Quotarian,* 2007, p.11.
[89] Interview with June Young, 11/6/2007 and Gloria Cook, 10/7/2007.

guilds and commercial sites marketing materials, although in this case the Quilters' Guild site is more extensive and informative than that of the NSW Embroiderers' Guild. Both, however, feature photographs of entries in their shows and internal competitions.

The Quilters' Guild of NSW holds a themed Challenge each year in which entrants must produce works representing the given theme. In 2008 the theme was Coast and Country and 39 quilts of great variety were displayed on the webpage. The winner was a quilt featuring an appliqued kookaburra (an Australian native bird famed for its laughing call) sitting on a fencepost.[90] Another featured an Aboriginal rock painting,[91] while that submitted by Lynn Hewitt was named in the plural, 'Coast and Countries', and displayed appliques of other countries – a European castle, Mount Fujiyama and a Pacific island coastline superimposed on an Australian background featuring rural mailboxes.[92]

Any member of the organisation – or of the public – viewing this parade of quilt images on the website is bound to learn much. There is the obvious value to quilters of seeing examples of different techniques in quilting, but also the geo-political and cultural learning gained from representations of the landscape and lifestyle of Australia and of the few other countries depicted. Along with the foregoing is the intrinsic educational value of viewing them as artworks and artistic representations of the features referred to above. Best writes of the value of viewing art:

> In the arts, language and many other aspects of human life, the possibility of *individual* development in thought and experience, so far from being restricted by, actually *depends* upon, the learning of the disciplines of objective, publicly shared cultural practices.[93]

Thus, the sharing by members of the products of their creativity is allowing their own and others' education in artistic criticism and creative skill, as well as expanding their intellectual horizons.

The CWA website is very different to those of the creative guilds, and carries links to other organisations and government facilities. There is a forum in which members may pass on information or express their views about the organisation, current affairs or relevant issues affecting members, although the forum is poorly patronised and the same names appear

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90 Bernardine Hine, *The Sentinel,* no.7, winner of 1st place in Quilters' Guild of NSW Inc. Coast and Country Challenge. Album of entries online at http://picasweb.google.com/quiltersguildnsw/CoastAndCountryGuildChallenge2008 Accessed online 21/11/2008.

91 Waltraus Klingohr, *Aboriginal Rock Painting,* no.19 in Coast and Country Challenge online album.

92 Lynn Hewitt, *Coast and Countries,* no.32 in Coast and Country Challenge album.

93 David Best, *The Rationality of Feeling: Understanding the arts in education,* London, The Falmer Press, 1992, p.84.

repeatedly throughout. Some of the views are quite critical of the organisational communication methods, including the navigation and presentation of the website. One member expressed her ideas for improvement of the website and her criticism of its inadequacy for the future:

> As a whole I found the website does not have much on it and if we are to be an organisation that survives we must embrace the technology of our future members.[94]

In addition to the forum and current affairs, the CWA Procedures Manual and other organisation documents are available for download as pdf files on the website. The member quoted above was actually incorrect in some of her criticisms, as reports of outcomes of executive meetings, although not full minutes, are on the site, as well as information on competitions. However, items are not well organised, as for example with dates of forum posts, which are not in chronological order and are thus confusing in regard to responses.

In addition to the information on the website and in *The Country Woman,* CWA members with internet access are invited to subscribe to *E-News,* a regular newsletter with extra updates and information relevant to members and to the current projects of the organisation. The January 2009 issue, sent out well before the first issue of the magazine in February, carries a change to the Head Office phone number arrangement, a request for an additional member for the Social Issues Committee, and other general news. This news informs of grants and scholarships available to rural women, and the launch of a new online degree from Deakin University. The degree, Graduate Certificate of Management (Family Business), is relevant to CWA members whose families are operating farming and agricultural businesses.[95]

The Christian organisations covered in this study all have either their own websites or are linked to the parent church organisation. CWCI's Australian website is quite comprehensive and is linked to the international organisation's home website, with a considerable amount of information about KYB and the overseas countries which subscribe to the program.[96] Most of the websites of the other Christian organisations are quite comprehensive but PWA only features as a single page on its parent denomination's site.[97]

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94 Member, Country Women's Association of NSW Members' Forum, Thread 'Group Reports from Executive', posted 23/11/2008 http://www.cwaofnsw.org.au/membership/forumTopic.do?topic.id=30 Accessed online 27/11/2008 (members' password protected area).

95 'Welcome to the family business: New degree from Deakin University', *E-News,* January 2009, Country Women's Association of NSW, www.cwaofnsw.org.au

96 CWCI website serving all states of Australia at www.cwciaus.org.au Accessed online 21/3/2009.

97 Presbyterian Women's Association, http://www.pcnsw.org.au/index.php/our-work/womens-association Accessed online 31/1/2009.

Australian Quota and Zonta websites are both linked from the parent websites in the United States, and most information is password-protected, meaning access to non-members is limited, and Quota's Australian website cannot easily be found, even through a search engine. Very few individual Quota Clubs appear to have their own websites, although a few Zonta Clubs do have their own websites.

Libraries and archives

The two Guilds I have chosen to include in this research are almost directly educational in their ethos and have a narrower focus than any of the other organisations. Consequently they are the only ones where I have discovered substantial libraries. The other organisations, by their very nature, do not have the same requirements for reference although some, like the CWA, do have archives to retain the record of their history. There is also a very small library in the CWA Headquarters in Sydney.

Libraries are a vital learning resource in all areas of life and learning, particularly in today's emphasis on lifelong learning by governments and academia. Sisco and Whitson write that 'Libraries as universities of the people have been an enduring part of the adult education tradition in the United States ... (and) have provided an important educative function in the promotion of an educated citizenry'.[98] Kearns writes of an Australian initiative in which local councils promote community learning, with the council libraries taking a 'leading entrepreneurial role' in 'functioning as a community learning centre'.[99] Libraries are often not viewed as having the value they deserve, especially among adult educators, and Adams et al challenge the adult education community to 'reframe its perspective on libraries, seeing them with fresh eyes as genuine partners on the learning journey'.[100]

The Embroiderer's Guild carries a well-stocked library of several thousand volumes which provides a valuable resource to inform teachers and members, and in which all members have borrowing privileges, and responsibilities, as in every public library. The real drawback of the library, however, is its location at the top of the headquarters' steep flight of stairs, making it inaccessible to older or less physically able members. While books may be posted out to members or the staff are willing to fetch and carry books for those unable to climb the

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98 Burton R. Sisco & Donna L. Whitson, 'Libraries: The People's University', in Michael W. Galbraith (ed), *Education Through Community Organizations: New directions for adult and continuing education,* No.47, Fall 1990, San Francisco, Jossey-Bass Publishers, pp.21-28.

99 Peter Kearns, 'A tale of two towns: Learning community initiatives in Bega Valley and Thuringowa', *Australian Journal of Adult Learning,* Vol.45, No.3, November 2005, pp.371-384.

100 Sue Adams, Lisa Krolak, Eva Kupidura, Zvonka Pangerc Pahemic, 'Libraries and resource centres: Celebrating adult learners every week of the year, *Convergence,* Vol.35, Iss.2/3, pp.27-39.

stairs, this renders browsing out of the question, one of the most enjoyable, and profitable, of activities in a library. Nevertheless, there are plans to place the library catalogue on the website at some time in the future and there are other contingencies for those unable to access the library because of distance or disability.[101]

As with any library, that of the Embroiderers' Guild is a rich source of information on many subjects, not necessarily limited to embroidery but linked to needlework in some way or of use as inspiration. Thus a Guild member may find many books on a specific type of embroidery or other needlework and craft techniques. If she is skilled and wishes to create her own designs she could as well, for example, find there an illustrated volume of flowers of the world or one of gardens to use as reference and/or inspiration. The Newcastle Branch of the Embroiderers' Guild has its own small library at the New Lambton Community Centre where it meets each week.

The Quilters' Guild also has a library situated in its city headquarters and a limited copy of the catalogue is on the website to provide members with an idea of the books and resources available from which they may further their learning on the subject of quiltmaking.[102] The books are mostly limited to quilting topics, although there are a few other reference works such as Petrie's *Decorative Patterns of the Ancient World,* in the library to stimulate and inspire design ideas.[103] For practical requirements, the library also holds the very necessary *Artists at Work: Your rights and responsibilities.*[104]

Adams writes of libraries as being an essential part of adult education whose importance has been little recognised in critical work. She contends that their conventional image as places to read and borrow books is limiting as they 'perform a more complex function in society by supporting literacy, social action, and lifelong education'. Libraries themselves have, according to Adams, begun to develop a 'renewed relationship' with adult educators and 'Many conventional libraries (have) become more intentional in their support for adult learning activities, viewing themselves not only as venues for learning but as agents in the process'.[105]

These two guilds are therefore encouraging in their members a sense of ownership of their organisation by providing an important service through their libraries. The collections

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101 Telephone conversation with Lizette Campbell, Guild Librarian, 9/10/2008.

102 The Quilters' Guild website, library catalogue pages, http://www.quiltersguildnsw.com/library.html Accessed online 9/10/2008.

103 W.M. Flinders Petrie, *Decorative Patterns of the Ancient World,* 1930 (no publication details).

104 Wayne Hutchins, *Artists at Work: Your rights and responsibilities: A guide for artists and employers,* North Sydney, NSW, Australia Council, 1987.

105 Sue Adams, 'Libraries', in Leona M. English (ed), *International Encyclopedia of Adult Education,* Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2005, pp.367-9.

enhance the potential of the members to become closely involved in the network of the learning community through self-directed education. Those members who donate books and other media items to the libraries are themselves demonstrating their loyalty and willingness to contribute to the life of their community. The other organisations in this study do not have the focused material object of skill acquirement the guilds have, and thus they do not retain libraries themselves, except for the small collection of The Women's Club mentioned previously. However, in New South Wales public libraries are accessible in all but the most remote communities, and some members may also have access to academic libraries. This would especially apply to some members of Quota and Zonta who may be professional women with tertiary education.

I did not include the Jessie Street National Women's Library in the broader study as it does not closely fit the social network criteria of the women's organisations selected for this research, although it is an educational entity which exists specifically for and about women. Some members of the organisations in this study use and belong to the library, which is named in honour of Jessie Street, the prominent Australian feminist and activist on behalf of women's rights.[106]

The stated aims of the library are:

- To heighten awareness of women's issues
- To preserve documents on women's lives and activities
- To support the field of women's history
- To highlight women's contribution to this country's development[107]

Apart from a monthly fundraising luncheon in the city of Sydney, this library does not hold meetings in the same way as the organisations covered in this research. Therefore there is not the same personal involvement of the membership, my main reason for excluding it apart from lack of space. However, there is nevertheless a camaraderie among the members of the board and the volunteers who serve to maintain the collection, process membership and mailouts of the newsletter, and attend to library users and telephone calls. Most importantly, in addition to the enormous opportunities for learning by the membership, the library is a valuable resource for, by and about women.

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[106] The library is situated in Sydney at Ultimo Community Centre, 523-525 Harris Street, Ultimo. Website www.nationalwomenslibrary.org.au Information from publicity brochures of the library and from the newsletter of the Jessie Street National Women's Library, February 2008.

[107] Newsletter: Jessie Street National Women's Library, Vol.19, No.1, February 2008, p.2.

While most CWA branches would not have their own libraries, the members of the organisation are very much a part of their communities, with access to the local council public library. The *Country Woman* carries a Book Review feature in each issue, thus encouraging its readers to seek out the book in the local library or for purchase.[108] CWA branches often report encouraging local schoolchildren with reading and library use, as did the Nelson Bay Evening Branch when their Handicraft Group made 64 library bags to encourage the children to borrow more books.[109]

The CWA holds extensive archives which fill a large room at the Potts Point headquarters in Sydney. The organisation also holds a complete run of *The Country Woman* and all of the preceding publications. However, the latter are not readily accessible to members and researchers as the majority of the records are stored in a cupboard in the President's office, meaning they can only be consulted when she is not present.

For the purposes of this research the organisation was generous in allowing me free access to the archive, and the twelve-page printout of the more than 700 files displays its diversity – and thus the diverse activities of CWA itself. Along with the various administrative files there are a number of scrapbooks of newspaper and magazine cuttings going back many years about the organisation's activities and its members. Unfortunately many of these cuttings are unsourced and undated, so that it is necessary to guess an approximate date from the context or from surrounding clippings which are dated. Nevertheless, they are a valuable source of historical information and a learning opportunity for any member who wishes to browse through them.

Commercial Magazines

Commercial magazines in the context of this study are most relevant to the members of the creative Guilds or CWA as specific targeted audiences. There is a plethora of magazines associated with quilting, crafts and embroidery, some published in Australia but the majority sourced from Britain and the United States. They form a community of their own with their readers, but those published in Australia are especially relevant as the featured designers are often involved with the Guilds as tutors and members, as well as teaching at the major city

[108] See, for example, reviews of a book on pelvic floor exercises, Mary O'Dwyer, *My Pelvic Flaw,* Redsok Publishing & Seminars, Buderim, Queensland, 2008 (with a percentage of profits being donated to the Hamlin Foundation for Fistula Surgery in Ethiopia), and another written account of experiences as a remote area nurse in an Aboriginal community, Maureen Helen, *Other People's Country,* ABC Books, Sydney, 2008. Reviews by Shirley Lenton, Hon. Editor, *The Country Woman,* Vol.49, No.3, June/July 2008, p.25.

[109] Margaret Wilkinson, 'Gift with Literature in Mind', *The Country Woman,* Vol.47, No.2, April 2006, p.30.

craft shows. These magazines may test the loyalty of women to the Guild and probably draw away potential members because of their own self-promotion as a community. However, because of the amount of information each issue contains on the quilting and embroidery worlds in Australia and overseas they are a significant opportunity for informal learning, or active seeking of learning opportunities, for readers who are members of the Guilds.

The magazines form part of the outreach of the organisations to the wider community and so they overlap with the discussions on incidental and transformative learning, and on the promotion of the organisations covered in the following chapters. The organisations in this study are not closed communities. Their members are living in a society where communication is pervasive, and as such they are noticed and commented on in various ways. As well, resources are available involving the interests of the members in areas outside the organisations, and these are consequently drawn into the scope of the organisations and become a part of the learning communities. This is especially the case with the two creative guilds and CWA.

Publications outside the organisations, whether print, online or other media, serve a dual purpose if they publish articles relating to the organisations and their members. They can add a great deal to the members' knowledge and understanding of their field, and become part of the learning community. This happens as the members' interests and needs are targeted in editorial articles and advertising, even if only read for relaxation. Often, too, editorial features are written about groups, individual members and leaders of the organisations, as well as designers and teachers. At the same time, however, they are publicising the organisations and increasing their social capital, or perceived value, by informing the public about their value in the wider community.

Articles about people and groups in similar or related areas, such as those published in embroidery or quilting magazines, add knowledge and skills, broaden understanding, and may even lead to friendships between individuals or cooperation between groups with similar interests. An example is the regular column, 'Between Friends', in one Sydney-based magazine. A recent issue carries a story about Epping Lace Group and its 'Tree of Life and Energy' work which the members created as a group project.[110] The article describes how each member made one or more leaves of the tree and the hanging was constructed as a group, eventually winning first prize in the group section of the 2007 Canberra Show and the Grand

[110] Lauren Broomham, 'Larger than Life', *Embroidery & Cross Stitch,* Vol.15, No.8, pp.38-39.

Champion award at the Castle Hill Show. In a statement which I see as inspiring to readers, the project coordinator is quoted as saying:

> We had no idea how it would grow, and that's why it's called the Tree of Life and Energy ... The camaraderie is just wonderful, the ladies are all keen lacemakers who are very willing to share their knowledge. Plus, they love a good chat![111]

Through this article women, who may or may not be members of other organisations, are learning about the Epping Lace Group and its members. However, they are learning much more than that. Novice craftswomen are learning that lace is not simply a strip of decorative fabric for bras and knickers but is also an art form! Quilters and embroiderers may be encouraged to learn the craft to enhance their own works or may decide to join the group to further their knowledge of another craft. A desire to belong to more than one Guild was the case for Helen Marsh, who was the paid secretary of the Embroiderers' Guild for 23 years. At an interview shortly before her retirement she spoke to me of her plans after she finished work, when she would at last have time to spend on embroidery after all the years of hearing workshops and groups beyond the room divider but being unable to join in:

> Like all the things I'm going to do when I retire. I said to somebody I'll join the Lace Guild as well, because needle lace is one of my passions, needle lace and drawn thread work.[112]

Readers are also learning about the advantages of working with a group, not only to gain or increase knowledge of the chosen field, but realising as well the friendship and other emotional benefits they could reap. Last, but by no means least, the article closes with information about the Lace Study Centre of the Powerhouse Museum, which has links to the Embroiderers' Guild, and a call for volunteers, publicising an institution which can increase the reader's knowledge further and teach the value of volunteering.[113] Thus the understanding of the reader is broadened in many ways as she reads about the activity of one group of women enjoying lacemaking as an art form. The strength of the group about whom the article was written is enhanced by its shared pride in accomplishment. Consequently it grows as a learning community through the recognition, as well as drawing in the magazine, and other creative organisations, to become a part of that community.

The same magazine often features articles about the Quilters' Guild and the Embroiderers' Guild or their groups, informing members who purchase it of the activities of

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111 Edna Boyd, quoted by Lauren Broomham in 'Larger than Life'.
112 Interview with Mrs Helen Marsh, 27/2/2006.
113 Lauren Broomham, 'Larger than Life', *Embroidery & Cross Stitch,* Vol.15, No.8, pp.38-39..

other members in a more detailed and visual way than the Guilds could afford to do in their own publications. The Southern Highlands Group of the Embroiderers' Guild held an exhibition in 2004 which included a group project which had taken four years to complete. The spokeswoman for the group described the embroidered landscape of the area as 'a time capsule', and it hangs in the town's old library as a permanent educational record of significant landmarks and of the value of the group of women who created it. The closing paragraph of the article is relevant in its reference to learning and social activity:

> Southern Highlands Group provides an environment where women can share and learn from one another and more importantly, have a good laugh over a cup of tea and whatever they're stitching at the time'.[114]

The 'Between Friends' column provides a link between readers with similar interests, and also opens up the possibility for women to learn about – and possibly join - groups in their own area if they see the article. The members of the Gunnedah, NSW, Embroiderers' Guild Group created a spectacular triptych wall hanging of Gunnedah's history and environs for its sesquicentenary. The article portrays in detail the working and progress of the panel with photographs of the work as it proceeded. The members of the group achieved a great deal of learning, adding many new skills and techniques to their repertoire. One of the women declared

> It was a tremendous journey for us all, and it was particularly amazing for members to realise they could accomplish much more than they thought they could....We were always coming across new ideas and methods.[115]

Such links are especially valuable in the encouragement they provide for remote members of the Guild like these women in rural Gunnedah, hundreds of kilometres from the Guild Headquarters in inner suburban Sydney. They also provide an incentive for other groups to undertake similar projects which they otherwise might feel too daunting. So there are several aspects of learning achieved in the magazine's publication of the article. First, there is the obvious informative matter about the town and those aspects of the history and environment included in the article. Then there is the fact of the existence of the group and its warmth as related in the text about their bond in producing the hanging. The photographs and the description of the working are detailed enough to give inspiration and guidance to other readers considering such a project. Lastly, the photograph of the magazine editor standing in front of the completed hanging is a clever way of drawing the embroidery community and the

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[114] Juliet Chan, 'Between Friends: Exhibiting history', *Embroidery & Cross Stitch,* vol.12, no.1, 2005, pp.58-9.
[115] Lauren Circosta, 'Between Friends: Gunnedah Sesquicentenary Panels', *Embroidery & Cross Stitch,* Vol.15, no.1, 2008, pp.54-7.

publication together in a collegiate fashion, thus including her and her magazine as one of the learning and social community.[116]

Many of the tutors in both the Quilters' Guild and the Embroiderers' Guild publish designs, with patterns and instructions, in commercial magazines. Mary Brown is a tutor in the Embroiderers' Guild and has published a book.[117] The Sydney-based magazine, *Embroidery & Cross Stitch,* has published her profile, recounting her background as the daughter and granddaughter of skilled needlewomen, and her training and subsequent teaching of art. After a course at the Royal School of Needlework Mary began teaching Goldwork Embroidery at shops and at the Embroiderers' Guild NSW Inc. The biographical article of this prominent Guild teacher is illustrated with several stunning examples of her work, followed by instructions for a goldwork design.[118] Another issue of the same magazine includes several of her designs, one of which is an opulent goldwork framed picture 'Radiant Medallion'. The instructions for the intricate design, worked in lavish gold threads on silk, cover nine pages of the magazine, including photographs and working diagrams. Mary's phone number is included at the end of the article, should a reader have difficulty with the project and require help.[119]

Advertising in this magazine, as in all needlework and craft publications, can form part of the informative content, as well as offering learning opportunities. One issue includes advertising for a P&O Lines Pacific cruise with craft classes and an entry form for readers to enter a draw to win a cruise for two if they subscribe to the magazine or to others in the same stable. Details of the fare are also included, as well as of the three tutors, regular contributors to the publisher's magazines, who would be teaching passengers patchwork and quilting, embroidery and folk art painting.[120]

Articles on the history of different eras or techniques in embroidery are a feature of *Embroidery & Cross Stitch* magazine, sometimes written by Helen Parsons, who is a member of the executive of the Embroiderers' Guild. The Annual Report of the Embroiderers' Guild in 2008 refers to these articles and their association with the Guild itself thus:

> This year has also seen a new advertising initiative, Helen Parsons has written a number of articles for the Embroidery and Cross Stitch magazine, in return for which we have had an advert in each issue.[121]

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116 Lauren Circosta, 'Between Friends: Gunnedah Sesquicentenary Panels'.
117 Mary Brown, *Goldwork Embroidery: Designs and projects,* Bowral, NSW, Sally Milner Publishing, 2007.
118 Juliet Chan, 'Profile: Mary Brown', in *Embroidery & Cross Stitch,* Vol.12, No.2, 2005, pp.26-29; Mary Brown, 'Basket of Gold Flowers', *Embroidery & Cross Stitch,* 12,1, 2005, pp.30-37.
119 Mary Brown, 'Radiant Medallion', in *Embroidery & Cross Stitch,* Vol.14, No.12, nd., pp.16-24.
120 P&O Pacific Sky Competition, *Australian Embroidery & Cross Stitch,* Vol.7, no.5, 2001, pp.74-5 & 91.
121 Susan Gower, 'Annual Report', *The Record,* No.488, November 2008, pp.3-5.

Helen Parson's articles are usually illustrated with photographs of items held in the Guild Collection, and one article on Hardanger embroidery is accompanied by photographs and text on samplers worked by Heather Joynes for her City & Guilds of London certificate, about which I wrote in Chapter Two, including quotes from an interview with Heather about her experiences regarding this course. Helen writes of the technique, that it originated 'in the mountainous area at the head of the picturesque Hardanger Fjord in Norway'. She comments that the pictured piece of Hardanger, which Heather worked for her portfolio in 1969, 'still looks very modern today' and goes on to promote the Guild in closing:

> Hardanger work has a long tradition, which is being sustained and extended by embroiderers today. The NSW Embroiderers' Guild has tutors and special interest groups for stitchers who are keen to learn this technique or extend their skills using contemporary designs and materials.[122]

Detailed instructions for two Hardanger doileys, one with step-by-step photographs, are published in the same issue of the magazine, so that readers have the opportunity to either learn from the magazine or to contact the Guild for information about tutors and classes.[123] By reading the article they have learned about the history of the technique, the costume and some of the culture of the women who worked it from 1650, and the influence Hardanger had on the development of other drawn thread embroidery in Europe, as well as contact details of the Embroiderers' Guild as an invitation to further learning opportunities.

Heather Joynes has since specialised in ribbon embroidery and has written seven books, most of them on that technique. Another issue of the magazine features a profile of Heather, among the many other tutors and designers, at least one of whom is featured in every issue. She is quoted as saying "The marvellous thing about embroidery is you never come to the end. There's always another technique, or something else you can do. And if you feel like a challenge there's always something difficult you can try."[124]

One Sydney magazine which features both embroidery and quilting features a biographical article about Lorraine Trezise, then President of the NSW Quilters' Guild, who gives so many of her quilts to charity and as gifts that she was unable to provide any to illustrate the feature. In spite of the subject being the Guild President, the value of learning from topical magazines is evident from her experience, as the writer relates:

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122 Helen Parsons, 'Hardanger Embroidery', *Embroidery & Cross Stitch,* Vol.15, no.3, 2008, pp.22-4.

123 Sibille Kreideweiss, 'Golden Harvest', Helen Harvey, 'Bud Vase Doily', *Embroidery & Cross Stitch,* Vol.15, no.3, 2008, 'Golden Harvest', pp.10-14, 'Bud Vase Doily', pp.58-61.

124 Trudy Baldock, untitled profile of Heather Joynes, *Embroidery & Cross Stitch,* Vol.3, no.6, 1998, pp.74-6.

> She admits that (at first) she learned most of what she knew about quilting from magazines with clear pictures and diagrams, as she never attended a meeting, and only visited the library on odd occasions when she could.[125]

Quilters' Guild members would be interested in this insight into the life of the woman who most of them would be unlikely to have an opportunity to get to know personally. The telephone number and web address of the Quilters' Guild is located at the end of the article to encourage non-members to join the organisation.[126]

The women whose biographies and designs feature in the Australian quilting magazines are familiar and are perhaps even personally known to the readers. They are sometimes even shop owners, as in the case of Michelle Marvig, who owns The Patchwork Heart, a quilting fabric shop in Penrith in outer western Sydney. The Sydney-based magazine *Australian Quilters Companion* features product reviews, instructional articles, and/or quilt designs by Michelle Marvig in every one of the six issues that I have obtained.[127] Michelle Marvig is also advertised as the leader of a *Quilters Companion* tour to the USA which visits an international quilt show and other venues in mid-2009.[128]

This magazine carries a wide range of information for the reader, not only covering the making of quilts, but also information associated with the designs which may be historical, scientific or even the obvious home decorating tips. The issue to which I refer above also contains references to the Quilters' Guild and its members, including a report on the entries received for the annual challenge in 2007, 'Looking Forward, Looking Back'.[129] Each issue of this magazine also includes an instructional DVD on some aspect of quiltmaking.

At a Quilters' Guild meeting I attended one of the women seated at my table was the founding editor of *Downunder Quilts*, another Sydney-based quilting magazine. She has been closely involved with the Guild as a member of the committee in the past and provides sponsorship and prizes at the Sydney Quilt Show. As with all quilting magazines, *Downunder Quilts* features quilt patterns, biographical profiles of leading quilt teachers and designers, and notices of upcoming shows and competitions. The advertising in these magazines forms part of the instructional and editorial content as it provides information about access to materials, venues and dates of opportunities for further learning and inspiration.

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125 Cassie Bellemore, 'Jack of All Trades', *Australian Country Threads Annual: Country-style patchwork, quilting & stitching,* Vol.8, No.8, July, 2008, pp.58-9.

126 Cassie Bellemore, 'Jack of All Trades'.

127 See, for example, 'Road Test: New Battings', *Australian Quilters Companion: Excellence in patchwork and quilting,* No.32, Vol.7, July/August 2008, pp.16-17 (editorial style excludes the apostrophe in the title).

128 Advertisement, *Australian Quilters Companion,* July/August 2008, p.19.

129 'Looking forward, looking back', p.13 of above issue.

