

**PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH  
AT THE MIGRANT WOMEN'S LEARNING CENTRE**

**A Report and a Reflection**

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## STATEMENT OF AUTHORSHIP

Except where reference is made in the text, this thesis contains no material published elsewhere or extracted in whole or in part from a thesis presented by me for another degree or diploma.

No other person's work has been used without due acknowledgement in the main text of this thesis.

This thesis has not been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any other tertiary institution.

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Ongoing discussions with my partner David Legge have also contributed to the development of the ideas in this thesis.

## ABSTRACT

This is an account of a collaborative process of discussion and learning that was planned within the broad framework of participatory action research and took place in the Migrant Women's Learning Centre at the Northern Metropolitan College of TAFE between May 1991 and May 1992.

The teachers at the Centre constituted themselves as an 'action research group', resourced by myself as one of their number. We embarked on a process of reflection and discussion in order to share and develop the theoretical understandings informing our work, to share classroom experience and techniques and to explore more deeply what we do in the classroom and why. We identified a number of problems with the notion of 'personal development' and worked from there to articulate a discourse of the meanings and practices of a pedagogy of adult education and English as a Second Language within an all-women's setting.

The collaborative process amongst the teachers was paralleled by two other processes: monitoring my own classroom behaviour by means of a teaching journal and involving the students in reflection and feedback on the theme of the enquiry.

There are several themes that interweave through the presentation and discussion of the project outcomes: the problematising of 'personal development' and 'empowerment' in relation to our teaching; the consequent reworking and reconstruction of our pedagogical understanding; a discussion of the possibilities for teacher-student solidarity in terms of the poststructuralist analysis of language and power; a discussion of the significance of the project as a model of collaborative teacher-based professional development; a critical reflection on issues of action research methodology suggested by this project; and a reflection on the power of feminist poststructuralist theory in interpreting the outcomes and suggesting new possibilities for action research itself.

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## OVERVIEW OF CHAPTERS

In Chapter 1, the institutional and political context is outlined as the context for the project. Current methodological literature relevant to participatory action research in education is referred to and theoretical resources used to discuss and interpret the outcomes are introduced.

In Chapter 2, I describe how the project was first conceived, the action research group formed and the reconnaissance phase initiated. I outline the aims of the project, the three main streams of action and reflection that took place and the evidence used in presenting this report.

In Chapter 3, I describe the initial brainstorming of 'personal development' in which we started to examine and critique our own usage of the term and explored issues of individualism and cultural imposition. We examined how power is implicated in the usage of 'personal development' as a curriculum item and interrogated our own practice in terms of the potential for domination.

In Chapter 4, I show how three strands of the discussion converged to form the basis of the 'planning phase'. These were: identifying of the different ways in which we use the term 'personal development' at the Centre, articulating our personal and professional values as teachers and making a critique of how power is implicated in the wider discourse of 'personal development' as well as in our own practice. The plan for a 'mini teach-in' whereby we would continue to learn from each other, but in a systematic way is also described.

In Chapter 5, the 'action' part of the process, the 'mini teach-in', is described. The teacher's presentations are interpreted in terms of three pedagogical themes which illustrate the elements of an eclectic and feminist-informed pedagogy practised at the Centre.

In Chapter 6, I document the feedback and reflections of the participants on their involvement in the action research process. The processes of collaborative learning included sharing classroom methodology, building theoretical frameworks and applying the techniques of literacy teaching to our own learning. Feedback by the participants indicates that the process enhanced our solidarity as a group and led to a clearer articulation of the philosophy and ethos of the MWLC.

In Chapter 7, I describe the process of action researching my own teaching. Keeping a detailed teaching journal over eight months enabled me to monitor my classroom behaviour and to start to change some aspects. The monologic process of reflection on my own teaching was informed by the discussions and reflections of the action research group and fed into the group reflection on personal development and eclectic pedagogy.

In Chapter 8, I describe my attempt to involve students in reflection on the theme of 'personal development'. The written contributions of two classes are shown to mirror the themes developed during the teacher discussions of 'personal development'. The poststructuralist critique of institutional knowledge/power is discussed in the light of the processes of student involvement and an analysis is made of the possibility of solidarity as well as coercion in the student-teacher relationship.

In Chapter 9, I draw together the outcomes of the three main streams of action and reflection (teacher collaboration, student input and teaching journal) and draw out a number of themes which emerged from this project and are relevant to teaching and research in ESL and adult education in the current context.

## Chapter One

# INSTITUTIONAL SETTING AND THEORETICAL RESOURCES

### **1. Introduction**

### **2. The Institutional Setting**

**(a) Trends in educational policy**

**(b) The students**

**(c) The teachers and the college**

### **3. Theoretical Resources**

**(a) Positivism and 'grand narratives'**

**(b) Poststructuralism and discourse theory**

**(c) Action research and educational reform**

**(d) Action research and critical pedagogy**

**(e) Action research and feminist research**



# **ChapterOne**

## **INSTITUTIONAL SETTING AND THEORETICAL RESOURCES**

### **1. Introduction**

In this chapter I describe some key features of the institutional context of the Migrant Women's Learning Centre (MWLC) and identify the main theoretical and methodological resources which have informed this participatory action research project.

I will discuss the setting of the project in relation to the students and teachers, the College and the current political and economic situation which together form the backdrop for reflection on its significance as a contribution to educational change. In the theoretical discussion, I locate the current project in terms of the critique of positivism, the current literature on participatory action research in education, discourse theory and the principles and approaches of Freirean and feminist pedagogies.

### **2. The Institutional Setting**

#### **(a) Trends in educational policy**

Developments within TAFE colleges in recent years clearly reflect the values and policies of economic rationalism as have been described by Anna Yeatman (1990, 1991), Michael Pusey (1991) and many others.

The discourse of 'the clever country', and the consequent reshaping of education and training to meet the needs of industry restructuring, reveal a paradigmatic shift away from liberal, humanist conceptions of education (such as the educational philosophy of John Dewey (1974)) towards the commodification of educational provision in the service of assigned economic ends.

On the one hand, this can be seen in the trend towards managerialism and the 'bureaucratic cultural revolution' within educational institutions, as described by Anna Yeatman (1990, Chap. Two). On the other hand, adult education and training is becoming largely de-institutionalised by the reshaping of the education sector into markets, the introduction of privatisation in adult education and training and the encouragement of

competitiveness between providers in order to reduce costs and to make them "more responsive to industry needs".

In the face of large-scale unemployment, the NewStart program is directing unprecedented numbers of unemployed people (especially migrants) into language and other training courses. Adult education can now be seen as not just subordinated to economic and industrial goals but also the means of palliating unemployment through programs which are implicitly 'victim blaming' by suggesting people are unemployed because of lack of skills, rather than lack of jobs.

In keeping with the wider discourse of economic rationalism, industrial conditions such as tenure and other award conditions are now cast as rigidities to be removed to provide sufficient flexibility for 'market forces' to operate. It would seem that increasingly top down management is necessary to implement these changes and overcome teacher resistance. On May 23, 1992 the contract teachers in TAFE held a conference under the slogan, 'Language teachers as the new grape pickers of the 90s'. Helen Moore spoke about how economic rationalism has completely changed the discourse and culture of adult educational delivery. Quoting Anna Yeatman, she described how a market-oriented ethos of efficiency, competitiveness and increasing productivity has now displaced the ethos of service to the students' needs and professional excellence. The professional and industrial down-grading of teachers must be seen in the context of corporate managerialism, in which the idea of public service is replaced by that of the management and delivery of instrumental outcomes. The power of professional advocacy is being broken:

"By redefining professionals as employees subject to management prerogatives, they are so placed that their expertise, craft and judgement are not called upon to inform decision-making processes in respect of the needs of the client group concerned ... On the contrary, they are to manage demands at the coalface effectively, efficiently and economically ... What we have seen is the replacement of public policy objectives couched in terms of social goods by public policy objectives couched in terms of economic goods" (Yeatman, 1991).

Corporate managerialism in colleges imitates private sector management models so that course delivery can 'compete' efficiently with the new generation of private training providers. This privatisation model, in the context of growing polarisation in Australian society, strikes at the heart of

some fundamental assumptions about the educational relationships. Simon Marginson wrote of the potential impact of privatisation and the development of 'education markets' on the 'moral' ethos of education as follows:

"The 'commodification' of education means a fundamental change in the social ethic on which education is based. As we have seen, in the case of fully developed commodity production, the only objective is profits. More and better education is no longer an objective of production. This has implications for both government policies and for the practices of educators ... Market exchange requires educators and students to see each other differently from before. In markets there is neither solidarity nor altruism. To the extent that the market logic becomes determining, neither party adopts the interests of the other." (1991, p.12)

In other words, the issue is not whether skills transfer should take place, but whether it should be in the context of an alienated relationship or a relationship of solidarity. Marginson suggests that teachers should respond by challenging the underlying value assumptions of the new discourse and

"... develop a new educational discourse, with a different logic to that of market relations...The opening is there for educational policies and practices that are based on democratic values and social solidarity - rather than the extreme individualism, competitiveness and market nihilism that characterises the free market position." (p.19)

In the same vein, Yeatman talks about the development of 'politics of discourse' as a strategy to resist the state-centric discourse. The politics of discourse has the potential 'for encouraging the proliferation of discursive interventions, of different forms of deconstruction, and of different languages themselves' (1990, p.174).

Within this context, the action research project which we undertook can be seen as an attempt to resist 'top down' theory and policy-making which constitutes teachers as employees delivering a service, rather than as professionals contributing to the development of educational theory and policy as a part of their practice. The process of collaborative reflection has strengthened us as a group and has enabled us to theorise our pedagogy more clearly as contributing to the welfare and empowerment of the students in a relationship of solidarity with the students.

**(b) The Students**

At any one time, there are approximately 180 women enrolled as students at the MWLC. They have a wide range of national and ethnic backgrounds and have been in Australia for periods of time ranging between 28 years to a few months. The majority of them have low levels of previous education and have worked in unskilled positions in manufacturing industry and/or are currently unemployed. Most are disadvantaged in their participation in mainstream society through the effect of family pressures and responsibilities, lack of English language and literacy skills, low self-confidence or a combination of these.

The demise of the clothing, textile, footwear and other manufacturing industries means that many of the students are now facing the prospect of permanent unemployment. Many come from traditional patriarchal societies in which their role and rights are firmly circumscribed. The upheaval and cultural shock of immigration, the new economic pressures and the absence of support from community and extended family networks often results in family breakdown. Around 40% of MWLC students are single mothers who are often often struggling to bring up large families with little support. Many of the women have come as refugees, fleeing violent wars or political repression, and are suffering the effects of war and loss.

My most recent class is a 'slice of life' of migrant women facing the multiple disadvantages mentioned above. The nineteen students come from eleven different countries: Egypt, Greece, Vietnam, Columbia, Poland, El Salvador, Thailand, Somalia, Eritrea, and Turkey. One worked as a part-time cleaner, and the rest were unemployed, wanting to find work or to set up small businesses. Seven of the nineteen were single mothers. Two were on WorkCare for industrial injuries. Five had been retrenched from manufacturing industry in recent times. Ten of them lived in high rise flats in Carlton, Fitzroy or Brunswick. Five were refugees from El Salvador, Eritrea and Somalia.

Despite their many problems, students who come to the MWLC tend to form lively groups who communicate warmly with the teachers and with each other. They remain optimistic about the future and seem determined to advance themselves and their families through developing their English language and other skills and joining the paid workforce. In classroom discussions they show a concern for social and global issues which goes beyond their own personal interests. In the safety of the Centre most

participate avidly in questioning and debate about the world - how it is changing and how it should change, and share the perspectives of their various experiences and cultures.

In the context of the classroom and the Centre, collaborative processes of learning and acquiring language and literacy become a medium for group and individual development, and vice-versa (Sanguinetti, 1991). This project helped to reveal the possibilities as well as the limits of pedagogy as a process of building relations of solidarity between the women students described above and their teachers.

### **(c) The Teachers and the College**

Teachers at the MWLC, in common with over 80% of ESL teachers in TAFE colleges, are employed sessionally or on contract or with a combination of both. Of the six people who took part in this project, only one of us (the coordinator of the Centre) has permanency. The remaining five have an average of twenty years teaching and professional experience. Although experienced and committed teachers, we do not have access to security of tenure or other privileges of permanent employment.

Lack of tenure tends to act to exclude contract teachers from the 'polity' of a college whose basic mode of employment (discounting recent developments) is permanent. This 'second class status' of ESL and other contract teachers at the MWLC (in a College in which permanent tenure is still the norm in other departments) undermines their morale and implicitly acts as a barrier to their full involvement in the life of the institution, especially in terms of contesting and contributing to institutional discourses and practices. -At the same time, the amalgamation of many campuses into one large institution with the corresponding amalgamation of union branches, has led to a breakdown of teacher networks and the bureaucratisation and marginalisation of union activity. Significantly increased class sizes and an increase in teachers' administrative work load, associated with new arrangements whereby we are now accountable to local Commonwealth Employment Service offices in our enrolment procedures, have all added to the demands and stresses of our work lives.

The institutional life-world of the MWLC is thus characterised on the one hand by frustration and pessimism about the future. On the other hand, as a women's centre in a separate geographical location, it is a dynamic teaching environment and an oasis of women's culture and communication within the institutional mainstream. As an all-women's

English language centre, the MWLC is like an institution in itself which has developed its own culture and vitality. Teaching there brings rewards which tend to compensate for the frustrations and the current decline in industrial rights and conditions. We enjoy our work, which involves communication and exchange between women of many different ages, ethnicities, cultures and classes.

Nevertheless, the demands of a job in which the teacher must respond to a multiplicity of needs and possibilities above and beyond 'straight teaching' are such that they could never be adequately fulfilled. We find ourselves in a continuous state of tension between what we could do to develop our teaching in responding to the needs of groups and individual students, and the practical and institutional limitations on our time and energy. In working with and attempting to meet the needs of students who are (in the main) casualties of the recession, we constantly come up against the limits of our own personal resources and of the TAFE system. The main problem, however, is that at the end of the course, there are still no jobs.

It was in this environment of tension between commitment to our teaching and the well-being of students on the one hand, and industrial demoralisation on the other, that we made time to embark on a process of participatory action research.

### 3. The Theoretical Context

#### (a) Positivism and 'grand narratives'

Participatory action research has evolved within a family of contemporary theoretical traditions that built on the critique of positivism of the critical theorists of the 'Frankfurt School' (as explicated by Held, 1988) and later characterised as 'anti-positivism'. More recently, the critique of positivism has been extended by the so-called postmodernists such as Lyotard (1979) and Foucault (1972) and poststructuralists such as Weedon (1987), Elsworth (1989), Lather (1988,1991) and Grosz (1988). Their critique of meta-narratives and universalist explanations is sometimes described as 'post positivist'. Post positivism is perhaps characterised by a more sophisticated handling of the ways in which knowledge and meaning are carried in language and that language arises in social practice.

A product of Enlightenment rationalism, positivism assumed that the 'real world' could be objectively known and described by theories of truth. According to positivism, 'social life is taken to be of an objective, factual

and 'thing-like' nature, independent of the observer; something 'real' and 'out there.' (Wadsworth, 1985)

Positivism assumes a dualism between mind and body, subject and object, the observer and the observed. The researcher, as objective observer, is seen as systematically adding to, and improving the shared store of knowledge and thus bringing it towards a closer correspondence with the real world.

"The critique of positivism rejects the dualism of mind and body and is based on the notion that human knowledge does not exist separately from the knower. Knowledge is fundamentally self-referential and recursive: language is an integral part of social practice, yet it is language within which we are trying to capture the objectified model of the real world. There is no separable body of language which can bear a one to one correspondence to the world without drawing in assumptions from the social practice from which that language arose." (Legge, 1992)

Constructivism is a term often used to describe the alternative theory of knowledge associated with post- or anti-positivism. Whilst social life may have the appearance of externality, in practice it consists entirely of inter-subjectively and socially constructed 'realities'. "All knowledge is constructed, and the knower is an intimate part of the known" (Belenky et al, 1986, p.136). For the constructivist, knowledge is about

people making sense of their experience; creating and assigning meaning in accordance with their own past pains and joys and future fears and hopes. The test of validity is usefulness to the subject; usefulness in making sense of past pains and joys; usefulness in steering an action pathway away from the fears and towards the hopes ... Hence, the prior issue is one of identity: who am I, the subject who knows? Who am I, whose experiences and projects shape the meanings which I use? (Legge, 1992 (b), p.14)

Positivist research in the classroom is about modelling what is really going on: objectifying the universalised truth and assuming a value-free and scientific neutrality (Carr and Kemmis, 1986, pp 35 - 41). Interpretivist or phenomenological research is about an individual's own interpretations of the experience of teaching and learning, aiming 'not to provide causal explanations of human life, but to deepen and extend our knowledge of why social life is perceived and experienced in the way that it is'.(p.90) In this

sense, interpretive research is compatible with a constructivist epistemology. However, interpretive research may still be consistent with positivism, if it allows a dualist separation of subjective and objective and if it is done in the sense of tapping people's subjective understanding of '*what is*'.

Participatory action research is about groups of people collaboratively coming to terms with their own subjectively and socially structured realities and constructing shared meanings in the context of working to change those realities.

This action research project has brought the questioning of meta-narratives and universalist explanations and prescriptions into a practical setting. It has set up a process by which teachers have not only questioned the 'givens' of curriculum policy, but have criticised these as discourses and have claimed the right to construct and articulate their own knowledge about their own practice.

#### (b) Poststructuralism and discourse theory

The interpretation of the data presented in this thesis also builds on 'discourse' as a key concept in considering how knowledge is framed and how relations of power are reflected and mediated through language.

By *discourse* I mean the network of meanings encoded in language in an area of social practice (a *discursive field*), and the linguistic symbols, icons and sets of meanings which reflect sets of cultural values and also power relations within a society. In *The Archeology of Knowledge*, Michel Foucault explains *discourse* as consisting of a *set of statements* which share a *common set of objects* and which allow for a *specified range of subject positions* (and exclude other subject positions). (1973, pp.106 - 117)

In *Feminist Practice and Poststructuralist Theory*, Chris Weedon explains Foucault's concept of discourse as

a structuring principle of society, in social institutions, modes of thought and individual subjectivity ... Meanings do not exist prior to their articulation in language and language is not an abstract system, but is always socially and historically located in discourses. Discourses represent political interests and in consequence are constantly vying for status and power. The site of this battle for power is the subjectivity of the individual and it is a battle in which the



individual is an active but not a sovereign protagonist. (Weedon, 1987, p.41)

The concept of 'discourse' is further developed in this thesis in the course of reflecting on and discussing the outcomes of the action research project and reflecting on the research itself.

### **(c) Action research and educational reform**

In education, participatory action research occupies a marginal position in comparison with positivist and interpretive research.

In Victoria, however, there is a significant history of teacher-based action research as a means of professional development, curriculum development and program evaluation. Marie Brennan's *Investigation As In-Service* (1982) documents an Education Department-sponsored in-service in which groups of teachers from around Victoria participated in action research into issues of classroom practice and school organisation. That project focussed on the role of teachers as learners, taking over the control and direction of their own learning processes about teaching. Lynton Brown's *Group Self-Evaluation: a Collection of Readings* (1990) gives a guide to educational action research and documents a number of case studies in schools around Victoria. Group self-evaluation is described here as

a voluntary process of participative problem-solving designed to enable staff to become more aware of the effectiveness of their work. It involves groups of people involved in common tasks, or in the pursuit of common objectives, in an on-going process of research through action in the work-place. Issues for investigation must be relevant and should be identified by the participants themselves.( p.2)

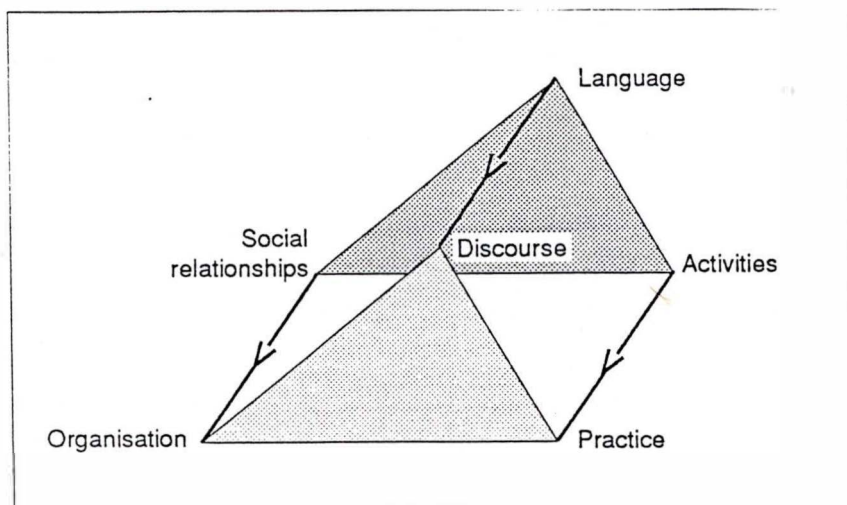
Participatory action research in education has been theorised by Carr and Kemmis (1986), Kemmis and McTaggart (1988) and Smyth (1991) as a strategic response to the political forces seen to be inhibiting the development of more just and rational practices. At the Second World Congress on Action Learning, in July, 1992, Robin McTaggart said of this tradition of action research (in contrast with value-free, technical and managerially controlled notions of action research) that:

To be credible, (action researchers) need to **work** to improve the rationality, justice, coherence and satisfactoriness of practice in their own cultural contexts. Current economic ideology provides the socially aware with plenty of scope for concern. Economic rationalism

at home embodies all that is ill about 'development' .. t is economic, patriarchal, ethnocentric, individualistic, Judea-Christian, and Western democratic with moral idealism subordinated to materialism. It creates social problems which signify a deep malaise we need to attend to at home. Participatory action research is an appropriate approach for the personal, institutional and societal changes which are necessary.(1992, p.56)

As a strategy of institutional change in education, Kemmis and McTaggart theorise action research in terms of the dialectics of institutionalisation and contestation (1988, pp. 39-43).

According to this framework, there are three inter-dependent domains within institutions; language, action and social relationships. Through processes of contestation, these domains take on institutional forms: language becomes discourse, activities become practices and social relationships become organisation. This is represented diagrammatically on p. 42 as follows:



According to Kemmis and McTaggart, 'educational reform consists in opening up, challenging and changing the institutionalised forms of language, activity and social relationships which constitute education, and restructuring the relationships between them'(p.40).

This framework which highlights the reality of processes of contestation within institutions was a useful model for the interpretation of our own processes of opening up and challenging institutional discourses in relation to our classroom pedagogy.

#### **(d) Action research as critical pedagogy**

Participatory action research is closely related to the pedagogical theory and methodology of Paulo Freire. His rejection of the 'banking' or 'filling the empty vessel' model of education and his vision of a 'shared project of naming the world' in which 'teachers become students and students become teachers' (Freire, 1970) has been an important influence on adult literacy as well as on practices of community development.

The process of gaining literacy, according to Freire and his followers, starts with the 'community of learners' reflecting on their experience. This is problematised and discussed, in order to build an understanding of the broader social and historical context. Literacy activities are developed as part of this process. For Freire, becoming literate means being able to 'name' one's immediate social and economic environment, to think critically about it and hence to have the tools to act to change it.

As teachers at the MWLC, we attempt to develop English language and literacy skills in a Freirean mode; the women themselves and what they say about their lives and social needs is the starting point for developing classroom discussion and developing curriculum. In classroom discussion, the students are not merely finding words to describe their worlds, but are actively constructing and reconstructing their worlds as reflected in language. Freire has had an additional relevance in the current project, in which our reflection has moved between the 'empowering' classroom pedagogy we aspire to practise, to the pedagogy of our own learning through the action research itself; our own empowerment as teachers through questioning and naming our own realities.

#### **(e) Action research and feminist research**

Clearly, a research project based at the MWLC needed to be compatible with the culture and the pedagogic aims of the Centre, so that conventional educational research (either positivistic or interpretive) which could be carried out upon students as passive objects would have been inappropriate. Principles of feminist research, as described by academics such as Patti Lather (1991) and Elizabeth Grosz (1989), dovetail with the principles of participatory action research and confirm their appropriateness for our setting.

The decision to embark on an action research project, rather than using more conventional positivist or interpretive paradigms, was influenced by

the feminist critique of such research as potentially oppressive and exploitative. Patti Lather, for example, wrote that:

Shulamit Reinharz uses the term 'rape research' to name the norm in the social sciences: career advancement of researchers built on their use of alienating and exploitative inquiry methods (1979: 95) In contrast, for those wishing to change as well as to understand the world, conscious empowerment is built into the research design. (Lather, 1988, p.570)

In the Proposal to the current project (Appendix A) I wrote that 'the project would reflect a feminist research paradigm in that it would be based on participatory, enabling values, rather than coercive values.'

In *A Brief History of ARIA (Action Research Issues Association) and ARIC (Action Research Issues Centre)*, action research is described as "not research done 'by', 'to' or 'for' a 'them'-but research done 'by', and 'with' an 'us', for an 'us'. This commits such research work to being accessible, culturally-relevant, participatory, and collaborative" (Wadsworth, 1988 p.5). As described, an action research project by, for and with women fits well with the aspirations of feminist research.

A powerful theme in contemporary feminist thought is the rejection of the paradigm of positivistic, monolithic truth and an affirmation that theory is constructed as 'context- and observer-dependent; that is, historically, politically and sexually motivated'. Universal models of 'truth' or 'reason' are 'phallogocentric': that is to say, they claim to represent both sexes while repressing or excluding femininity and privileging male values. (Grosz, 1988, pp.94-100) Poststructuralist feminist theory on the other hand, while rejecting the dualism of phallogocentric models,

is neither subjective nor objective, neither relativist nor absolutist: it occupies the *middle ground* excluded by oppositional categories. Theory is *relational* rather than relativist: it occupies a position (that of the sexed subject) and is connected to other practices" (p.100 ).

In our case, the position occupied is that of a group of women teachers who are working with and for their women students. But whilst being grounded in (our) feminine experience, we do not claim to be representing our experience in an absolute way, but in relation to and closely connected with that of TAFE and ESL teachers generally and in relation to discourses that are liberatory but not necessarily feminist. (It is worth noting here

that the notion of working 'for' the students is problematic in terms of the contradiction between the institutional power and privilege of teachers in relation to students and the assumption of shared project (research by and for 'us') made by Wadsworth (above) as it became clear in this project).

According to Grosz, criteria of validity in feminist thought consist not in objectivity considered as generalisability, 'but on inter-subjective understandings between different subjects, a shared or collective response to new material'(p.100). Action research processes, such as those that took place in the current project, can be seen as the organised development of 'inter-subjective understandings between different subjects' as described by Grosz. Based in an all-women's setting, it brought to the fore feminine perceptions of teaching and learning that are ignored by phallogentric mainstream theory.

Feminist poststructuralism, with its emphasis on the connection between subjectivity, language, discourse and power, and the possibilities of discursive resistance, as described by Weedon (1987) has had a key role in interpreting the development of the MWLC project and its significance. The collaborative reflection brought to light contradictory meanings of 'personal development' and how these are constructed discursively. The overall significance of the MWLC project was the process of developing language and discourse about how we are subjectively constituted as teachers and how we construct our pedagogy and our institutional world.

Weedon says of language that,

If language is the site where meaningful discourse is constituted, then language also determines how we perceive possibilities of change. Language in this sense consists of a range of discourses which offer different versions of the meaning of social relations and their effects on the individual. The way in which we interpret these social relations has important political consequences. (1987, p.86).

Patti Lather, a leading contemporary exponent of feminist poststructuralism as it relates to educational research, talks of dissolving the authoritative foundations of knowledge by deconstructive critique of texts and discourses and by self-reflection on our own interpretive frames (Lather, 1991. p.13). Apple describes her as calling for knowledge generation which

..is fundamentally dialogic and involves a mutually educative experience. It must respond to the experiences, desires, and needs of oppressed peoples by focusing on their understandings of their situations.... Research needs to be based on a more collaborative, praxis-oriented and advocacy-based model that acts on the desire for people to gain self-understanding and self-determination both in research and in their daily lives (Apple, 1991, p.x).

The action research process described in the following chapters is an attempt to apply the principles of feminist, poststructuralist research and knowledge-creation suggested by Lather, Grosz and Weedon.

Whilst there were immediate outcomes in terms of professional and group development, the wider implications of the project are about teachers developing their own discourses and deconstructing and challenging the official educational discourses at this time.

## **Chapter Two**

# **INITIATING THE ACTION RESEARCH PROCESS**

1. Introduction
2. Getting Started
3. Forming the Action Research Group
4. Deciding on a Theme
5. Clarifying Aims
6. How Data was Collected and Used
7. The Three Main Streams of Action and Reflection
  - (a) The developing process amongst the teachers
  - (b) Action researching my own teaching
  - (c) Student involvement and feedback
8. Conclusion

## ChapterTwo

### INITIATING THE ACTION RESEARCH PROCESS

#### 1. Introduction

In this chapter I will firstly describe how the processes of collaborative enquiry amongst teachers at the MWLC were initiated and organised. Secondly, I will show how, following the theory and methodology of the *Action Research Planner* (Kemmis and McTaggart, 1988) a reconnaissance process resulted in our focus on a thematic concern: *personal development*. Thirdly, I will outline our agreed aims as these were developed in the early stages. Finally, I will give a broad outline of the events that took place from May 1991 to May, 1992, as the process unfolded within three main streams of action and reflection (dialogue among teachers, my own personal reflections and student involvement).

In subsequent chapters I will give a more detailed account of what happened within each of these three streams and the learning that took place. I will also reflect on the outcomes in the light of the various theoretical resources that were introduced in Chapter 1.

The excerpts cited as evidence in this chapter are taken from the action research bulletins which I produced for circulation to participating teachers (Appendix B) and from my own action research process journal (Appendix C).

#### 2. Getting started...

I had long been aware of the unique educational environment of the MWLC and the need to research and document some of the excellent work that is taking place there.