Other magazines, too, publish articles about the organisations and about groups and individuals who are part of the organisations. *Inspirations* magazine, an Adelaide-based embroidery magazine, published a story about my own research for this degree, which led to greater recognition of my work, assistance with some aspects of research and new friendships.[130]

The editor of *Inspirations* needlework magazine and proprietor of the Country Bumpkin company, Margie Bauer, writes a regular webletter to subscribers of the magazine and viewers of the website who subscribe to the link. One particular webletter demonstrates in an effective way the positive impact a commercial organisation can have on publicising women's organisations and their aims, and also in showing the overlap between the interests of women who belong to different organisations, in this case Zonta and a quilting group. While the event publicised is in South Australia, both the magazine and the webletter are widely distributed in New South Wales and thus influence the women in this state, even opening the opportunity for them to take up the idea for themselves. The promotion of the event, staged by the Zonta Club of the Fleurieu Peninsula, begins with background information about the Zonta organisation, before describing the planned activities of a needlework exhibition in January 2009, "Art of the Needle Trail". Activities include a main exhibition in the local town hall, workshops in several quilt and needlework shops, parades, displays and needlecraft stalls in another hall.[131] The webletter does not include the recipient of the proceeds, but a link to the Zonta International website provides information about the aims and objectives of the organisation and its list of projects for the 2008-2010 Biennium (the two year time allocations of governance and projects in Zonta).[132]

The magazine *Inspirations* is distributed in more than 70 countries, with many readers in the United States and Great Britain. The masthead describes it as *The world's most beautiful embroidery magazine,* and the quality of the presentation, as well as the detailed instructions for projects, bears out this statement. I find it difficult to write objectively because I tend to be over-enthusiastic in my admiration for what is inarguably a beautiful, and truly educational, publication. Furthermore, an article on my research has opened up a personal link with the magazine since the editor and proprietor of the publishing company, Margie Bauer, invited me

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130 'A passion for learning', *Inspirations: The world's most beautiful embroidery magazine,* Issue 55, nd. pp.6-7.

131 Margie Bauer, Webletter sent to subscribers to Country Bumpkin publications and website, 28/11/2008.

132 Zonta International website, http://www.zonta.org Accessed online 29/11/2008.

to write the article and subsequently published an edited version of it.[133] In addition, Margie has requested a photograph of my 'Learning Journeys' thesis quilt to publish with its story in a later issue of the magazine.[134] In 2008, Margie invited me to participate in a workshop based around the magazine project, the Healing Quilt, held in St Helens in Tasmania, which I did, and a personal acquaintance has continued.

The Healing Quilt project invites women who have lost a loved one, especially mothers who have lost children, to embroider a block in memory of the person. My own embroidered crazy quilt block in memory of my daughter, Judith, is included in the quilt. Margie believes that the activity of creating such a memorial for a lost loved one is healing therapy for grief, something which has been borne out by the many responses received to the project. An upcoming issue of the magazine will be themed around this issue of healing through creativity, an issue to which she invited readers to contribute comment on their own experiences.

In most cases it is the needlework and quilting magazines which allow publicity of the organisations because of the high cost of advertising. Very few people to whom I spoke about my research had actually heard of Quota, although more women knew about the existence of Zonta. Christian women's organisations are known within their own denominations but Christian media is too limited in Australia to publicise them outside their own circles. Apart from CWA, whose publicity is discussed in Chapter Six, most publicity for women's organisations is through word-of-mouth and local fundraising events.

Conclusion

Whether in resources and events associated with women's organisations, or in the organisations themselves, a large amount of informal learning takes place in the women who are members. The women actively seek out learning opportunities through attending meetings to hear guest speakers and to learn about current and future activities in the organisation. They also learn from the newsletters or magazines of their organisations and from the organisations' own websites, as well as their libraries where the organisation has that facility. As well, the members gain information from outside sources associated with their interests which are relevant to their organisation. These sources may include local or specialist libraries, commercial magazines, relevant websites and other electronic media. While I have found it convenient to place it loosely in the category of informal learning, this seeking out of learning

[133] Robyn Hanstock, 'A Reader's Story: A passion for learning', *Inspirations: The world's most beautiful embroidery magazine*, Issue 55, pp.6-7.

[134] See Appendix 2.

in women's organisations is so extensive and occurs in so many different ways that it cannot be 'boxed in' to any theoretical category. Thus I am compelled to conclude that the conventional demarcation of informal learning as a discrete element of adult education theory cannot be applied to women as learners in voluntary organisations.

The responses of the women interviewed, the amount of material in organisational newsletters and magazines and the volume of the material I have collected make it impossible to even scratch the surface of the learning opportunities which women who are members of these organisations seek out for themselves. They often go to great lengths to locate information they need either for perfecting of their own skills or to be able to carry out community service to the best of their abilities. Often it is both, as well as fulfilling their desire to meet, socialise and form friendships with women who share their interests. The following two chapters demonstrate further ways that women learn both for and from membership and service in their organisations or the wider community. They enjoy the stimulus of like-minded companions, as well as gaining skills to keep their knowledge and their crafts alive to pass on for future generations.

Chapter Five

Expanding Worlds – Part One

Incidental and Transformative Learning and Personal Growth

Women experience incidental learning in many ways through membership of their organisations. As well as gaining knowledge, this learning can include emotional and spiritual growth – transformative learning – which I include in this chapter although it can result from other learning. Like serendipity, incidental learning is usually learning unsought for, as against the learning in the previous chapter, which is actively appropriated by the learner. Even more than in earlier chapters, my findings here differ from and spill over the boundaries set by theorists. So, incidental learning – and other forms of learning – can lead to social action and emancipation of the individual for individual members of the organisations. Consequently much of the content of this chapter overlaps with the following chapter on social capital and the activities of organisations in the community, my reason for naming it 'Part One'. To better organise, I focus this chapter on the individual and the following chapter on the outreach of the organisations and their members to their wider communities.

Almost every woman I have interviewed, and many with whom I have had informal conversations, has told me that the most important gain that she has made from the membership of her organisation has been self-confidence and confidence in her own abilities – that her membership has been life-changing.. Along with confidence the women see their friendships with other members as enhancing their lives to a substantial degree. This research has certainly enhanced my own learning considerably as I have conversed with the women and listened to their responses to my questions during interviews. Without even realising how it has happened, since I became involved in the research I have become increasingly an enthusiastic advocate for women's organisations. This has been part of my own incidental learning in both the research and my personal learning journey. The original mindmapping, followed by the construction of the quilt, whose photograph accompanies the thesis, has also contributed to my enthusiasm, as well as enhancing my own learning in an often unconscious – or incidental – way.

Incidental learning can take place at any time while the individual is involved in the activities of everyday life. It is sometimes referred to as 'learning by doing' or 'learning from your mistakes', also known as 'experiential learning'. In the Embroiderers' Guild, for example, skills can be improved simply by noting, sometimes even unconsciously, what the next person at the table is doing, while engaged in your own project at a workshop. But incidental learning

also comes about through the process of socialisation, of sharing time and experiences with other women in a relaxed and positive way. Some writers may include it under informal learning.

Stromquist writes that '(s)ignificant informal learning occurs through the activities women undertake as they manage their own organisations'.[1] That learning, which may take the form of formal, non-formal, informal or incidental, can also lead to a member's educating capacity extending beyond group meetings and workshops to sharing skills with friends, neighbours and family members. One outstanding way women learn in their organisations is the communication between members at meetings, workshops and special events. The learning is not only the practical aspects of a skill, such as in a needlework or craft class, but can be spiritual and emotional learning as well. The process of the women telling their stories to each other as they work together or share food is a vital form of communication, as Jane Thompson, a British adult educator, writes:

> Women telling stories is a method of learning I have come to value and seek out in countless conversations and exchanges over decades, in both formal and informal classrooms, wherever I have been. The current popularity of autobiography and narrativity in feminist research is a measure of the significance which now attaches to experience, reflection and psychoanalytic understanding, as a counterbalance to the kind of public and external evidence which is available from historical and structural analysis and political economy. Carolyn Steedman exemplifies the theoretical genre perfectly, whilst insisting that, 'Once a story is told, it ceases to be a story; it becomes a piece of history, an interpretative device'.[2]

This communication through telling their own stories empowers women in a way that Kuhn says is 'a key moment in the making of ourselves'.[3] So the women are not only bringing about an understanding of each other's personal views, outlooks and life journeys, they are also clarifying their understanding of themselves and their inner lives. As well, the process of reflection in the sharing often leads to emancipatory, even transformative, learning.

Stromquist argues that '(w)omen's organisations perform important transformative and emancipatory functions that enable women to develop new feminist identities, become political agents, and learn to engage in collective forms of social change'.[4] While Stromquist is writing

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1 Nelly P. Stromquist, 'The Educational Nature of Feminist Action', in Foley, *Dimensions of Adult Learning,,* pp.35-51(45).

2 Jane Thompson, *Women, Class and Education,* London, Routledge, 2000, p.7.

3 Quoted in Thompson, *Women. Class and Education,* p.5.

4 Nelly P. Stromquist, 'The Educational Nature of Feminist Action', in Griff Foley (ed), *Dimensions of Adult Learning: Adult education and training in a global era,* Sydney, Allen & Unwin, 2004, pp.35-51(50).

from a politically active point of view, I see the functions of which she writes as applying also to the members of the non-political voluntary organisations in this study.

Hayes writes that women can learn more than intended during the acquisition of skills and knowledge at organised learning activities and gives an example from another educator, Mary Beth Bingham, of Appalachian women active in local community centres who reported 'a wide range of learning outcomes'. These outcomes include 'instrumental skills, increased self-understanding, and enhanced ability to work with other people'. My own findings on transformative learning in women's organisations in NSW concur with Bingham's, in that a wide range of learning can be the outcome of activities. Hayes writes further of Bingham's experience:

> Their experiences at the community centers changed their perspectives on what they were capable of doing in their lives and communities. Bingham points out that this learning was not merely incidental but was instead the result of the centers' commitment to leadership development and collaborative teamwork and of other women's continuous support.[5]

This shared understanding and support between skilled members of organisations and newcomers or casual attenders is presented as the social constructivist view by Merriam and Caffarella, who quote Driver et al as arguing that knowledge is constructed:

> when individuals engage socially in talk and activity about shared problems and tasks. Making meaning is thus a dialogic process involving persons-in-conversation, and learning is seen as the process by which individuals are introduced to a culture by more skilled members.[6]

Sometimes this sharing can be somewhat overwhelming in light of the excitement which can be seen when a prospective member comes through the doors of a meeting. I have often experienced this enthusiasm when I have attended a meeting and spoken about my research. The paradox of dwindling numbers against the wholehearted commitment of many of the longstanding members is a probable explanation for this obvious desire to influence a newcomer to join the organisation. My assumption is that they feel that the organisation has changed their lives – transformed them – and they want others to experience a similar transformation.

In her text on transformative education Cranton describes emancipatory learning as 'a process of freeing ourselves from forces that limit our options and our control over our lives, forces that have been taken for granted or seen as beyond our control'. She goes on to cite

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5 Elisabeth Hayes, 'Social Contexts', in E. Hayes et al, *Women as Learners: The significance of gender in adult learning,* San Francisco, Jossey-Bass Publishers, 2002, pp.23-52(43).

6 Quoted in Sharan B. Merriam & Rosemary Caffarella, *Learning in Adulthood: A comprehensive guide* (2nd Edition), San Francisco, Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1999, p.262.

Mezirow's argument that ' "Emancipatory learning often is transformative" '.[7] The discovery of their own intellect, abilities and strengths can be life-changing to a radical degree for many women in, from a feminist viewpoint, removal of patriarchal control, an issue which formed the basis of suffragist activism. This activism was the instigating factor for the establishment of numerous women's organisations in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, all of which educated – in a transformative way – both their members and the wider society.[8]

For individuals the confidence gained through transformative learning can change the course of a life, as Sue Wood writes. The advantages to her personally went well beyond the skills she learned, about which I am writing here because of the enrichment of her own life. In an account which shows the blending of formal learning and transformative learning, she tells of her experience in exploring design possibilities and producing major works for the Proficiency certificate awarded by the Embroiderers' Guild, as mentioned in Chapter Two. However, the results of her learning now potentially extend to all of her students and colleagues, whether in her professional life as a university lecturer, her teaching at the Embroiderers' Guild annual Summer School, or in the quilt world of which she is also a part:

> I have never once regretted a year spent immersed in machine embroidery. It is not overstating the case to say that the Proficiency Certificate changed my life. It gave me confidence as an independent embroiderer and the courage to teach machine embroidery and design. It opened teaching opportunities beyond the Guild itself and it eventually led me to further education and a new career. It was the first step on a learning adventure that provides great intellectual and emotional satisfaction and which I imagine will continue for the rest of my life.[9]

Since writing about the benefits gained from undertaking this certificate course Sue Wood has been awarded a PhD for her dissertation on the history of a group of creative embroiderers in New South Wales.[10] Wood's 'learning adventure' since being awarded that certificate in 1986 by the Embroiderers' Guild has led to her employment as a lecturer in Art History and Visual Culture in the School of Humanities and Social Sciences at Charles Sturt University, New South Wales, where she is Discipline Co-ordinator and Sub-Dean: Learning and Teaching.[11]

It is significant to note Sue Wood's statement "It is not overstating the case to say that the Proficiency Certificate changed my life." Her experience is a clear demonstration of

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7 Patricia Cranton, *Understanding and Promoting Transformative Learning: A guide for educators of adults,* San Francisco, Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1994, p.16

8 Susan Magarey, *Passions of the First Wave Feminists,* Sydney, University of New South Wales Press, 2001, p.49.

9 Sue Wood, 'Proficiency Certificate', *The Record,* No. 451, April 2005, p.14.

10 Susan G. Wood, 'Creative Embroidery in New South Wales, 1960 – 1975', unpublished PhD thesis, RMIT University, 2006.

11 Bio, Dr Sue Wood, Charles Sturt University website, http://www.csu.edu.au/faculty/arts/humss/staff/sue_wood.htm Accessed 15/5/08.

Mezirow's theory of transformative learning, which in her case was the introduction to a learning journey through working towards the end of perfecting her skill in machine embroidery.

The confidence and courage of which Wood writes is part of the process of the change in the learner's frame of reference. Reflection on the successful introduction to a learning journey brings about an understanding that further change is possible. The learner then proceeds to embark on what often becomes a lifelong journey of learning that may even lead to educating others – or at the very least inspiring them to learn. This is where group learning can, I suggest, be so advantageous in women's organisations. Who knows how many women may have been inspired to take an Embroiderers' Guild course or workshop through reading Wood's article in the monthly organisation newsletter/magazine sent to every member – or even to move on to higher education?

Mezirow writes of this process of what he calls 'critical reflection' and the change in a learner's perspective:

> Much of what we learn involves making new interpretations that enable us to elaborate, further differentiate, and reinforce our long-established frames of reference or to create new meaning schemes. Perhaps even more central to adult learning than elaborating established meaning schemes is the process of reflecting back on prior learning to determine whether what we have learned is justified under present circumstances[12].

A plethora of theorists, some of whom I write about below, have engaged in discussion and expanded on Mezirow's theory of transformative learning which parallels emancipatory theory. Merriam and Caffarella write that Mezirow defines learning as a 'meaning-making activity' and that meaning perspectives are 'the lens through which each person filters, engages and interprets the world'.[13] A woman who is under the control of a parent or partner will, I suggest, be prone to interpret the world in a way that will please or placate the authority figure in her life until she is able to emancipate herself into independent thinking. Merriam and Caffarella write of this process:

> A change in perspective is personally emancipating in that one is freed from previously held beliefs, attitudes, values and feelings that have constricted and distorted one's life.[14]

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[12] Jack Mezirow, 'How Critical Reflection Triggers Transformative Learning', in Jack Mezirow and Associates, *Fostering Critical Reflection in Adulthood: A guide to transformative and emancipatory learning,* San Francisco, Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1990, pp.1-20(5).

[13] Sharan B. Merriam & Rosemary S. Caffarella, *Learning in Adulthood: A comprehensive guide,* San Francisco, Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1999, pp.319-20.

[14] Merriam & Cafarella, *Learning in Adulthood,* p.320.

Appropriately in this context, Mezirow is quoted as advising that '(w)hen the disorienting dilemma is the result of oppressive action by a partner, landlord, or anyone else, the transformation process *requires* that the learner take action against her oppressor'.[15] Of course, the process may not necessarily be triggered by a negative event or situation, in some potential learners there may simply be a gradual awakening of a desire to better themselves through learning.

Cranton writes that emancipatory learning takes place 'through critical self-reflection', which may or may not have emanated from life crises.[16] She argues that the 'less dramatic changes in perspective' which take place can be, for example

> The maturing of an intimate relationship, developing a new friendship, adding new responsibilities at work, taking a course and meeting different people, or joining a club or a new social circle. Several of these provocative events center on the influence of discussion with others. For many people, discussion is likely to provoke critical self-reflection.[17]

Discussion, whether more or less structured and formal, is a major part of almost any kind of meeting in women's organisations, but I want to emphasise at this point the value of the transformation that can occur in members through the catalyst of any kind of learning within their organisations. Thus, the transformative effect occurs across the spectrum of learning, and is not confined to any one area. The element of organised education is a central focus of the Embroiderers' Guild, but it is also present in most of the other organisations I have researched, although to a lesser degree.

Merriam & Caffarella write that '(t)he process of transformative learning is firmly anchored in life experience' in a process of critical reflection.[18] The only way for a student to find a way through to transforming her worldview and consequently her ability to learn freely and fully is through critical self-reflection; this almost always occurs as a result of life-changing circumstances or through the guidance of a wise and compassionate teacher. Although the current dictum by psychologists and counsellors is for the person to 'find themselves' (through critical self-reflection), a more positive attitude towards the practice in my view is that advocated in Chappell et al's text on lifelong learning and identity: 'Thus from

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15 Quoted in Merriam & Cafarella, p.323.
16 Patricia Cranton, *Understanding and Promoting Transformative Learning: A guide for educators of adults,* San Francisco, Jossey-Bass, 1994, p.81.
17 Cranton, *Understanding and Promoting Transformative Learning*, p.82.
18 Merriam & Caffarella, *Learning in Adulthood,* p.320.

a relational point of view the pedagogy of self-reflection insists not on discovering who one is, *but on creating who one might become'* (my italics).[19]

The strength of Mezirow's work is in assisting the individual towards emancipation, as opposed to Freire's, which is aimed rather at emancipating an oppressed society. In writing of Mezirow's work and its impact on participants in a conference they attended under his leadership, Belenky and Stanton contend that their experience of his practice 'convinces us that he is a gifted midwife-teacher and leader who has helped give birth to a vibrant community of learners'.[20] One of these is Patricia Cranton, who has expanded Mezirow's ideas to make them more practically applicable. She writes of emancipatory learning which is part of, or parallel to, transformative learning as:

> a process of freeing ourselves from forces that limit our options and our control over our lives, forces that have been taken for granted or seen as beyond our control…. Emancipatory learning has remained a goal of adult education through time and across cultures. For example, in a history of adult education in Britain, Harrison states that "it has in the main been regarded as a movement for freedom and liberation, both personal … and social".[21]

Sometimes the circumstances which act as a catalyst to begin the transformative learning process may be cataclysmic, such as illness, divorce, bereavement, or accident, an example of which I provided in a paper published a few years ago about a self-directed learner who transformed opportunities in his life after a serious vehicle accident resulting in brain injury.[22]

Personal growth is a vital part of women's education, and is not a separate area of life confined to counselling or spirituality. Jean Barr writes that '(a) huge strength of feminism is that it is not just an academic discourse but inspires a social, cultural and educational movement'. Furthermore, she argues that feminism must be viewed in terms of a larger context involving 'relations among real women' and 'concrete educational processes and wider social processes'. Thus adult education, in her view, cuts across all boundaries.[23] The work of Belenky and her colleagues on women's 'knowing' attests to this important aspect of confidence-building in women's learning: 'What these women needed…was confirmation that

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19 Chappell et al, *Reconstructing the Lifelong Learner,* p.23.

20 M.F. Belenky & A.V. Stanton, 'Inequality, Development, and Connected Knowing', in J. Mezirow & Associates (eds), *Learning as Transformation,* pp.71-102(99).

21 P. Cranton, *Understanding and Promoting Transformative Learning: A guide for educators of adults,* San Francisco, Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1994, p.16.

22 R. Hanstock, 'Self-directed informal learning: A case study', *Australian Journal of Adult Learning,* Vol.44, no.1, April 2004, pp.72-83.

23 Jean Barr, *Liberating Knowledge: Research, feminism and adult education,* Leicester, NIACE, 1999, p.108.

they could be trusted to know and to learn. Given confirmation, they felt they could "just do anything" '.[24]

A lack of confidence can be a problem for women, and being situated in a group of women, away from male disparagement, is often affirming. It is now more generally accepted, as I have stated earlier, that the field of adult education is not confined to formal institutions.[25] In their groundbreaking work, Belenky and her colleagues present a 'transformative learner' as becoming 'a storehouse of information. Not only could she receive knowledge from others but she could also pass that knowledge on to others'. This learner, named as Ann in the account, pointed to the birth of her children as the initiator of what Belenky et al term her 'epistemelogical revolution'. They claim that many mothers they interviewed named childbirth as their most important learning experience, commenting that, for these women, it was 'as if this act of creation ushers in a whole new view of one's creative capacities'.[26] Once realised, these 'creative capacities' can lead to the possibility of pointing out learning opportunities to others, as did Ann in the account cited by Belenky et al above.

Women educate adults, whether by teaching or communicating information, in many organisations and places outside formal learning institutions. Often this is as volunteers, and the voices of these latter women are silenced in history to an even greater extent, often even by other women in academia. Elisabeth Hayes writes of the 'imbalance of this focus', where academic women are heard and little attention is paid to women's learning 'in other contexts', and goes on to stress 'the significance of all social contexts in understanding women's learning'.[27] Most health professionals would ignore or even condemn the knowledge of child care acquired by Ann, mentioned above, and her passing on of her knowledge to other women. However, her learning, and that of others like her, is important and representative of the kind of learning on which my research has been focused. For that reason I have chosen to concentrate on the range of learning which takes place in women's organisations, because it can be of inestimable value in the lives of ordinary women who for various reasons may not have had access to formal post-secondary education. Many of them may never have access to further formal education because of personal circumstances or low self-esteem, so the learning they

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[24] M.F. Belenky, B.M. Clinchy, N.R. Goldberger & J.M. Tarule, *Women's Ways of Knowing: The Development of Self, Voice and Mind,* New York, Basic Books, 1997 (1986), p.195.

[25] Mohamed Hrimech, 'Informal Learning', entry in L.English (ed), *International Encyclopedia of Adult Education,* Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2005, pp.310-12.

[26] Belenky et al, *Women's Ways of Knowing,* pp.35-6.

[27] Elisabeth Hayes & Daniele D. Flannery et al, *Women as Learners: The significance of gender in adult learning,* San Francisco, Jossey-Bass Publishers, 2002, p.23.

acquire from their friends and their organisations – especially the CWA in this group I have chosen – may be all they will be able to achieve.

Unfortunately there are negative aspects to membership in women's organisations, some of which stem from inadequate resources and poor administration, but often simply from personality clashes. Any negative experience can inhibit or prevent learning and can result in the loss of members, as I relate in the following section. The grey section on the lower folded-back corner of my quilt was included to show that, despite the many positive aspects of women's organisations, there is a 'dark' side which creates hindrances to learning.

Negative Experiences in Women's Organisations

A conversation with a tutor in the Embroiderers' Guild has revealed some real difficulties which can occur while teaching women's groups. She experiences particular problems teaching in regional groups, as many of the women attend classes for social reasons. She finds it frustrating to travel sometimes long distances to country areas and then find that she has to instruct over the buzz of unceasing conversation, with women who are sometimes difficult, but that may be caused by their limited opportunities to get together.

Fig 6. A variety of problems can hinder womens' learning.

One woman in the city was a particular problem and the tutor was relieved when she eventually stopped coming to the class. The woman was 'noisy', 'demanding' and 'pugnacious' according to the tutor, and the class members became dissatisfied that the woman was demanding so much of the teacher's time that they were unable to learn. Two women in

another class did no stitching in class, one was even without fabric, but chatted all through the class, rendering it virtually impossible to teach and for other learners to participate. The combination of these women's chatter and the office noise from the front left the tutor feeling unwell, unable to think and deciding to no longer teach in that area.[28]

Rumours can also cause disquiet and even threaten the stability of the organisation, as was the case in one, which I will not name. A rumour about the actions of the executive committee, with accusations of misuse of funds, had been circulating amongst members, with a small group of mischiefmakers seeking to cause trouble. Against constitutional rules they called a special meeting to demand answers to questions based on the gossip, subsequently proven false. Much grief ensued and a special issue of the organisation's newsletter had to be sent out to members, at considerable cost, to answer the accusations and establish the innocence of the accused executive.[29]

Often these problems are caused by power struggles among ambitious members, and Gloria Cook had some revealing comments to make about her experiences in different organisations:

> I think in some of these organisations people are perhaps there for the wrong reasons and what they're seeking is not always to share with other people less fortunate than themselves, *but* to take the power within these organisations, and I would be very amazed if there's any women's organisation anywhere in the world, where there isn't a power struggle going on, at any given moment of any given day ... And they are very often the people who cause disharmony within the group, and there then becomes dissatisfaction... [30]

Gloria went on to express her disquiet at the result of these struggles, that it was often the women who were not involved in the troublemaking who would leave and take their hurt with them:

> and that's sad because you lose the expertise of those people; you lose the ability of those people to help carry the workload and sometimes those people become, instead of being really good allies, they actually become almost enemies of the organisation because they take their hurt from the organisation, and share it widely with other people.[31]

Gloria believes that the remedy for such problems is to educate new members as they arrive, so that 'we could eliminate a lot of those interpersonal relationship difficulties'. She did not specify in her interview how this could be done; I suspect that 'educating' a new member

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28 Conversation with Guild tutor who wished to remain anonymous.

29 The above event occurred a number of years ago in one of the organisations researched in this study. I have a copy of the newsletter in my possession.

30 Interview with Gloria Cook, 10/7/2007.

31 Gloria Cook.

on relationships and avoidance of troublemaking might be confrontational and could result in the immediate loss of her membership.

A few women in other organisations spoke of bullying and discrimination, all of them all wishing to withhold their own and their organisations' names. One woman related a positive aspect of 'bullying', where women who felt inadequate for executive positions were strongly 'persuaded' to take up positions which they found they were able to do and gained confidence in the process. I discovered an entire volume on 'rivalries among women' during my research, and it was interesting to read the way women become involved in such disputes, and of it being a universal problem.[32]

Fortunately such experiences are exceptional, and most members of the Guilds and other women's organisations that I have encountered enjoy their membership, with their organisations continuing to exist for the benefit of their members and others in the local and wider community who they seek to serve, as does CWA.

CWA

The ABC television series *Not All Tea And Scones* drew passionate responses from many of the members, who felt that they were portrayed rather as *being* focused on 'tea and scones' because of the predominance of portrayal of cooking competitions in the series of four programs.[33] One of the most prominent activities of the membership is fundraising for medical research, and frequent references are made in the magazine by members to activities which disprove what they feel is that false portrayal. Reports in the pages of 'Branch News' in every issue of *The Country Woman* are published as they are written by members who send them to the editor for inclusion in the column. An officer of Mudgee Evening Branch writes:

> After many fundraising efforts the hard working ladies from our Branch proudly presented Jenny Bryant from Rural Nursing Services with a Bidirectional Vascular Doppler Machine, to be utilized by the Rural Nursing Service to diagnose and aid in the treatment of leg ulcers, thus avoiding long trips to Dubbo for treatment.
>
> The machine is valued at more than $2000 and is also used to assess blood flow and to assist in early detection of blood clots, thus avoiding deep vein thrombosis. Fundraising for the machine took nearly six months and not one

[32] Leora Tanenbaum, *Catfight: Rivalries among women: From diets to dating, from the boardroom to the delivery room,* New York, Harper Collins, 2003.

[33] Carmel Travers, *Not All Tea And Scones,* Purple Pictures, 2007.