As a member of the Action Research Issues Association (ARIA) and student of *Qualitative Research Methodology* at LaTrobe, I had been initiated into the culture of action research as an 'empowering' research paradigm, with particular scope for application in educational settings. Hence, with the immediate requirement of an M.Ed. research project and with academic



support as well as informal support from ARIA members, I decided to attempt to set in motion such a project at the MWLC.

Clearly, the first step would be to enlist the support and participation of my colleagues. From the last week of March 1991, I took two weeks to sound people out informally and to introduce the notion of action research. One teacher had had prior acquaintance with action research, but all were interested and expressed their willingness to participate in a process of collaborative, practical enquiry into an aspect of our work at the Centre.

The process in fact commenced with the positive response of the teachers: their interest needed to be followed up quickly and the steps of building and supporting the AR group needed to be recorded and reflected upon as an important part of the entire process. On May 7, 1991, I began my AR Journal as follows:

Today I realised with a shock that the initial steps I have taken to reconnoitre and plan for action research have in fact triggered off the process ...

...At the pub on Friday night, Annie's enthusiasm about the idea of a collaborative enquiry made me feel that in terms of a ready-made AR group, I was on a winner. My earlier fears about the difficulties of setting up a group, the interpersonal dynamics and level of trust required, have been allayed... I feel elated about the prospect of the challenge ahead and confirmed in my earlier conclusion that this would be the most useful, personally interesting, politically sound and methodologically appropriate form of research at the MWLC.

On Tuesday, May 7, I presented the idea of action research at our regular weekly staff meeting and the group as a whole decided to take on the project on the basis that I proposed:

1. that such an action research process would be a useful professional development exercise, one which we would control and lead in the direction of our own needs at this time,
2. that in addition, it would be a means for us to communicate in a more organised way with each other about our work and our problems,
3. that it may lead to some kind of publication or systematic data about the MWLC, that may be of use at some time in the future.

4. that this was to be a project for my M.Ed. research thesis (and therefore, I would appreciate their support).

Everyone agreed to take part, and we decided that our regular weekly staff meetings should be extended on a fortnightly basis and thus become 'AR meetings'. (This was later reduced because of the pressure of work and other issues.) We decided on a "reconnaissance meeting"(see below) for a fortnight hence, to be followed by a "planning meeting" . I agreed to circulate the notes of that meeting (and other papers about action research) and suggested an outline of questions to consider at the next meeting. (See Bulletin No. 1, in Appendix B.)

Thus, by the end of the first week in May 1991, the MWLC AR Project was initiated with the following activities:

1. group discussions among the teachers, beginning with a decision about the theme or focus of the enquiry (the 'reconnaissance phase');
2. production of the first of a series of "AR Bulletins" which recorded our deliberations and all subsequent developments;
3. the beginning of my own AR journal, recording observations and reflections about classroom processes, staff meetings and the development of the project;
4. the completion of the formal research proposal (Appendix A), including a theoretical discussion and statement of methodology, as an essay which was submitted on June 14;
5. my own study of the literature of critical and feminist pedagogy in order to feed theoretical background material into our group deliberations; and
6. my writing of a second essay, *The Sound of Babel and the Language of Friendship*, which examined the experience of teaching at the MWLC in the light of critical and feminist pedagogical writing (Sanguinetti, 1991).

### **3. Forming the Action Research Group**

The group of teachers forming the core group committed themselves to meeting regularly, both within the College and outside, in our own time, until the end of 1991 (the proposed period of the project being from May to December, 1991).

The following six teachers (who have agreed to have their real names used in this report) agreed to take part. They constituted the core team of contract teachers at the Centre and the Co-ordinator:

- Miriam Faine - teacher of ESL literacy and co-ordinator of the Centre,
- Elizabeth Connell - teacher of ESL and literacy in the 'Returning to Learning' program, and Introduction to Psychology,
- Annie Kelly - teacher of ESL, teacher and co-ordinator of the DEET funded 'First Step' program.
- Barbara Smith - teacher of ESL and literacy, teacher and co-ordinator of the English for Further Studies program.
- Dominica Nelson - Co-ordinator and teacher of the Social and Community Services (SACS) Certificate of Occupational Studies (COS) course for NESB women.
- Jill Sanguinetti - teacher of ESL and literacy in the 'Returning to Learning' (RTL) course and the SACS course. Facilitator and record-keeper of the project.

A number of other teachers who only taught at the MWLC for a few hours per week and could not attend meetings, took an interest, received bulletins and contributed ideas and student writing from time to time.

#### **4. Deciding on a Theme**

The two books guiding me through the uncertain stage of actually initiating the action research process, Wadsworth (1991) and Kemmis and McTaggart (1988) emphasised slightly different approaches which I attempted to combine. Wadsworth suggests reflection on possible areas of discrepancy between "is" and "ought", a process of problematising experience:

Most of our experience of noticing discrepancies or 'problematising' is where we have descriptions or images of a desirable or valued world in our heads, against which we determine that what is happening in the world is *not valued* propelling us to want to fix things and change them for the better (p.5).

I also used the *Action Research Planner's* model of problematisation and change in terms of contestation and institutionalisation (as described in Chapter 1) as a framework for thinking about our own immediate situation. In order to locate ourselves within that contestation they suggest a *reconnaissance* phase which could include:

- "reflection on "our own and others' educational values",
- having a view about "the way our educational work fits into the wider context of schooling and society",
- an understanding of how our particular institution has changed and evolved,
- some of the constraints on change, and
- a sense of "our own educational autobiographies (and personal histories)" (Kemmis and McTaggart', 1988, p.55).

Reflection on these questions, they suggest, should throw light on a possible theme that would lead into the improvement of an aspect of our practice.

I introduced these ideas at the first reconnaissance meeting of the action research group on (May 25, 1991). The meeting was held immediately after our usual staff meeting, and took about an hour and a half.

I presented McTaggart and Kemmis's schema of institutionalisation and change across the three interdependent domains of language to discourse, activities to practice and social relationships to organisation. This created a lot of interest and led to a discussion about the nature of discourse itself and some of the discourses entrenched in our practice.

Our consideration of possible areas of enquiry included: themes which highlighted what is different about the Centre as a *women's* centre and the problems that we see in relation to this; an evaluation of the Returning to Learning course; an evaluation of the effectiveness of our role; teacher domination. (See AR Bulletin No.2.) Miriam suggested a theme which seemed to incorporate most of our concerns and which stimulated an energetic response. This was that we should look at the notion of '*personal development*' in our curriculum and in our teaching. (See AR Bulletin No. 2).

Questions that were raised in an extremely lively discussion of the potential issues included:

- what do we mean by 'personal development'?
- how does it take place?
- how does it fit in with everything else we do?
- is it a middle class concept that we inappropriately impose on students who don't need it?

- what do we make of the explosion of curriculum activity around the notion of personal development, that it is becoming the flavour of the month, officially sanctioned by DEET? (AR Bulletin No. 2)

The discussion revealed a diversity of opinion amongst the five of us and our acute awareness of the range of problematic issues it touches upon. Some of the comments were:

- "You can't confine personal development to a two hour class!..."
- "People are already formed when they come here - how much really makes a difference...?"
- "Some things in personal development classes have been very valuable..."
- "It can be integrated into other aspects of learning"
- "It can be a little seed..."
- "We are only a minor part of the students' lives..."
- "It's never too late to change..."
- "We need to examine teacher domination..."
- "Bringing in personal crap can disrupt the group..."
- "They all develop in some way..."
- "It can make them aware that their problems are universal, that there are social solutions, in a sense..."

The meeting finished on an enthusiastic note as people seemed to warm to the challenge of the task ahead: to get to the bottom of what we individually and collectively thought about a discourse and set of practices that was part of the jargon, the everyday thinking at the MWLC. As we started to talk about it, we became increasingly aware of the ethical and pedagogical uncertainties surrounding the whole notion of 'personal development'.

The implications of such an enquiry were potentially threatening - to current programs and to our own self-concepts. Elizabeth described her nervousness at what might come up, saying that "personal development is a nauseating pastel area that upsets me..."(AR Bulletin No. 2).

However, Bulletin No. 2 records that :

"We all agreed that our first proper meeting was wonderfully stimulating with a great outpouring of ideas and debate (collaborative of course!). Not only that, but we also produced the prescribed product of a 'reconnaissance meeting' - a decision as to what will be the theme we

will focus on in the action research... the elusive concept of *personal development*."

In evaluating the session, Annie said that she still felt "fuzzy" about what was involved, but that it would probably be useful. Elizabeth said she saw it as "an open-ended process which was mildly structured" and that she thought she "would have faith in it as a natural process". Others said that the meeting was "stimulating" and "had a high energy level". Elizabeth made the important observation that the process "reflects on our own personal development as teachers". This was a theme that was to be taken up later.

To continue our discussion, we agreed to schedule another hour during our normal staff meeting in a fortnight's time.

In *The Action Research Planner*, Kemmis and McTaggart suggest that the product of the *reconnaissance phase* is "an initial analysis of your situation in relation to your thematic concern." They give a very comprehensive checklist of points that are relevant to such a reconnaissance statement (pp. 63 - 64). These include:

- the history and contemporary usage of: language and discourse, action and practices, social relationships and organisation in relation to the theme or situation;
- contestation and institutionalisation in each of these aspects of individual action and the culture of the situation,
- the correspondences and non-correspondences between the registers of language / discourse, activities / practices and social relationships / organisation...

Such a prescription is, as they say themselves, "a tall order" (p.64). In starting to tease out some of these threads, it became obvious that more than one meeting would be needed. In fact, for the next few months (June, July and most of August) we continued to explore the different viewpoints and usages of 'personal development', until we were ready to move on to the *planning phase*. In the mean-time, the discussions that could be categorised as belonging to the *reconnaissance phase* in fact became a key part of the whole process.

In Chapters 3 and 4 I document and discuss the content and significance of this extended process of collaborative reflection on 'personal development' and show how it led into the *planning phase*.

## 5. Clarifying the aims

Once the action research group was formed and we had determined the theme of the enquiry, I was then able to complete the formal proposal, submitted as a coursework essay. The formal proposal set out explicitly the aims that had been agreed to by the group:

### *1. To organise our own internal staff development process*

- to improve our classroom practice, by collaboratively sharing our experience, ideas and insights in a systematic way,
- to build our theoretical understanding of our work, particularly in terms of the meanings of 'personal development' and what we do about it at the Centre.
- to develop our relationships and communication as a group.

### *2. Published Outcome*

- to be able to jointly produce, at the end of the year, a clear statement of our aims and pedagogy, which may be of use in official documentation, in discussions with other women's (or with other language) centres or in presenting our public profile (crucial at a time of funding cuts and future economic uncertainties).

### *3. M. Ed Minor Thesis*

- for Jill to present a report which will be an account of and reflection upon the entire action research project as her M. Ed. minor thesis (See Appendix A).

## 6. How Data was Collected and Used

I kept a written record of the developing action research process: my process journal (Appendix C). Journal entries were sometimes daily, and sometimes up to a fortnight apart. Although I was the only member of the group to keep a journal, both Elizabeth and Barbara wrote down occasional thoughts about how they saw 'personal development' in terms of their teaching and notes of critical classroom incidents and gave these to me. In addition, I kept a detailed teaching journal, in which I recorded classroom

interactions that were relevant to the theme. (See Chapter 7 and Appendix D.)

AR meetings were recorded by either my own hand-written notes, or tape recordings. Five tape recorded meetings were transcribed and an edited version circulated to the others by means of the Bulletins. One teaching session was recorded but not transcribed.

Both the RTL (Returning to Learning) and the SACS (Social and Community Services) students made contributions in writing which are attached as Appendix E and Appendix F.

Other sources include a video recording of students making short farewell speeches at the end of semester one; a large number of photographs; and a large sample of students' writing, in particular the personal profiles they wrote under the heading of "Who am I?" Three student magazines (produced during the research period) are also useful records of the students' thinking and of the culture of the Centre. Owing to the constraints on the size and scope of a minor thesis, the evidence used for analysis and presentation has been limited to the 'process' and 'teaching' journals, taped and written notes of meetings, taped interviews with teachers and some student writings.

By the end of the 1991 school year, we had not yet completed the process of making presentations and there was a consensus that there was much more that we could do and that we should continue the process into 1992. Action research meetings amongst the teachers in fact continued into the following year (although less frequently) until I left the MWLC in August 1992. In October 1992 I returned for a discussion among the teachers which was a general reflection on the outcomes and review of the action research process itself. In November 1992 I returned once more in order to present a draft of the main findings and the themes I developed in reflecting on the collaborative processes as a whole.

## **7. The Three Main Streams of Action and Reflection**

The action research process following the reconnaissance phase involved three streams of activity:

- (a) discussion amongst the teachers,
- (c) action researching my own teaching.
- (b) student involvement and feedback.



**(a) Discussion amongst the teachers**

Initially, we decided to have an action research meeting every two or three weeks, straight after administrative and other business had been dealt with in our normal staff meetings. In addition, we would meet informally at each others homes for dinner gatherings when we would invite outside experts to feed into our deliberations.

After each meeting I prepared a newsletter ("AR Bulletin") to be distributed amongst the participants, feeding in relevant information and ideas, feeding back what we had discussed at the preceding meeting, reminding people of on-coming dates, etc. Twelve bulletins were prepared and distributed from May 1991 to May 1992, when the process was wound down. The bulletins are attached as Appendix B. There were 15 meetings of the group, held at irregular intervals, between May 8 and October 29, 1992. (See Appendix G.)

**(b) Action researching my own teaching**

Throughout the main period of the action research, I kept a detailed journal of my teaching and interactions with students from May until December, 1991.

My teaching journal became a tool for my own monologic exploration of the theme of 'personal development'. Through it I was able to monitor and 'name' aspects of my classroom behaviour that I wanted to change or develop. The anecdotes and reflections recorded in the journal further contribute to the notion of an eclectic and feminist-informed pedagogy and to the developing theme of teacher-student solidarity.

**(c) Student involvement and feedback**

I attempted to involve my Returning to Learning (RTL) class group in the idea of action research and in reflection on the theme of personal development. The outcome of this episode (described in Chapter 8) is a set of writing about how the Centre helps them to become more confident. I also collected student writing from other classes (contributed by teachers) that would throw light on the theme of the research. One such set of writing, by the Social and Community Services (SACS) group, is also presented and discussed in Chapter 8. The issue of extending a teacher-based project to students provided a basis for useful reflection on methodological issues, on the role of power and on the possibilities of teacher-student solidarity.

Both sets of student writing are included as Appendix E and Appendix F.

## **8. Conclusion**

In this chapter I have related how the project was initiated, how the data was collected and used and I have described the three main streams of action and reflection that took place subsequently. Chapters 3, 4 and 5 document and discuss the developing process amongst the teachers whilst Chapter 6 is a reflection on the collaborative learning process as a whole. Chapter 7 reports on the second stream, that of action researching my own teaching. Chapter 8 reports on the third stream: the involvement of students. In Chapter 9 I discuss a number of themes and outcomes of this project in the light of the institutional issues and the theoretical resources introduced in Chapter 1, and reflect on a number of methodological issues in relation to the participatory action research itself

## Chapter Three

# BRAINSTORMING 'PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT'

1. Introduction
2. What do we Mean by 'Personal Development'?
3. 'Personal Development and Individualism
4. 'Personal Development' and Implications of Power
5. Conclusion

## Chapter Three

### Brainstorming 'Personal Development'

#### 1. Introduction

The process of discussion and reflection on the theme of 'personal development' turned out to be a rich, collaborative learning process.