> scone was sold in aid of the machine. So you see we were "not all tea and scones".[34]

The author of the piece does not say what other means were used to raise the money since it was not raised through the sale of scones. Obviously it was enough for the members of Mudgee Evening Branch just to be able to claim a 'scone-free' effort. What *is* evident, however, is the women's passion to disprove the inaccurate, stereotypical and demeaning image they felt was presented of their organisation. Through this project they perhaps drew closer in their camaraderie – social learning – as well as the small amount of medical knowledge they acquired in the process of making the vital piece of equipment available to patients outside a large town. Unwritten, but safe to assume, is the probably varied pieces of learning that came about through the various events staged to raise the finance.[35]

Another branch, Narooma, is keen to portray the enjoyment they derive from their 'weekly get together'. The photograph accompanying the article has unfortunately been reproduced too small in *The Country Woman* to be able to confirm their assurance that

> As you can see we laugh as much, or more, than we work. In spite of this, we have managed to help supply clothes, sheets, blankets etc for New Guinea Mums and Babies, and at present are knitting jumpers for AIDS affected babies in Africa, clothes for premmie babies ...[36]

The women's list goes on with many more causes for which they create items, including rugs for Wrap With Love Inc. They add information about their learning which is valuable in this context, as well as adding another sly dig at the film makers' interpretation of their organisation:

> We share our skills and have acquired a comprehensive craft library mainly from donations. Our group typifies the way CWA members share their joys, skills, woes & laughter. We, indeed, are more than scones and tea.[37]

That above is another example of the difficulty of defining separate learning areas in women's organisations. These women are learning at several different levels, one of which is theoretically defined as 'informal' according to Foley, in that they are seeking their own learning through their acquired craft library and the sharing of their skills.[38] It is possible that they may jointly acquire new skills through classes or workshops since they have elsewhere in

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34 Lynn Halpin, 'Mudgee Evening Branch', 'Branch News', *The Country Woman,* vol.48, no.04, August 2007, p.32.

35 Lynn Halpin.

36 Mary Ryan, Narooma Branch, 'Branch News', *The Country Woman,* Vol.48, No.4, August 2007, p.32.

37 Mary Ryan.

38 Griff Foley, 'Introduction: The State of Adult Education and Learning', in Griff Foley (ed), *Dimensions of Adult Learning: Adult education and training in a global era,* Sydney, Allen & Unwin, 2004, pp.3-18(4).

the news item reported outstanding success in the group handicraft competition several years running. The most obvious achievement in their learning journey as a group, however, seems to be that of personal growth, although as individuals it is not possible to ascertain without having spoken to each woman personally.[39] Nevertheless, the humour and friendship is clear and must apply to most, if not all, members of the branch involved in creating the handmade items.

Mrs Joy Granger, President of the Tarcutta branch and a former State Treasurer of CWA, shared her opinion of disappointment in the series *Not All Tea and Scones,* the same as that of every other CWA member I have asked. Joy feels that there is so much more that CWA has to offer that wasn't shown, especially not enough of the social issues. However, she does wonder if she should look at it again in a different light because of the appreciation of the general public, which differed from the members' response, and the number of new members who joined because of the series.[40]

As with other examples to which I have drawn attention throughout this thesis, my conversation with Joy highlights the discrepancies I have found in trying to fit learning in women's organisations to the theoretical views. Joy told me that from her viewpoint as a past State Treasurer, she sees CWA as giving many opportunities:

> You learn so much and give so much, but you are given in return – there is give and take in CWA.[41]

This learning to which Joy refers covers the whole spectrum of education and learning, from the training provided for judges and the set rules of the *Procedures Manual,* right through to the emotional support given by rural women to each other in drought-stricken areas. Thus my brief conversation with this one member could have been included in every one of my chapters and, even so, I have been obliged to include parts of it in more than one of them because of the breadth of one woman's experience in one organisation. Joy ended our conversation by saying 'CWA is very close to my heart'.[42]

In a recorded interview with two other members of CWA, my first question is 'What does CWA mean to you?' Pamela Gilbert replies first to say, 'Mainly to me it's friendship, that's the number one thing'. Her friend, Wendy Macallister, echoes Pamela with 'Friendship is definitely the main thing, it's women supporting women'.

Pamela continues with her view of the healing effect of membership:

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39 Mary Ryan, Narooma Branch
40 Carmel Travers, *Not All Tea And Scones,* Purple Pictures, 2007.
41 Telephone conversation with Mrs Joy Granger, 16/2/2008.
42 Joy Granger.

> P: They might come to CWA with some sort of problem, home or illness and they seem get over this when they've spent some time with us.
>
> W: Yes. And often – even M. when she was – her husband used to say 'Oh, you can't keep the books, you're useless – you are', sort of thing, and she was the treasurer and she showed him! (laughs).[43]

Whether this brought about improvement to this woman's marriage or not is unknown, but she must have gained the confidence to which women often refer. Both Pamela and Wendy confirm that confidence is an important aspect of CWA's positive influence and is a focal point of their lives. They mention another woman who does baby sitting for her family but 'she will always put them off to do a CWA thing'.[44]

A woman who responded to my request in *The Country Woman* for assistance with research expressed that she felt she hadn't yet changed as a person, but went on to say:

> I am gaining confidence in being able to achieve with the help of others in the spirit of community service.[45]

This woman had been ostracised in another organisation because she suffers from seizures, but she told me that she feels accepted since she joined CWA as the members accept her unconditionally and show personal concern when she is ill. As a consequence she is fully involved in community service with her CWA branch.[46]

Through speaking with members and browsing the 'Branch News' pages of *The Country Woman* I have often seen and heard of experiences similar to the above. They all confirm the academic views I discussed, and quoted, earlier, that women's lives can be transformed through the personal growth that comes as they are involved in their organisations. Every other organisation I have researched, whether those in greater depth or some I only briefly observed, has shown the same kind of growth through learning.

Embroiderers' Guild

It is important to point out that many members of the organisations about which I am writing would not consider themselves feminists, or radical in any way. The leisure and prosperity many members of the Embroiderers' Guild enjoy in traditional middle or upper class marriages, or as superannuants, allows them time and money to indulge in fine needlework, a practice redolent of earlier eras. Social class is an element that impinges on membership,

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43 Interview with Mrs Pamela Gilbert and Miss Wendy Macallister, 11/10/06.
44 Interview with Pamela Gilbert and Wendy Macallister.
45 Telephone conversation with Lyn.
46 Conversation with Lyn, 18/8/2006.

including or excluding women according to their level of prosperity, something which was obvious to me at an Embroiderers' Guild exhibition I attended some years ago. I was overwhelmed at the intricacy of a large framed stumpwork embroidery displayed. A member nearby commented to me that she knew the embroiderer, who was supported by her husband and employed staff to care for her home so that she could devote all of her time, from early morning until night, to her embroidery.[47] Obviously working class women, and even some middle class Guild members, could never have the opportunity to create such a work, both because of the cost of the materials – even the framing would have cost several hundred dollars – and the time involved to work the embroidery. Thus the prosperity accompanying middle and upper class women is an important element in membership of creative guilds today and consequently the opportunity for advanced learning in embroidery may well be limited to them.

The domestic linen referred to as fancywork was practiced widely in the mid-twentieth century and is only now beginning to return to some favour among embroiderers. Because basic sewing and embroidery was taught to children from primary school and stamped linens, now referred to as traced linens, were available cheaply at any haberdashery store, most women could embellish their own linen, often as young girls for their 'box' as the supply for marriage was known. In my own case my mother taught me simple embroidery and helped me to advance to traced linen by the time I was a young teenager. As with most women of her era, though, she did not design her own work. Jennifer Isaacs writes that fancywork

> enjoyed great popularity in Australia in the 19th and 20th centuries ... (and) in the 20th century all social classes, to one extent or another, were involved in making or embroidering small objects for the home.[48]

In my experience, cross stitch has taken the place of fancywork as something to be looked upon with condescension as being available to less affluent women, despite the fact that it can often involve many hours, sometimes hundreds for a large project, working from complex charts. Other non-fibre crafts, such as scrapbooking and bead jewellery, are widely promoted in the media as leisure activities which often become fads and may be taken up across class boundaries.

The element of snobbery became evident to me personally during the early years of my candidature for this degree when I worked cross stitch projects as a way of relaxing from the

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47 'Uniting Threads – Past, Present and Future', Embroiderers' Guild Exhibition, 10 – 13 November, 2004, Wesley Hall, Sydney. Stumpwork is a form of three-dimensional embroidery dating back to Elizabethan times.

48 Jennifer Isaacs, *The Gentle Arts: 200 years of Australian women's domestic & decorative arts,* Sydney, Ure Smith Press, 1987, p.114.

extensive reading requirements. A number of embroiderers made derogatory remarks to me like 'I would be so bored doing the same stitch all the time!', quite obviously wishing to convey their superior knowledge of different embroidery techniques. Hayes writes of power relationships in groups and the way that class, along with race and gender, can affect the extent of students' participation in communication and group activity in an adult education class. She relates that 'the two students whose contributions were least recognised by their peers were ... a working-class White student and the other a Black student'.[49]

I see the condescension of my fellow Guild members as representative of a similar problem. The popularity of cross stitch and the wide availability of materials, kits and instructions for it through magazines and low quality fabric chains produced a sense of revulsion for a 'simple' technique indulged in by the masses. Consequently they decried it as beneath them, in the process limiting their own learning opportunities, both in the reviled technique and in personal growth socially. I must add, however, that an untutored socially-based cross stitch group has since begun to meet at Embroiderers' Guild headquarters. Paradoxically, traced linen has become elevated and Effie Mitrofanis, the Guild tutor about whom I have written previously, has designed a range of traced linens for the international needlework company DMC and its Australian agent, Radda.[50]

Despite some of these difficulties mentioned above, I have uncovered many positive results relating to personal growth from workshops or classes. These cannot be classified in a particular learning category, and sometimes reveal tremendous benefit to women participating. Carolyn Pearce has been so moved and impressed by the response to her Village Bag design and the way that it has claimed almost a cult following that she wrote me a letter about some of the circumstances surrounding it. Her design is frequently adapted by women to incorporate scenes from their lives or important memories, and the editor of *Inspirations* magazine from time to time publishes variations of the design to show how adaptations have been made.[51] Carolyn writes of two women's needs fulfilled by making the bag, which includes appliqued elements decorated with embroidery and novelty buttons:

> I taught it at Beating Around the Bush in 2003. I received so many requests for the kit and/or pattern from all round the world. One was from a lady in Perth who (was) undergoing yet another cancer operation – her surgeon paid for the kit! He realized the importance of embroidery to her and if you have something to live for, that is half the battle. ... Mary Gould of South Australia told me

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49 Elisabeth Hayes, 'Social Contexts', Elisabeth Hayes et al, *Women as Learners: The significance of gender in adult learning,* San Francisco, Jossey-Bass Publishers, pp.23-52(31).

50 'What's new from Radda', *Australian Embroidery & Cross Stitch Yearbook,* Vol.8, No.3, 2002, p.41.

51 Carolyn Pearce, *The Embroidered Village Bag,* Malvern, South Australia, Inspirations Books, 2005.

> recently the most touching story of how she helped finish the bag for a lady dying of cancer. In the end when she could no longer stitch, Mary kept stitching (for her).[52]

Carolyn goes on to say that Mary, who helped that dying woman complete her bag, runs the Village Workbag club at Country Bumpkin, the needlework shop in South Australia which is also the home of the *Inspirations* publishing house. 'The participants meet together at the shop, pay a small amount to cover tea and coffee and share ideas. I have had people in class who have formed sewing groups to help each other with the bag'. Designing it was a help during a difficult period in Carolyn's own life when she needed to support both of her parents, ill at the same time:

> The bag was my salvation when for a period of my life, I felt all I did was drive to help sick parents. Likewise it has been for others. Often when teaching, I feel I am not only there to teach a skill but to help others overcome or forget for a while, the problems in their lives.[53]

This has been the case in my own life, not only while working through the process of grief following the loss of my daughter, but during this research, when I began making the quilt to visualise and clarify my thinking, which it has done (see Appendix 2). Working on the quilt has been therapeutic in having something positive and different on which to focus during rest times away from the computer as well as, at the same time, helping me through the process of supporting my own elderly mother in her terminal illness. The quilt has also been a tangible way to look at the results of my research and conclude the outcomes of women's learning journeys as members of their organisations. The visual medium has thus emphasised my own learning journey through the research while I designed and created it as an expression of the intellectual work.

Women in the guilds are encouraged to initiate their own designs today, but this has not always been so. Heather Joynes, designer, accomplished tutor in the Embroiderers' Guild and author of several books on embroidery, expresses her initial diffidence about original designing in her embroidery and the reluctance of women, like Roma Field about whom she was speaking, to undertake it in earlier generations:

> Yes, I think that generation might have been very tentative about that – you know – it wasn't the sort of thing you did. You bought a pattern. I remember from my childhood – nobody would have *dreamt* of doing their own designs

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[52] Personal communication from Carolyn Pearce, 26/9/2008. Beating Around the Bush is a needlework conference convened by the Country Bumpkin company.

[53] Carolyn Pearce.

> because you just bought a transfer or pattern or something. It was not until I joined the Guild that I would have even dreamt of designing anything.[54]

Today all of the tutors in the Embroiderers' Guild are required to create their own designs, unlike that earlier generation, which included Roma Field, who never designed her own work, in spite of the fact that she was a highly accomplished needlewoman and teacher.[55]

Along with encouragement to design, Heather found support when she began teaching following her graduation with the City & Guilds of London, about which I wrote in an earlier chapter.

> And then, we just started teaching! You know – when I think of it now – I can remember the first time that I took a class was down in Wollongong – and Jean Vere, who was the chairman at the time – did you ever know her? – well, she was the loveliest person, and she came down with us because she felt that we needed a bit of moral support, Prue Socha and I went down and we did this class together, and that was all right, and it just started from there – you know I started classes at the Guild and then they started paying the teachers, it just grew.[56]

Years after Heather's first teaching experience, she had for a long time been teaching a class at night, consisting mainly of women working outside the home. She found a difference when she then started a new class:

> I did have another class in the daytime but there wasn't the commitment you know, you realise that women who go out to work – you know – they don't let themselves in for anything lightly, if they're interested in something they make a commitment, whereas people who were at home – it's just - I used to find that they'd miss lessons – and you'd set something for homework and they wouldn't do it. They just didn't have the level of commitment as women who went to work – it's strange really – other people have said the same thing - other teachers that I've known have said the same thing. That was in the 70s and 80s – p'raps it's different now, oh – not many people are at home.[57]

Heather's comment on the deeper commitment to their leisure activity of women who go out to work is interesting. It would be difficult to ascertain whether they would be more committed as a natural trait or whether they felt a greater need for diversion. I imagine this would be an entire study in itself, one beyond the scope of this research. However, in spite of some negative experiences embroidery has been a significant part of Heather's life, and she said to me of it and the Guild,

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54 Interview with Mrs Heather Joynes, 6/10/2005.
55 Heather Joynes.
56 Heather Joynes.
57 Heather Joynes.

> Oh, I've been a sewer all my life ... (it was) something I really loved ... but I know when I found the Embroiderers' Guild it was just right for me – it was just what I wanted at the time. It was lucky that I found it.[58]

Conversations I have heard when visiting the Guild, as well as a general overview of articles written by members in *The Record,* reflect the same sense of satisfaction in their membership as does Heather in her statement above.

The experience of creating a joint project often forms a longstanding bond which may even last after the death of a member. The women who designed and worked the Gunnedah Sesquicentenary Panels, described in Chapter Four, were bonded in such a way through the accomplishment of their common goal, which brought their group closer together, according to the magazine article describing it. "It was a great experience", one of them is quoted as saying, "We all enjoyed it and the result was worth all the time and effort". The achievement and the memories mean that the panel

> will always hold a special place in the hearts of all the members. One member was able to contribute in spite of macular degeneration and another passed away just before the project was completed. However, her contribution 'lies embedded in it forever, for all to see, in the embroidered sporting items in the panels that she did.[59]

In a similar vein, a number of the women in the Newcastle Branch of the Embroiderers' Guild related to me how much the friendship and support of their fellow members and their needlework meant to them. My visit to the branch revealed an unusual closeness in such a large group of women.

Newcastle Branch of the Embroiderers' Guild

All of the members I interviewed from this branch of the Guild, and others in conversation, expressed how much they had gained personally from their membership, especially their Monday meeting day, strictly kept by many members. Of course there may have been others who would not have come forward because they were less positive, but that is possible in any social situation. Elvie Short was enthusiastic about her faithful thirty years of attendance, sharing a table with the same group of women:

> Feff Orton, who was a wonderful embroiderer, sat with us for a few years before she died. We have two new people at our table who are younger who have brought so much fun and enjoyment. It's really cemented the friendships, these delightful younger people – and we can help them if they say they need

[58] Heather Joynes.
[59] Lauren Circosta, 'Between Friends: Gunnedah Sesquicentenary panels', *Embroidery & Cross Stitch,* Vol.15, no.1, pp.54-7.

> help. No, it's been something that Monday was my embroidery day and there's no way I would have missed that if it was possible to come.[60]

Throughout the interview Elvie continues to reiterate how much the Guild and her Mondays mean to her, as well as the billeting of visiting tutors, even from America. At one point she reaffirms her delight with the 'very, very dear friendships', and that 'it has been really very enriching in every way, really ... it's been wonderful'.[61]

Not all incidental learning is emotional and spiritual, however. Often the element of helping each other, while part of the relationship as Elvie stated above, is also important in skill acquisition. At Elvie's table it occurs on a regular basis:

> Two of the people at our table are turning 90 this year, and one in particular is very alert and still leans across the table and says to me, – "I wouldn't use that green, I'd use a paler one, if I were you." She's amazing for ninety.[62]

When I ask if she always agreed with her friend, Elvie responds with a laugh, 'Oh yes, you wouldn't dare question! Yes, she's a delight!'[63]

Social contact is important to women, especially older women who have been widowed and are living alone. Sometimes there is more conversation than sewing, as another of the Newcastle members confides to me:

> Well, I think – the social contact – especially with – well, I'm on my own now, my husband died a few years ago. I find – I miss the social contact at home, and I always look forward to coming to Guild on a Monday, and I think there's a lot of the members are the same. And they may not do much sewing here, but they sit and talk and have a lot of communication that way, yes.[64]

The bond thus created by the members of this large branch of the Embroiderers' Guild was especially significant in the life of a younger member, Ronelle Cook. She tells me about the loss of her mother and how the women who had been her mother's friends became not only her own friends, but in a sense surrogate mothers:

> Yes, I do think I have lots of surrogate mothers here. A couple of them very much so nowadays, but – um – there are still a lot of them that knew Mum, so I get memories of Mum from them, which is great.[65]

I ask Ronelle about the support and she replies at length and in detail about the overwhelming response from the women when her mother, who was very involved and active in the branch,

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60 Interview with Mrs Elvie Short, 20/2/2006.
61 Elvie Short.
62 Elvie Short.
63 Elvie Short.
64 Interview with Mrs Heather Lamerton, 20/2/2006.
65 Interview with Ronelle Cook, Newcastle Branch, Embroiderers' Guild NSW Inc. 20/2/2006.

died very suddenly. The family decided to hold the funeral on a Monday because, as Ronelle says, 'Monday was Mum's day':

> We rang Zona at the time and she was down on the next day to see how we were and she said, 'We'll make an announcement in the morning when the ladies are arriving', because Mum used to set up the hall, she'd come in the morning and set up the hall, and she used to stay from – like 8.30 in the morning until ten at night, there was a couple of them used to stay just as long, I think. They're all insane, those ladies, 'cause I do it now, and I think Oh, God, it's a long day! And I come in later! Yes, she used to do that.[66]

Ronelle goes on to speak about the funeral, and her surprise when she realised how many of her mother's fellow embroiderers had come to share the family's grief and farewell their friend:

> So, they actually surprised me – I was amazed. I walked into the funeral and didn't really stop to take notice of how many people were in there, but I – when I went in I was with Dad at the door and all these people talking on the way out and all these Guild ladies were there, they'd arranged car pooling at the Guild on the Monday, all the ladies who wanted to come out in the afternoon, it wasn't just the ladies who knew Mum and sat with Mum, I said "Is there anyone back at the Guild? Because every time I turned around it was a Guild person it was like I was just stunned. I thought in the end probably a couple might come out, but we had that many.[67]

The Monday following the funeral Ronelle took in the paperwork and equipment her mother had used as branch librarian and was again surprised at the warm response from the members. They urged her not to worry about anything, that they would fix it all up, but nevertheless demanded that she keep attending. Ronelle quotes them in her lively way:

> "You make sure you come back next week." "Don't you not come in just because Mum's gone!"[68]

Although she had attended the evening section of the weekly branch meeting while her mother was alive, Ronelle later found a job which allowed her to have flexible hours, and so at the time of our interview she took Mondays off so that she could attend the meeting all day. Although she did not find it easy at first, she persevered until the Guild became as much a part of her life as it had been of her mother's:

> You know, I found it very hard for a while because I expected to see her in there. And the ladies in there are very good, they talk about Mum. There's a lot of them miss her, because it was a very shock for them because they were very close and as time's gone on it's been easier for me to talk and the ladies they talk about Mum – "Oh, Alice would have done this" or "Alice wouldn't like

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66 Ronelle Cook.
67 Ronelle Cook.
68 Ronelle Cook.

> this, they haven't done this properly" – "Oh, Alice would have loved this" and it's great because it helps me to remember Mum in a very positive manner, and keeps her alive. And they do it for me too.[69]

This young woman has learned the value of a group bond and of sacrificial friendship, encouragement and even practical assistance. That was given when she and her father had difficulty preparing meals for themselves and one of the women talked them through a critical meal preparation problem with instructions on the phone. Ronelle herself became part of the support network for another young woman seeking employment – she tells me with great relish how one Monday evening group supplied the girl with job interview techniques so that they all rejoiced with her when she succeeded in getting a job. 'Each group at the table are very supportive of you', Ronelle continues, adding that the women at other tables are supportive as well. 'Even people you see once in a blue moon', she concludes, they tell you "If you need help don't forget we're here!"[70]

Other members were enthusiastic about the personal advantages of their branch. Yvonne Wilcock speaks about the benefits to all, but especially to women who may otherwise be isolated, and how it added a whole new dimension to their lives:

> It's the chattering going on outside but it's that sharing so willingly; I think for the older ones in particular it's been a wonderful thing, because they can go home and sit there and do their needlework. ... It fills in that time on their own at home instead of sitting there thinking about other things, they can be sitting there doing their embroidery.[71]

Yvonne also speaks about the enhancement of her own life through embroidery, that she finds it 'very relaxing – very relaxing'. As a member since 1969 and one who has felt it her duty 'to help out on the administration side', Yvonne has felt that the latter, too, has brought about learning: 'It's marvellous how you learn to think for others – how to make the decisions for the others – and that's what the committee's for, which is another education on the administration side'.[72] Learning how to run a meeting is an acquired skill she shares with many others to whom I have spoken, and as an accredited tutor, Yvonne has found her knowledge of her subject proven in her own mind. Attending tutors' meetings has been a further education for her:

> And going to their meetings, to the tutors' meetings at Headquarters, listening to other people, listening to how they solve problems with students, whether they're ones that are not understanding – how to be patient, and be persistent

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69 Ronelle Cook, Newcastle Branch Embroiderers' Guild NSW Inc., 20/2/2006.
70 Ronelle Cook.
71 Interview with Mrs Yvonne Wilcock, 20/2/2006.
72 Yvonne Wilcock.

> and persevere with them. It's been a – for me it's been a privilege – I've thoroughly enjoyed it.[73]

When I ask if her life has been broadened, Yvonne responds that she could now go out, with other groups as well as embroidery, and that she has overcome her diffidence as a country person to be in the city environment.

> ... life, I think, is an education no matter where you are, but it has helped me to be a part of a group, and given me confidence that I can go out to others.[74]

Finally, this talented woman is happy to give credit for her learning to another Guild tutor who has taught many women a beautiful technique, and with it history as well:

> With stumpwork – I give all credit to Jane Nicholas, to go into the history, and just to be with that lady, you learn the history of what they did – of embroidery years ago – by actually doing a small item.[75]

In response to my comment about her learning history as well, Yvonne extends her generosity of spirit to myself in adding to her learning:

> Yes – yes, by talking to you – this is something that I hadn't stopped to look at it that way. You are learning in a lot of different ways – the education of going through life, of different stages.[76]

All of the members to whom I spoke during my visit to the Newcastle Branch of the Embroiderers' Guild were enthusiastic about the role the women in their branch played in enhancing their lives through learning together and sharing knowledge and skills, and simply through friendship and support.

Much incidental learning can result from volunteering within the Embroiderers' Guild or in the Quilters' Guild, discussed below. By acting as a hostess at meetings, or at headquarters of either Guild, many opportunities for learning arise during the course of the day, whether from overheard lessons, answering the phone or through conversation. The same applies to those members who take on the task of being a 'white glove lady' at exhibitions to handle exhibits for visitors – the learning of techniques and social gains are inestimable.

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73 Yvonne Wilcock.
74 Yvonne Wilcock.
75 See, for example, Jane Nicholas, *The Complete Book of Stumpwork Embroidery,* Bowral, NSW, Sally Milner Publishing, 2005.
76 Yvonne Wilcock, 20/2/2006.

Quilters' Guild NSW Inc.

During the visit to the Quilters' Guild headquarters when I spoke with Mrs Lynn Hewitt, she told me of the benefits in personal growth and companionship that she has seen during her membership, and I quote from my journal entry for the day:

> Lynn reiterated what she told me when I first met her, that quilting has become therapy and forms a support group for many women. She said that people come to Guild meetings and workshops for all sorts of reasons, and that she has heard it said "I married him for better or for worse, but not for lunch", so that time during the day is a woman's own if her husband is retired. Many women stay back after Guild functions just to chat. A longtime member of the Guild, who I knew when I was a member years ago, had lost her husband the previous weekend and Lynn was preparing to send out contact information so that people could send condolences. Lynn said that there is a community aspect to the Guild and that it is definitely a learning community. Every first Friday of the month a member shows her quilts and the members in attendance all ask questions and discuss the work. The city office is the 'information headquarters.[77]

Members often contribute letters and articles to *The Template* about their personal experiences in groups, and many write of the value that participating in a group is to them personally. One member who visited an exhibition entitled 'The Power of One' staged by a group called 'Facets', writes:

> The energy that comes from working in a group can be a huge influence! When the dynamics of a group generate imagination and productive work, creative outcomes emerge. ... Desire is the fuel that draws these women together, to learn and contribute to the development of new skills. Their goal is to have fun, share techniques, and keep learning whilst sewing, beading, dyeing and experimenting with creative products. Cultural tours to gardens, rock pools, galleries in the Newcastle region are also important to regenerate and renew their inventiveness.[78]

The writer goes on to quote one of the women saying that 'the most interesting thing is how we use the skills we collect'. She closes by stating that this group is evidence of the 'huge benefit' of the five women 'reflecting and stimulating each other into creative action'.[79] From my own experience of such events, I would suggest that the women often may not be even aware of a conscious catalyst to creative inspiration, as it emerges from group interaction, conversation and external stimuli.

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77 Extract from personal journal entry of visit to Guild headquarters, 7/5/2008, recording conversation with Mrs Lynn Hewitt.

78 Pamela Priday, 'The Power of One: A story about a NSW group – the "Facets",' *The Template,* Vol.24, No.4, September, 2006, p.11.

79 Pamela Priday, 'The Power of One'.

Sometimes the camaraderie of the group, as well as the love of the craft, can lead to a radical life change as it did for Christine Lean, who opened a quilt shop with a friend. Her experience of quilting groups is positive and the women of the group are important to her, she writes. They meet to stitch, but 'most of all we talk and we listen'. She writes of quilting and its groups:

> We come from all walks of life but our common thread is quilting. We support each other and we think beyond ourselves and in a world which is increasingly more selfish, community gatherings are more important.[80]

She concludes her article by enthusing about the richness that has come into her life since she decided to make one of the most difficult designs of all, a Baltimore quilt she called 'I Must Have Been Crazy', for her first attempt at a quilt:

> Quilters are a fortunate group of like minded individuals that are a family and our lives are full of creativity, colour and friendship. From that first quilt, my life has changed and become richer because of the wonderful quilters and their families who have become a great part of my life. Sometimes I think I must have been crazy to make a Baltimore as my first quilt, but actually I prefer to think I was really most fortunate![81]

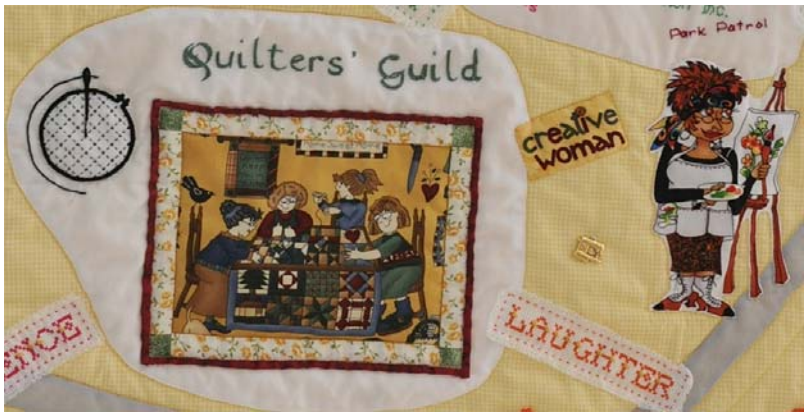

Fig 7. The Quilters' Guild demonstrates the importance of the group for learning in creative organisations. Logo copyright, used by permission of Quilters' Guild NSW Inc.