The discussions began with an examination of our own usage of the term 'personal development'. In the course of three meetings (see Appendix G) we discussed and unpacked the meanings of 'personal development' in terms of its history at the Centre, its role in current social and educational contexts, its connotations and effects, our educational aims as teachers, and our own values and personal histories. We criticised the construction of 'personal development' as a curriculum topic, and explored how within some institutional discourses and practices the notion of 'personal development' can become a vehicle for teacher domination and the imposition of middle class Western values.

Our attempt to come to grips with the meanings encoded in the term "personal development" can be understood as an exploration of its usage within contending discourses which ultimately represent different political interests within the *discursive fields* of education and personal growth.

According to Weedon , *discursive fields*

consist of competing ways of giving meaning to the world and of organizing social institutions and processes. They offer the individual a range of modes of subjectivity. Within a discursive field, for instance, that of the law or the family, not all discourses will carry equal weight or power. Some will account for and justify the appropriateness of the status quo. Others will give rise to challenge to existing practices from within or will contest the very basis of current organisation and selective interests which it represents (1989, p.35).

In the initial stage then, the action research group explored how 'personal development' has different meanings and implications within different discourses. According to Weedon, "all meanings have implications for

existing social relations, contesting them, reaffirming them or leaving them intact/(p.138) The meanings of 'personal development' had implications for classroom relations - for our aspirations to relations of solidarity with the students and for the potential within the teacher-student relationship for oppression.

Our examination of the institutional usage of 'personal development' revealed and challenged the power relations implicit in that usage and potentially reflected in our own practice. 'Personal development' at the MWLC has institutional meanings reflected in the curriculum documents, but also has meanings belonging to the discourse of feminist pedagogy, of solidarity and the interdependent struggles of women for emancipation. The confusion that became apparent in our thinking reflected the fact that various discourses were contending and overlapping in our thinking and our teaching practice. An important part of the first phase of discussion and reflection, was separating the competing meanings and usages 'personal development' within the context within which we were operating.

As this process developed, we described to each other related aspects of our teaching and examined and shared some of the theoretical understandings that underpin our work. This led to discussion of the personal and political aspirations that we express and reflect in our teaching, as shown in Chapter 4.

In Chapter 1, I referred to the framework on institutionalisation and contestation proposed by Kemmis and McTaggart (1988, pp.39 - 42) which became a theoretical backdrop to the MWLC project. The key constructs are the three interdependent domains of 'language', 'activities' and 'social relationships', which in an institutional setting become stabilised as 'discourse', 'practice' and 'organisation' respectively. In our case, the process focussed on the domain of language and discourse: by opening up, contesting and changing the institutionalised form of language (the discourse) of 'personal development', we were carrying out 'cultural action', feeding into the development and reform of education in our context, and according to our values. This framework is compatible with the theory of discourse and feminist poststructuralism that Weedon uses, building on Foucault.

The process of discussion began by an appraisal of what *we* mean by 'personal development' and its historical role at the Centre.

## **2. What do we mean by 'personal development'?**

On June 4 we began a series of discussions which unravelled the various usages of 'personal development' as it applies at the MWLC. Three of the teachers (Elizabeth, Barbara and myself) also contributed our thoughts in writing. This section recounts and comments upon the discussions that took place in the initial phase. It is based on taped records of the meetings, our written contributions and on many informal discussions.

Historically, we had inherited 'personal development' as a curriculum item from the founders of the Centre. For the first few years of the Centre (1987 - 89) 'personal development' classes were run by a professional counsellor as an adjunct to other courses, as part of curricula that were developed at the Centre.

In our early discussions, saw 'personal development' at the Centre in two different ways: either the 'focussed model' or the 'embedded model'. The weekly two-hour Personal Development class which is part of the First Step course for long-term unemployed women and single mothers, is an example of the 'focused model'. The 'embedded model' refers to the concept of personal development as it is built into our general philosophy and pedagogy.

We found that whilst the term 'personal development' (as either the embedded or focused model) has connotations of growth and liberation, it could also be used as a vehicle for teacher domination, cultural imposition and social control.

We talked about who the students are and how 'personal development' might fulfil their needs. Reflecting later on this discussion, Elizabeth wrote that:

The women who come to the Centre are often dislocated and isolated. They have lost the certainties of their native culture and language and they find themselves ill-equipped to cope with ours. They have a low level of education and realise that the lack of their "development" in this area equips them no more for a place in this society than for the one they left for reasons of lack of economic opportunity or as refugees. Life must feel like some incomprehensible immersion in a series of insoluble dilemmas for them.

We know that these conditions exacerbate personal problems, marriage breakdowns, lack of child-rearing support, lack of opportunity for personal friendships and partnerships. Often they are separated from loved ones and have to watch their children growing up not even speaking their language...

I think that they see themselves as "lacking". They are often unhappy with their lives in a fundamental way and want to change them. There are a range of positions. Someone like Amy Chung or Isabel Diaz seem to have happy marriages and families, they have good social relationships and are happy with Australian society and conditions. They want to learn English and get suitable jobs. They want a general education. Their aspirations seem almost attainable. They probably feel comfortable with their values. What could we imagine to be *their* goals for personal development?

Many students share with us their anguish or depression over family problems, isolation, ill-health and lack of any possibility for a job and so forth. As Elizabeth pointed out, many of these problems are problems women everywhere face, but they are often exacerbated by the migrant experience and finding themselves in an alien culture. How does our use of 'personal development' correspond to the ways in which the Centre responds to such different needs ?

We discussed the one remaining 'personal development' class that was running at the Centre. (In previous years, it was part of several courses but classes were run by an outside counsellor.) Barbara, who had recently taken on the job as the 'personal development' teacher for two hours per week with the First Step students, expressed her apprehensions about teaching that particular class. She said she had come to the conclusion that it "seems forced and even invasive when there is insufficient trust built up and it is impossible to take activities as far as with groups that you know". Later, she wrote that the alternative approach was to see that "personal development comes at students' own pace in their own time - through a broadening of their world view that probably comes over the whole course."

Dominica read out the official curriculum of the accredited SACS course. This provides for nine hours of 'personal development' to be built in, including, for example, two hours for 'self-esteem' and two hours for 'assertion skills'. She said that, rather than teaching these as 'subjects' in

this atomistic way, all of those things are embedded into the overall approach and style of her teaching. The theme of 'self-esteem', in so far as it was made explicit in the curriculum, was woven into texts and discussions throughout the course, rather than concentrated into one or two lessons. 'Personal development' comes as much through her relationship with the students which is implicitly supportive and respectful.

We seemed to be rejecting the notion of 'personal development' constructed as a curriculum item of commodified skills transfer.

On the other hand, we at the Centre use the term 'personal development' mainly to convey the idea of, "helping people to arrive at a clearer self-concept, of knowing who they are and taking control of themselves, of affirmation and self-esteem, so they are less likely to be controlled by their husbands, by DEET or whoever", as Dominica said. The development of students in this sense is collective and occurs through group processes as much as through engaging with the curriculum, learning language and talking about their lives and society in general.

Reflecting on this discussion later, I recognise that there are assumptions underlying the term 'development' (ie, assumptions of 'change' or 'growth' to which a normative judgement is implied of 'progression' which is 'good' or 'natural'). A key question must then be, *what are the conditions within which we might make such a judgement?* The answer (which emerged throughout the whole of the process described in this thesis) is the existence of *solidarity* (woman to woman, intersubjective understanding), *trust* (which as Barbara said, can only come about when a real relationship is built up) and *shared project* (as teachers and students struggling to find ourselves in patriarchal society, sharing common experiences). In other words, *my judgement about what is progress for you is legitimate in so far as you also identify with my broader project.* Hence the need for trust that is built on a real relationship and on classroom dialogue in which the teacher shares her hopes, fears and her situation in life as one of the group.

### **3. 'Personal Development' and Individualism**

We discussed the fact that in certain usages, 'personal development' can have connotations of conservative individualism, suggesting that people can develop and change if they are given special techniques, without reference to their social context. It can deflect attention from the social and economic structures which are often at the root of human distress, as Elizabeth pointed



out. Therapeutic constructions of "personal development" often implicitly accept that society is by nature stressful and oppressive and therefore that people have to be consciously taught about stress and assertiveness in order to be able to cope with ordinary living. Elizabeth wrote that:

Personal development is a new concept in our work. It is easy to see it at the first encounter as a wonderful opportunity for change and growth - a particular time or program for inward-looking, realizations about self, a fresh start, that gives the individual new energy to act...

On some reflection - through time and experience with the concepts, methods, literature and practice in the so-called personal growth area, I've become a little wary, mainly on a philosophical basis. 'Personal growth' fits into the- secularization of belief systems and what is sometimes called "the society of narcissism" or the growth of "psychological man" (sic) at a period of the demise of religious belief systems and the collapse of shared community values and support... the trend towards individual choice, inwardness, valuing of feelings and what has been described derogatively as "a system that has as its ultimate criterion a "sense of personal well-being". In contrast, supposedly, we have shared community values, respect for authority, consensus, support, valuing of shared factual information located outside the self, and a striving for both excellence and "the good". In such a culture, people believe; they have faith. In ours, everyone is without faith and shared beliefs, they become neurotic, alienated, and in order to alleviate their feelings of meaninglessness they turn to materialism. consumption and the sense of personal well-being characterised by the pursuit of physical health, material success, concentrating on psychological techniques of manipulating reality in order to minimize anxiety and "stress".

Elizabeth thus saw 'personal development', in this individualist sense, as being reflective of aspects of western capitalist culture that are spiritually empty and personally unfulfilling. Within the individualist/therapeutic discourse of 'personal development', alienation associated with an unjust and exploitative social system is rendered invisible and unstable. It is a deficit model and implicitly victim-blaming because it is individually focussed and ignores the social and economic context of the students' oppression.

On the other hand, we noted that most of us had benefited from some sort of 'personal growth' groups, therapy or counselling at some stages of our lives. Many students, too, seem to have enjoyed and benefited from personal development classes, especially those run by the professional counsellor who had been working at the Centre. Others have not, and have stayed away from such classes. Personal development classes, as Elizabeth commented, can be like a 'special time', a bit like going to church, a time when you can think about yourself and your needs. But again, we teachers can *choose* to go to a therapist or personal growth group. If it's on the curriculum, the students are given no choice in the matter and they may go into a situation in which judgements and assumptions have been made beforehand about their needs!

At this point, the discussion became bogged down to some extent in the contradictory views about 'personal development'. Weedon's analysis of discourses as "competing ways of giving meaning to the world and of organising social institutions and processes" would have been useful here in coming to terms with the competing meanings of 'personal development'.

*Our* usage of 'personal development' was about both individual and collective empowerment, helping the students to give voice to their lives, their subjectivities, within the patriarchal social context. As such, it was about the growth and empowerment of students and of ourselves, as women.

Within the wider context, however, the discourse seemed to have a more individualistic meaning, suggesting as Elizabeth said, that you can learn a set of techniques not only to cope with social stress and oppression, but to advance yourself by becoming more personally powerful. The usage of 'personal development' to describe sets of pre-arranged activities within the SACS curriculum, in isolation from the social context, suggests the individualistic model.

Our discussion can be seen as a reflection of the contestation over 'personal development': the institutional discourse which is individualistic and potentially victim-blaming (reflected in the curriculum documents) and as part of our own (feminist influenced) discourse about the empowerment of migrant women seen in the social and economic context.

#### 4. 'Personal Development' and Implications of Power

Whilst we were struggling with the differing meanings of 'personal development' and criticising the individualist model, we voiced our unease about how our pedagogy is constituted by the discourse of personal development: the subject-object orientation of such a discourse ("I can empower or personally develop you") could be the vehicle of imposition of our middle class western values.

We agreed with Miriam that the term 'personal development' "can be offensive because it implies that people come to us undeveloped and we are in a position to develop them, so we are somehow superior to them"(the deficit model). She raised the uncomfortable question of whether or not we teachers feel a "warm glow" of gratification by presiding over what we call the personal development of students. She asked, "do we have the *right* to come in here with a whole lot of philosophy and start saying how the women have grown, how the women have developed, and do we get a kick out of it?... we are educated and therefore that is enough for us... if these women had that education, would it be enough for them?"

Our exploration of how power relations are unproblematically assumed in the official curriculum discourse of 'personal development' in this way led to a consideration of culture: how 'personal development' is a term (a 'grand narrative'?) laden with our own cultural assumptions, yet purporting to meet the needs of those (the students) participating in completely different cultures and with what could be different sets of needs to our own.

Elizabeth raised the question, that as teachers participating in our own culture, 'personal development' activities may remediate or heal the psychological damages or psychic emptiness resulting from various social oppressions. We agreed with her that we may have our own 'personal development goals' within our own culture, but what of the women who come to us to learn English? How much can we really know, from inside our own culture, what their 'personal' needs actually are? To what extent can we assume that we are able to meet these?

Barbara wrote about the cultural assumptions that we make about 'personal development'. She gave the example of an occasion when she had expressed her values (by questioning whether a woman is *necessarily* exercising choice by having an abortion) and that this had turned out to be in direct

conflict with the student's cultural viewpoint, that abortion is an acceptable form of contraception. She wrote:

"Now what takes precedence here? My western feminist (individualistic) viewpoint, or the cultural collective viewpoint (represented by the Chinese student). How do we know what murky waters we are stepping through?"

Clearly, Barbara's "western feminist" viewpoint was only one of several possible viewpoints on an issue about which western feminists themselves are deeply divided. But her comment reflects the uncertainty we feel about our role in leading discussions on these deeply personal issues. We began to consider the question of how we *can* facilitate discussion in the classroom about values and beliefs and how we can participate in that discussion, *without* using our greater power as teachers to impose, a question that Elizabeth Elsworth has also asked (Elsworth,1989, p.297). Is it possible, as teachers, to promote sharing and dialogue without allowing our own views to dominate? And how can we meaningfully use the term 'personal development' in a multicultural setting when it is a field saturated in cultural assumptions, such as our assumptions about individual rights and personal choice as paramount values (as Barbara's story illustrated)?

We asked ourselves to what extent the Centre is a site for the imposition of the dominant Western culture on a multiplicity of other cultures via processes of teaching and learning. We then turned to our assumptions about our work expressed by the term 'acculturation'. AR Bulletin No.5 records a discussion in which we questioned exactly what we mean by 'acculturation' and again, whether or not this is a word we want to use at all in describing our work:

"... the word 'acculturation' implies a "one-way process". There is not one main culture, just many different cultures. Why should we be projecting onto them or initiating them into our Anglo, Christian, middle class culture? In multicultural Melbourne, all cultures must be seen as equally valid and important and we often forget this.

"... this could be an alienating model, that for all the cultures to be found in Melbourne, there is still something that is specifically 'Melbourne'. Part of our job is to break down the alienation and marginalisation by introducing the mainstream culture to them, showing them how to

understand, use and enjoy it and make it their own. (through language and literature as well as parks, free concerts, lovely bush places, Parliament House).

"...just as many of them come from a variety of cultures, there is here a generic Western culture (or set of cultures) which they need to become part of and learn about if they are to participate effectively. In this sense there is an 'acculturation', through the teaching of language, though this process is mediated (hopefully, in our classes) by allowing and promoting an on-going exchange across cultures.

"... do we merely inform our students or initiate them by participating in discussions arising from the differences they observe, their troubles in trying to live in a new culture, by offering our own cultural understandings, challenging their cultural preconceptions?

"... What is culture? - Culture is intimately related to language and ideas - by learning language, the students are learning about (and no doubt absorbing) cultural ideas and attitudes.

"... Our cosmopolitan culture is multi-faceted - the mainstream reflecting values which implicitly reinforce our profoundly unjust and exploitative world - individualism, consumerism, racism, sexism, etc. So *which* aspects of our culture do we implicitly reflect back to the students in our choice of texts, the way we facilitate discussion, etc?

At this point in the discussion, we had focussed on problematising our role as teachers in the negotiation and mediation of cultural understandings that is part of our on-going classroom practice.

The main effect of these discussions was to bring to consciousness the problematic nature of cultural mediation in the classroom: that our role as teachers is by nature problematic and that there were no easy answers. Our practice is to use our teaching to introduce and share cultural understandings which (to us) are emancipatory, affirming of the students' lives and identities and which challenge hegemonic and patriarchal discourses. On closer examination, however, there is an assumption hidden in the construction of 'personal development' of power over, of teachers using their institutional authority to impose *their* cultural meanings in a relationship of inequality and to invade students' lives by making

judgements about their needs. So how can we share *our* emancipatory understandings without oppressing, or should we even try?

Lyotard's critique of the 'grand narrative' (1979, pp.xxiii - xxv) might have been useful in these discussions. In the Introduction to *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, he points out how all generalisations (of either an explanatory or a prescriptive character) are in fact 'fables' used to legitimate formations of power. The partial and contingent nature of such generalisations is ignored and they are assumed to have a law-like status. In our discussions, we had recognised that 'personal development' carries with it a series of assumptions about desirable patterns of personal change and that these are in many respects belong to 'a grand narrative' specific to western culture.

However, Lyotard's critique of the 'grand narrative' in contrast with the legitimacy and 'vitality' of 'local narratives' (*Forward*, p.xi) is relevant in recognising that 'personal development' can only make sense in terms of the particularities of individual students, their cultures, families and individual challenges on specific occasions.

The judgement of *what is 'personal development'* then must be made in reference to specific people and situations, as well as within a *culture of solidarity*, as discussed in the previous section.

## 5. Conclusion

In this chapter I have shown how we began to dissect the meanings and implications encoded in the various usages of the term 'personal development' in our institutional and pedagogical practice.

Firstly, we had begun by rejecting the 'focused' model of personal development as belonging to a discourse of the transfer of commodified skills from teachers and curriculum. This implies overt teacher and institutional power and control in conducting activities or discussions which are targeted (with all our cultural agendas, as described) to the most intimate and possibly fragile aspects of students' lives. We recognised that the 'embedded model' of 'personal development' contained as much potential to manipulate and oppress as the 'focused' model. At the same time, our notion of 'embeddedness' also contained notions of authentic personal relationships, and dialogue based on trust and 'shared project'. As such, we were moving towards a recognition that the judgements about growth and development

need to be based in intersubjective communication and in a culture of solidarity.

Secondly, we had recognised the victim-blaming potential of 'personal development' (as illustrated by the individualistic therapeutic model) when structural context is rendered invisible and unstateable. In this, we were perhaps moving towards a recognition that a condition for making judgements about other people's 'personal development' must include an understanding that their oppression is linked to the same structures as our oppression.

Thirdly, we had recognised the cultural assumptions that are entrained by the concept of 'personal development'. In this we were moving towards a recognition of 'personal development' as a 'grand narrative' and that as such it needs to be judged in the specific circumstances of individuals facing *their* problems and challenges within their own cultural settings.

In terms of the research methodology suggested in *The Action Research Planner* (Kemmis and McTaggart, 1988) we had made good headway in our initial reflection, or reconnaissance, but were not yet ready to synthesise our views into a statement. By the end of July, most of us felt that we needed more time to be able to formulate what we thought about personal development as a group, and what we were going to do about it. After each of our meetings, I continued to write up the proceedings and circulate these to the others. (See Action Research Bulletins 1 - 4, Appendix B).

Two practical outcomes resulted from our discussions. Barbara's *First Step* Personal Development class was changed to an additional literacy class. Secondly, as a result of talking about the success of earlier personal development sessions taken by an outside counsellor, we decided that there were a range of 'psychological' skills that we would like to integrate into our teaching, such as a better understanding of group dynamics, how to use role play and how to respond to emotional situations in the classroom, and we conveyed this in a letter to the staff development committee.

In the next chapter I report on how the continuation of the *reconnaissance phase* (in which we constructed a statement of our own different usages of the term 'personal development' at the MWLC) led into the *planning phase* in which we decided what direction the process should take next.

## **Chapter Four**

# **FROM 'PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT' TO PEDAGOGY**

- 1. Introduction**
- 2. Clarifying our Usage of 'Personal Development'**
- 3. Articulating our Values**
- 4. From 'Personal Development' to 'Good Teaching'**
- 5. Planning for More Systematic Learning from Each Other**
- 6. Conclusion**



## **Chapter Four**

### **FROM 'PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT TO PEDAGOGY**

#### **1. Introduction**

In this chapter I relate how the 'personal development' brainstorm led us into a change in focus from the 'personal development' of the students, to our own teaching and hence to our own personal development as teachers. Three strands of our discussion led us to this point: the sifting out of the various ways in which we have used the term 'personal development' in our daily communication; the exploration of the personal and educational values which inform our work; and an examination, of the power relations implied by the institutional discourse of 'personal development' and its usage in our context. These three strands of discussions led to a plan of action that would enable us to deepen the process which had begun, that of learning from each other.

The three elements of the discussion about 'personal development' (our own usages, our own personal and educational values and the implications of power) unfolded as part of the same overall process, at different times between May and October, 1991.

#### **2. Clarifying our Usage of 'Personal Development'**

At the same time as making a critique of the discourse of 'personal development' we started to look at the different ways in which we actually use the term 'personal development' at the Centre. These ranged from the teaching of vocational skills to the process of students exploring 'their values and how to live their lives' through the subject matter of the curriculum.

Barbara, for example, wrote that,

Personal development can be as concrete as "making" a student make a phone call rather than doing it for her - and seeing the sense of achievement (and relief!) after it's been accomplished; or, seeing a really dictionary dependent student finally lift her head out of the dictionary and begin to make more eye contact and smile more; or, noticing a change in what a student talks about in terms of her future plans, eg, initially not considering returning to her previous training

and by the end of the course deciding to "go for it" .... I feel that topics that fit under the personal development heading could easily be integrated into many other kinds of lessons - by means of discussions, collaborative writing exercises, debates, etc." (Written contribution, June 91)

Annie pointed out that 'personal development' can in fact refer to a whole range of social skills that are taught in First Step, and that are necessary for women to acquire if they are to go out and get jobs. In this she was making the important point that skills transfer *does* have a valid role within the overall context of our pedagogy, and that in our context, we cannot make a simple opposition between 'focused' and 'embedded' or 'oppressive' and 'liberatory' personal development. Likewise, Miriam pointed out that 'straight teaching' of the English language, or basic maths (such as learning how to do percentages) can equally be said to be empowering, or 'personally developing'.

English language skills are fundamental to the students' social and economic empowerment (that is what they are here for!). 'Personal development' is intrinsically related to language. Barbara gave the example of a Polish woman who was labelled "unassertive" when she spoke in English, but in fact was very assertive in her own language. There is also the example of one of my current students, Nora, who wrote recently that she was always out-going and communicative in her own country, but here she is very shy and doesn't know how to express herself.

We recognised that we are contributing to 'personal development' not only through teaching particular skills and languages but also as educators, within the liberal tradition of education; as Dominica said, in the sense of "educare", or "I lead out". Reflecting on the problems expressed by some of her students, Elizabeth wrote that:

Perhaps their unfulfilled personal goals lie mainly in the area of being able to do satisfying paid work. However, I feel that they probably also wish to have a better general education, to understand politics, geography, science, etc. In the case of (other students who seem to bear burdens of greater personal pain) it seems clear that although education and jobs in themselves would improve their situations, they want to "explore" general issues of values and how to live their lives. This "exploration" is embedded in general education, maybe especially

In the humanities, in literature, psychology, philosophy, the arts.(Written contribution, June, 1991)

'Personal development', we agreed, is embedded in the culture of the Centre, as it is constituted by the process of developing relationships sharing values and experiences and the development of a common language and common interests between students and teachers. As Elizabeth said, "by just coming, talking, improving, not being lonely, having people who care". The existence of women's culture, within a safe and affirmative learning centre for women, is a fundamental aspect of 'personal development' at the MWLC.

The discourse that we were developing here was consistent in many respects with the vocational training-oriented discourse of the official policies. It affirmed these as part of the whole spectrum of educational opportunities from which students could benefit, in an eclectic curriculum and pedagogy. The teaching of language and vocational skills were an important part - but only a part - of all the different levels and aspects of learning and development that take place and that together make up the quality of the educational experience within a culture and ethos of solidarity.

After the second group discussion on 'personal development', I had prepared a synthesised version of all the main points that had been made and had circulated these as a draft statement entitled "MWLC Perspectives on 'Personal Development' in the Action Research Bulletin No. 4. This had been circulated and discussed at the meeting of July 30th. At that meeting we were then able to agree on a brief list summing up the different meanings that we ascribe to 'personal development' in our overall pedagogy. This was as follows:

1. The 'growth' of the students as they learn skills and language that they want and need - the confidence and self-esteem that comes from the acquisition of English language, skills and knowledge;
2. the growth of people that we observe as our courses progress, as they become more relaxed, open, as they develop friendships, express themselves deeply and more confidently;
3. related to number 2, the development of the whole learning group, in terms of group dynamics - 'social development'?
4. the teaching of specific skills such as listening, giving feedback, being assertive, that do empower people and can be taught explicitly;

5. the process of "exploring themselves through the subject matter of the curriculum";

6. conceptual growth that is part of developing general literacy - naming your experience, seeing the personal in the social, "connecting the word with the world", in Freire's terms;

7. identifying as women - and as such, starting to repair the damage we have all suffered as the result of patriarchal society. (AR Bulletin No.5)

The focus was changing from critiquing the power relations implied by the notion of teaching 'personal development', to exploring what it means in terms of our own teaching. As this happened, we became very curious about what we actually do in the classroom in relation to the various 'aspects' of personal development that we had listed.

### 3. Articulating our Values

As a group, we realised that the concept of 'personal development', as a part of a liberatory discourse, is an intrinsic part of the MWLC culture, and the ESL pedagogy practised there. In that case, did we need to talk about it at all? We referred again to the wider context, the current policies that construct adult education and language learning as uni-dimensional, one-way 'training'. 'Personal development', if it has a place at all was often trivialised as sets of pre-defined skills and competencies which are inserted into accredited courses and curricula as "units of work". On the other hand, to do away with it altogether, to keep silent about what is important in our teaching and what is often not spoken of in the official discourse, may be a further step along the road of the conversion of 'education' into 'training' and of teachers into technical 'instructors'. If we don't articulate that what we are on about is 'more than' teaching language skills and teaching 'content', the essence of what we believe in and do as teachers (our pedagogical commitment) would be further eroded by the practices and discourses of competencies, efficiency, training for the job market, etc.

How then, *would* we articulate 'what we were on about' that was 'more than' training? At the action research meeting of June 4, we decided that we should try to do just this, by simply making a list of our educational values that motivate and inform our commitment to teaching. After a short brainstorm (with a surprisingly high degree of consensus) the butcher's paper looked like this:

1. a commitment to "educare, to lead out" as an educational model, not the banking model, but the development of human qualities;
  2. a belief that emotional and psychological state is linked into intellectual development, therefore this must be considered;
  3. caring about the students as people, being concerned about their overall well-being;
  4. "woman to woman" the need for women to support each other in coming to terms with patriarchy and needing to become more empowered as women; the need for a critique of patriarchy;
  5. empowerment as "power with", not "power over" ie, to do with a sense of community;
  6. belief in the value of education and knowledge as powerful instruments for individual and social change... education is socially constructed and in this society it has enormous value. We can work with that and use knowledge for social change;
  7. belief in the need for social change and a belief that we are agents of social change.
- (See AR Bulletin, No.3)

The fact that we reached a loose consensus around a set of values in relation to our teaching, seemed to be a significant episode for the group. For the first time for all of us, we had given a name to what had been an intuitive commitment: we were developing our "intersubjective understandings" (Grosz, 1988) about what our work as teachers was most deeply about. This was perhaps also a step in realising Marginson's injunction to "challenge the underlying assumptions. of the new discourse... and to develop a new educational discourse with a different logic to that of market relations.." (Marginson, 1988, pp.12, 19). The sharing of values about our educational aims was also an important step in building trust and our sense of solidarity as a group.

Kemmis and McTaggart suggest that in order to move to plan "what you can do to improve education in your setting... you may need to revisit and discuss the *social and educational values* which inform your work" (AR Planner, 1988, p.65). In fact this had happened spontaneously, and the sense of enlightenment which we experienced in speaking about our personal/political commitments in teaching, prompted us to ask the following questions: *How do we individually express these values in our teaching? How do they fit in with curriculum and classroom management? What does each of us actually do about them in practice?*

#### 4. 'Personal Development' and 'Good Teaching'

From May to October, our focus continued to move from 'personal development' to 'good teaching'. The change in focus is well illustrated by an exchange which took place a few months later, when we again got back to the problem of the connotations of the words 'empowerment' and 'personal development' in describing our work:

Jill: "Empowerment includes the empowerment that comes through education and building up your understanding of the world, it's a broader concept that somehow encompasses all the different processes that happen.."

Miriam: "I agree about personal development but the problem with the word empowerment, it is still us doing it to them and even though you have been critical of Auerbach, it suggests that there could be a class of women, whose English is no better, but they have been "empowered".

Jill: "I agree with you, about empowerment, but we have to somehow name it ..."

Miriam: "In a way what we are talking about is good teaching ... in a way I don't think we need some word that implies there is a Christmas present which is all wrapped up in glossy paper with a bow on it, because to me, that is what the word empowerment sounds like. To me what we are talking about is an eclectic pedagogy (and I really like the word eclectic) that relates to students needs, and we can't say what we give them, there is no glossy aspect of it, we can only do our best as honest crafts people, trying our best to make the shoe fit the foot, and I really like the idea of putting it back onto us."

Barb: "I totally agree, I think over the four years I have been doing this each year I get progressively more and more rigorous with my self, and I have become more fine-tuned, what I am trying to do in that classroom ... I think I started in a really waffley way, when I went in and started to talk and be friendly, but it didn't really get anywhere .. but the talking is part of it, but there's got to be something behind it .."