There are many similar stories in *The Template,* and to be heard in any quilt group or workshop. The Quilters' Guild holds an annual weekend away, and two accounts of these events are equally enthusiastic about the warmth, the friendship and the learning that ensues. The writers of both agree in urging fellow members to join the weekend the following year to enjoy, as one writes, the 'camaraderie that having shared interests brings'.[82] Another writer,

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80 Christine Lean, 'I Must Have Been Crazy – Then again maybe not ... ', *The Template,* Vol.26, No.3, June 2008, p.24.

81 Christine Lean. A Baltimore Quilt is one which features a large number of intricate applique designs, from a tradition in Baltimore in the United States of America.

82 Dawn Richter, 'Tumbarumba', *The Template,* Vol.25, No.3, June 2007, p.20.

about an earlier but similar weekend, relates the activities of the time away and the way that the women helped each other to complete 'UFO's' (UnFinished Objects). She writes '(t)he quilting fraternity is one of friendship, fellowship, caring and sharing, as particularly experienced by (the member with UFOs)'.[83]

Mothers' Union

Many members of MU might express similar feelings about their organisation to those expressed by the Quilters' Guild member above. Certainly the African members were outspoken in the event related below by one of my interviewees.

The worldwide organisation of Mothers' Union has until recently held a World Council every ten years to coincide with the Lambeth Conference of Anglican archbishops and bishops in England. Betty Chiswell relates a little of her experience of attending the Council in 1978, 1988 and 1998 while her husband was bishop of the Diocese of Armidale, on the northern tablelands of NSW. A motion put at the 1998 Council brought a dramatic response from the African women, who constituted a two-thirds majority in the meeting:

> ... there was a motion put up by New Zealand or somewhere ....that we change the name of Mothers Union; it was too old hat and it should be changed to something else. Well! The Africans rose up in fury about it and they voted as a block; two thirds voted – no, more than that, voted – 'We cannot change Mothers Union, it is important words' – you know. And when the vote went through, I'll never forget, the whole auditorium, and there were 500 of us there, rose – the Africans and the others from other countries, rose and they started dancing and singing – that Mothers Union didn't change its name – they wouldn't let it happen.[84]

Betty did not mention what the alternative name might have been, but that response from the African members was a learning experience to the members from the Western world about the passion that their organisation could engender in their sisters. My interpretation from the response of the auditorium at the meeting and from the way that Betty spoke is that it inspired some of the same passion in the non-African women present.[85]

In spite of the reaction by the African women, the future of MU did not seem to me to be positive after hearing what Betty had to say about the Armidale area and the increasing age of the members, so I asked her if she had any thoughts about the future of women's

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[83] Pam Russell, 'Weekend Away', *The Template: Magazine of the Quilters Guild of NSW Inc.,* Vol.22, No.1, p.19.

[84] Interview with Mrs Betty Chiswell, 1/8/2006.

[85] Betty Chiswell.

organisations in the church. Her answer is interesting and probably relevant to any women's organisation, whether in the church or secular:

> I think they've got to be very flexible, they've got to be culturally appropriate in whatever they do, they probably have to be at times that suit people – people have families and jobs; they're already doing two things, most young women are, any age people seem to have so many more involvements these day; I know I do, myself, and I'm retired.[86]

Betty then refers to her own involvement with St Peter's Cathedral in Armidale, where she and her husband remain active. Of women's organisations, she continues 'I don't think they'll ever die out because women love to get together, and whether it's a formal or informal thing (they will)'.[87]

Mary Coyne has been a member of MU for decades and during that time has held many executive positions in the organisation, including that of editor of *Mia Mia.* While speaking with Mary it is impossible not to see the affection she has for her organisation and the passion of her view that it still has so much to offer young mothers, if they could only grasp that for themselves. In our first conversation she told me that from the very beginning, as a mother of young children, she 'found the network of daily prayer for all MU members around the world a great support and encouragement'.[88] As well, Mary found that meeting other women from different areas around Sydney also widened her horizons.

Christine Jensen is the wife of Dr Peter Jensen, the Anglican Archbishop of Sydney. At the time of interview Christine was the patron of MU in the Sydney Diocese, but she has since agreed to accept the position of President despite her already busy life. As a person in the public arena she was obviously careful in her response to my questions and revealed little of her personal views and feelings. However, she is enthusiastic about the role she could play in encouraging women in various ministries in the Anglican Church, including MU.

> I think it's beneficial to me not to be remote from where people are in parishes, …I see that as a good thing to do. Um, and to go to Mothers' Union meetings when I'm invited and to see those Godly women, who've been Christians for a long time – that's very humbling. ... I think with Mothers' Union, that for me was an interest – was a steep learning curve, really, in a way, and (to) see people are very passionate for it, well – for thinking – for the way it encourages women and family life … I really appreciated that.[89]

Christine goes on to explain something of the cultural changes within both the church and the wider society which are contributing to the dwindling support for MU in western society. She

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86 Betty Chiswell.
87 Betty Chiswell.
88 Conversation with Mary Coyne, 27/10/2006.
89 Interview with Mrs Christine Jensen, President, Mothers' Union, Sydney Diocese, 30/8/2006.

tells me that there were no 'gender-specific groups' like women's Bible studies in churches in MU's early days, and so Mothers' Union was a way for women to get together and share their own particular needs and problems. She believes that 'people are now more parish-focused – and wider-focused' and that groups like MU have to work really hard, and that they 'struggle to get membership'. Christine concludes the interview by saying that, because of the entry of so many young women into the workforce, groups like MU would have to try to capitalise on women 'in their fifties plus', although as time goes on that would be difficult because of the length of time women would have been working. What women's ministry leaders in the Anglican church are trying to do, Christine says, is 'to encourage women to be the women God wants them to be, in the situation they're in', and further, the aim of Women's Ministry in the Anglican Church, including MU and its outreaches:

> is to encourage women to be able to give an answer for the hope they have within them; now that will happen in different ways, so that if people – not that they'll all get up and speak in a public meeting, but they'll be able, in conversation, as they meet certain circumstances, like suffering, or spirituality that's in our community or dealing with the generation of people or just being part of their school community or um, whatever community they're part of, to be able to express their faith in Jesus, … in a way that's part of them and – you know – they can share that, so that people can know.[90]

As Christians that encouragement of individuals and groups includes personal as well as spiritual growth. This aim is not new, however, as a Diocesan newsletter for MU in 1977 refers to a retreat having been 'inspiring and uplifting'.[91]

For Glad Norman, reminiscing on her 100th birthday, just being a member of a group is not enough. She tells of how much she has learned throughout her long membership of MU, especially when she observed the 'fortitude of the women from the poorer countries' at worldwide MU meetings like the 1976 Centenary Celebration. She writes that 'one of the very powerful lessons I learned from this experience was that it is not just our little group that we need to support'. She insists that it was 'not about sitting back', but to reread and put into practice the 'aims and objectives set out by Mary Sumner (the founder); they haven't gone out of date'.[92]

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[90] Interview with Christine Jensen, 30/8/2006.
[91] Lorna Oates, Sydney Diocesan MU Secretary, Newsletter No.89, 3/2/1977.
[92] Glad Norman, 'Families still need help', *Mia Mia,* Vol.90, No.2, Winter 2006, pp.20-21.

Catholic Women's League

The interview I held with three women jointly responding to my questions about Catholic Women's League was, as I have said earlier, coloured with the enthusiasm and emotions of the women. Catherine McGrath, relatively new in the position of State President after six months, is a gentle, self-effacing woman who at one point becomes so emotional about her sense of inadequacy for the role that she is overcome and cannot continue for a while. When I ask her how she feels she had learned from CWL, she responds that she has learned so much, even just using the six months of her position as an example. The Sydney Diocese President (of the Catholic Diocese, not to be confused with the Anglican Diocese), Moya Potts, interjects with her own praise of Catherine's handling of her challenging role, noting that she had come into the position 'a little tentatively', to which Catherine adds her agreement. Moya continues about Catherine:

> She conducted her first meeting with the State Council in February, which had representation of all dioceses representatives at that meeting, and conducted it with great dignity and competence – but also with an undertone of her humour and her easygoing attitude. And I think that created a very nice atmosphere for the members ... So, I admire her greatly because it's no mean feat to come into an organisation on that level and – and acquaint with all those people from the dioceses.[93]

Moya's admiration confirms the learning that Catherine expresses as having taken place in her life. Much of what the women have to say is applicable to the communal subject of the following chapter. However, it is clear from their enthusiasm and their discussion of the activities of the organisation that the members and the executive learn about current issues through the lobbying of the organisation at local, state, national and international levels, with some being involved in letter-writing to achieve that end. All of the women speak of the challenges of leading the organisation and the wide range of learning they see as possible.

CWCI and KYB

Cecily Jackson, National President of CWCI Australia at the time I interviewed her, sees spiritual growth as evident in KYB classes:

> Well I think that – basically, I don't think one can study the Scriptures without some sort of change coming about, because it's everything that we study is so related to how we are as people and how we relate to our Creator. Yeah, it – it's I suppose it is possible to read it all and just have it on an intellectual level, but

[93] Interview with Catholic Women's League members, including Mrs Catherine McGrath, Mrs Moya Potts & Mrs Chris McKirdy, 19/7/2007.

> certainly I have found that most people – I use the word 'grow' – which is probably a bit of Christian jargon but – they do grow in their faith and understanding of what life is all about as they study the Bible through the KYB method.[94]

Listening to speakers at conferences and other CWCI events is, in Cecily's view, also a form of education. As well, Cecily shares that in her own KYB group the women meet for morning tea prior to the study 'and just share what's going on in our lives, and that's really important'. She continues that she sees change in her life:

> When I look back to what I was like – say 20 years ago I was most uncomfortable about getting up front or speaking into a microphone. In terms of that I've gone ahead in leaps and bounds – because I'm quite – I suppose confident is really the word – to do that sort of thing now. I've learnt a huge amount about the Bible in the 20 odd years that I've been going to KYB.[95]

Cecily sees her learning as in both practical areas and in spiritual growth, so that she feels that she has developed leadership skills, but at the same time felt inadequate to take on the position of President of the National Management Board:

> I felt that without God's help there was no way that I was going to be able to do it, and a year down the track I have been able to do it, but I'm very much aware that it's God that's supplying it all along the way – He's supplying the skills as they are needed.[96]

Cecily sees fulfilling the duties of her position as a daily challenge, but at the other end of the scale Leonie Morrow, a KYB group leader, relates how she sees women achieve practical skills in the group through acceptance:

> By being in a group and gaining confidence in things that they think that they can't do – like reading – there have been women who have been very poor readers … and just being in a group where there are other women who aren't fantastic readers but they're happy to read and sharing answers – you know we don't always stick to 'the Bible says and this is the answer' you know it gets on to things like kids – you know – and just being able to talk things through.[97]

Leonie speaks of the way women gain the confidence to pray aloud in the group, more challenging than reading aloud, and how this in turn leads to getting to know each other, supporting each other both inside and outside the group. This mutual support is a strong feature in women's affirmation of Christian organisations. Jean Raddon, the founder of the KYB arm of CWCI, also refers to it, in particular to the support that she says 'helped and encouraged' women in isolated regions who are the target of the 'Safaris' which CWCI city women make

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94 Interview with Mrs Cecily Jackson, 7/2/2006.
95 Interview with Cecily Jackson, 7/2/2006.
96 Cecily Jackson.
97 Interview with Leonie Morrow, 19/9/2006.

several times a year.[98] Jean remembers how CWCI had helped her in her own life, as a single woman, not to be lonely, in addition to the spiritual encouragement. She says in her humorous way that she would have liked to have married, but the only man who ever asked her was 'bald and boring!' However, she looks back on her life and realises 'that I would never have been able to do all that I have done if I had been married. And that's a sort of comfort to my heart'. When I respond that she had been able to perhaps be a greater blessing to women because of having been single, Jean continues:

> And I think that the encouraging thing is bringing home to women the power of the Bible for us all, whether we're single, married or divorced – or whatever. And I s'pose that's been one of the most encouraging things to me in CWCI.[99]

Another thing which Jean felt was important that she had learned over the years of speaking at CWCI events was about time. 'You ask a man to speak for 30 minutes, he invariably goes for 40!' she declares, and affirms that she speaks for 30 minutes when asked to speak for that length of time. She was in no doubt that women could teach as well as men, even though men thought they were 'the bee's knees and the cat's whiskers'![100] With such wonderful humour and clear sense of purpose, it is not surprising that Jean was deeply mourned by the church when she passed away in 2008.

What these three women have to say about learning in CWCI and KYB confirms that learning in a women's organisation, especially this one, cannot be confined within a category. Each of their interviews reveals the crossing of boundaries between all categories of learning, with many women evidencing transformation and emancipation, even in literacy.

Christian Women's Organisations as Learning Communities

Christian organisations use conferences as a means of educating their members in the process of spiritual and personal growth, as well as reaching out to draw new women into their faith and their organisation. These events promote identity as part of the group, in the same way as secular organisations do in their annual conferences, as well as enhancing the individual's sense of belonging. This is another area where I have found it difficult to select a theoretical area by which to define this learning. While I place it here in the chapter which deals with transformative learning for individuals, it applies equally well to the next chapter. The changed life of an individual influences her organisation and her society, because properly

[98] Interview with Miss Jean Raddon, 31/1/2006.
[99] Interview with Jean Raddon, 31/1/2006.
[100] Jean Raddon.

absorbed emotional and spiritual learning will always make a difference to the way a person relates to her wider community.

Welton refers to the Christian religion as a whole as a 'transformative learning community sharing a common life and attuned to the least of God's creatures'. He emphasises the ideas and work of Paulo Friere as being rooted in Freire's Christian faith, a fact usually ignored by the academic community.[101] Personal development has been observed and discussed by adult educators for more than half a century as a factor in planning programs, according to Courtenay.[102] Yet, as in the case of Freire given above, faith development is ignored despite having similar origins in the individual.[103]

As well as consolidating identity with the organisation, conferences in this context educate women in the faith and promote spiritual growth in the individual. CWCI exists mainly to promote conferences for women, apart from its Know Your Bible ministry, but the other Christian women's organisations researched in this study also hold major statewide or regional events and conferences.

Salvation Army Women's Ministries is the oversight for all women's activities in the Army, as well as those Women's Home League branches still operating under the name. An issue of the magazine *Women In Touch*, the quarterly journal for Salvation Army Women's Ministries, outlines several major regional events held in 2007, the centenary year of Women's Home League, (also the 125th anniversary of Salvation Army in Sydney). Self esteem and personal Christian ministry were the themes of all of the events, with the theme reflected in the striking décor at a central NSW event.

Major Coral Hodges, who I had interviewed the previous year, was the guest speaker at the Newcastle and Central NSW Division's Regional Women's Celebration, attended by 142 women in 2007 (specific date not given). The theme, *Be A Star,* was emphasised in the decoration of blue with silver stars. Major Hodges spoke on the Bible verse 'among the people of the world you shine like stars in the heavens' to illustrate the theme.[104] The unnamed writer reports that in her message, Major Hodges 'reminded those present that to shine as stars we

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[101] Michael Welton, 'Seeing the Light: Christian Conversion and Conscientization', in P. Jarvis & N. Walters (eds), *Adult Education and Theological Interpretations,* Malabar, Florida, Krieger Publishing Company, 1993, 105-123.

[102] Bradley Courtenay, 'Personhood—Personal and Faith Development', in Jarvis & Walters, *Adult Education and Theological Interpretations,* pp.153-170(153-4).

[103] Courtenay, 'Personhood'.

[104] Verse from the Holy Bible, Philippians 2:15b; 'Stars shine at women's celebration: Newcastle and Central NSW Division', *Women In Touch,* Volume 8, Issue 3, September 2007 p.16.

must be children of God without fault so that our lights shine brightly making a difference in the midst of the sin that we are surrounded with today'.[105]

In our interview, Coral Hodges tells about the importance of events in the lives of women in the Salvation Army and her excitement from her own observations:

> There's specific events that happen in our organisation that bring a lot of spiritual results for women and growth in the life of the women and there's particular functions that we have throughout the year that I see the development of women on those occasions, so that's really exciting to just see what's happening with women out and about.[106]

A further report outlines another division's celebration to commemorate the centenary of Home League's commencement in Britain. Spiritual growth was not the only educative element of that event as the work of the Army overseas was shown. The theme of light and darkness was used by the speaker to give insight into the work at a camp in Zimbabwe, and in self-help groups in Eastern India. Later in the meeting a description of the work of each Home League and focus group was given and the writer concludes by reporting that 'We each left with the challenge to do our part in "lighting up the darkness".'[107] Thus the women at these meetings gained not only opportunities of spiritual learning, but practical knowledge of needs in developing countries. As well, the group was consolidated and each member encouraged through the sharing of information about the activities of branches.

Quota International

I have previously referred to the Quota member and leader, Gloria Cook, and her valuing of rules and by-laws as essential to daily life in the community as well as the smooth running of organisations.[108] In that same interview she gave an amusing illustration around garbage collection:

> If you want to live in society, in this house; if the Council says "if you put your garbage bin out on Thursday night, in the early hours of Friday morning, I'll come by and empty it." If I'm going to say "Don't you think you can tell *me* when to put my garbage bin out; I'll put my garbage (she bangs on the table) bin out when *I* want to – " Well by the next early hours of Friday morning its going to be quite unpleasant, isn't it, sitting out on the footpath, waiting for the local council garbage man to come and pick it up for me. There are certain rules we all have to abide by, even basic though they be.[109]

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105 'Stars Shine', *Women In Touch*.
106 Interview with Major Coral Hodges, 13/8/2006.
107 'Lighting up the darkness: ACT and South NSW Division', *Women In Touch,* p.16.
108 Interview with Mrs Gloria Cook of Quota International, 10/7/2007.
109 Gloria Cook.

Prior to this clip, Gloria had been speaking of cooperation in organisations about meeting times and the importance of that cooperation, which she began teaching to the children in the pre-school of which she was a director for many years. While hers may be an elementary example, it serves to demonstrate the way we can gain understanding from the simplest of actions in community. Women's organisations are each a community, with their branches, chapters and clubs microcosms of the whole of society. The very formality of rules, which can become onerous if over-imposed, are nevertheless able to impart incidental learning to the members which may enhance their everyday lives, even in something as simple as the reason for punctuality as an honouring of others and an accommodation of practical living.

June Young has also had significant involvement in Quota for many years. I asked her 'if you could tick off on your fingers what you think you have learned just from being involved in Quota the way you have, what would you put as headings in a list?' She replied:

> I would put first and foremost, the caring, of sharing of women around the world for one another. And I've proved that with this operation. They care so much about everybody and they extend themselves past reality to try and make life easier for people. And you can't always do that – but *they're trying*. I mean, they don't shut the door and pull the shutters down and that's what service people do – they, they, they understand that not everybody is equal and that lots of people need a bit of a helping hand.[110]

I pressed June for further examples of how she felt *she* had learned as a Quota member and she responded by expressing her disappointment at her perception of the narrow views of some people:

> I think – the thing that sometimes upsets me is that some people still have preconceived ideas of different cultures and not only different cultures but also different relationships. You know, the gay community and things like that, and there's still so many prejudices out there from people you wouldn't expect.[111]

On a more positive note, June continued that she had learned that everybody could make a difference, could just roll up their sleeves and 'get out there and do it'. She insisted that no one should ever miss an opportunity to get involved.

> Don't sit back in the background and say "Oh, let Joe Blow do it". Say, "Look, I'll have a go and Joe Blow might help me.[112]

June sees negative repercussions in this kind of activity - this kind of person – in that it may limit social opportunities:

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[110] Interview with Mrs June Young, 11/6/2007.
[111] June Young.
[112] June Young.

> You don't make friends because they all think "Oh, she's pushy and, you know, she's up front", but if you don't take that step forward; there's a lot of people that won't take the step forward; once you take the step forward you can give it to somebody else and they'll keep it going.[113]

The recent extra inclusiveness in Quota provides opportunity for women (and very few men) to come from a wider spectrum of society to become involved as membership has become more open, according to June:

> You don't have to be a business person or you don't have to have qualifications, you can be a little lady who wants to come and knit some outfits to go to the Biafrans or something. Now that person is equal in every way. But that person may not have the confidence to say, "Oh, why can't we do this or that." But if you can just egg them along or lead them along, and get them in their own little way to make that first step, they open up like a rose and that person might go further than all the people with all the qualifications under the sun.[114]

Clearly both women have learned much more and gained in personal growth more than they specifically state in response to my questions at the interview. The anecdote above shows they have learned from long experience in leadership how they can encourage members to discover their own abilities and make use of them. That they are also willing to share their own learning with their friends and fellow members in the organisation is obvious from the above. However, whether these women are innately generous in that way or whether they have gained that quality through incidental learning in their organisation would be impossible to discern within the parameters of this research.

On a simpler level, the members of Sydney City's Quota Club keep a 'Message Book', a notebook in which inspirational quotes are written by members and shared at the meetings. Such quotes may encourage a measure of personal growth, like that when I visited: "A smile is a curve that straightens things out".[115]

Zonta International

The Zonta members I interviewed and those I met were all enthusiastic in their advocacy of their organisation and what it had to offer to its members and to those they sought to assist and benefit through their service. Dr Mary Jane Mahony, a member of the Sydney Breakfast Club who is also an adult educator, spoke of the many different areas of learning for women through Zonta. She was so passionate about her organisation that she began the interview with a request to 'please stop me if I go on too long, because we're talking about

[113] June Young.
[114] June Young.
[115] Visit to Sydney City Quota Club meeting, 7/5/2008.

things that are very important to me'. She refers first to education about local and international issues, and then 'there's the education of ourselves'. The goal of Zonta is advancing the status of women, and in Mary Jane's view what we can do 'to improve ourselves' is part of that aim. She feels that she has found her membership 'socially refreshing' in being able to expand her world from the 'narrow society' of the university sector in which she works – 'it's satisfying I've made good friends in my current club', she says.[116]

Sometimes the stories of speakers can touch a raw nerve when listeners hear of the experiences of women who have been in difficult situations. One woman, a member, spoke about trafficking in women, and Mary Jane says of that:

> that's the contribution that she particularly makes I wouldn't have known (about) – it's one thing to see it on TV – it's another to hear someone tell their story. When we have a conference... people coming in to tell stories of various kinds, you learn a lot from real people at all levels.[117]

Zonta has guest speakers on a regular basis to learn about issues that are related to the women's concerns as an organisation. Those speakers vary widely, and I was present at a meeting where the three speakers were the winner and runners-up of the Young Women in Public Affairs Award, about which I wrote in Chapter Two. The young women were inspiring, as Isabel Pollard says of earlier winners when she says that her life is enhanced by what she learns about community:

> just to hear those girls speak is so encouraging. It is *so* encouraging. We had them just a couple of weeks ago and they're so inspiring and that just doesn't – it doesn't just stay in Armidale. We had the runner-up was from Inverell High School – so we spread that around the community. I guess things like that, I've just found it so encouraging to hear what young people do – what young women do – their desires for women.[118]

The Armidale Club is very active in the community, making an award to a woman they select as Woman of the Year, as well as holding a special dinner for a selected cohort of women in the community such as Women in Education, about which I will write in Chapter Six. Isabel refers to the different needs that are met through Zonta Club membership, and speaks of her own enjoyment:

> Well, I think for me the reason that I really benefit so much from being in Zonta is that I come in contact with people I would not normally – in my everyday life – come in contact with so I'm meeting different professional women that I wouldn't normally meet – and then you form friendships and it's been a

[116] Interview with Dr Mary Jane Mahony, 16/2/2006.
[117] Mary Jane Mahony.
[118] Interview with Mrs Isabel Pollard, 24/3/2006.

> wonderful opportunity to learn about what the other professional women do and you know – that's what I've appreciated.[119]

Sometimes there are personality conflicts, about which more than one Zonta member spoke. One anonymous former Zonta member who left years ago told me that she saw status as being very important to many members, who often just used the club for networking and self-promotion. She was present when the club to which she belonged rejected the application of a would-be member because the members considered her to be 'not like the other members, not one of their kind'.[120]

While noting that she sometimes saw negative responses in meetings, Rosemary Johnson, a Zonta executive at Area level at the time of speaking, told me that 'Knowing procedures to use effectively can prevent arguments and personal attacks, and makes for a happy, achieving club or group'.[121] She was very positive about the personal benefits of Zonta for herself:

> I really think Zonta has changed my life, as a slow, ongoing process. It depends how much you put into anything, as to what you get out what of it. ... The more education I get from both Zonta and the other women, the better chance it gives me as a Zontian to fulfil my wishes to achieve results for the women of our world.[122]

Rosemary went on to tell me that she joined Zonta to 'befriend the caring, forward thinking, community minded, and empowered group of women who were achieving for their community in Armidale'. At the time, she said, she had not even considered that she, as one of them, 'could make a difference in other parts of the world'.[123]

Self-esteem is of enormous importance, according to Helen Gee, who attended an international Zonta conference in Melbourne shortly before our interview. At the conference, she tells me, the object of improving self-esteem was added to the bylaws because 'if you're going to improve the status of women there has to be self-esteem'. At the local level, Helen tells me that women were encouraged to be office bearers even if they didn't see themselves as taking on that responsibility. The secretary at the time, 'a fairly self-effacing person', was 'just fabulous at writing letters', which Helen sees as a personal skill rather than secretarial. In her own life, Helen believes she has learned collaborative and listening skills by being a Zonta

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119 Isabel Pollard.
120 Conversation with anonymous former Zonta member.
121 Conversation with Mrs Rosemary Johnson, Zonta Area 8 Director and member of District 24 Board, 11/7/2007.
122 Rosemary Johnson.
123 Email from Rosemary Johnson.

member.[124] The skills of which Helen speaks are more likely to be acquired through incidental learning than through attending a class. They can lead to social action and emancipation of the individual, perhaps preparing women for leadership in their organisations.

Conclusion

Membership in the organisations included in the research provides numerous opportunities to learn in ways that are not actively taught by the organisations or deliberately appropriated by the women themselves. Meetings, workshops and classes, and even social events, are learning opportunities for the women participating as they communicate with each other. The members are not only acquiring new knowledge, they are learning social skills and developing their own identities, often transformatively. As they gain self-understanding and spiritual growth through incidental and other learning they are increasing their potential for self-improvement, gaining life skills and learning to interact effectively with others, both the women who comprise their learning community and their wider circle of family, friends and acquaintances. While there are negative experiences as in any area of human life, most of these hindrances to learning can be overcome by the group.

Women who have experienced transformation through learning are likely to influence the lives of other members with whom they come in contact, thus providing similar learning opportunities for others. Through their learning they have gained the confidence to be leaders and to help their organisations in their efforts to create a better world. My research has shown that the members of every organisation in the study have significant opportunity to learn throughout the activities they attend in their organisation, and from that to gain personal growth, whether in a secular or a church organisation. The examples I have given in this chapter have shown how important it is to the women to be able to communicate and build friendships through their membership, as well as to experience increased self-confidence. As these women achieve their own personal growth through learning in their organisations, they then reach out individually and as an organisation to enrich the wider community, as I will show in the following chapter.

[124] Interview with Mrs Helen Gee, 31/7/2006.

Chapter Six

Expanding Worlds – Part Two

Women's Organisations Making a Difference in Society

Women's organisations are founded because of perceived needs, either of the women themselves, or of those they see in their own or another community. Each of the organisations selected for the purpose of this study has at least some element of altruism in its outlook. By their membership in any of the organisations in this study, the women are learning about the needs existing in the community and in the wider world, as well as bringing about learning in those in the outside community associated through the outreach. Together they constitute a learning community by their focus on their joint interests and their efforts to transform and improve themselves and the world around them. This chapter shows the way that these women's organisations make a difference to society by putting into action the learning they have gained through their organisations.

As well as their own personal growth, women have in many cases through their organisations also changed their communities near and far and even changed the lives of women and children in the wider world. Barr writes of this interactive nature of women, their learning and the community:

> Adult education and feminism are enlightenment projects. Both rest on the belief that people can develop better understandings and knowledge of themselves and their social world and that they can act to transform them.[1]

This concept of a wider vision, often on a global scale, is especially true for several of the organisations in the study. Members of CWA contribute to and are involved in Associated Country Women of the World (ACWW), an international organisation for rural women which assists women in the developing world.[2] The two service organisations, Quota and Zonta, have programs to assist women in the developing world and MU also has a worldwide vision as well as focusing on needy women close to home. After writing the heading of this chapter I realised that I was inspired by the thematic title of the CWA of NSW State Conference I attended in Jindabyne in 2007. That title was "Women Making a Difference" and reflects the ethos of CWA as an organisation, and that of most of its members. Their achievements in their communities not only educate the women themselves as they prepare and carry them out, but

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1 Jean Barr, 'Women, adult education and really useful knowledge', in J. Crowther, I. Martin and M. Shaw (eds), *Popular Education and Social Movements in Scotland Today,* Leicester, NIACE, 1999, pp.70-82 (76).

2 See website of ACWW at http://www.acww.org.uk

also the onlookers and beneficiaries of their service. The learning taking place through these activities is inestimable in its flow-on effect, as others have noted. It is important to emphasise again, however, that in these, as in all of the organisations, there are always members who have joined only to satisfy their own social needs.

Members of the church organisations researched vary. Some now function mainly as social groups with a strong component of spiritual outreach, which may be referred to by some as proselytising, a term which, as a Christian myself, I find pejorative and distasteful. However, these organisations did do 'hands on' charity work in the past and continue to do so in a smaller way. Others, most especially the Salvation Army Home League and its oversight, the Army's Women's Ministries, continue to work actively to help women in need, often coming in close contact with the needy. CWA works in both arenas, as a social justice organisation to assist rural women, while also providing leisure activities and instruction in a similar, but smaller, way to the Embroiderers' and Quilters' Guilds. The learning taking place within them all varies, but it always takes place where women meet together, as I have shown.

Aspin, Collard and Chapman write of what they see as the necessary expansion of the concept of lifelong learning from education presented as 'the achievement of an extrinsic goal', to perceiving it instead as:

> an intrinsically valuable activity, something that is good in and for itself. From this perspective the aim is to enable those engaged in learning, not merely to arrive at a new place but 'to travel with a different view'. The (learners) would be enriched by having their view of the world continually expanded and transformed by the increasing varieties of educational experience and cognitive achievements (offered) for their illumination and enrichment throughout their lives.[3]

The above authors later praise a Victorian state government report which recognises that 'adult learners are in a process of personal transformation (that) has a flow-on effect to their interpersonal relationships and to the multiple communities in which they move'.[4] In the transformational process of self, the illumination and enrichment of which Aspin et al speak, the learner usually includes others in the expansion of her world, seeing needs beyond her own and using her newly discovered inner resources to reach out to those others.

Many women's organisations use their combined power to make a difference beyond their own limitations. Two major combined, or 'umbrella' organisations include several bodies in this study in their corporate membership. One of these is the National Council of Women

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3 D. Aspin, J. Collard & J. Chapman, 'Lifelong learning in Australia', in J. Field & M. Leicester (eds), *Lifelong Learning: Education across the lifespan,* London, Routledge Falmer, 2000, pp.171-190 (172).

4 Aspin et al, 'Lifelong learning in Australia', p.185.

(NCW), which began at the time of the suffragist movement as a political organisation aimed at the emancipation of women, especially regarding the right to vote. NCW is still active politically, and is also now an umbrella organisation which counts in its membership some less politically active women's organisations. The website of the National Council of Women of Australia states:

> NCWA is a national non-government umbrella organization with broadly humanitarian and educational objectives, which seeks to raise the awareness of women to their rights and responsibilities as citizens and to encourage the participation of women in all aspects of community life.[5]

At a meeting of the Council in 1921 Lady Rachel Forster, the wife of the Governor-General of Australia, was the guest speaker. In her speech she is reported as saying, in describing the Council of Women, that

> The primary object was a body of women who were banded together for counsel and advice; to gain joint sympathy and enthusiasm. The status of women had improved greatly during the last 30 years. Those who were benefiting by the present advantages should remember that power meant responsibility. "If we are to justify this acquisition of power we must feel that we are worthy of the great responsibility it involves; and if we are to be worthy of the responsibility we must try to educate ourselves." Power was so often unwittingly misused, continued the speaker, because of lack of knowledge. …A woman should strive to be an educator, a mediator, and a peacemaker.[6]

Peacemaking and positive mediating continue to be the aim of NCW, but unfortunately they are not the aims of every woman in any organisation, and the actions of some who have an agenda of power, self-seeking or who are just emotionally needy people may cause problems in the group or in the whole organisation, as I discussed in the previous chapter.

The promotion of peace is a focus of the other umbrella organisation which is relevant to this study. Pan Pacific and South East Asia Women's Association (PPSEAWA) has several of the organisations in the study as corporate members, and some belong to both PPSEAWA and NCW. The main purpose of both organisations is to create a confederate body to more greatly empower lobbying of governments and the United Nations, to which they both have access, on behalf of women and children. Through this action they have had, and continue to have, a tremendous impact on the education and emancipation of women as a whole.

First, though, it is important to look at the way the individual women's organisations relate to their communities, to the wider society in which they operate and to the trust which

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5 National Council of Women Australia, http://www.ncwa.org.au/ Accessed online 15/4/2009.

6 N.C.W. At Home: Presentation to Miss Scott, 'Women's Column', *Sydney Morning Herald,* 1/6/1921, p.7.

they may or may not arouse among their fellow human beings. Social justice often emanates from transformative learning, discussed earlier in this thesis, and it is discussed briefly below.

Social Justice

Justice does not come naturally. Education is necessary in order to transmit the idea of justice in society and down through the generations, according to O'Neill. She links justice and virtue, seeing virtue necessary as a positive act of rejecting injury, indifference and neglect rather than a neutral state of being. I see the function of many women's organisations as promoting O'Neill's ideal of a social fabric built with confidence and trust through reformed and renewed 'special relationships, shared cultures and shared community'.[7] Furthermore, I contend that justice and virtue may be learned through participation in organisations whose constitutions, as well as their members, hold these values and share them in community.

Social justice features strongly, is even paramount, in many women's organisations. 'Women's participation' according to Marilee Karl, 'is changing the world in which we live by bringing new priorities and perspectives to the political process and the organization of society'.[8] This writer goes on to emphasise the importance of women's empowerment and their participation in politics through their community groups and organisations, and cites Arvonne Fraser, former director of the International Women's Rights Action Watch:

> Non-governmental organizations are the conscience of the body politic, whether they are providing social welfare services or advocating for changes in public policies. Civil societies cannot exist long without them because NGOs are a check on the power of governments. Every government needs to be held accountable by its citizens, and citizens acting together in non-governmental associations are far more powerful than individuals acting separately. NGOs also have the freedom to generate, test out and promote the adoption of new ideas, policies and programs.[9]

Australian women's organisations have been influencing governments for more than a century, most significantly in the achievement of franchise for women in Australia in 1902.[10] As I show in the section below dedicated to CWA, that organisation is continually lobbying for the welfare and rights of rural women and their families. Other organisations may not lobby their

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7 O. O'Neill, *Towards Justice and Virtue: A constructive account of practical reasoning,* Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1992, pp.202-3.

8 Marilee Karl, *Women and Empowerment: Participation and decision making,* London, Zed Books, 1995, p.1.

9 Cited in Karl, p.5.

10 See Audrey Oldfield, *Woman Suffrage in Australia: A gift or a struggle?,* Cambridge University Press, 1992, *passim.*

own government in quite the same way but they are exercising social justice by reaching out to their communities and beyond.

Women's Organisations and Social Capital

In recent years the concept of social capital has become a 'buzz word', although its meaning can be broad and is sometimes disputed. Put in the simplest terms, social capital is the result of cooperation in networks of relationships in communities of any kind and it has been widely discussed in some academic circles.

Citing Putnam, Leonard and Onyx write that 'social capital is necessary for a robust civil society and robust civil society is necessary for all economic development and stable government'.[11] Robert Putnam, an American academic, is the most prominent recent writer on social capital, through his publication in 1993 of research he had carried out in Italy.[12] Since that time, Putnam has published a major work on the loss of community life in America, but his observations in that work apply equally to the deterioration of social integration in Australia or indeed in any western nation.[13] Putnam writes of social capital:

> Social capital refers to connections among individuals – social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them. In that sense social capital is closely related to what some have called "civic virtue." The difference is that "social capital" calls attention to the fact that civic virtue is most powerful when embedded in a dense network of reciprocal social relations. A society of many virtuous but isolated individuals is not necessarily rich in social capital.[14]

Civic virtue is often expressed in the community through its organisations. These community groups have been the focus of social capital research in the way that they can strengthen community ties and provide bonding between individuals, whether those ties might be geographically or culturally based. Leonard and Onyx argue that social capital is 'at its most powerful when developed by and through formally constituted community organisations'.[15]

Social capital has been a cause for contention between academic social researchers and government departments. Amongst bureaucrats there is currently a desire to put a price on everything, whether economically definable or not, and community relationships is an area

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11 R. Leonard & J. Onyx, *Social Capital & Community Building: Spinning straw into gold,* London, Janus Publishing Co., 2004, p.6.

12 Cited in R. Leonard, 'A Qualitative Exploration of Women's Volunteering in Human Services', *Third Sector Review,* Vol.8, No.2, 2002, pp.31-50.

13 R.D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The collapse and revival of American community,* New York, Simon & Schuster, 2000.

14 Putnam, *Bowling Alone,* p.19.

15 Leonard & Onyx, *Social Capital & Community Building,* p.71.

which one would hope to be unassailable by economic rationalists. Unfortunately that is not so, and community organisations have lately been drawn into the web of government control by being included in calls for tendering of services. As a consequence, they are then obliged to comply with government demands for performance-based contracts and to report on volunteers and compliance to policy.[16] Lyons goes so far as to say that third sector organisations provide 'a cheap way of delivering government programs'.[17] Onyx and Leonard write that 'Even those radical feminists working in refuges and other women's services have inadvertently become agents of the state when they are diverted into lobbying into direct service delivery'.[18] I have not personally investigated the official method of using social capital, but I wonder if I am being too cynical in querying if economists use the concept to quantify the monetary value of a service and deduct it from their balance sheets. In the same way politicians might gain from the use of social capital in their campaigning for votes.

In this respect I would argue that the use of the CWA to distribute funds (which were not at all generous) from the Howard Federal government for drought-affected farmers was simply a cynical vote-buying publicity exercise intended to promote public acceptance prior to a forthcoming election. It is hard to imagine most politicians nurturing a desire to help promote a women's organisation, and without a doubt the manoeuvre also considerably reduced the cost of bureaucratic administration. My view, then, is that the Australian government was utilising the 'social capital' of a respected organisation to achieve its own ends, whatever those ends may have been.

CWA is very similar in aims and ideals to the Women's Institute (WI), the British organisation which also has engendered respect and trust in its own country. Jackson has written of research that she has carried out on that organisation and the impact that education carried out by the organisation has on its members. She argues that the social relations represented by social capital are 'traditionally important aspects of women's lives and (the Women's Institute) enables the development of social capital for its members, with high levels of networks, norms and trust'.[19] Her findings would no doubt correspond to further research in similar organisations in Australia.

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16 J. Butcher, 'Government, the Third Sector and the Rise of Social Capital', *Third Sector Review,* Vol.12, No.1, 2006, pp.69-88.

17 Cited in Butcher.

18 Jenny Onyx & Rosemary Leonard, 'Women, Volunteering and Social Capital', in Jeni Warburton and Melanie Oppenheimer (eds), *Volunteers and Volunteering,* Sydney, Federation Press, 2000, pp.113-124.

19 S. Jackson, 'Jam, Jerusalem and Calendar Girls: Lifelong Learning and the Women's Institutes (WI)', *Studies in the Education of Adults,* Vol.38, No.1, 2006, pp.74-90.

Jackson's research also involves the relationship between social capital and learning, particularly lifelong learning. Field argues that 'civic engagement' may increase an individual's capacity to seek personal transformation through education, and cites a British study which found that two-thirds of respondents had been active in voluntary organisations. The author of the study concluded that 'active participation … increases an individual's perception of power and self-worth'. Another advantage found was reduced aversion to risks associated with return to schooling.[20]

My own reading of these findings is a link between social capital and the concept of transformative education. Thus, women participating in the voluntary organisations on which this study is focused may use the social capital, or building of trust, they derive from their involvement to transform their worldview and increase their knowledge. Field contends that 'people use their social capital to increase their access to learning', but I would argue that the benefits of belonging to a community organisation are far broader than simply learning, or gaining factual knowledge. Women gain social skills and emotional maturity from interacting with others in ways that they could not attain by remaining alone at home watching television.

Television-watching is a focus of Putnam's research, and he condemns it strongly for its adverse effect on community life and, consequently, social capital. He quotes the poet T.S. Eliot's observation in *New York Post* in 1963 that television is 'a medium of entertainment which permits millions of people to listen to the same joke at the same time, and yet remain lonesome'.[21]

Putnam continues that '(m)ore television watching means less of virtually every form of civic participation and social engagement'.[22] According to his study, television viewing cut individual activities like letter-writing by 10-15 per cent, but cut collective activities far more. The results of Putnam's own and other related surveys demonstrated that activities like attending public meetings or taking leadership roles in community organisations were reduced by 40 per cent through loss of time to electronic media. Putnam concludes that

> just as television privatizes our leisure time, it also privatizes our civic activity, dampening our interactions with one another even more than it dampens individual political activities.[23]

Leonard and Onyx remain sceptical about Putnam's insistence that television plays a dominant role in the loss of agency and sociability. They refer to empirical research by other researchers

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[20] J. Field, 'Civic Engagement and Lifelong Learning: Survey findings on social capital and attitudes towards learning', *Studies in the Education of Adults,* Vol.35, No.2, 2003, pp.142-156.
[21] Putnam, *Bowling Alone,* p.217.
[22] Putnam, p.228.
[23] Putnam, p.229.

to further their argument that people without the building blocks of social capital like trust would stay home anyway, even if television had not been invented. They see television as also contributing to social capital, as in work-based or social discussions of programs of common interest. 'Such discussions', they write, 'have an important role in shaping (people's) shared understanding or their social and political life'.[24]

As mentioned earlier, an important development for CWA in 2007 was the screening on ABC Television of the four-part documentary series *Not All Tea and Scones,* a program about CWA members and their organisation in NSW.[25] The documentary aroused considerable controversy among members as they felt that the title was a misnomer – in fact the programs *were* mostly 'tea and scones', focusing as they did on cookery judging above all other aspects of the organisation. Nonetheless, the series did bring about public interest in the organisation and new members joined as a consequence. There is nothing documented officially about this disquiet, perhaps in deference to the show's producers, but the women attending the 2007 conference had a lot to say between themselves. The negative view of the membership is interesting, because almost every time I have mentioned CWA to a member of the public the response has been: "I saw the program about CWA on the television". So the 'social capital' engendered by that series seems to me to be more positive in the public arena than the members themselves are aware.

Feminist theory has been utilised to evaluate the data gathered for this study and, in this case, to clarify the way that social capital benefits both the organisations and their wider communities. In relation to social life, Ryan and Connolly see feminist poststructural theory as having a 'strategic alliance' with other progressive social movements and as 'central to its value for community education'. They have written on their own findings from a study of women's community education in Ireland and its theoretical background:

> Feminist poststructuralism provides a radical framework for understanding the relation between people and the social world and for conceptualising social change. The structures and process of the social world are recognised as having a material force, a capacity to constrain, to shape, to coerce, *as well as to make possible individual action* (my emphasis).[26]

My own findings have been that the 'social world', including the networking of the wider organisation and the women who comprise the membership, makes possible the communal

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[24] Leonard & Onyx, *Social Capital & Community Building,* pp.40-41.
[25] Carmel Travers, *Not All Tea and Scones,* Purple Pictures, 2007.
[26] A.B. Ryan & B. Connolly, 'Women's Community Education in Ireland: The need for new directions towards 'really useful knowledge' ' in J. Thompson (ed), *Stretching the Academy: The politics and practice of widening participation in Higher Education,* London, NIACE, pp.94-110.

actions of those organisations to bring about social change. The significant element is that those structures and processes within organisations can, and often do, make possible the *individual action* of a woman who has learned that she has the power to change her own world one step at a time. In the cameos of each organisation below I am outlining a few projects undertaken by organisations for their communities, in order to show the way that they demonstrate the gaining of trust and respect of the organisation by the wider community.

CWA

Networking sometimes happens to a high degree between branches in CWA and between the local CWA branch and its surrounding local community, and this is clearly shown through the regular 'From our Branches' pages in *The Country Woman.* One report shows how the knowledge within a CWA branch can make a difference in a community. A letter in the magazine expresses appreciation for the outcome of the sharing of knowledge in a small town in western NSW:

> On behalf of the Tottenham Soccer Club we would like to thank the CWA for their contribution towards us receiving a grant for our Club, for which we received $1690 towards our trophies and to cover the costs of Presentation Day. Without our local CWA's knowledge of these grants, we would not have known they were available and where to apply. This has saved our Club a large sum as it is the major cost for the year, as most of our funds go to registration and insurance... Please pass on our appreciation to your members.[27]

The example quoted above involves the relationship of the CWA branch with just one other organisation in the community. Another report in the CWA magazine highlights the way that the local CWA branch can be a significant part of the community. The town of Tenterfield in northern NSW is fortunate to be able to support two CWA branches, one whose meetings are held in the daytime, and one for working women in the evenings. The report relates how both branches combined to participate in the planning and running of the Tenterfield Volunteers Expo, in which 40 organisations took part.[28]

The Sydney Group, known as Phillip Group, is reported in the same issue as being involved in an activity to assist Head Office to provide 'Material Aid' to women in Papua New Guinea. Groups collect items such as haberdashery, fabric and spectacles, and transport them to CWA Headquarters for distribution to women in needy areas, either rural women in NSW or

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[27] Lesley Hilham, 'Letters to the Editor', *The Country Woman,* Vol.49, No.01, February 2008, p.14.

[28] Helen Petrie, 'Tenterfield Evening Branch: Tenterfield Volunteers Expo', 'Branch News', *The Country Woman,* Vol.48, No.1, February 2007, p.32.

in Papua New Guinea.[29] The producer of the CWA documentary *Not All Tea and Scones*, says of her experience in meeting and filming CWA members:

> We formed wonderful friendships, and developed such admiration for the CWA. In many rural and regional communities the CWA is the heartbeat of the district. Without it, in some cases, there would be nothing.[30]

I experienced the outreach of CWA members personally while visiting my mother in her nursing home in the Blue Mountains. I noticed on a printed cloth label that the rug over her knees had been made by members of the Jervis Bay CWA Branch, hundreds of kilometres away on the south coast of NSW. I was able to telephone the secretary of the branch, Mrs Irene Wright, and had a brief conversation with her about the way her branch serves the community.[31]

Irene told me that the members, who number 65, had made nearly 80 rugs during 2008. These rugs are distributed to local hospitals, including the dialysis department at Shoalhaven Hospital, where patients have to sit for many hours while they receive their treatment. Excess rugs are sent to CWA Headquarters in Sydney, perhaps the source of the rug being used by my mother. As well as the rugs, Jervis Bay members make matinee sets for stillborn babies, trauma dolls for children in hospitals or involved in accidents, and beanies and gloves for elderly people being taken out in cool weather in the area.

The members of this very caring branch meet each week for craft and 'talk over a cup of tea'. Irene told me that the members 'help one another with problems or things they can't do – it's a good therapy session!' She quoted her husband as saying that "If only men would talk like women do there wouldn't be half the problems in the world that there are". This woman's commitment to her organisation is also demonstrated by the fact that she has attended seven consecutive State Conferences, sometimes travelling hundreds of kilometres across the state to attend. She was encouraged and delighted to have the feedback that her branch's contribution was benefiting a frail elderly woman so far away, and no doubt her pleasure was shared with the other members of the branch at the next meeting, if not before. [32]

While travelling to Victoria, my sister visited the Farmhouse Industries shop on the Hume Highway at Tarcutta, where she had a conversation with a CWA member which resulted

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[29] Andrea Pulford, 'Phillip Group: Packing Material Aid', 'Branch News', *The Country Woman,* Vol.48, No.1, February 2007, p.33.

[30] 'Not All Tea and Scones: ABC to broadcast documentary series about the CWA', *The Country Woman,* Vol.48, no.1, February 2007, p.9.

[31] Telephone conversation with Mrs Irene Wright, Secretary, Jervis Bay branch of CWA of NSW, 11/12/2008.

[32] Irene Wright.

in my being put in contact with Mrs Joy Granger, President of Tarcutta CWA branch and a former State Treasurer of CWA. Joy's branch produces and sells through the shop a local phone book, published annually for the convenience of local people. Despite being in a severely drought-stricken area, the branch members make rugs which they send to CWA Headquarters to be given to Father Chris Riley's 'Youth Off The Streets' program, who had also asked for scarves. Some of the rugs they make also go to nursing homes and they make beanies (knitted hats) for cancer sufferers undergoing chemotherapy. Tarcutta Branch is part of the Riverina Group, which is an area still in severe drought, unlike the northern parts of NSW. Joy told me that the people appreciate the assistance which comes through the Woolworths Drought Action Day, other commercial support and government funds channelled through CWA as it helps people with bills such as electricity. So the social capital engendered by the CWA also comes back to its members to assist them as they serve the wider community.

Some of the community contributions made by branches are practical and involve negotiation between government departments, local councils and commercial enterprise, as well as fundraising and practical involvement with the community. Therefore the networking capacity of the organisation, plus the learned (and 'being learned') skills of the women come into play. Such was the case when transportation was required for water in a country district:

> Recently Bigga Branch presented the community with a mobile water tanker. Its purpose is to assist community members in the transportation of water from the newly commissioned water bore installed by the Upper Lachlan Shire Council. This tanker acquisition was made possible by donations from the Department of Agriculture, private donations and the supply of a trailer by Peter and Cynthia Chappell, while Dick Allport Trailers modified the trailer to carry a water tank and pump.
>
> The mobile water tank will allow people to conserve their rainwater and use the bore for non-potable purposes. People are very happy at being able to have a garden, particularly for veggies, again, said Cynthia Chappell, President of the Branch.[33]

So, the networks CWA maintains with government on a local, state and federal level, as well as the knowledge the women themselves share, allow members to benefit their local communities in practical ways. The sale of CWA premises, probably because of decline in numbers and the high cost of maintaining a building, allowed Narrandera Branch to make a difference to the Nurses' Home at their local hospital from the proceeds of the sale. The accommodation is used by trainee nurses from Wollongong and Charles Sturt Universities, as well as trainee doctors and radiologists.

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[33] 'Bigga Branch', in 'From our Branches', *The Country Woman,* Volume 49, No.4, August/September 2008, p.26.

The report notes that the home was used by more than 100 people for varying lengths of time during 2007. Donations from the CWA Branch included painting of rooms and halls, carpets, air conditioners and soft furnishings, as well as exhaust fans in the bathrooms and provision of needed furniture. No doubt the sense of achievement for the women was enormous and resulted in a great encouragement to the country community, especially when they were honoured with a visit from the CWA State President, Mrs Margaret Roberts, to open the refurbished Nurse's Home. The emotional and spiritual learning that results from such a generous gift flows on from the women of the organisation, through to the wider community and, of course, to those who benefit from it personally as they use the improved residence.[34]

Fig 8. CWA is a busy organisation meeting many different needs in the community. Country of Study, which I forgot to embroider, has since been added. Logo copyright and used by permission of CWA.

One more example demonstrates the way that city CWA branches support their 'sisters' in a drought-stricken area in the country, in this case Oxley Group, who received assistance from Galston Branch in the north-west of Sydney.[35] The previous year they had put together 'pamper packages' for women in the country, and then learned that five small schools needed materials and equipment. The 'wish lists' they had received from the schools were used to gather donations from members and from local businesses, surprising the women with the level of generosity. Nevertheless, they were still short of many items until the local Lions Club revealed that they had some unspent money for a 'Give Back to the Bush' project. Thus all the

[34] Ruth Teasdale, 'Narrandera Branch', *The Country Woman,* Vol.49, No.5, October/November 2008, p.27.
[35] Gai Whitlam, 'Galston Branch', *The Country Woman,* Vol.49, No.1, February 2008, pp.28-9.

requirements were met, even extending to a generous donation from the Lions Club to bus a group of pupils to Sydney for an excursion. The problem of transporting the gifts was solved by two university students on vacation who drove to the country in a packed borrowed vehicle. The learning and social benefits achieved from such an exercise are immeasurable. Other service organisations were part of the community network that formed, as well as businesses that had been approached and contributed, plus the women themselves and the young people who took the long drive of many hours to deliver the goods.[36]

This undertaking, as begun by the women and thence picked up by the others involved, is a fine example of civic engagement or active citizenship. Field expounds Putnam, the most well-known of the writers on social capital, by stating that

> active citizenship (is) an important source of social capital because it is the main way in which people – particularly those who are strangers to one another – experience reciprocity through their pursuit of shared objectives. This in turn helps to create a dense web of networks underpinned by shared values and producing high levels of social trust, which in turn foster further cooperation between people and reduce the chances of malfeasance.[37]

In this case the initial network was begun by the CWA women who had learned of the needs of the country schools via a contact from the President of the country group. Her group of branches, the Oxley Group, is in an area which has long been suffering from drought and its consequential poverty for farmers. Their concern led to opportunities, for many different people and organisations, of community service being realised to help country people in need, a process about which Willis has written, referring to it as 'organic transformative learning'. He defines it as learning which 'people and groups can undertake to facilitate their natural ripening and growing to maturity'.[38]

The members of the Galston branch of CWA had learned through their earlier preparation and distribution of the 'pamper packages' for country women, and utilised this learning to carry out the country schools project. In the process they helped other individuals and groups to realise that they, too, had the potential to realise goals of enriching the lives of country people battling drought. The outcome, according to Willis, is that '(l)earners who achieve a potential they may not have previously imagined can energize and deepen the social capital of a group significantly and joyfully'.[39] The whole style and spirit of the article, written

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36 Whitlam, 'Galston Branch'.

37 John Field, 'Social capital and lifelong learning', *The Encyclopedia of Informal Education,* www.infed.org/lifelonglearning/social_capital_and_lifelong_learning.htm 2005, Accessed online 8/1/2009.

38 Peter Willis, 'Transformative pedagogy for social capital', *Australian Journal of Adult Learning,* Vol.47, No.3, November 2007, pp.349-378(361).

39 Willis, 'Transformative pedagogy'.

by the Publicity Officer of the Galston Branch of CWA, is of joy and a sense of the significance of the outcome as she reports the country schools project. By submitting her report to *The Country Woman,* the writer is embracing and drawing in – thus educating – every member of the organisation who reads the report.[40] Local newspapers and the newsletters of other organisations such as Lions and Rotary, who also contributed, would have likewise reported widely, and thus the 'social capital' engendered would have spread like ripples in a pond well beyond the small group of women who wondered how they might assist disadvantaged members of country communities. The learning which ensues from such activity cannot be quantified.

Quite often there can be an overlap or a meeting together of different organisations, sometimes just in a meeting situation which does not extend as far as that above. It can nevertheless, lead to a significant understanding of a shared ethos. A letter to the editor in *The Country Woman* refers to a visit by a CWA branch to their local Salvation Army Home League branch. There was a sharing of information across the two organisations and the writer comments: 'As we listened to each other it soon became clear that we shared the same values in our service to the community, not only in our own backyard, but also throughout the world'.[41]

The Quilters' Guild Inc.