Miriam: "We are talking about the kind of teaching which takes for granted what we all know we mean by empowerment and personal

development, even though we have not necessarily articulated it; there is' a lot of consensus in here about what we practise, but by putting it in a special box, we are almost saying it is OK to teach without it... to me it is so integrated, it is so much part of what we should be doing, that I really resist the idea that it is an extra special thing we do .. it is part of the educational process ... and anybody who says they are teaching ESL without it, to my mind is not teaching ESL - they are teaching EFL (English as a Foreign Language). The difference between EFL and ESL is that in ESL it ('empowerment') is part of that agenda."

Jill: "So you're saying that the politics of what we are doing is so intrinsic to what we do that we don't need a special term, such as empowerment, which implies that the focus is on them... if we talk about our own pedagogy, which is an eclectic pedagogy, we are putting the focus back on ourselves."

Miriam's observation that what we are talking about is "good teaching" and that "we don't need "some special word that implies there is a Christmas present which is all wrapped up in glossy paper with a bow on it" summed up pretty well the stage we had come to. The next stage was to be able to articulate our pedagogy as an 'eclectic' pedagogy, one which draws on a range of theories and methodologies and encompasses all the dimensions suggested by our usage of 'personal development'.

In fact, at that point we had already begun on the next stage of articulating classroom practice and sharing our pedagogical understandings more systematically, as described below.

### **5. Planning for More Systematic Learning from Each Other.**

On July 24, I made several suggestions about what might be the next step of the project including the suggestion that:

- Each share with the others how they see personal development taking place in the classroom (a mini-teach in?). This can include ideas for lessons, activities and approaches that we could all use. What do we each actually *do* that maximises a relaxed and growthful environment - how do we deal with personal issues when they arise in the classroom, how do we help bring out the quiet and withdrawn ones, what actually

happens, that ends in students saying how more confident they feel at the end of the course, etc. (AR Bulletin No. 4).

At the meeting of July 30 we took up the idea of the 'mini teach-in' which is described in Chapter 5.

## **6. Conclusion**

In this chapter I have shown how various strands of our initial reflection - or *reconnaissance* - led us to a recognition that we must locate 'personal development' within a broader discourse of our own pedagogy, a pedagogy which is reflective of humanism, psychological insight, 'caring', solidarity and an orientation to social change, as shown in section 3. This in turn engendered a great deal of interest in how each of us operate in the classroom in enacting such a pedagogy. Finally, we devised a plan of action as to how we might learn from each other in a more systematic and detailed way than we had done previously.

In terms of the action research, we had moved to the second step listed in Kemmis and McTaggart's *Action Research Planner* (1988, p.65), that of *planning for action*, in the light of the analysis we had made. In this case, the 'action' which will be described in Chapter 5, was 'cultural action' (Freire, 1970) continuing the process of collaborative exploration, but in a more organised and disciplined way, focussing on our teaching in the light of our previous discussions about 'personal development'



## Chapter Five

# **THE 'MINI TEACH-IN': FOUR TEACHERS TELL THEIR PEDAGOGICAL STORIES**

1. Introduction
2. What is Pedagogy?
3. Three Pedagogical Themes
  - (a) Eclecticism and Praxis
  - (b) Feminist pedagogy
  - (c) The personal and the pedagogical
4. Conclusion: The 'Mini Teach-In' as 'Thoughtful Learning'

## Chapter Five

### THE "MINI TEACH-IN":

### FOUR TEACHERS TELL THEIR PEDAGOGICAL STORIES

#### 1. Introduction

In this chapter I document the *action* phase of the action research project: the 'mini teach-in'. This was a series of meetings in which we took in turns to present to each other aspects of our teaching that related to our earlier discussions on 'personal development'.

Four teachers made presentations to the group during 1991. Two more presentations were made in 1992, but this chapter is about presentations made by Dominica (August 28), Miriam (September 10), Elizabeth (October 29) and Barbara (December 3). The talks were recorded and slightly edited transcripts are in Bulletins 7, 8, 9 and 10 in Appendix A.

At the beginning, I suggested some headings that we could use in order to bring out more of the deeper issues in how we think about our work. These were:

- *What sort of educational theories guide you in your teaching?*
- *What are your main teaching aims?*
- *What is your 'hidden agenda' in working with the women here?*
- *Do you see yourself as a feminist teacher? If so, what does this mean?*
- *What have been some of your successes (failures?) from which you have learned something?*
- *What are the most difficult things you find about teaching?*
- *What are the joys? (AR Bulletin No. 6)*

Each talk was completely different, yet a number of common themes emerged from the exploration of how we each approach 'personal development' in our teaching. Here I give an account of the presentations (including the group discussions which followed) organised around three interrelated themes within our pedagogical thinking and practice.

Seen in terms of the methodology of *The Action Research Planner*, the content of the presentations can be seen as the 'product' of the action phase:

certainly, they were considered by the participants to be the high point of the whole 'project'. Recording the presentations and typing up the transcripts and circulating them were crucial parts of the process, enabling participants to digest, further reflect on, and build discussion about key issues in subsequent sessions. Simply being able to articulate our intuitive understandings about our work in the group was not enough to stabilise the new language and understandings in our thinking and culture: to become part of *our* institutional discourse. By having each of the talks in written form we were able to go beyond 'finding the words' for our own intuitions and *our* own classroom realities: we were becoming conscious about our unconscious and informal culture, formalising and strengthening it and thus creating our own institutional discourse.

## 2. What is Pedagogy?

The notion of 'pedagogy' became a key concept in the "mini teach-in", and it is useful to briefly consider at this point the distinction that can be made between 'pedagogy' and 'teaching'.

The word 'pedagogy' is almost absent from the official TAFE discourse, in which even 'teaching' is increasingly constructed as 'training'. The emphasis in our discussions on the notion of 'pedagogy' has significance in terms of countering this official discourse.

The word 'to teach', does not usually convey the complex and varied processes of facilitating learning that a teacher participates in. It suggests a subject-object relationship and a one-way process, rather than the complex interactivity suggested by 'pedagogy'.

In *Feminist Research in Education: Within/Against* (1991, p.85) Patti Lather discusses this issue and quotes David Lusted's definition of pedagogy as addressing "the transformation of consciousness that takes place in the intersection of three agencies - the teacher, the learner and the knowledge they together produce". She comments that this definition focusses on the "interactive productivity as opposed to merely transmissive nature of what happens in the pedagogical act."

The teachers' stories discussed in this chapter all reflect 'interactive productivity' rather than simply 'transmission'. They reveal elements of a pedagogy which is *eclectic* (in the sense of combining a variety of theoretical and methodological approaches), *reflexive* (developing through many cycles

of action and reflection), *contingent*, (responding to needs and situations as they arise) and *collaborative* (developing inter-subjective understandings in the classroom from discussion of common experiences).

### **3. Three Pedagogical Themes**

The three presentations which form the raw data for this section can be found in Bulletins 7 - 10, in Appendix B. For the purposes of illustrating the development of a discourse about our own pedagogy, I have extracted three themes from the presentations and discussions. The three themes are as follows:

(a) Eclecticism and praxis

(How we go through learning cycles in responding to the needs of a different groups at a different times and how we draw from and combine a variety of theoretical frameworks as part of that process. )

(b) Feminist pedagogy

(Reflecting on the MWLC as a feminist centre and on how we express our feminism in our teaching.)

(c) The personal and the pedagogical

(Who we are as teachers, how we problematise our practice, learning from the students, our own 'personal development' as teachers.)

### **4. Eclecticism and praxis**

*Barbara talked about how she attempts to integrate insights of Frank Smith's literacy theory <sup>1</sup>in terms of balancing "top-down" and "bottom up" approaches and balancing the necessity of teaching actual skills with having a student-centred classroom and encouraging spontaneous dialogue. Her story is a good illustration of praxis: the on-going process of critical self-reflection and the dialectical movement between educational theory and classroom practice.*

Basically I try to have a student-centred class room, although in fact I also impose quite a lot. I suppose what I try to do more and more is get a balance between bottom-up and a top down approaches. This is Frank Smith's terminology. bottom-up is word level, and top-down is text level. For too long I was doing a top-down. I feel I have had a too generalised

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<sup>1</sup>Smith, F., 1981 *Comprehension and Learning*, New York Holt, Rhinehart .

outlook in my program, with not enough substantial under-pinning of purely skills, going into where their needs are, and I think that is where I am going now...

*Dominica showed how in teaching Human Services Skills she integrates the elements of the curriculum, her own life experience, the specific needs of each class group and an overall orientation of empowerment, again, constantly adapting the material to the specific needs:*

The Human Services Skills course has all aspects of personal development, self-exploration, empowerment and the development of confidence, incorporated within the curriculum. I give these my own personal flavour, developed after many years of teaching in adult education. There is always a bias according to what ever group is present - there are different groups with different backgrounds and experiences. A lot happens spontaneously.

My approach for the course is not to carve up, so much as integrate all the aspects - communication skills and human service skills overlap. Self-esteem arises from getting more power with the written word and is not treated in isolation.

*She described a session about 'self-esteem' as an example:*

I wrote on the board, 'who am I?' They started to talk within small groups about who they are at this level. So many of them said, "I've never been asked 'who am I?' before!". My framework for this goes a long way back to people like Dietrich Bonhoeffer - I think of his poem, 'Who am I when I step from my prison?' so I often think about Bonhoeffer arriving at self-knowledge in the face of all kinds of adversity and keeping his integrity intact. This influences a lot of things I do.

I use simple things on the board, like, a timeline, then we workshop: someone volunteers to do their timeline, giving their key experiences in chronological order. It then has another level, 'what did I learn at these various stages?' It's extremely simple, we talk and laugh, and I do mine. This went over two sessions. I move them out of their language groups and allow them to get to know each other. Written work comes out of this; they present any part they feel comfortable with in writing. These regular written exercises are not compulsory, but

they always do them, and I have a thick file. There is no formal assessment for this. So somewhere along the line, the notion of self-esteem comes in, but I don't explicitly bring it in. When we sum up, the notion comes up - for example, 'I'm feeling good because I've shared that', and it connects up with self-esteem. But I believe that self-esteem is also enhanced by learning how to use computers...

*However, she said that when working with an NESB group, the Human Services Skills must at the same time be about language development:*

"I always bear in mind certain things, such as that I'm always teaching language, so I'm responsible for language development. This means dictionary work, journals, writing a summary together on the board at the end of the lesson. My theory for this comes from philosophical frameworks such as Freire, socio-linguistics and Basil Bernstein...

In 60's and 70's there was a great development in linguistic theory - attitudes were behaviouristic before this, with deficit models of language acquisition. Socio-linguists said, 'No!... people can be equally powerful in their own areas of culture, but there are certain conventions, that everyone needs to learn.' Freire, Illich, Douglas Barnes and Graves are about building strength with an emphasis on process. Carl Rogers' teachings on human relations are important with his emphasis on empathy, genuineness, non-possessive warmth."

*Elizabeth too spoke of how she refers to different theoretical insights about growth and empowerment from psychological traditions and builds these into her own thinking:*

"Freud has said that 'consciousness consists in being able to name something', but that is only part of the process (of the development of consciousness). Writing has got that special feature to it, that you actually come to terms with your own ideas and objectify them and name them, and I guess that's the way your consciousness grows..."

"Particularly with the RTL group, I find that it is important that this group is relating to general education, not just language. I see those people as being very devoid of information about the world (even in their own languages). It might be a Western paradigm of education, but I

really feel that they need to know so many different things. They need to divide up the world into a whole lot of different categories, divide up knowledge and see that this is part of the process of creating consciousness, analysing and nominalising. You really can't perceive intellectually unless you do that and say, "here is the physical world, here are the continents, this is how climate affects them". There is a taxonomy of names of things and you have to access a lot of vocabulary and information in order to be able to discuss those things and go out and view them confidently..."

*Elizabeth's theoretical understanding of learning styles leads her to monitor her own ways of presenting information as well as to appreciate and respect the different learning styles of students:*

"Then there is the idea that we all access information in different ways - auditory, visual, tactile, etc. Most people are actually highly visual; not many people are auditory or kinesthetic. But by the same token, we should use other channels, as well as the intellectual - we often forget just how verbal we are, and that a lot of these people are still operating in a more visual mode. Because they are more illiterate than us, they are going on visual cues a lot more - again the analogy with children's learning is that they need pictures.

For example, it (theory about learning styles) helps me appreciate somebody like Sabina more. I don't think she is dumb because she is so illiterate. She has her own forms of intelligence. She understands in a large kinesthetic way really well and she knows Melbourne very well. She said to me today, when we started talking about our planet and the stars, and she said, "me know group stars". She was a shepherd in Yugoslavia, and she used to sleep out with the sheep ....she was saying, (acting out) the sower, and other names of the constellations, going back to ancient Greek myths...

*The insights of both Karl Jung and Carl Rogers are important influences on her pedagogy, on a spiritual as much as a theoretical level:*

...The Jung personality types, the dualisms of introvert/extrovert, feeling/thinking, judging and intuiting are also important... The way this fits in is that you don't expect everybody to be the same, and you

know that people are learning in different ways, not everybody is going to be the same.

That's really important in terms of the empowerment and personal development agendas, because both of those, at their most crude delivery, tend to negate that. We often to say, X is a lovely lady, great person in the class, but she is slow. Other people are quick intellectually. Those messages imply that everybody is going to be brought from the same point A to the same point B and that somehow an extroverted person is the one who has been more empowered, so an introverted person is 'disempowered' because we have that stereotype in our brains. That pinpoints the rather crude brash thing about assertiveness training. There is something a bit vulgar about it at a certain level, making people be pushy; the sort of exercises that you often take students through, there are things that are often a bit undignified such as making sure you are getting your own way. But there may be another wisdom in just being slightly different...

#### **(b) Feminist pedagogy**

*All of the four teachers expressed a feminist orientation and awareness of feminist issues, although none of them saw their teaching in specifically feminist terms.*

*Barbara related an anecdote on how her students see the MWLC as an affirmative space for women:*

I got the literacy women to do an evaluation yesterday, and I asked them, why it was important for them to come to a women's learning centre. They were all quite pragmatic about it, saying that the Centre is convenient to home etc, though they did all chip in and say, "you can speak more freely with no men around", and that there would be sexual tension in the class if there were men around. Chan said, yesterday, when it was suggested she should do ETS at Otter street, "if there are men in the room, I won't open my mouth"...

*Miriam saw her feminism as first and foremost a question of respect for the struggle of other women of different cultures:*



Feminism is a very broad church and I'm happy to locate myself within that. I can only tell them about my experience and other women's experience, but I can't say to them that their culture is any worse to women than my culture is. It wouldn't help them even if it were true. There are Arabic feminists who are in a better position to talk to the Lebanese women than if they need to be talked to. I'm sure they are also going through struggles and I can't impose my struggle on them. I don't have the answers anyhow. So it's a question of dimension, but to me it's a cultural experience - there is no such thing as any sort of over-riding feminism."