Community Quilts has been a strong group in the Quilters' Guild for many years and members make quilts for many different hospitals and organisations. The group does not isolate itself, but displays the completed quilts at full Guild business meetings, ranged colourfully along the balcony railing in the club venue where it is held. Onyx & Leonard write of such activities and the importance of community:

> Social capital draws much of its philosophical underpinning from a communitarian position. Community is essential. …
>
> What is implicit throughout most discussions of social capital is a sense of personal and collective efficacy, or personal agency within a social context. Agency refers to the individual's capacity to plan and initiate action. The development of social capital requires the active and willing engagement of citizens working together within a participative community.[42]

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40 Gai Whitlam, 'Galston Branch', *The Country Woman,* Vol.49, No.1, February 2008, pp.28-9.

41 Edith Rolfe, 'Letters to the Editor', *The Country Woman,* Vol.47, No.4, August 2006, p.12.

42 Jenny Onyx & Rosemary Leonard, 'Women, Volunteering and Social Capital', in Jeni Warburton and Melanie Oppenheimer (eds), *Volunteers and Volunteering,* Sydney, The Federation Press, 2000, pp.113-124 (116&117).

The community of the Quilters' Guild is certainly participative, with strong networking evident through the *Template* newsletter, meetings and outside involvement through shops, shows and commercial magazines. Sometimes groups which may or may not be affiliated with the Guild also operate in the same way, often in tandem with Guild events.

Such a group is Braidwood Quilters Inc. in the country town of Braidwood, NSW, an hour's drive south-east of the nation's capital, Canberra. The entire town holds an annual 'Airing of the Quilts', when quilts are draped from just about every veranda, balcony and window in the town, with proceeds of the event going to charities such as the Westmead Children's Hospital in Sydney.[43]

The Quilters' Guild as a whole is quite focused on charity work, as I wrote in my journal after one visit to the Guild headquarters in the city, where I spoke briefly with the women who were on duty that day:

> Community Quilts is the charity arm of the Guild. They currently make quilts for foster children through the Foster Parents' Society. They are now making quilts for specific children according to their interests e.g. 'Freddie likes dinosaurs' so they make a quilt for him with dinosaurs. They also make quilts for the Salvation Army and for Stewart House, the house for country children which is supported by the Teachers' Federation. As well, the members have made quilts for nursing homes and have made one for the Viewing Room at Royal North Shore Hospital, as a quilt is so much more pleasant and comforting for people seeing the body of their deceased loved one rather than a white sheet. The quilt is reversible, with one side for men and one for women.[44]

Most issues of *The Template* carry items about charities to which members may contribute in some way, whether individually or through the Community Quilts group. Blankets of Love is one scheme to which members of the Guild contribute small quilts to parents of a baby who has died, as a tangible memento of their child, and suggestions for contact and website addresses are provided for members who wish to become involved. The author of the article in the June 2007 issue of the newsletter also includes other charities who distribute such quilts to bereaved families.[45] In this way the Guild maintains a caring profile in the wider community, while also promoting the learning of the ethic of care among its own members.

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[43] Rebecca Ware, 'Group Profile: Braidwood Quilters Inc.', *Australian Patchwork and Quilting,* Summer Special, Vol.17, No.6, January 2009, pp.114-15.

[44] Extract from personal journal entry of visit to the Quilters' Guild NSW Inc. and conversation with Mrs Lynn Hewitt, 7/5/2008.

[45] Rowena Morgan, 'Quilting in Cyberspace: Memory Quilts', *The Template,* Vol.25, No.3, June 2007, p.28.

Embroiderers' Guild

There is considerably less outreach to the community in the Embroiderers' Guild than in the Quilters' Guild. This is almost certainly because of the focus of the Guild on promotion of embroidery as an art and commitment to excellence of workmanship. The founder, Margaret Oppen, wrote on the issue in 1962:

> Our chief aim is the establishment of EMBROIDERY AS A CREATIVE ART (upper case in original). We are not a charitable society, but a strongly cultural one. Any good we do must arise out of our willingness to share what we know with our fellow members, and our ability to draw out the power of producing beautiful, rich and competent work which most of our members ... often unconsciously ... possess. We urge all Guild members to make use of all the facilities of the Guild.[46]

Despite this emphatic stricture by the founder, however, there is some 'charitable' work done by members, and some outreach to the community outside of self-promotion. Following disastrous bushfires in the state of Victoria when many hundreds of women lost their homes and, consequently, their needlework and fabric collections, members of the Guild sent gifts to replace the losses.

The Campbelltown group makes embroidered garments for Wee Care, which is an organisation providing grieving gowns for stillborn babies. One issue of *The Record* features a photograph of members of the group displaying articles they had made, which in the first 12 months numbered '132 gown and bonnet sets, 55 hospital gowns, 16 wraps plus knitted bonnets, miniscule bootees and pilchers'. The article states that many other groups are involved with the Wee Care project.[47] The smocking group also makes these tiny garments for Wee Care.

There is a significant amount of cooperation for this project – some members of the Embroiderers' Guild also belong to the Smocking Arts Guild, one of whose members teaches smocking at the Embroiderers' Guild as well as her involvement in making the tiny garments and quilts for Wee Care.[48] Another member told me of the blankets and quilts they make to wrap the baby and also little covers for the baskets in which the baby is taken to the mortuary. 'It's giving dignity to the baby and comfort to the mother', she said:[49]

Clare Munstone is a member who told me more about Wee Care and the contact they have with hospitals, never directly with the bereaved parents. The Campbelltown Group

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46 Quoted in Wendy Schmid, 'President's Report', *The Record,* February 2005, p.5.
47 'Wee Care Campbelltown Group', *The Record,* Number 442, May 2004, p.11.
48 The website for the Smocking Arts Guild of NSW Inc. is http://members.ozemail.com.au/~tfyb/
49 Conversation with Mrs Reilton Bullock, 20/1/2009.

supplies five hospitals: Campbelltown, Liverpool, Taree, Lismore and Canberra. The hospitals away from the local area began to be supplied because one year the women had made too many items so they decided to extend their reach.[50]

The women have sometimes had contact from mothers who had lost babies years before, demonstrating the benefit from the group's work – they will not ever personally contact a bereaved parent but only supply to hospitals as an ethic of their work. At the Campbelltown Group's 25th Anniversary exhibition a few years ago a woman approached the stand on which some of the Wee Care items were displayed and said that she had lost a baby about ten years before and had been given garments for her baby. She told them that she had a feeling of comfort because women who didn't know her and would never know her were supporting her at such a difficult time. Clare says they wept with the mother at the time and afterwards when they returned home as well.[51]

Another time the Saturday Group of another organisation was meeting in a home where some of the women were working on projects for Wee Care. The hostess became very quiet and then left the room. When she returned she was carrying a basket of lace which she had been using for the ceramic dolls she made. She told the group that she had lost a baby years ago but she felt that it was now time to move on from the dolls and was giving the lace for the group's use. Clare says the gift is very useful as lace is very expensive even if bought at the shows as they need a lot. I suggest that this experience was probably a learning opportunity for healing for this woman, that it helped her to move on from that stage of her grief.

The group began working for Wee Care because Clare had been a nurse at St Vincent's Hospital in Lismore. Midwives told her that they had to wrap the babies in surgical sponges and sometimes had to search for something to cover the child before it was taken to the mortuary. The thought of that 'turned her stomach' so she determined to do something about changing it.[52] These groups are helping to put in the past the attitude that a mother who had lost a baby should just forget it and have another child. The Campbelltown Group supplies more than a hundred gown and bonnet sets a year to these hospitals and the Smocking Guild supplies 300 sets a year. Both groups also make tiny quilts, bunny rugs and knitted bootees, bonnets and pilchers. Such a service is a gift of inestimable value to a grieving mother and is educating families, hospital staff, other group members and the wider public that grief can be faced and journeyed through together.

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50 Conversation with Mrs Clare Munstone, 20/1/2009.
51 Clare Munstone.
52 Clare Munstone.

Individual groups in the Embroiderers' Guild are sometimes involved in community embroideries and, as in the women working for the Wee Care project, the following group consists of both members of the Guild and outsiders. The group itself is independent but it has informal links to the Guild through members and leadership. Creative Embroiderers of Penrith Valley have produced a number of spectacular works which hang in public areas in the community. I visited the group at the invitation of Mavis Reynolds, the founder and coordinator of the group.[53] The leader of the group, to whom the group gives the title of 'Honorary Mistress of Embroidery' is Del White, who is a tutor at the Embroiderers' Guild.

On arrival for my visit to the group one 85 year old member had just successfully retaken her driving test and was regaling the group with everything that had happened. A long discussion ensued and there was certainly a considerable exchange of information on driving tests and their impact on elderly drivers! Following that the women gave me a list of some of their skills and how they contributed to the knowledge pool, which turned out to be a useful and educative mix:

- Two members came from Iran and brought their traditional embroidery to show
- One member does beading
- One teaches embroidery to children
- One does china painting
- An English lady worked the leaves on the gum tree in the Australian Flora and Fauna embroidery and excelled in the colour choice and shading, despite those greens being so different from those she had grown up with in her native country.
- A lady from Zimbabwe does upholstery and interior decorating so is able to advise on framing and presentation of the finished embroideries.[54]

In addition to their skills, at the time of my visit the women represented many other voluntary organisations between them. Nine women in the group were members of the Embroiderers' Guild NSW Inc., one of CWA, one Red Cross, one member delivered Meals on Wheels and three ladies served the morning tea for Morning Melodies, a weekly musical program for seniors. One of the members belonged to the writing club at a community centre. Thus the members were actively involved with the community and as volunteers in many different ways. Mavis told me 'We're really the cement of the community'. Later in the morning in the

[53] Visit to the Creative Embroiderers of Penrith Valley Inc., 31st October 2006.
[54] Creative Embroiderers of Penrith Valley.

course of conversation some further community organisation memberships were added to the list.[55]

In response to my query about what the group offers, the women stated 'Friendship', 'To meet people', 'To get out of the house', and 'To have intelligent conversation'. For their own enjoyment they were planning to have a bus trip to visit the home of an embroiderer to see her work. Their benefit to the local community is great, however, with several intricate wall hangings in the Penrith City Council buildings and library, including images of Australian flora and fauna, and of local history. The council provides funding for the materials but the women volunteer their time.[56]

The latest project was the fifth major work the group has undertaken and its designer was a Fine Arts honours student soon to graduate from the University of Western Sydney. There was general agreement that both he and the women were learning from each other. The young designer told me that he felt he was learning through this project to relate to the community and to older women especially; the women informed me they were learning to relate to young men and their ideas, so cross-generational relationships were being enhanced through the association.[57]

A minor work was the making of Christmas ornaments, sold for $7 each at a function to benefit the Children's Hospital. The Joan Sutherland Centre, a major cultural venue in Penrith, is the owner of a spectacular wall hanging by the women, 'Resonances of Inspiration', which is a collection of embroidered musical instruments and related themes. It was discovered through criticism before the completion of the piece for the foyer that the number of keys on the piano was incorrect. The local Federal member of parliament at the time, Jackie Kelly, completed embroidering the additional piano keys to correct the omission during a sitting of parliament.[58]

While this group may not have formal association with the Embroiderers' Guild, articles about it in copies of *The Record* demonstrate how close the informal links are, and how they involve the Guild in the community, sometimes indirectly.[59]

The Guild has a relationship with the Powerhouse Museum in Sydney in sharing information about their respective collections and assisting each other with conservation and

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55 Creative Embroiderers of Penrith Valley.

56 Penrith is a municipality on the outer western edge of Greater Sydney.

57 Conversation with Rob Hungerford and women of the Creative Embroiderers of Penrith Valley. The work is 'If These Lakes Could Speak', now permanently displayed in the Nepean Room of Penrith City Council. 'Artwork honours Penrith City landscape', *Western Weekender Penrith Online,* http://www.westernweekender.com.au/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=411&Itemid=50

58 Information gained from visit to the Creative Embroiderers of Penrith Valley Inc., 31/10/2006.

59 'Awards and Prizes: Guild member, Barbara Curran, receives Centenary Medal for her contribution to embroidery', *The Record,* No.434, July 2003, p.17.

queries from members of the public. In the year 2000 the Guild actually provided funding for the purchase of a set of 17th century bed valances which the Powerhouse Museum could not afford to buy themselves. The President writes:

> The inability of the Powerhouse to purchase these valances would mean that they would be taken overseas, probably to England, and sold. The Executive Committee of the Guild was invited to view the valances with the idea of helping the Museum acquire them through various avenues of fundraising. ... The (Guild) Committee agreed to the purchase for the study and enjoyment of all embroiderers and the valances will be held in perpetuity by the Powerhouse Museum.[60]

The Guild's existing relationship of trust with the Powerhouse Museum enabled the request to be made and the subsequent valuable acquisition which benefits both the museum, the members of the Embroiderers' Guild and the public. In Australia there are few opportunities for study of such historical textile items, and this exercise in partnership provides a rare learning opportunity for embroiderers and other members of the community.

Mothers' Union

MU is attempting to build relationships with the community in most of its activities, especially through its shopfront in the busy Town Hall Arcade in the Sydney CBD. The Parenting Program discussed in an earlier chapter, as well as hospital visiting, court attendance and gifts to new or grieving parents all contribute to the organisation's social capital or trust-building. That few young women are involved is in my view more a reflection on society than on the value or relevance of the organisation.

Changes in family structure and the possibility of family breakdown are more openly acknowledged, if not more common today, than they have been, and MU has changed its former policy of excluding those who have experienced this problem. The MU Handbook states under the heading of Social Justice Issues:

> In the light of rapid social changes in our society, and its effect on relationships there is a need for The Mothers' Union to widen its vision and, whilst holding on to its aims and objects, face the realities of life today.[61]

Then follows a call for advocacy and lobbying of authorities on issues relating to the family, and children especially. The first point asks that the organisation press the Australian Government to set up a Family Policy Unit which has input from the local community; next

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60 Lorraine Walker, '17th Century Bed Valances', *The Record,* No.406, September 2000, pp.14-15.

61 Mary Coyne (ed), *MU Australia: Part of the worldwide Mothers' Union: A handbook,* 'Social Justice Issues', p.15.

that a national children's Advocacy Centre be developed 'to consider all aspects of legislation as it affects children. The three subsequent statements impinge directly on the relationship of MU and the church to the local community :

> (c) We accept that in the interests of the child it may be necessary on occasion to separate the child from the family.
>
> (d) The Mothers' Union accepts that in the cases of prolonged physical and/or emotional conflict within a marriage it may be that the most creative outcome for all involved is for that relationship to be terminated.
>
> (e) That the Mothers' Union recommend to bishops and theological colleges that in the training of clergy and laity more emphasis be placed on marriage preparation and enrichment programmes to equip them for their pastoral role in this area.[62]

One of the ways in which MU serves the community is through providing refreshments to families involved in court cases at the Children's Court. This outreach is strictly controlled and those participating must undergo training prior to doing so, as I have stated in Chapter Two. The women are not permitted to discuss personal or court matters, but may only serve refreshments and carry on general conversation, which is nevertheless a comfort to worried parents and relatives.

Catholic Women's League

Catholic Women's League has a large infrastructure with many committees, although it is losing members as they age without attracting young women, as in all of the other organisations. State committees such as Bio-ethics and Social Responsibilities work through their national body to make representation to government on behalf of CWL women. The organisation thence has representation to the United Nations as an NGO through membership of the World Union of Catholic Women's Organisations (WUCWO). Moya Potts, President of the Sydney Archdiocese, gave me these details and more of the way the organisation operates to make the views of Catholic women known at the highest level.[63] She also told me of the financial support the organisation receives from one of their projects:

> Through a property we own at Strathfield, which is a retirement – self-care units – which was a huge vision by women back in the fifties and sixties – eventually built in the sixties – to develop that complex of 70 independent living. … the property there generates our ability to have an office here in the building, to have our staff as well, so we are in a very, very fortunate position in Sydney.[64]

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62 Mary Coyne (ed), 'Social Justice Issues', p.15.
63 Interview with Moya Potts and her colleagues, 19/6/2007.
64 Moya Potts.

Other facilities and services involving CWL women include Chisholm Cottage, located near Westmead Hospital for family members from the country who need to stay with transported patients at minimal cost. At Armidale, CWL women operate the Community Visitors' Scheme, which has state government funding and allows the women to visit those with needs in the community.[65]

Chris McKirdy, the paid Executive Officer of CWL, says that the organisation does not restrict itself to Catholic agencies, but that the women in the branches knit for Wrap With Love – 'we're now knitting for African babies', and raise funds for overseas organisations like the Fistula Hospital in Addis Ababa in Ethiopia. They also support Youth Off The Streets, an organisation to rehabilitate homeless young people, as well as fundraising and information events for breast cancer research.[66]

The women have also provided material help for AIDS patients from early in the recognition of the condition. Chris relates how they had purchased small personal radios for the patients in palliative care who had no diversions, as well as the major purchase of a minibus for their use. The organisation is attempting to reach younger women, but is stalled by what the women to whom I spoke refer to as 'roadblocks' – the problem of young women working but also the image of CWL as elderly women running cake stalls, as Moya passionately declared:[67]

> This is the issue – this is the point – this is where we're typecast like CWA, … because even the parishioners: 'Oh, good old CWL ladies! And this we're not dismissing! $1400 was raised for – 'That's what they do!' They don't know that behind that branch they are actively aware, they are actively getting information on stem cell research and pornography, and contributing on those levels. 'Oh, good old CWL ladies, they'll have that cake! Blah, blah, blah!' And that's what they focus on because they're not really aware of what we're doing.[68]

This problem also occurs consistently in other women's organisations like the Country Women's Association, as Moya says, and prevents the truth being heard of active, hardworking women lobbying authorities for support in many vital societal issues.

CWCI and KYB

CWCI is basically an educational organisation aimed at the women of the Christian faith and is therefore not in the general public view in the same way as, say, CWA. The main outreach of CWCI as an organisation is through the Safari Ministry to outback Australia.

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65 Moya Potts.
66 Joint interview with Chris McKirdy and other CWL women, 19/6/2007.
67 Interview with CWL women.
68 Moya Potts.

Teams from CWCI Australia travel to remote areas, often in small aircraft, to encourage the women, especially those who are already Christians and rarely get significant teaching in their faith. So the main aim of the Safaris is encouragement, although many women do decide to become Christians as a result of attending functions held during the outreach. There are four national safaris to be held in 2009, to south-west Queensland, central Australia, Arnhem Land in the Northern Territory, and outback South Australia.[69] Each Safari lasts for two weeks and ten to twelve towns are visited, with the team usually staying only one night in each town. Each state also holds regional safaris, travelling by car in NSW to eight towns in 2008 over five days with a packed itinerary. During that year's safaris, towns severely affected by drought like Collarenabri, Walgett and Barradine were among those visited, and the women were able to provide emotional and spiritual support to many women hurt by the drought.[70]

Cecily Jackson emphasises that this encouragement is so important to women in isolated areas who may rarely, if ever, have the opportunity for mentoring from women experienced in their faith. Cecily says that "People pour out their hearts to these ladies because they're listeners" when they arrive in the areas, despite the brief time they are able to be with them. The women who go on the safaris go, according to Cecily, "with an attitude of serving rather than 'proselytising', " although the purpose is not to provide practical aid, but rather encouragement and emotional support. However, the organisation does provide a small amount of finance to the workers to use if they see an immediate need, such as for the hostess with whom they are staying. The hostesses are often the ones who benefit most from the visit, Cecily says, from 'talking round the breakfast table' with their guests.[71]

As the organisation is interdenominational, the Know Your Bible groups are not necessarily restricted to a church and women from several churches may attend one group. A KYB group is held in a retirement village in Cherrybrook, a suburb of Sydney, and women from a number of different Christian denominations attend the group. Cecily Jackson told me of one KYB group which has decided to 'adopt' a group in the area devastated by bushfires in Victoria in February 2009. They will pay for all of the sponsored group's study materials during their time of need, with individual members of the sponsoring group probably providing other support as well.[72]

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69 '2009 Safari Teams', CWCI Australia website, http://www.cwciaus.org.au/safari.htm Accessed online 12/2/2009.

70 Telephone conversation with Mrs Cecily Jackson, 13/2/2009.

71 Cecily Jackson.

72 Cecily Jackson.

CWCI is not an aid organisation and its constitution does not allow for fundraising and practical aid in the same way as that of a service organisation does. However, its reputation is high within the Christian church network both in Australia and overseas. Furthermore, the encouragement and support – and learning opportunities – it provides to women who are already committed Christians, or are deciding to become so, is substantial.

Presbyterian Women's Association (PWA)

In writing of the community work of Presbyterian deaconnesses, members of PWA and other church women's organisations in the early twentieth century, O'Brien argues, in an idea she attributes to Oppenheimer:

> What did all this work have in common? It 'added value': it was productive, valuable and contributed to the economy, directly and indirectly…. the work that women did through their involvement in church communities fulfilled an important but largely unrecognised welfare role.[73]

Community outreach in PWA is undertaken through the Dorcas Committee, which is the practical support ministry of the organisation and the Presbyterian Church. Individual groups also provide service to their own communities, such as that of the Springwood branch of PWA at Frazer Memorial Presbyterian Church, where the women provide catering for funerals held at the church. This ministry is an outreach for the community, and is not restricted to church and PWA members.[74] A leaflet produced to promote PWA states that the Dorcas Standing Committee:

> promotes the social outreach of the Church and reinforces the work of Presbyterian Social Services and the Aged Care Committee in caring for those in need in the community.[75]

The leaflet goes on to list the different ministries under the oversight of Dorcas, including the Allowah Presbyterian Children's Hospital. PWA women raise funds towards equipment and redevelopment for the children and young people with physical and intellectual disabilities in this hospital's care. An important ministry of Dorcas in regard to the outside community is the Park Patrol. Barbara Jarvis, President of Springwood PWA, told me how this group provides a service to homeless people in parks in the inner city of Sydney, handing out knitted hats and

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[73] Anne O'Brien, *God's Willing Workers: Women and religion in Australia,* Sydney, UNSW Press, 2005, p.66. Reference to Melanie Oppenheimer, ' 'We all did voluntary work of some kind': voluntary work and labour history', *Labour History,* 81 (November) 2001, pp. 1-11(3).

[74] Personal conversation with Mrs Karen Budin, 11/2/2008.

[75] Promotional leaflet, 'The PWA in the Twenty-First Century', Presbyterian Women's Association, Surry Hills, NSW, nd.

scarves, as well as socks and handkerchiefs and other clothing if needed.[76] The women of the Randwick PWA branch make sandwiches which are distributed daily along with fruit juice.

Hospital visitation is organised by Dorcas for country members who have been transferred to city hospitals, where chaplains work as part of their overall ministry.[77] A report on the Dorcas Committee in *SPAN* magazine tells that the girls at Presbyterian Ladies College (PLC) at Croydon, a suburb of Sydney, are involved in providing gifts which are distributed to women's refuges, aged care facilities and Allowah Hospital, thus educating the next generation in community service.[78]

As do most other Christian denominations, the Presbyterian church operates opportunity shops selling used clothing and other goods to provide funds for services. Some of these shops specialise in linen, and the 'Linen, Lace and Retro' shop in Glenbrook in the Blue Mountains of NSW is a treasure trove of old and new household linen, lace and embroidery – some of it partially worked 'UFO's'. As well as used clothing, jewellery and small household goods this shop also sells needlework tools and patterns.[79]

The leaflet referred to above lists a number of other ministries of PWA aside from the Dorcas committee, some of which are associated with or aimed at the wider community. The organisation has membership in the umbrella organisation, the National Council of Women, which thus links it indirectly with the United Nations and the international community.[80]

Women's Home League

The original aim of Home League was to be an outreach to poor women in the community, not a fellowship group within the established membership of the Salvation Army. Florence Booth, wife of Bramwell and daughter-in-law of the Army founders, General William Booth and his wife Catherine, founded Home League in early 1907 in London. The organisation was founded because the Booths had earlier seen the need for health education in the poor, especially mothers, who could not afford expensive medical treatment for their families as Florence Booth's biographer quotes from *Sunday Circle,* a later periodical of the Salvation Army:

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76 Personal conversation with Mrs Barbara Jarvis, 17/11/2008.

77 Promotional leaflet, 'The PWA in the Twenty-First Century', Presbyterian Women's Association, Surry Hills, NSW, nd.

78 Laurel Dixon, 'Serving With Dorcas', *SPAN: Service, Prayer And News for Presbyterian Women in NSW,* Vol.45, No3, September 2008, pp.14-15.

79 I have made a number of personal visits to this shop to purchase linen and embroidery.

80 'PWA in the 21st Century'.

> The General and Mrs Booth felt that the laws of health should be taught to the people, and poor mothers be qualified to treat simple ailments and to recognise the more serious symptons of disease that needed skilled attention.[81]

Florence wrote of her undertaking that the lowering of standards of home life were leading to the deterioration of England, and that her organisation would 'combat this tendency'. By its 50th anniversary the League had a membership of more than 277,000.[82] The first Home League meeting in Australia was held in North Melbourne, Victoria, in March 1911 during the 30th anniversary celebrations of the Salvation Army in Australia. The *War* Cry of August 1911, is quoted as reporting that by July of that year a group had begun in Rockdale, NSW, and had eleven members:

> a visitation band has been formed and thorough systematic visitation is kept up, cheering the sick, helping the needy, enlisting the sympathy of outsiders. The League meets every Monday at 2.30 p.m., members taking turns to conduct.[83]

Major Joyce Harmer, who was well known as a Court and Prison Chaplain in Sydney for many years prior to her retirement, held true to Florence Booth's vision in her organising of Home League branches during her earlier years as a Corps leader. Henderson writes in her biography of Major Harmer:

> At her Home League evenings each week, she organised speakers on topics from health to housekeeping, the idea of the Home League being to give disadvantaged women a fellowship where they could be supported and taught ways to better their lives as homemakers and mothers. They shared recipes, read scripture, laughed together and went home not only a little wiser about how to cope but also in cheerier and stronger spirits. 'I had them in raucous laughter one night about our antics … ' says Joyce. 'Laughter, I believe, is very therapeutic'.[84]

Although the outreach element of Home League still exists, the membership is ageing, and some branches of Women's Home League are changing the name in an attempt to overcome that stigma, of which I have written earlier. The image of Home League as an organisation for elderly women persists, so the oversight of Women's Ministries has moved to draw in young women through new naming while retaining the administrative oversight within the original Home League area at present.

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81 Quoted in Jenty Fairbank, *For Such a Time: The story of the young Florence Booth,* London, Salvation Books, 2007, p.22.

82 Fairbanks, *For Such a Time,* pp.142-3.

83 Sampson, Lt.-Colonel Lily, 'Half a Dozen Oranges: Prepared by Lt.-Colonel Lily Sampson to commemorate the Jubilee of the Home League in Australia – 1911-1971', excerpt from unreferenced periodical clipping c.1971, in Salvation Army Archives, Home League/Women's Ministries file, Box CB3.1.

84 Anne Henderson, *An Angel in the Court: The life of Major Joyce Harmer,* Sydney, HarperCollins, 2006, pp.100-101.

Major Coral Hodges tells of Salvation Army's Women's Ministries' outreach to women in the community through pampering days or weekends, aimed at young women and girls.

> ANYA is the name of a group where we're mentoring young girls from – like housing commission areas that haven't got good mother roles, and that's a course where we take girls away over a weekend and they get pampered – well and truly pampered with – the tables are set beautifully, they might be able to have make up done – all special things just for these girls and then they can do canoeing and extra activities, but they're also shown the love of Jesus and then the mentoring role is that the ladies that come on for the leadership of this mentoring weekend – they promise before they go that they will follow up those girls. They're expected to follow up the girls once every couple of weeks for an ongoing period so that the girls know that somebody cares about them.[85]

As with all of the other Christian women's organisations, evangelism is also a major part of the outreach activities to represent the Christian faith to women who may not know or who may have been misinformed through stereotypes and caricatures in the public arena. Playgroups, evening meetings for women in employment and other activities specifically aimed at younger women are actively pursued, according to Coral.[86]

Women's Home League also raises funds and has guest speakers from other organisations like the Blind Society or Beyond Blue, the support organisation for people suffering from depression. Overseas Salvation Army projects in countries like India also benefit, as Coral tells; women in Home League have raised more than two and a half million dollars since 1970.[87] The website invitation to join is inclusive in its language:

> Come along to one of our Women's Ministries activities for women of all ages and interests! ... run regularly by the Salvation Army for women in the community who wish to meet up with other women and have fun, while gaining greater personal fulfilment and an enriched family life. ... interdenominational and open to all women. Christian belief is not a prerequisite to membership and there are no age limits.[88]

Women who are unable to get to a group, either because of geographical isolation, illness or age, are offered membership in The Outer Circle, which for a small fee of $5 per annum provides a bi-monthly mailing to encourage and support them.[89] The efforts of the Women's Ministries oversight seems to indicate that, while Home League under its present name may

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85 Interview with Major Coral Hodges, 13/8/2007.
86 Coral Hodges.
87 Coral Hodges.
88 Salvation Army Women's Ministries website, http://salvos.org.au/getinvolved/womens-activities/ Accessed online 14/2/2009.
89 'Can't Get To a Group?', http://salvos.org.au/getinvolved/womens-activities/cant-get-to-a-group.php Accessed online 14/2/2009.

not survive far into the future, young women will continue to be drawn into the Salvation Army women's groups through the Army's high level of respect in the community.