*She was critical of some of the "feminist" curriculum materials on our shelves in that they focus on the negative, rather than the positive:*

There are things in 'Life Skills for Women' which are incredibly crass. I think it's very important to *affirm* rather than focus on the oppression of women (though we can when it's necessary). I take the misery and oppression of being a migrant as given and focus on the positive things.

So being a feminist teacher also means introducing positive models of women and affirming positive models of them ... "not saying you poor women, you are frightfully oppressed", but "you wonderful women, you've come to Australia, you've done extremely well, you are brilliant cooks, ... you have managed to bring up a family in most cases successfully and well...!"

*Dominica also was aware of the danger of labouring the oppression of women, and also of the moral responsibility entailed in feeding in feminist perspectives that may result in the overturning of a woman's personal life, and create a whole new set of dangers and insecurities when on-going support from the Centre is not available:*

Feminism is also obviously a part of this, although I don't need to say, "I'm a feminist". I don't talk a lot about the oppression of women and I don't believe that I have to labour it philosophically although my standpoint is feminist. I'm also intensely aware of the conflict that can arise in women's lives, between the personal development, self-exploration and the high that they have at the end of the course, and what can happen in their own lives as a result of it. So I have to tread a very very careful path: encouraging a certain peace and stability and

then having the courage to grow and go on. For example, one woman said, "my husband is very cross with you, because I went home and said I wanted my name on the cheque account" - not that we had even discussed that - and the other end of the extreme is what happened to Fahra<sup>2</sup>

Miriam: It's interesting that you have not talked about them in any way in terms of their needs as migrant women. Maybe the message is that their needs are not different from any other group of women who might be doing this kind of training...

This is right, I don't single them out particularly, but the fact that they are migrant women, influences very much the way I work with them, through method, rather than content...

*Elizabeth reflected on the theme of 'teacher as mother' in terms of her own teaching:*

Jung said that 'any creative act requires a return to the realm of the mothers'. I interpret that to a certain extent, when I free associate with it, by thinking of my own mother who was very supportive and gave me whatever I've got. I didn't come out of a highly intellectual background but somehow I have been a person who is interested in and loves all sorts of different areas of knowledge. And it's something that I always try to take to my students, that life is terribly interesting and there is always something to be involved in... so, do you see yourself as a mother?...Yes, I think there is an element of that. If you see it in a gender polarity way, the mother gives permission and gives pleasure and stimulation... there is a connection.

I think women often feel so afraid of joining into the discourse of society in general that they do need that extra encouragement and permission from the mother. As I said before, Jung says the introvert is afraid of the object, whereas the extrovert goes out to the object. I guess that I think education should encourage the student to go out to the object... when they get very stimulated, they are so stimulated that they want to identify with things so they will start to get their own education in process...

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<sup>2</sup> Fahra Ahmad was a student in the SACS course who was murdered by her ex-husband in March 1991.

*She discussed nurturance in terms of Carl Rogers' 'non-possessive warmth' and linked this to the lesson of the Demeter myth of Greek mythology - the mother who also wants to control:*

The other thing is Rogers, which had a big impact on me at the time, in the counselling course. At the time I found it an extremely beautiful philosophy, that one shouldn't attempt to influence or control other people. I guess the sorts of things I got from it were the ideas of letting the other person be and just receiving them. This comes back to the mothering idea that that's what a good mother does, to give the person confidence by allowing them to be themselves and not by criticising. In a counselling situation, you never never judge the person. That includes learning to give non-possessive warmth and I realise how much a lot of women in particular want to control and get power, through trying to be nice to people. They force people to do what they want by being nice, for example, expecting things to happen because you're nice and they love you. That's the Demeter mother: Hera is not interested in personal feelings but family relationships and what should be done as a matter of form, whereas Demeter is the mother who loves too much and is possessive...So Carl Rogers was important to me, and I try to moderate in that direction...

**(d) The personal and the pedagogical**

*Each teacher shared processes of her own personal/professional development and an awareness her own socialisation as a teacher. The talks reveal processes of the teachers problematising and reflecting on their own practice; striving to develop new strengths and new approaches; learning from the students and seeing the personal in the pedagogical.*

*Miriam started by reflecting on how her own bicultural background had helped to form her attitude to students:*

I've grown up in a context where to speak lots of language is normal, where people's experiences have been in some cases really awful, but that there hasn't been this dreadful feeling that each one is responsible for them. Not that I don't get angry about that nor that I am unaware of the tragedy of each particular person, but I'm aware of it as part of a much greater tragedy. From another point of view, that person has survived, and their children have survived... And from the other side

of my family, I'm aware of the fact that the people who never speak English still can have a rich and wonderful life here.... I'm worried about the tendency we have to act as if anyone who doesn't look or talk or act like us must have a miserable and horrible life...

*She told an anecdote about how she discovered the circumstances of poverty of a young Turkish student she had been teaching in England, resulting in a 'sort of revelation' about ESL curriculum in the light of the student's real needs:*

I realised that what he really needed was housing, and it was about access to rights. In the end it's up to the students to determine that kind of agenda, and I don't necessarily mean just a negotiated curriculum, but that we do need to know more about their lives and what they need and the way they are going...

*Miriam said that if we are to offer students advice and counselling about problems in their lives, then we need to become very well-informed about what their circumstances are... on the other hand, advice-giving is not necessarily one-way:*

If we are going to intervene, then it behoves us to be well-informed ... If we do take that role, we have to be responsible to that degree. Also, they give as good as they get ... last week I had a long talk with one of the students and gave her some excellent advice, and she finished off giving me some excellent advice too, not all of which I wanted to hear! I went away from that sufficiently humbled, realising that she also has a right to tell me what to do in my life. I just had to sit and take it...

*Elizabeth talked about how what she has learned by being a mother feeds into her pedagogy:*

One of the things that worries me is how we decide what level of abstraction we will go to, being aware we shouldn't throw too much at them, which can be very disempowering. Sometimes I worry that I do try to give them too much, but you just monitor that, and I think that over-stimulation doesn't really hurt, I don't see that I'm giving them a task that's too hard, I feel that I should give them a lot and see what they can cope with. This is where I bring in the experience of having a child, because you can read a three year old a very difficult book, that

she can't understand, but if you do it often enough, over the years they do start to understand them, and the kids who have never been challenged in that way don't. I imagine that there is an automatic way of tuning into what you are capable of. It's like what I have got from psychology about "smooth and crunchy" - that you make things crunchy enough, they have to get the texture of it - it's a little bit difficult and they get a bit worried and have to find out "why". Whether that works as well for adult students as it does for children, I don't know, but if you make the atmosphere warm enough and personal enough, that shouldn't worry them, it should make things interesting to them.

*She talked about one way in which her M.Ed. course helped her to let go of barriers of self-image and ego in her teaching,:*

Bernie Neville has helped with this (learning to act things out). A lot of barriers went down doing his course, where you do often have to get and make a fool of yourself, so I don't mind making a fool of myself now, if I want to show them something, I'll crawl along the ground, or whatever.

*Barbara also discussed her teaching in terms of the development of her pedagogy, in particular in working with the paradoxes and dilemmas that we are confronted with daily:*

What I would also like to do, (but I don't know how to do it, because I think I try to control too much in the classroom) is that Freirean framework of building things that come out of dialogue. I don't think I'm very good at allowing that to happen and I'd like to be able to do that more. I find I work to a program, and I can let go of that, but it's difficult to lead the process so that real issues come out and it can go in a direction.

*Barbara described how she is trying to create a balance between structure and spontaneous flow; between being available to give emotional support and protecting her own sense of well-being:*

...also, I haven't had the courage to actually sit back and try to see whether they will work it out, because I remember quite clearly with this group, in about the third week, I felt absolutely oppressed by two of them because they were such strong women, and they were dominating

so much in the classroom I thought they were almost going to come to verbal blows in the classroom. They have ended up good friends now. I sort of orchestrated it in the meeting time, to respect the speaker, but it would have been good if I had sat back to see whether the group itself would have taken the issue up... I had a feeling of these two women devouring me, I was swamped by them... The other day, too, I was being swamped by a few women's anxieties and Miriam's advice was that I should step back. I need to practise that.

*Her account shows the extent to which learning how to balance the different perspectives and competing demands is a personal as well as a pedagogical challenge:*

... I'd like to get back to Elizabeth about the Demeter complex, because I feel that is something I have to fight against too. I am a bit too indulgent to them, and I feel in a way it is detrimental to them in lots of ways. It doesn't train them in many ways - it doesn't prepare them. Some of them leave early and come and go when they want. But I feel in a real bind, because I understand why they have to go and I know that they have to leave at a certain time, or may have a sick child or whatever. But then they become too free maybe it's just a few women ... some of them are very motivated and what can you do about the slack ones?"

#### **4. Conclusion: The 'Mini Teach-in' as 'Thoughtful Learning'**

The four 'pedagogic stories' that Dominica, Miriam, Barbara and Elizabeth told, arose from and reflected the unique particularities of each teaching situation and the unique approach and contribution of each of the teachers.

The presentations and discussions illustrate how the pedagogical discourse of the MWLC builds on methodological and theoretical eclecticism, particularly drawing on theories of human relationships, such as Rogers, Jung and Freud. Pedagogy here is basically seen in terms of relationships and nurturance: theory and methodology are integrated into the body of intuitive knowledge and experience (the subjectivity) of the teachers. At the same time, the teachers were open about their own subjectivities (Barbara's "being swamped" by students' problems, Miriam's acceptance of "unwanted" advice from a student) and revealed their own dilemmas and processes of personal learning and development.

The process of sharing and reflecting on each others' pedagogical stories could be interpreted in Max van Manen's terms as a process of "thoughtful learning". In *"Action Research as Theory of the Unique: from Pedagogic Thoughtfulness to Pedagogic Tactfulness"* van Manen talks about phenomenological action research as 'thoughtful learning' which he compares to 'skill learning' (derived from practice) and 'principled learning' (derived from positive theory) (1984, p.159).

The practical significance of phenomenological reflection is that it gives us tactful thoughtfulness: situational perceptiveness, discernment, and depthful understanding.... As teacher, parent, principal, counsellor or psychologist, I act pedagogically by implicating in unique and complex ways all aspects of pedagogic competence" (p.174).

The 'mini teach-in' deepened the collective inquiry on the theme of 'personal development' by enabling us to reflect on our own and each others' pedagogical thinking: on each person's "situational perceptiveness, discernment, and depthful understanding". Each teacher reflected on her approaches to solving pedagogical problems which were always specific to the needs of the particular group or individual, rather than presented as generalisations. For the presenting teacher as well as for her audience, the process was an occasion of "thoughtful learning", which van Manen says, lies "at the heart of pedagogical competence" (p.175).

The notion of "thoughtful learning" about our teaching fits well with the definition of pedagogy with which I began this chapter, as being both interactive and transformative of teachers as well as students. By exchanging pedagogical stories, we had shared not only *what we do*, but *who we are* as teachers and *how we are changing*. This had strengthened us as a group and was part of the process of articulating a theoretical discourse about our pedagogy.

In Chapter 6 I document and discuss the final stage in the action research cycle, the feedback and reflection on the mini teach-in and on the entire process that we had gone through as a group. In Chapter 7, I return to the pedagogical themes so far discussed, in the process of monitoring in detail my own classroom behaviour. In Chapter 8 I again take up these themes, as they are reflected and corroborated by the perceptions of the students about their experiences of studying at the Centre.

## **Chapter Six**

# **TEACHERS AS COLLABORATIVE LEARNERS: REFLECTIONS AND OUTCOMES**

- 1. Introduction**
- 2. Teachers Reflecting on Their Own Learning**
- 3. Sharing Classroom Methodology**
- 4. Articulating an Educational Philosophy of the Centre**
- 5. Building the Group and Developing a Collective Ethos**
- 6. Other Outcomes: the 'Ripple Effect'**
- 7. Conclusion**



## Chapter Six

### TEACHERS AS COLLABORATIVE LEARNERS: FEEDBACK AND OUTCOMES

#### 1 Introduction

In Chapters 3, 4 and 5 I documented the process of MWLC teachers talking to each other about their teaching: sharing experience, insights and individual goals for change and development. The purpose of this chapter is to show how the processes of collaborative, 'thoughtful' learning that started with the reconnaissance phase of this project and continued into the "mini teach-in" were followed through in our thinking and practice and fed into the pedagogical culture of the Centre in empowering ways. Based on the participants' feedback, this Chapter documents the fourth step as set out in *The Action Research Planner* (1988, p.86): that of the teachers' reflection on the overall process that we had participated in.

Following Kemmis and McTaggart (1988), one of the main aims of the MWLC project had been to implement the idea of educational action research as a means of professional development based on collaborative and critical enquiry into classroom practice. There was a number of local case studies to emulate: in the Victorian Education Department, in the early 80s, action research was gaining in popularity as a form of school-based staff development which aimed to combine research, teacher development and curriculum development (Brennan, 1982, p.2.) Lynton Brown's *Group Self-Evaluation* (1990) was a product of this period, and served a useful resource for the MWLC project. Marie Brennan's *Investigation as In-Service* (1982) likewise gave valuable guidance, based on the outcomes of the *Investigating Learning* project that involved teachers from all round Victoria in processes of collaborative learning about classroom practice. Since then, several restructurings of the Education Department and the shift towards a culture of managerialism (as described in Chapter 1) has unfortunately severely affected those programs.

The MWLC action research project built on the experience of the 'Deakin school' (Kemmis, McTaggart, Smyth and others); facilitating a process of collaborative, critical enquiry as a means of professional development and learning. John Smyth's *Teachers as Collaborative Learners* (1991), which gives a critique of "top down" forms of teacher appraisal and development and argues for 'collegial' approaches that give teachers more control over

their teaching and their professional development, gives another useful theoretical framework for the MWLC project. An important difference between our project and that described in this book and in much of the literature, is that it was a teacher (myself) who initiated the process amongst her peers, rather than supervisors or Departmental consultants.

Reflecting on the idea of action research as an *empowering* research methodology, I wrote in my introduction to the research proposal:

The opportunity for an experience of an empowering, collective self-education of the teachers offered by action research methodology is a parallel issue of equal importance. *Together* we focus on the challenges and problems, and decide on a course of action. We will then observe and record the results of our actions, collaboratively reflect upon them and on that basis plan for new action. By methodically recording our thoughts and classroom experiences, by comparing notes, by being sceptical, by dipping into theoretical writings, by developing our *praxis*, we would organise and control our own staff development process. We would be able eventually to more clearly articulate our aims and our pedagogy. We would improve our classroom practice, improve our theoretical understandings and produce new theory. Finally, we would amass rich data as evidence for our claims about the Centre use this to share our insights more widely (Appendix A, p.2).

At the time, this 'ideal vision' of how action research might take place seemed highly ambitious, given that most of us were working part-time and were already stretched to the limit in fulfilling our curricular and extra-curricular teaching responsibilities. In this chapter, I will show how despite these limitations, progress was in fact made towards achieving the explicit aims, as well as the implicit aim of our own 'empowerment': having greater insight into and greater control over our professional practice and the ability to contribute to educational and political discourse more widely.