Quota International

The women of Quota and Zonta operate from similar motives to the benevolent 'ladies' of the nineteenth century in that their aim is to assist those less fortunate than themselves. They differ, however, in that their benevolence is mainly limited to fundraising and lobbying on behalf of the disadvantaged and they have little or no direct contact with the poor and underprivileged they seek to assist.

As an international organisation Quota has built up respect and recognition, although it is less recognised in Australia than the United States and I have often had to explain the nature of the organisation when I have been talking about my research. When I asked Gloria Cook about what the organisation meant to her, however, she immediately launched into an impassioned commendation for her organisation, along with an explanation of the reason for her regard:

> The word 'quota' is a Latin word meaning 'we share' and as a 34 year member of Quota I have a great regard for the aims and ideals of our organisation. I believe in the ideals of 'we share' and I think, there we have to talk about the word 'share'. ... It really means 'to give', which people in Quota and other organisations do extremely well to make the lives of people less fortunate than we are a little better. But the other side of the word 'to share' and probably equally as important, is 'to take'. Share means 'to give and to take' and very often we don't think about, talk about or realise what the 'take' means. And the 'take' is actually --- personal satisfaction. The organisation gets the satisfaction in being recognised, and we *are* recognised internationally ... but it's the satisfaction within us as people.[90]

The Quota Collect is recited by the group at each meeting, a practice which must inculcate the values of the organisation in the members to a high degree. Gloria recites it during our interview, and it reveals the aspirations of the leadership to maintain a high standard of ethics and humanitarian values in the members:

> Quench in our hearts, oh Lord, all fires of selfishness.
> Unfold to us the joys of true friendship.
> Open our minds to a better understanding of service.
> Teach us the real meaning of sharing.
> And help us to hold high those principles of Quota for which we stand.[91]

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[90] Gloria Cook interview, 10/7/2007.
[91] Gloria Cook.

To try and live up to such aims and ideals daily, Gloria goes on to say, 'would make us all better people'. Some of Quota's work has been included in the earlier chapter where I have written on scholarships because of their formal aspect. They also belong in this chapter because of their example as the acquisition of social capital in the wider community for the organisation concerned. Both Gloria Cook and June Young are enthusiastic about the amount of work and funding which benefits the wider community and is carried out by Quota women. One beneficiary is the Camp for the Hearing Impaired, founded in 1985 by Dr Veronica James:

> We run the Science camp in Sydney University each year and that's for all the hard-of-hearing kids to go in and Dr Veronica James runs this camp where she teaches them science and it's brilliant; it's absolutely brilliant! Um – there's just *so* many programs. You just can't keep up with so many programs.[92]

Although the website of the camp does not refer to Quota, fundraising for the hearing-impaired is a major program of Quota. The cost of running the camp would almost certainly be considerable and so through that support Quota is making a direct impact on significant education and enhancing the potential of children and young people who attend. The promotional material on the camp's own website states:

> The main aim of the camp is to show the children (and their parents!) that a hearing disability is not an insurmountable barrier to a full and interesting life, including an unrestricted career. This is especially obvious and practical to demonstrate in the world of science.[93]

The potential of hearing impaired children is obviously a major focus of the women in Quota International. As part of that work funds were raised for a building in the Liverpool area for the Shepherd Centre, which provides facilities for enabling deaf and hearing-impaired children 'to develop spoken language', with their vision promoted through the slogan. "Giving deaf children a voice". June Young told me about that project:[94]

> The Shepherd Centre, well the Shepherd Centre is another one of my babies. I was given the task by the Mayor when they come out here – " June, I'll give you the land. The Shepherd Centre'll build a building, but we need – (I think it was $550,000) – to purpose-build it." My role in that was to obtain as many funds towards that goal as possible. ... I have a lot to do with the cochlear implant centre because that's where Kirsty is and we still support all of that.[95]

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92 Interview with Mrs June Young, 11/6/2007.

93 Veronica James Science Challenge for Hearing Impaired Children, http://www.cfhi.med.usyd.edu.au/about.html Accessed online 11/1/2009.

94 'About Us' page, Shepherd Centre website, http://www.shepherdcentre.com.au/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=28&Itemid=271 Accessed 27/08/2008.

95 Mrs June Young.

The pride of both women in the achievements of their protegée was both touching and impressive. Gloria Cook told me more about Kirsty Gardner-Berry and her work in the Infant Hearing Screening Program.

> we gave a South Pacific area Scholarship to an absolutely wonderful young woman called Kirsty Gardner-Berry, and she was working at the time at the Liverpool Hospital and she was doing testing and she was doing a Masters with our Scholarship funds. She went overseas to Italy to an International Convention, and, um, ah, she came back from there with some ideas ... they weren't doing the universal testing over there, but something there triggered her to go on and it was her statistics that were used – to put to the State Government. "How much cheaper, bottom line of the big picture, it would be if we could identify children with hearing problems at an earlier age and start intervention." Because – if the intervention took place prior to 18 months, action taken, by the time those children are up to school age, they are main-streaming and they are off the hands of the Government financially.[96]

Gloria goes on to relate how Kirsty Gardner-Berry worked to persuade government to instigate the earliest possible intervention, thus making deaf children and their families independent of assistance because of programs put in place immediately after diagnosis in infancy.

> then Kirsty Berry worked out a system where, for example, um - you mightn't have a nurse audiometrist in Broken Hill, and the nurses could actually do the testing, put it onto a computer. It was then e-mailed in to a central point, where the readings were done by the audiometrist and then the results sent back. And that's Quota; that's our girl … Kirsty, who's just the most beautiful person. She's left the hospital now and she's working at the Cochlear Implant Centre.[97]

Closer to home for Gloria, the Armidale Quotarians paid for a cochlear implant and an extra decoder for a local small boy who was, she says, 'a very lively little boy' who once left his

Fig 9. Quota has a worldwide focus on creating a better world for those who are disadvantaged and/or hearing impaired.

decoder hanging in a tree in the rain. It was vital that he always have a decoder but in such a situation it had to be sent to Sydney for repair, thus necessitating a spare while the other was

[96] Interview with Gloria Cook, 10/7/2007.
[97] Gloria Cook.

away.[98] The value of the women's generosity is demonstrated by the fact that the recipient was, by the time of my interview, a student at university, something which may have been impossible for a hearing-impaired person prior to the technology of cochlear implants.

Despite the emphasis on realising the full potential of hearing impaired children, Quota does considerable work in other areas of disadvantage as well. Gloria elaborates on what she calls the 'burning bride syndrome', which is either when women are burned on their husband's funeral pyre or, more commonly today, when their dowry has been used up and the husband wishes to take another wife and thus acquire a further dowry. In this situation there is often an 'accident' when the unwanted wife, clad in her flowing sari, is cooking on the primus stove which is usually used. If she survives, the parents will not take the woman back as they have already paid her dowry, and so she is destitute and often forced to work on the streets. A Quota Area Director, Joan Dooley, mooted the idea of the home in New Delhi, according to Gloria, and that is another major project of Quota International.[99] June Young told me that her 'great love is world service, because of living in New Guinea and because of being in places and seeing different cultures' (her husband was in the Australian Army prior to his retirement). For this reason June has travelled to visit overseas projects and attended the opening of the home in India, as well as, just before her interview, having just returned from Manila, which she says has 'a very special place in my heart'.[100]

The international website of Quota features members of Liverpool, NSW, Quota Club (the club to which June Young belongs) participating in different projects to the above. In one, members were encouraged to sign up as organ donors, and a member is pictured holding her completed form. Another member is shown donating blood and, in a cooperative activity with the local Red Cross, Liverpool members collected donations from shoppers in a two-day fundraising drive to benefit the other organisation's programs. To round off their 'month of caring' the Quota members themselves contributed to send money to help victims of a cyclone in Queensland.[101]

Gardens in towns across Australia are another feature of Quota's work. On the way to Armidale on one trip to the university I spent a pleasant lunch stop in a beautiful garden at Singleton, created to commemorate the Australian Bicentenary. June Young told me that Quota

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98 Gloria Cook.
99 Gloria Cook.
100 Interview with June Young.
101 'Service Shorts', 'Long-Term Service Projects Benefit Liverpool', *We Share e-Zine,* http://www.wesharefoundation.org/ez.sh.sect.htm#sh1

women have themselves built, and continue to maintain, such gardens all over Australia, and she becomes quite animated as she speaks about this facet of Quota's community work:

> Broken Hill has just opened a new Rose Garden out there, so we went out there to open that. At the Gold Coast, right along the Gold Coast – all that beautiful expanse outside Sea World, is all a Quota memorial park. Millions of dollars worth of stuff and that's half a dozen ladies putting all that together. And they just work and work and work – I mean, they're public things, apart from the medical things and the scholarships that we award.[102]

As well as the gardens, June tells me that Quota women also raise funds to build public toilets in areas where they are needed. I was amused that she referred to one public toilet near Armidale as 'magnificent', but she remarks with continuing humour that often it is only half a dozen or a dozen ladies who raise the funds and organise the building 'and yet, nine out of ten people, if you asked them who Quota was, they wouldn't know! When I ask June to explain Quota's purpose of planting gardens and making parks, she responds:

> Well, an awareness of Quota, naturally, but simply providing a facility to the community for the betterment of their citizens.[103]

This awareness of community needs comes through time after time in the interviews that I conducted with these two women, and it is also obvious in the Quota website and in the *Quotarian* annual magazine. The airline, Qantas, gives Quota all of its unused care packs which they provide for passengers as they cannot be reused (presumably if the passenger has left it behind unopened or partially used). June told me that these are then repacked by Quota members and given to welfare organisations such as the Salvation Army to distribute to homeless people, to women's refuges and to hospitals emergency wards.[104]

Lest the record of the service of these women become tedious by virtue of its length, I will close with a brief account of a Quota meeting I attended as a guest in its venue at The Women's Club in the city. These few elderly women were just as impressive in their service to the community as were my two interviewees, albeit in a smaller area. I recorded my visit in my journal and extracts are below:

> One woman who was interested in my thesis gave me her card and wants to keep in touch – the women have almost without exception throughout this project been so helpful and generous. This woman told me about a nun who has joined the club through a project she was doing and wanting to raise money for. The club raised about $700 for another thing she wanted to do – to print an

[102] June Young.
[103] June Young.
[104] Interview with June Young.

> attractive and sensitive pamphlet with helpful information about how to deal with the morgue when a loved one had died.[105]

At the Sydney Quota meeting I learned that at the previous meeting the guest speaker had been a hospital chaplain who had told the club members about her work, which led the women to decide to make this their District Project. Apparently the hospital had not increased the annual allowance of $4000 for twelve years, which was no longer at all adequate for the amount of help chaplains are called on to give. It will not be widely publicised, however, in case the hospital reduces the allowance. The chaplain was asked to write an account of her work to submit for the upcoming Quota District Conference.

At the meeting I attended the correspondence acknowledged a donation of $100 towards the South Pacific Area Scholarship, as well as $100 to the We Share Foundation. The Sydney Club was included on the list of winners of the 'District Dynamo' award for the greatest increase in membership worldwide. Australia had 10 out of the 36 winners.

Zonta International

Zonta women are as active in humanitarian work as Quota, but with different projects. They too work with disadvantaged and needy women both locally and globally to fulfil the Zonta aim of 'Advancing the Status of Women Worldwide'. All of the Zonta women to whom I have spoken have been enthusiastic about their organisation and the level of service in which they have been able to participate. This service can be in the local community but extends beyond right up to representation at United Nations level.

Mrs Helen Gee, President of the Armidale Zonta Club, had just attended the Zonta Biennial International Convention, that time held in Australia.[106] However, she was more eager to tell me about the service of Zonta women in her own area, like the work for the Women's Refuge, which was established by Zonta Armidale, and the Women's Housing Group. Helen's account reveals the value imparted by seed funding for whitegoods for women setting up a new home after family breakup :

> These are women who have been in crisis, and usually come through the Refuge and then the Women's Housing Group house them. Now, it's very easy to get furniture from charity groups, but whitegoods are something that's very difficult to get – a washing machine that works or a fridge that works. Most of these women are by themselves and invariably have four or five children – this is the way it tends to be. And they obviously can't cope without a washing machine that's reliable and a fridge that's reliable, so what we did was we provided

[105] Extract from author's personal journal.
[106] Zonta 58th International Convention, 24-29 June 2006, Melbourne, Australia.

> money which would buy a fridge or a washing machine – brand new – and again, most of these women would never have had an appliance that was brand new – and really there's a lot of self-esteem involved in that.[107]

Helen goes on to describe how the women pay back the cost of the loan over the year that they live in the subsidised housing, so that the appliance eventually belongs to them. The repayment then frees up finance for another woman to be helped in the same way.

As Armidale is a country town the projects may not be as large as those women in the city can undertake, but they are more likely to be involved in practical service and advocacy, such as when there was no radiologist to read breast screening in Armidale, so the club went to work and had a promise within three days that the situation would be rectified. Finding more assistance for older women with dependants with disabilities was another successful project, as well as a campaign against violence against women:

> And we try to look at all areas. Like, for example, Aboriginal women, women in need, women in crisis. One of the things we've done is – if you look in the toilets around the university you'll find behind the door a sticker on violence against women, we funded those, we paid for the 1800 number where women can ring free when they need help to escape domestic violence. Domestic violence has been a very big push.[108]

Isabel Pollard adds more about Zonta Armidale projects, like the road signs reading "Zonta welcomes you to Armidale" (or other towns to which they have sold them as a fundraiser). There was also the Arts in the Garden function in Isabel's beautiful garden, displaying the work of artists and musicians, mentioned above.[109] This active group holds dinners to recognise the service of local women and girls outside their membership, about which I have written earlier, and the group is also active in international projects which the whole organisation support.

I was able to attend a birthing kit assembly day and found it horrifying to think of the basic supplies we were putting together as the only support for a mother giving birth. The kit includes a one metre length of black plastic to lie on, a gauze sponge, a razor blade and two pieces of string for the cord, a pair of surgical gloves and a small guest-size cake of soap. Despite the primitive nature of the kit, however, it provides an element of antisepsis otherwise not present which may make a difference to infant and maternal mortality.

In an unrecorded interview, Rosemary Johnson told me of the way that Zonta Armidale and its surrounding district is able to make an impact on women throughout the world,

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[107] Interview with Mrs Helen Gee, 31/7/2006.
[108] Helen Gee, 31/7/2006.
[109] Interview with Mrs Isabel Pollard, 24/3/2006.

including cooperation with other service organisations. The District 23 & 24 Birthing Kits Project provided kits for a Laotian village through a Uralla woman now working for Village Focus International as a volunteer management advisor, who had had contact with the Zonta Club of Armidale. This young woman's parents work at the university in Armidale and she learned of the project through reading the Armidale news on the local paper website, but she had also won a book prize for leadership from Zonta as a Year 10 girl in Armidale. 'So', Rosemary said, 'internationally we, as a small group of women, can have a direct impact as shown with this contact with these Laotian villagers'. Most Zonta Armidale birthing kits go to Papua New Guinea, where the Rotary International Mosquito Nets project provides nets for the same village as a follow up to protect the babies, children and parents. The joint effort has transportation provided with AusAid funding.[110]

Because I have been able to spend more time with the women who belong to Zonta Armidale, several of whom extended personal friendship to me, I have focused on their service. However, all Zonta women serve their local communities and the international projects in ways which are best suited to their own environments and needs. I was impressed by the knowledge of those local and international needs all of the Zonta women to whom I spoke had acquired through their organisation. Much of this knowledge comes through the strong network in the organisation and the website, which contains publicly available information and a password-protected area for members. There is also *The Zontian*, the worldwide magazine of Zonta, available publicly as a pdf. file to download.[111] Sometimes the organisations are able to gain valuable publicity and trust in the wider community through commercial magazines and other media.

Events and Shows

One of the largest events of the year for a member of either the Quilters' Guild or the Embroiderers' Guild, and for many members of other organisations as well, is The Craft & Quilt Fair at Darling Harbour Convention Centre. The show is organised by Expertise Events and a telephone conversation with Judy Newman, co-proprietor of the company, revealed some interesting insights into the company's ethos and its policy regarding education. Her own background is as a textile design teacher at high school before she became Craft Editor for *Australian Women's Weekly,* which sponsored the Quilt Show for the first few years. Judy later

[110] Unrecorded interview with Mrs Rosemary Johnson, Zonta Area 8 Director and member of District 24 Board, 11/7/2007.

[111] The international website is www.zonta.org Accessed online 14/2/2009. The pdf. file for *The Zontian* can be accessed from this page of the website.

changed her employment to Expertise Events, where she is responsible for activities such as the Craft and Quilt Fair and other craft-related shows. She told me that she feels a need to continue the educational component in her life and career.[112]

Expertise Events, which stages major shows and events including the Craft and Quilt Fair, believes in the importance of attractions to draw show visitors into the event from the moment they walk in the door. There is a focus on ensuring that the event is not just a collection of retail stands as retail is only one aspect of the show. There are three aspects to the show:

- The retail stands
- The education program
- The displays as an inspirational aspect which aim to inspire in the viewer a desire to become involved in such creation herself.[113]

Judy Newman told me that it is the policy of the company to always showcase leading craft talent. Expertise Events aims to inspire and educate the general public and to have a point of difference from other companies in their industry. The link to the craft industry is crucial to the company, as is its association with the Guilds. All non-profit guilds are provided with stands in quality space, free of charge, as opposed to many other event organisers who just fill in leftover space with non-profit guilds and organisations. Judy says that she sees the guilds as important networks worthy of nurturing. The guilds use the space provided to display examples of members' work and also for promotion in order to acquire new members. There is a large number of workshops and classes led by many well-known teachers, from other guilds (some internationally), shops and mail order businesses. One featured display at the June 2008 Craft and Quilt Fair was that of a postgraduate researcher for a Master of Design who was seeking viewers' opinions of her work for her research. The writer of the promotional brochure urges show visitors to view the works and provide an opinion for the research.[114]

Nurturing these networks of craft workers is especially vital as skills must not be lost now that schools focus less on areas like textiles and design than they once did. For this reason the shows feature 'The Creative Zone', a dedicated area of the Craft and Quilt Show for children. Schools may book groups into this area for workshops, which is low cost and specifically marketed to schools. One private school sent a group accompanied by their PE teacher as there was no textile teaching in the school. Individual children may attend

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112 Telephone conversation with Judy Newman, 15/10/2008.

113 Judy Newman.

114 Alison Muir, 'Fresh and Salt: messages in stitched textiles', *Craft Fair Friend: Your preview to the Sydney Fair June 11-15, 2008,* Vol.9, Issue 5, p.37 (promotional brochure mailed to registered interests).

workshops at weekends. Ms Newman feels that young groups in the Guilds such as Young Textile & Fibre Group (YTFG) in the Embroiderers' Guild is 'preaching to the converted' as these children and young people have relatives and friends who are already involved at the main membership level and are themselves skilled. The company's aim is to educate the wider public who may not otherwise have access to education in such skills.[115]

By providing free space and organising the shows, Expertise Events is able to take the pressure off the Guilds and thus help to keep the craft industry alive and growing. Judy Newman sees the guilds as also having a valuable social aspect, as well as their educational function through museum collections and competitions, the latter of which encourages excellence in workmanship.

Expertise Events supports charities at every event, such as at a recent Melbourne Quilt Convention where they promoted a South African charity which supports women affected by HIV/AIDS by marketing their handicrafts. A considerable sum was raised through the sale of the women's goods and the charity was itself publicised and promoted to show visitors.[116] In Sydney in 2009 a project collected knickers for women in the Fistula Hospital in Addis Ababa. Thus Expertise Events is a facilitator for charity work in addition to its educational ethos, thus aligning itself with the ethos of each of the organisations in this study and therefore forming part of their learning communities.

As well as the major shows, small quilt shows can be found throughout the country in towns and suburbs, often put on as fundraisers for charity or local needs. Branches of the Guilds often put on their own shows in their local area to showcase their talent and raise funds for their own needs or charities. The women of the Salvation Army Corps in Springwood in the Blue Mountains of NSW hosted an 'Airing of the Quilts' Show in September, 2008. Some of the women of this local group represented by their quilts were also members of the Quilters' Guild, as well as of the Women's Home League. Funds raised were contributed to the work of the Salvation Army in the lower Blue Mountains, but the quilts were the prominent feature of the day and evening, when country dancing was held in the large barn-like shed on the property. My sister's twelve year old granddaughter, already proficient in sewing her own and her siblings' clothes, was inspired to begin quiltmaking by the show, and such motivation of the young ensures the continuation of the craft into the future.[117]

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[115] Judy Newman.
[116] Judy Newman.
[117] Quilt Show and Bush Dance, 27th September 2008, Springwood Salvation Army Corps.

Quilt shows are always inspirational to young and old alike and not only educate the viewers in quilt construction and colour coordination, but also in the cultural and natural history often depicted on the quilts displayed. The viewing of the quilts is always accompanied by careful examination and lively discussion about the features of the quilts, often involving questioning of the maker if she is nearby. The Salvation Army show discussed above carried brief notes beside each quilt about its inspiration, its construction and its maker.

In quilt shows there are always some quilts which will make a careful statement on a relatively 'safe' issue such as the environment or even racial diversity. However, few of these middle class women would dare to be as explicit as Bella Graham and Joyce Stalker, who write about their use of fabric to make 'defiant messages' on domestic violence and rape in New Zealand. They write of quilters who are complicit in silence about these issues, leading Stalker to construct a quilt using the metaphor of 'nice women' drinking tea, sitting around 'while other women die as a result of violence against them'.[118] Surprisingly, since I have found almost all of the women in my study to be the 'nice' women of Joyce Stalker's quilt, a later exhibition of her radical quilts in New Zealand, *Threadbare,* was reported in an Australian quilting magazine. The brief article pictures another of her quilts, 'Night Sounds on Pitcairn Island', which is constructed of woven zip fasteners as a metaphor of the systematic rape and abuse of young girls on the island.[119]

The Zonta women of Armidale were among the few women who spoke openly of domestic violence during my entire research project, so that I am forced to agree with Graham, who writes that her idea of 'quilters' in New Zealand 'brought to mind a picture of women of a certain age, class and ethnicity focused on the technical and aesthetic aspects of their art'.[120] Since most of the women to whom I spoke in this study fall into the category of preferring to remain silent about the 'unspeakable', it is obvious that another study is called for to investigate the existence of radical statements in quilting in Australia.

Fundraising Events in the Public Arena

As shown in the example above, apart from the obvious reason, fundraising events provide opportunities, however limited, to raise the profile of the organisation as well as the

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[118] Bella Graham and Joyce Stalker, 'Through the Eye of a Needle: The story of two academics' use of fabric crafts to make defiant messages', *Waikato Journal of Education,* Issue 13, 2007, pp.33-48(41).

[119] 'Truly Unruly', editorial report on *Threadbare: An exhibition of unruly quilts,* Staged in Hamilton, New Zealand in 2008, *Australian Quilters Companion: Excellence in Patchwork and Quilting,* No.36, p.13. Another report of this exhibition is online at http://radicalcrossstitch.com/2009/03/15/handcrafting-a-new-society/ Accessed online 12/5/2009.

[120] Graham and Stalker, p.42.

possibility of bringing in new members. They also educate the public in awareness of the need which the organisation is seeking to meet. These events can vary widely, depending on the organisation presenting them and the area in which they are held.

During my research I have found evidence in some surprising places and interesting ways. One day my husband was chuckling over a book he was rereading on the life and work of the cartoonist Stan Cross, who created the first newspaper comic strip to be published in Australia, in the periodical *Smith's Weekly*. His work went on to be published in national newspapers in Australia and ran for decades.[121] I picked up the book to see what it was all about and, in one of my many 'serendipity moments', discovered a reference to Armidale Zonta, some of whose members I have interviewed and some who have since become friends. Apparently the artist had lived in the Armidale area on a sheep property and had painted a six-metre-long mural to decorate his woolshed, not long before he died in 1977. The members of the Armidale Zonta Club mounted an exhibition of the work of Stan Cross, including the woolshed mural, in December 1980, opening on his birthday, 3rd December.[122] The exhibition would no doubt have aroused much interest, being the work of a local who was nationally recognised.

The exhibition of the work of this artist would have raised funds for the Armidale Zonta Club. As well, it would have educated the women themselves and visitors to the exhibition in the world of art, especially cartooning and the social comment in this particular artist's work.

Conclusion

The examples I have given in this chapter demonstrate the relationship that members of women's organisations develop with the wider community. In the case of the church organisations this includes promoting their faith and enriching the spiritual lives of the members and others with whom they come in contact. These examples also show the way that the organisations reach out to bring about learning in that community of the needs with which they are concerned. As I showed in the previous chapter, such learning can bring about personal transformation and growth as the women themselves see beyond their own concerns to those of others. In their banding together as a learning community they are offering outsiders the opportunity to learn through their community assistance, exhibitions and fundraising

[121] Vane Lindesay, *Stop Laughing: This is serious!: The life and work of Stan Cross, 1888-1977,* Melbourne University Press, 2001, p.17.
[122] Lindesay, *Stop Laughing: This is serious!,* p.100.

events. This in turn builds social capital, or trust and respect, between the organisation and the wider community and results in added strength to both.

Conclusion

This research has shown that there is significant learning in women's organisations that flows across established theoretical boundaries in adult education. Those organisations selected for the research have been chosen as examples of a broad range of organisations, but the idea at the core of what this thesis has evolved into came very late, almost at the end of my research. It became evident as the research progressed that education and learning in women's organisations cannot be contained in the 'boxes' of conventional adult education theory. I have found it to have a life and nature of its own, flowing right across the spectrum of learning theory.

In Chapter One I outlined basic theory in adult education as propounded by a number of academics, using the ideas of Foley as a basis on which to show the way that learning occurs in adults. However, while Foley sees learning as central to human life and occurring in all areas of human activity, he nonetheless places it in categories. I find that in examining learning in women's organisations the practice of categorising learning and placing it in boxes is anathema. Women in the learning communities which comprise their organisations move throughout all levels and areas of learning, at any one time learning in several different ways.

So, the education offered by universities and colleges may fit comfortably into the category of formal learning, that which is followed by a qualification or award on successful completion, and one of the four main areas which many adult education academic theorists apply to learning. However, I found that applying this criterion to women's organisations introduced difficulties because of the different structure and the level of informality in many of the organisations I selected for research. Informality in their practices, however, is not an indication that learning does not take place in the organisations researched, or that it is not quality learning, and I found a depth of learning happening at all levels of every one of the organisations in the study.

Most of the organisations carry out training for their members, whether in leadership or in their focus as learning communities. The Embroiderers' Guild, the Quilters' Guild and CWA all require qualifications for certain positions such as teaching and judging, for which training must be undertaken before the applicant is permitted to take up the position. These three organisations make awards in recognition of achievement through training and acknowledgement of the right to teach, judge or lead in some way.

The Embroiderers' Guild is shown to have the greatest focus on learning of any of the organisations in the study and is a learning community in the strongest sense of the term as defined in the thesis. The Guild's formal teaching program is intensive and aimed at promoting embroidery as an art form that will survive the test of time. Through the many accredited courses, members learn embroidery and further their skills right up to the level of teacher and judging accreditation, all of which I demonstrated to be formal learning in the way it is defined by theorists, albeit outside a recognised formal education institution.

Flowing on from the formal instruction offered by this Guild is the teaching through workshops and classes. While these do not lead to formal qualification, they engender considerable learning of embroidery as a skilled craft and as an art form in the members who take up those learning opportunities. The full calendar of classes at the Guild headquarters, as well as the groups scattered around the state, show that there are many of these opportunities through the Guild's operation.

Thus non-formal learning, the second category agreed on by many academics, is relevant because it covers the workshops and classes offered by other women's organisations as well as the Embroiderers' Guild, as I have shown. Nevertheless, it does not sit well as a discrete category in this area because it can also be present as, for example, in a thematic conference in a Christian organisation or a class in a quilt shop.

Overlapping the above criterion of non-formal learning is informal learning, where the learner seeks out information for herself in an 'ad hoc' way. This search for information can, of course, include taking a class or classes on a particular technique, as well as browsing in the Guild library and borrowing books, looking up relevant websites on the internet, or purchasing books and magazines on the desired topic. It can also include questioning the tutor or other participants in a workshop.

This third 'category' of informal learning as espoused by many adult education academics is the broadest area of learning. It covers all of the information and knowledge actively sought out by an individual in pursuit of a goal, whether overall self-improvement or amassing knowledge of a particular area. This learning can take place through questioning and discussion in a group situation such as, again, a class in a quilt shop mentioned above as an example of non-formal learning, or it can be a journey of discovery by an individual on her own. This area is by far the most common and the most appropriate learning area in women's organisations because I have found these women to be in most cases active seekers after learning and growth. Again, it occurs right across the spectrum of learning from the formal arena of a judge's accreditation course to a discussion outside a CWA branch meeting.

Incidental learning also occurs in the process of any other area of learning and is not actively sought out by the learner but is, as I commented in Chapter Five, a case of 'serendipity' – learning unsought-for. This learning results from the experience of day-to-day living, in the workplace or at home, and even in formal teaching situations, so it again overlaps, in fact is included in all three of the above theoretical 'boxes'. Following on from incidental learning, and perhaps evolving at the same time, is transformative learning, often described as personal growth, which I touched on in the initial explanatory chapter and then enlarged upon in Chapter Six. The women I interviewed spoke often of this kind of learning, for example in the confidence they acquired through participation in activities in their organisation, and through reflection on what they were in the process of learning.

The work of Colley, Hodkinson and Malcolm, which I discussed in Chapter One and later, brings an important insight into the way that learning in a complex human world does not necessarily fit the boundaries to which academics would like it to conform, especially when it happens outside their own academic institutions. Community organisations, even when office holders are academically qualified, have many characteristics which differ significantly from the formal colleges in which people gain academic qualifications, usually in order to gain employment. Tara Fenwick agrees with Colley and her colleagues, that knowledge 'is constantly emerging and spilling into other systems'.[1] I conclude that this phenomen is especially evident in the way women learn in women's organisations.

Beyond the basic categorisation of areas of learning, ideas which are relevant to women's ways of learning, including feminist theories of justice and an ethic of care, influence the way women's organisations operate and the way their members learn. Transformative learning comes about on many levels and the women to whom I spoke frequently referred to the way that being a member of their organisation had brought personal growth and significant change to their lives.

The work of Paulo Freire, Jack Mezirow and others who write on transformative or emancipatory learning, inform the way a changed life for the learner evolves as she reaches beyond introspection on her own needs to consider the needs of others. In the group situation of the organisations studied there is increased opportunity for this transformation through community outreach from the organisation, especially in those which classify themselves as service organisations.

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[1] Tara Fenwick, 'Inside out of experiential learning: Fluid bodies, co-emergent minds', in Richard Edwards, Jim Gallacher & Susan Whittaker (eds), *Learning Outside the Academy: International research perspectives on lifelong learning,* Abingdon, Routledge, 2006, pp.42-55(48).

The two service organisations I included in the research are Quota International and Zonta International, and both of these organisations focus on fundraising and activities for projects for disadvantaged women and children. Quota and Zonta do not offer formal education which awards qualifications. However, the scholarships they award lead to considerable learning opportunities, not only for the recipient but also for members who learn about the recipient and her work, as well as the beneficiaries of the recipient's work. This has been especially so in the case of Kirsty Gardner-Berry's scholarship from Quota, which indirectly resulted in governments providing hearing screening for all newborn babies in most states of Australia. The Amelia Earhart Scholarship, awarded by Zonta International for young women in male-dominated areas of science and engineering related to aerospace, is a significant encouragement to young women to break through barriers and prove themselves capable of excellence in a challenging and innovative field.

Thus it can be seen that scholarships awarded by the organisations, not only by those who call themselves service organisations, can result in learning of all types, often more than one area of learning in a single individual. The two Guilds and CWA all offer scholarships or grants. Such awards all lead to significant learning opportunities and personal encouragement for the recipients and for other members of the organisation through their publicising and through subsequent teaching by the winner if that is required or offered.

Publicity by the organisations also provides learning opportunities for members through the newsletters, magazines and websites they publish. The women learn through reading instructive and/or informative articles, through reading about the achievements of other members, and through accessing workshops, classes and activities from the calendars listing functions and events.

Commercial magazines related to the interests of the organisations as learning communities also offer considerable learning opportunities for the members who read them. As well as instructional and informative articles they also often publicise the organisations and their events, especially the Guilds, thus promoting themselves as part of the learning communities. In the same way exhibitions, shows and retail shops form part of the Guild communities, as I related in Chapter Four.

All of the individual and group learning in the organisations can result in outreach as a community of practice to the outside society, whether local or global. Of the two Guilds the Quilters' Guild is most active in this way, with the group known as Community Quilts, as well as individual members. Through members' efforts quilts are made for other organisations, thus widening the sphere of influence of the organisation. CWA also reaches out to the wider

community in ways I have shown. Quota and Zonta both have local and overseas projects, such as those which Zonta carries out under its theme of 'Advancing the Status of Women'.

Mothers' Union, a women's organisation within the Anglican church, is also a worldwide organisation as are Quota and Zonta. In the Sydney Diocese, where some members are younger and more active than they possibly are in other areas, MU has significant outreach to the community through its city shop, its Parenting Program for parents of young children, hospital visitation and service to people waiting at the Children's Courts.

Further learning in MU comes about through attendance at meetings, services and conferences, and especially through newsletters and *Mia Mia* magazine. In a similar way to MU, all of the other Christian church organisations included in the study offer many learning opportunities through meetings, newsletters and their magazines. The Catholic Women's League, PWA, and the Salvation Army Women's Home League all have a similar aim of encouraging and enriching the spiritual lives and personal growth of the members, as well as drawing in new members to the organisations, to the Christian faith and to the associated churches. CWCI, as a non-denominational organisation, adds to these aims by actively promoting study of the Bible through KYB in addition to the encouragement of spiritual growth it provides to participants in the program.

Learning takes place in The Women's Club through its Learning Circles and through the practical and social involvement of members, but it does differ in the way members meet and the facilities it offers as an elite club on a single site. However, women who are members learn in similar ways to those in the other organisations in the study.

The National Council of Women and PPSEAWA, as the two umbrella organisations, have only been briefly mentioned in the thesis. However, they represent many of the organisations in this research through their operations at government and United Nations level. For that reason they extend the influence and learning opportunities of the organisations and subsequently to the women in membership.

Thus through this research I have shown the extensive learning opportunities offered by these women's organisations. The learning extends to the women who are members of the organisations and beyond to their friends, families and communities. Therefore learning can be seen to be significant in the women's organisations included in this research. As well, all of the categories of learning within the established boundaries set by the theorists whose work I have discussed are present, but the learning is fluid and overflows the boundaries to enrich and empower the lives of the learners and those beyond their learning communities.

There are many more women's organisations whose education and learning could be the focus of future research. Indeed, all of the organisations in this study contain untapped riches for future researchers which I was not able to include because of limitations of time and space. Each of the organisations as a single entity is worth a focus because of the depth and breadth of learning opportunities whose surface I have barely scratched. The larger organisations, especially CWA and the Guilds, would yield more than one thesis or research study. Much could also be written on radical activity in women's organisations.

There were numerous organisations I was obliged to omit altogether from my research for various reasons, including lack of relevance, yet they were rich in value. Women's associations linked to professions and workplaces are an important future study, as I discovered when I met a woman who was at the time mayor of a large western Sydney local government area and an executive in Australian Local Government Women's Association (ALGWA). I recorded an interview with her, but found that it did not fit within the narrower parameters I was forced to draw, thus excluding hers and other significant and worthwhile organisations.

During the course of my study I realised that each of the organisations examined called for an in-depth historical analysis in its own right. I had earlier prepared a chapter on the history of the organisations under scrutiny in this research but, owing to the particular focus on learning in my study, this was omitted. Thus possible areas for future research could be histories of individual women's organisations (voluntary and otherwise) emphasising the contributions they have made and/or continue to make to enriching the lives of their members and society. There are many organisations that could be researched other than the ones studied here, such a VIEW clubs, women's associations in churches other than those I have studied, and radical women's organisations. There is also potential for other kinds of studies. While this study is cross-disciplinary, studies could be carried out from a narrower social science perspective that examine, for example, the life histories of women (like myself) whose lives have been significantly influenced by belonging to such organisations. The impact on society that such women have made would surely make a fascinating research topic.

The list of possible future studies is limited only by the interests and imaginations of future researchers. I have shown just a little of the way women learn and grow and benefit the wider community through their voluntary organisations; women's learning in any organisation they have formed is broad and deep enough to stimulate much study to show the ways in which women contribute to the community and benefit from their voluntary organisations.

Fig 10. Women's learning breaks through boundaries.

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Appendix 1

Fabricating The Many Faces of Eve

Visualising research and interrogating a thesis with a quilt

Engaging place(s)/engaging culture(s)
Ninth Humanities Postgraduate Conference
Faculty of Humanities, Curtin University, Perth, Western Australia

Proposal

The quilt, of which I propose to submit photographs, began life as an illustrated thesis plan, inspired by the flyer for this conference. Fabricating The Many Faces of Eve is a theoretical mind map making visual in illustration and text the diversity of women I have discovered in my quest to investigate education and learning in women's organisations.

Mind maps are well-known as assisting thought, although usually more ephemeral than my creation. This more permanent fabric mind map represents the variety and changeableness of Woman, whether staunch feminist, contented wife and mother, or some other facet of womanhood, and provides many possibilities of representation. It is a textu(r)al exploration of women's service and leisure organisations in NSW, their histories and the activities of their membership as cultural and social groups and learning communities.

The PhD thesis itself is cross-disciplinary, in that it crosses borders between arts, education and sociology to investigate the way that women's organisations can teach and transform the lives of the women who are their members, whether in conscious education or incidental learning through relationship building. Creating the quilt engages with the research and its subjects and assists my own thinking. At the same time it provokes thought in onlookers and makes my research visible and tactile to them.

Appendix 2

The Journey of a Thesis Quilt

Mind maps are a productive way of working out where you want to go to solve a problem, work out your career path – or write a thesis. I learned the way to produce one in a TAFE college Tertiary Preparation Certificate course and had used it to write early essays, so it made sense to use the tool more than once in my thesis preparation. It became even more essential when the university closed my school and I found myself in a different faculty, with new supervisors, having to re-craft the thesis.

When an email dropped into my inbox about a postgraduate conference at Curtin University in Fremantle, Western Australia, which questioned the idea of stretching boundaries to use creativity in Humanities, I was enthralled. Looking at what we do 'as words on a page, as paint on a canvas, culture as translocal, transnational, multi-national, global, local ...' – what could I do with that? To start with, I sent an email to the convenor, Dr Jan Baldwin, to thank her for the inspiration and express my regret that I could not participate in the conference; she replied inviting me to do so.

Inspired by the conference theme, I had gone back to the mind map and thought about the skills I had beside writing – about the skills of the women about whom I was writing and my relationships with them and with the organisations to which they belonged. Quiltmaking and embroidery was a big part of those skills for me and for a lot of other women in my research too. I don't remember exactly how it happened, but the quilt began to form in my mind and in my visualising, and I began to work it out, at first with the central focus of adult education and the different ways that academics like to theorise about the different ways that people learn, then on to the organisations whose members were the focus of my research. It was then that the mind map on paper began to metamorphose into the mind map on fabric to the mind map on a quilt.

As I played about with fabric and threads and ideas the quilt began to 'materialise', and the most important early development was creating a poster of the quilt in progress and sending it off to Curtin University to hang in the gallery of work at the conference. As I continued to work on the design of the quilt an unexpected bonus emerged. Not only was I creating a quilt from the ideas encapsulated in the thesis, I found that my thoughts about what I was researching and writing crystallised, so that I was able to write down my findings in a clearer

and more ordered way. So the two – the fabric 'mind map' and the thesis – were working with each other and inspiring each other.

Visits to quilt shops and stalls at shows to find just the right fabric also provided inspiration, because it began conversations with proprietors and bystanders about why I wanted, for example, fabric with a woman speaking on a telephone (what excitement on one shopping expedition when my friend discovered it and came rushing up to the counter with "I found your telephone fabric!"). Every woman I met wanted to know all about the quilt and the research and to tell me about someone she knew who could contribute something to it long after I had more than enough.

And so the quilt, in the end, has contributed enormously to the thesis and aroused interest in so many women who want to see it after completion. Long before finishing it, when I had not even completed the top, I was compelled to take it to a Zonta Club meeting where I was photographed beside it with the President so that she could include it in the newsletter. I wish that I could have included everything in the thesis on the quilt, but that, of course, has not been possible. Unfortunately there were some important omissions I discovered, or was told about, after the photograph was taken. The most significant of these was 'Country of Study', left out of the CWA's image on the quilt. I knew that I would have to add that, but too late for the photograph, after its absence was pointed out to me by David Ward, Master of Earle Page College at UNE, which hosts the Country of Study weekend annually for CWA.[2]

As I showed the completed quilt while nearing the end of my candidature, I found that women were receiving it with real enthusiasm. They voiced their realisation of how much they had learned from their membership through my visualisation. As well, I see them as continuing their learning by my depiction of other organisations included in the research. Some women have even expressed renewed enthusiasm for their organisations when I have told them the outcomes of my research and shown them its visualisation in the quilt.

The quilt, however, although having the appearance of completion, will never truly be completed. That is because the story of women's organisations and the learning of their members will not end until the last member has left the last organisation. Where this quilt will go on its own journey after my graduation I do not know, but it has played a great part in enhancing the research journey about the journey of women's learning in their organisations. The thesis would not be the same without it.

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[2] See discussion of this weekend in Chapter Three.

Appendix 3

Research Approach and Strategies Adopted

This appendix outlines briefly the approaches, techniques and strategies used in undertaking the research, collating the data and writing it up into the form of the thesis. It discusses why a qualitative/naturalistic methodology was taken, how mixed methods were used, and how choices were made in the selection of sources of information.

As my background is arts-based in the humanities, this study is placed primarily in the area of what Willis refers to as 'arts-based expressive research'.[3] Willis quotes Eisner as saying of arts-based enquiry that:

> Arts-based research is a way to ensure that science-based research alone does not monopolise how educational practice can be studied or what needs to be done to describe it.[4]

Through varied techniques and strategies in the thesis, not only arts-based but across other disciplines, I have shown that women's organisations are learning sites, as I discuss below. As the focus was on the role of women's organisations, the research approach adopted was predominantly feminist.

Choice of a qualitative, feminist approach

Feminism, by its very nature, crosses all disciplinary borders since women as half of the population have interests in, and are affected by, elements of every field of human inquiry. Thus, because this thesis has its basis in feminist methodology, it is therefore cross-disciplinary. Consequently the data collection techniques used vary, but the research approach emanates basically from my position in the humanities and thus is interpretive by nature as opposed to positivist.

The thesis sought to examine how the practices of women's organisations are, or can be, driven by issues of social justice, an ethic of care, equality, creativity and class, all aspects of the feminist approach to research. Thus, the use of this mixed methods approach for the thesis permitted a useful triangulated framework which afforded a more valid analysis of the data which emerged from the multiple research strategies adopted.

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3 Peter Willis, 'The Work of Portrayal: Expressive approaches to educational research', in P. Liamputtong & J. Rumbold (eds), *Knowing Differently: Arts-based and collaborative research,* New York, Nova Science Publishers, 2008, pp.49-65(51).

4 Quoted in Willis, 'The Work of Portrayal'.

My own membership of several of the organisations meant that I was a participant as both a researcher and a subject. This position resulted in the creation of the quilt whose images accompany the thesis, and which I used as a tool to facilitate thinking and to reflect on and through research strategies. The quilt was and is, as well, an expression of my own creativity and learning through my membership of the organisations involved. Its creation fits with Eisner's concept of arts-based inquiry as noted earlier.[5]

Multiple research methods require a strategy to draw them together into a unified whole. The process of triangulation noted above allowed me to make sense of the varied collection of data and thus draw conclusions from it all. The research process draws on multiple sources which are discussed below.

Research strategies and tools

The initial source of information was secondary academic work on adult education and feminist publications to review the literature and become familiarised with the background of the field. After narrowing the research area to women's organisations I collected primary material – publications by the organisations under scrutiny themselves, including corporate histories, literature such as newsletters and journals to advise members of the activities of their organisation, and publicity to attract new members. Secondary material consisting of newspaper and magazine articles about activities of the organisations was also collected, as well as information by them or about them on the internet.

Informants, chosen from the organisations and for interviewing, were selected through the procedure of non-probability or purposive sampling, considered by researchers as the most appropriate for qualitative studies which do not seek to make statistical inferences. Thus, I chose each subject because she was, or in a couple of cases had been, a member of one of the organisations included in the study. They comprised the people who knew what I sought to know. Furthermore, I chose the women, and asked the questions during the interviews, in order to discover what they had learned through their membership of the organisation.

Other sources used for data collection included in-depth interviews of thirty women who were officebearers or ordinary members of organisations included in the study. The interviews were recorded on a Sony minidisk recorder and copies on compact discs were subsequently deposited in the State Library of New South Wales Oral History Collection after

[5] Cited in Willis, 'The Work of Portrayal'.

permission had been granted by the interviewees.[6] Notes were taken during other informal interviews because of an unsympathetic meeting environment such as cafes, or because they consisted of telephone conversations. In most cases the written-up notes were sent to the informant for checking and returned to me. Length of the interviews varied considerably, with those by key informants in leadership positions being the longest at an hour or more, and some by members being as short as a few minutes.

Most of the shorter interviews were those with the members of the Newcastle Branch of The Embroiderers' Guild of New South Wales, where I hired a room at their meeting site in New Lambton and interviewed the women by turns. Some of the interviews were informal – unstructured but not undirected – where I had conversations with women at meetings and conferences or even, in some cases, while waiting for trains or buses. I rarely encountered women who were unwilling to speak about their organisations, and they were usually positive about their membership and the learning which resulted from it. I also gathered information through corresponding by email with some members known to me or who were recommended by other members. In the case of Quota and Zonta I approached the organisations 'cold' to ask for their participation, which was freely given.

My membership of some of the organisations examined has allowed me to experience and share firsthand the workings of the organisations and the feelings of the other members. This meant that some interviews took the form of conversations more than research interviews, such as in the the Embroiderers' Guild, where I shared a knowledge of, and interest in, the experiences of which the informant was speaking.

Some of the others, however, such as for example Quota, Zonta, the Catholic Women's League and, especially, The Women's Club with its elite environment, were more remote, thus rendering me closer to Virginia Woolf's experience of being a 'benevolent spectator', to which I referred in the thesis.[7] In these situations I deliberately attempted to distance myself and remain a listener to the questions I asked, which I allowed to be directed by the informant's previous responses. However, the friendship and enthusiasm of the women in their communications with me and their hospitality helped to bridge the divide of my distance from them as a researcher.

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6 Each interviewee was given an information sheet and permission form to sign. These documents had been approved by the Human Ethics Research Committee of the University of New England.

7 In Chapter One (p.43) of the thesis. From L. Stanley & S. Wise, 'The Research Process', in L. Stanley & S. Wise, in *Breaking Out:Feminist Consciousness and Feminist Research,* Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1993, pp.150-196(166).

Measures taken to ensure validity

Established principles as laid down by Owens for naturalistic enquiry were adhered to in order to enhance credibility of the research findings.[8] These principles are:

- *Prolonged data gathering:* This process was undertaken over a period of at least three years in order that I might be thoroughly familiar with the organisations and have a deeper level of understanding of the informants and their experience of learning in their organisations.
- *Triangulation of data:* Multiple research tools allowed the data to be verified and cross-checked. Thus, for example, interviews with informants, study of the literature produced by the organisations and reference to secondary sources such as an article in a women's magazine about the activities of that particular organisation, followed by the consulting of a biographical entry of a member, together served to demonstrate the validity of the findings.
- *Member checks via interviewee's feedback:* Validity of data was checked through conversations with other members, checking of literature and websites, and observation in organisation meetings where possible.
- *Collection of 'referential' source material:* Throughout the research period I collected and filed a substantial amount of data apart from the academic literature. This data included newsletters, magazines and journals of the organisations, secondary references from newspapers and magazines and some video and DVD recordings of relevant documentaries and films, to which I have referred in the thesis. I have also downloaded material from the organisations' own websites, as well as copies and transcriptions of the oral history interviews I conducted.
- *Use of 'thick description':* The narrative nature of the thesis, developed from the material collected over the period of the research, is deliberately written to provide a thick description which Owens states must 'take the reader there'. In telling the stories of the women involved I have created an outcome of that thick description from my humanities background.[9]

Willis has listed seven features of arts-based research after Barone and Eisner, showing how creating a narrative which engages the reader is valuable in the writing of research and its outcomes. These seven features of this good writing are:

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8 R.G.Owens, 'Methodological Rigor in Naturalistic Inquiry: Some Issues and Answers', *Educational Administration Quarterly,* 18(2), 1-21.

9 Owens, 'Methodological Rigor in Naturalistic Inquiry'.

1. It creates a virtual reality.
2. It exists in the presence of ambiguity.
3. It uses expressive language.
4. It uses contextualized and vernacular language.
5. It promotes empathy in the reader.
6. It carries the stamp of the writer's personal signature.
7. Aesthetic form is present in the work.

Thus, the "living inquiry" approach to arts-based research, when well applied, should 'as far as possible be good art as well – a good story, poem and the like'.[10]

The other measure taken to ensure validity as advocated by Owens is that of *Engagement in peer consultation* as noted above. In the case of this research this process involved consultation with supervisors in person and via telephone calls and email, as well as with other academics in relevant fields, including adult education, humanities and social sciences. In addition to the direction of the Human Ethics Research Committee of the University of New England, as recounted below, I hold membership in the Oral History Association of Australia, New South Wales branch. As a member of this association I have attended seminars and consulted with officers of the association, one of whom is my principal supervisor, Associate Professor Janis Wilton, who is also a Past President of the International Oral History Association.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical procedures as dictated by the Human Ethics Research Committee of the University of New England were followed with regard to interviewing the participants. The key principles adhered to comprised:

- *Informed voluntary consent.* Participants were informed of the nature of the research and agreed to participate.
- *Protection of privacy.* No information provided was divulged to others.
- *Anonymity and confidentiality.* All participants were assured of anonymity and no participant was identified in the research unless she was willing to be identified. However, most participants were identified and willing to be identified, a feature of much oral history research. The participants were virtually unanimous in their desire to see the valuable

[10] Willis, 'The Work of Portrayal'.

contribution of women's organisations, and their own in particular, publicised and made available to a wider audience.

- *Sensitive handling of data.* All records were, and continue to be, kept in a secure place.
- *Storage of data.* Data collected will be stored for a minimum period of five years, most in my home, but all but one of the audio recordings and their signed release documents are held in the Oral History Collection of the Mitchell Library.
- *Avoidance of bias.* Every care was taken to avoid gender, social and cultural bias.

An information sheet which had been approved by the Ethics Committee was given to each interviewee informing her of her rights in regard to the information in the interview, and she was required to sign a release form giving permission for the interview to be recorded and deposited in the Oral History Collection of the Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales. Names, and in most cases organisations, were not included in situations where informants disclosed sensitive issues or negative views. In the case of this research this only arose in unrecorded interviews for which I took notes. No sensitive issues were disclosed in any of the interviews which I recorded and all of the women except one agreed to have their identifiable interview deposited in the public library. The interview for which permission was withheld has not been placed in the public collection with the others but is in my keeping.

Appendix 4

Women's Organisations in this Study

Organisation	Service Component	Leisure Activities	Formally Organised Teaching	Informal Activities
Associated Country Women of the World (ACWW)	Support to rural women worldwide, especially in developing countries. Umbrella organisation encompassing women's organisations worldwide including CWA and WI. Lobbying of governments and United Nations	Not investigated for this work	Training and development to assist rural women to advance. Promotion of aims to maintain membership of organisations	Not investigated for this study
Catholic Women's League	Mutual support of women in the Catholic Church. Community service. Representation to Catholic hierarchy. Some government representation.	Fundraising activities, events and social functions.	Catholic teaching,	Guest speakers Meetings
CWCI (formerly known as Christian Women Communicating International)	'Safaris' to isolated women.	Events and social functions such as coffee and dessert nights or morning teas.	Bible teaching through CWCI Conferences and Know Your Bible classes.	Social aspects of classes and conferences. Guest speakers at meetings and conferences
Country Women's Association of NSW	Lobbying of governments and commercial organisations, especially on behalf of rural women. Support of rural women, fundraising for medical research and for needs in rural areas.	Outings and activities as organised by branches and groups.	Judges' training. Needlework & Craft classes, workshops and competitions. Scholarships International Study Schools.	Guest speakers at branch, group and conference level. International Days, Cultural Days, Book compiling for cultural and international competitions. Activities within branches.
Embroiderers' Guild NSW Inc.	Conservation & Valuation Services. Charity and community service by individual groups	Involvement in classes and workshops is seen as leisure by most members	Scholarships. Formal courses for judges, teachers and Certificate awards. Classes and Workshops	Guest speakers Meetings

Organisation	Service Component	Leisure Activities	Formally Organised Teaching	Informal Activities
Mothers' Union	Support for young parents. Gifts to new mothers and to female prisoners. Serving of refreshments in children's courts. Caritas mother and toddler groups. Volunteer service in shop.	Events and social functions for fundraising	Parenting Courses, Bible Studies	Guest speakers Meetings. Sydney Shop.
National Council of Women	Umbrella organisation of women's groups. Lobbying of government and UN		None	Meetings of organisation representatives and individual members
Pan-Pacific & South East Asia Women's Association (PPSEAWA)	Umbrella organisation of women's groups. Lobbying of government and UN.	Luncheons, visits to activities organised by member organisations.	None	Regular meetings of representatives and individual members with guest speakers.
Presbyterian Women's Association	Association of women who are members of the Presbyterian Church in Australia. Dorcas outreach to the homeless in cities. Local service e.g. catering for funerals in Springwood church.	Events and social functions	Bible Studies. Annual Craft weekend.	Guest speakers Meetings
Quilters' Guild	Construction and gifts of quilts for charities. Joint charity projects e.g quilts for Ronald Mcdonald House, hospitals or foster children. Valuation Service.	Quilting groups	Workshops and classes, teacher accreditation. Scholarships.	Guest speakers, meetings, Annual Quilt Show at Darling Harbour, Sydney and smaller shows organised by members and groups.
Quota International	Fundraising for hearing-impaired and disadvantaged women and children. Lobbying of government and commerce.	Events and social functions	Workshops for leadership training; award of scholarships.	Guest speakers Meetings

Organisation	Service Component	Leisure Activities	Formally Organised Teaching	Informal Activities
Salvation Army Women's Home League	Outreach, provision of leisure activities and education of disadvantaged women.	Events and social functions	Bible Studies. Leadership training.	Guest speakers Meetings
The Women's Club	Social club with city premises for leisure. Hotel-style accommodation for women	Events and social functions	Learning Circles	Promoted as 'a haven in the city' for busy women, especially those in business.
Zonta International	Fundraising and Advocacy to advance the status of women and children. Lobbying of government and United Nations.	Events and social functions	Leadership training; many awards and scholarships such as Amelia Earhart Fellowship.	Guest speakers Meetings. Joint projects such as Birthing Kit assembly days.