The evidence referred to in this chapter includes reflective comments made by the participants during the course of the project and documented in the Action Research Bulletins and recorded during feedback meetings in June and October, 1992. The feedback was elicited by the questions, *how do you see the project in retrospect? How did it work for you?* The ensuing discussion and reflection was about our own learning processes; the sharing of classroom methodology; the articulation of an educational philosophy of the

Centre; the development group solidarity; and some stories about individual outcomes of personal and professional development.

## **2 Teachers Reflecting on Their Own Learning**

On one level, simply having to reflect on the deeper questions of what informs our teaching and to articulate this to the group was a learning experience which reinforced our professional confidence in ourselves as teachers. As Annie said, this process had helped her in "debating with myself or coming to terms with my own methodology and ideology in my teaching" (29/10/92).

Most of the teachers confessed to feelings of nervousness before it was their turn "to account for themselves" before their fellow teachers but said later that they had found it a valuable and empowering exercise. Dominica, for example, said that she was nervous talking in front of her peers, but in the end she found it enjoyable. She said she enjoyed being challenged about her thinking about her work and articulating what her frameworks actually are, how they are the culmination of twenty years of teaching and research and are integrated into her own value system (AR Process Diary, 27/8).

Looking back on the action research process at a meeting in April, 1992, Barbara said that the process had been important for her in that it had enabled her to "crystalise my ideas":

"I now understand the basis from which I work: what I think about education ... and I have a good stance on where I fit into the educational spectrum, because we have worked in a collective way to actually say what the basis is." (Process Diary, 5/92)

Many commentators have noted that teaching can be a very private pursuit; teachers spend years doing their own thing in their own classroom, often with little knowledge of what the teacher in the next room does, or how she approaches her work. Our process helped to break down this isolation and enabled a more systematic sharing than the usual staff room exchanges allow for.

The typed transcripts were an important part of the process of sharing and developing of ideas. The teachers expressed satisfaction on seeing their ideas in published form, realizing that these were of use and interest to the others. This led us to reflect on how we use a very similar technique with our students by editing and printing their work in order to make their

writing accessible and to affirm the significance of their ideas. We teachers had organised for ourselves the same sort of empowering activity as we organise for our students! As Barbara said, "the action research process has been "bottom up" just like social literacy. The ideas have been allowed to grow from the client body - that is, us!" (Process Diary, 4/92)

In giving her feedback about the process, in a taped interview (13/10/92) Elizabeth said that:

Looking back on it now, it was even more important than I thought it was at the time when we were all caught up in it. The very most important thing was that it made us all summon up what we were all about individually and as teachers. Once again it was that whole process of bringing something to consciousness and then you wrote it down, you recorded it and fed it back to us, and of course that was exactly parallel to what we do for our students for their literacy. That's an interesting parallel because when we talk about personal development, it is not just emotional development that we go through, but it is a form of intellectual development, ... we get the students to write things down, even though it's pretty basic, then we refine it and give it back to them; that's a great process for them. Something similar happened to us, when we all had to prepare something, there were lots of things going on, because we had to talk in a personal way about who we were professionally, what had informed us as professionals...

When I think of the personal development that I undertook through the research, as a professional, it was virtually intellectual development - the idea of nominalising and bringing our ideas into consciousness, that was what we did together. We didn't only do it individually, as if we all had run off and written an essay for a tutor... Here we had to do our little essay and a little speech too, then we had to put it together and mix it all up like a great big cake and see what we were *all* on about.. we weren't just academics in a tutorial, we were all people who were involved in the same project, so, it's a simple idea but it's very good because we were involved together in the same project."

For Elizabeth, the key things were: that the 'personal development' and the 'intellectual development' were actually the same thing; that the 'language development' was a process of bringing our intuitive understandings to full consciousness by articulating them and seeing them in print; and the fact

the collaborative process (like 'mixing up a great big cake') gave the results a far greater significance than the equivalent individual reflection in a university essay.

### 3. Sharing Classroom Methodology

On the most simple level, the presentations and discussions resulted in a cross-fertilisation of ideas that we reflected on and fed into our own practice. Barbara, for example, commented, two months after Dominica's talk:

I loved that bit in Dominica's talk where she talked about Victor Frankl and Freire, the idea of action and reflection: I had never really realised that process, of doing something and then reflecting on it, and it really is an insight for me, thinking about that and actually trying to put it into practice in the classroom. My students were out all day Friday, just busy busy at the VOC (Vocational Orientation Centre) and so on, and first thing today, I just got them in silence to just write about it, and it seemed like it was a really good exercise for them to process their experience in a quiet way, because normally I would have gone in and started talking.... it was a very good process, just getting them to reflect immediately after that very active day and I wouldn't have done that before. (AR Bulletin No.9)

For both Elizabeth and myself, discussions about how we may be encouraging student dependency by "mothering" in the way we teach writing, had an impact. Elizabeth remembered,

... when there was a little bit of a word scuffle about how many times you draft or get people to draft their work... and it just stayed with me, and I thought, should I get people to draft their work more? Am I being too much of a 'smother mother' with them because I just get them to correct it once, or else I correct it and type it out for them and they get this beautiful finished product right away? Is it actually better to slog away with them and not try to make it so interesting, but just get them to make three or four copies of the same thing? I haven't come to a conclusion about that but it has just stayed with me and I felt well... it's a point for my own reflection (AR Bulletin No. 9).

I too, had been re-examining my classroom practice, in the light of our talks and my thinking about feminist pedagogical models which construct teaching in terms of maternal nurturance:

Miriam talked about some students putting up their hands and saying (in effect), "Mummy, mummy, come and correct my work!", and I thought may be I do do that to some extent (ie, behave as if they are children and I'm Mummy), and maybe I could be helping them to be less dependent on me, and I could be saying, "have you checked it? Go back and have another look"... I think I am a bit indulgent, and that's something that I have sort of learned.. (AR Bulletin No. 9).

These three examples suggest that the learning that is taking place is part of the on-going cyclical process of praxis: personal reflection and learning from our own and from each others' experience. Becoming an experienced teacher means developing one's skills and sensitivity over years of such intuitive self-evaluation and countless learning spirals. Our action research as a professional development activity stimulated the individual learning processes by encouraging more openness and sharing: it gave a structure and a legitimacy for both challenging and supporting each other more than we otherwise would.

Why then, apply the term 'action research' to what can be seen as normal every day processes of self monitoring and development? In the MWLC experience, the fact that we had consciously embarked on a project led us to be *more* conscious and *more* systematic about the normal exchange of ideas and issues. In Wadsworth's terms, "Resorting to more conscious, theorised and articulated practice can offer to short-cut some of our otherwise slower processes of learning"(Wadsworth, 1991, p.60). Ideally, building on the "fruits of our every-day-type research" in this way can influence the developing culture of organisations, leading to "a culture of evaluation" (p.45). In our case, twelve months was insufficient time to be able to claim this result unequivocally, although as I have shown in this chapter, significant progress was made.

#### **4. Articulating an Educational Philosophy of the Centre**

In earlier chapters I showed how group reflection processes led to a detailed analysis of notions of 'personal development' and the construction of an 'institutionally indigenous' discourse, theorising our own pedagogical practice. The 'mini teach-in' and our many discussions developed this process further by pooling and collectively exploring a range of theoretical perspectives that underpin our work.

The AR Bulletins (Appendix B) had a role in feeding in theoretical background about relevant pedagogical issues and about action research itself. 'Circulation of the bulletins provided an opportunity to circulate papers that would further enrich our collaborative theorisation.

My essay, *The Sound of Babel and the Language of Friendship* (1991) was a reflection on the experience of teaching at the MWLC using insights from pedagogical theory, feminist theory and language acquisition theory to argue for the value of learning centres for migrant women, such as our own. The essay was to a large extent informed by the collaborative discussions and reflected the development of theoretical understandings of the group as a whole. It was read by all the participants and fed into the theoretical basis of our discussions.

During a discussion on the significance of the project in October 1992, Barbara said that:

The main thing was that it provided the opportunity for the first time in the Centre, for all of us to expound upon the ideology of the place. I suppose it was implicit. We all knew what we believed in but it was the first that we had sat down and talked about it (13/10/92).

As women teachers in a women's learning centre, we were able for the first time to consider collectively whether or not we saw ourselves as feminist teachers and what this actually meant. In effect, we were developing a discourse about our practice, and at the same time, collectively creating an ethos and philosophy of the MWLC.

To fulfill the aims originally set out for the project, it remains to produce a document setting out the specific aims and philosophy of the MWLC, as a teaching Centre in a large TAFE college.

##### **5. Building the Group and Developing a Collective Ethos**

An important outcome was that the project helped to cement relationships within the group and to boost our often flagging morale by renewing the sense of respect that we felt towards each other. As Barbara said, reflecting on one of the meetings,

It was a lovely injection of energy yesterday - and made me feel it is all worthwhile. We don't realise how rich it is the way we do teach. We

must go out and document and spread what we are doing here (AR Journal, June, 1992).

Elizabeth also said,

I think it emphasised how rich it is, ... our collective teaching culture and also our individual contributions...what I got was a very distinctive flavour of everybody having something very special. I don't mean this not just as a platitude, but I did see that everybody had something very important, something very different to offer, and that's what made us a great team. But as an individual process for us, it also made us think about what we were doing individually. It made me value what I was doing and it made me value what other people were doing. And it was only through clarifying that, and forcing us to talk about it all that it happened and I think that it was a fantastic process that we wouldn't have gone through if you hadn't asked us to do it for the action research (taped feedback discussion, 29/10/92).

Dominica summed up the value she had received from the process and the way in which our solidarity as a teaching department had developed in the course of our discussions as follows:

"I had a suspicion that ideologically we were all on the same pathway. After these meetings I was sure that there were absolutely no conflicts in our ideas about feminism, about learning for critical consciousness etc, so in that ideological philosophical issue it was very affirming, and I also learnt a few good ideas, just in terms the classroom etc, that I hadn't dreamt up for myself. My one thing I am sorry about is that there was never enough time to explore as deeply as one would like to... it was the first time that I have actually talked about what I do in TAFE." (29/10/92)

Dominica's comment that "there was never enough time" underlines the issue that not only are the processes of action research time-consuming, when they are added on to an already over-crowded work life, but that the processes of developing our own critical consciousness as a group (a process of cultural change) is by nature slow. In one year it was only possible to go a certain way towards what would have been possible over a longer time-span.



## 6. Other Outcomes: the Ripple Effect

For Barbara, Elizabeth, Dominica and myself, there were some other outcomes that resulted from the overall process.

Barbara saw it as an important stage of her personal and professional development, in that she now had the confidence to perhaps go on from teaching at the MWLC:

I remember when Miriam asked, "what are we here for? what is our own agenda?" and I realised that of course I am here for myself. But now I feel that I no longer need the protection of this Centre. I could go out to other places and know what I think educationally (April, 1992).

For Elizabeth, being able to "take risks" in the safety of the collective and to rehearse her ideas with us, led to her having the confidence to run a session at the College-wide staff development conference in April, 1992. She said of her presentation at the "mini teach-in":

Whereas at first, I thought I should go along and stick to talking about the safer and more conventional things that the others had talked of, I said to myself, "no, psychology is my thing, so I should really talk about that". In the end, it gave me a tremendous boost. The direct result of that process (especially being able to articulate the different psychological frames behind my thinking, including the Jungian approaches - albeit, not perfectly thought through at the time) was that I had the confidence to go ahead and do the workshop on Jungian typology at the staff development conference, which I otherwise would never have done.

For Dominica and myself, a similar outcome was our subsequent participation in other workshops and conferences.

On December 5 we jointly led a workshop at the AAACE (Australian Association of Adult and Community Education) conference entitled, "And What if There is No Work?" Our idea to run the workshop came out of our action research discussions on how our teaching relates to the impending joblessness of most of our students. At one of our meetings we had reflected on the fact that some students that we know about have gone from the "high" of support and stimulation at the Centre to a low, after they have left and not found a job or suitable course. We had asked ourselves, what does "personal

development" mean in this context? Are we setting them up to be let down? (See AR Bulletin No.10.)

At the AAACE conference workshop Dominica and I raised issues about unemployment and retraining and shared our concern about the overall role of adult education at this time with forty other teachers and community-based adult educators. In the ensuing discussion, issues were raised such as that "we are now facing the situation of having a permanent underclass: we (adult educators) are the ones who are in a sense a fig leaf of the government to contain it and cover it up." Another was, "how do we feed into the political education of students, and prepare them to become part of the decision-making process, how do we support them to become political beings?..." The workshop produced a series of recommendations that were fed back to the final plenary of the conference.

Wanting to share our activities and findings more widely, I presented a paper at the VATME - ATESOL conference in Melbourne, on January 17, in which I talked about the MWLC and our developing pedagogical discourse. Again, the action research process of developing shared meanings about our pedagogy had led to a sharing with other teachers of what is our collective experience, once again feeding into the wider collectivity an alternative (and in the current context) radical discourse.

## **5. Conclusion**

It can be seen that a number of related processes of group learning were taking place throughout the process: sharing techniques and methodologies that fed into our on-going classroom praxis; constructing our work in terms of a variety of theoretical frameworks; developing a discourse about our philosophy and ethos as a Centre; applying techniques of literacy development that we use in the classroom to ourselves as teachers. For each of us, these aspects of our learning were all related processes of personal, intellectual and professional development.

As a group, we had developed of our own 'indigenous' pedagogical discourse which fed into our on-going critique of managerialism in TAFE and "training" models of adult learning. Our sense of solidarity and the increase in honest communication about key issues amongst ourselves, led to our being able to articulate more clearly and to problematise the wider political issues that are affecting teachers and students.

In the concluding chapter of this thesis I further discuss the significance of collaborative learning amongst teachers in relation to the current mainstream educational discourse and current policy context. Before doing so, I will report on the processes of monitoring my own teaching and of facilitating and gathering student input, in Chapters 7 and 8 respectively.

## Chapter Seven

# ACTION RESEARCHING MY OWN TEACHING

- 1. Introduction**
- 2. Keeping a Teaching Journal: Finding a Focus**
- 3. Monitoring My Own Classroom Behaviour**
- 4. Spirals of Learning and Development in Pedagogic Practice**
- 5. Insights About Personal Development and Eclectic Pedagogy**
- 6. Conclusion**

## **Chapter Seven**

### **ACTION RESEARCHING MY OWN TEACHING**

#### **1. Introduction**

Working on my own teaching by means of keeping a journal of my classroom interactions was the second of the three streams of action and reflection that made up the MWLC project. This journal was kept separately from the 'process journal' that I kept in order to document the development of the project overall.

In this chapter I will report and reflect on the processes of keeping a personal journal of my teaching in terms of two distinct but related functions: firstly, as a means of monitoring and reflecting on my classroom practice, and secondly, as data gathering for the developing themes of 'personal development' and eclectic pedagogy.

#### **2 Keeping a Teaching Journal: Finding a Focus**

One problem of having the concept of 'personal development' as a thematic focus for the project was that it had so many meanings and was woven into so many aspects of our pedagogy that it was impossible to use it as a clear focus for my own journal. The policy that I adopted was to record incidents which I intuitively felt reflected on the issue of 'personal development' or interactions with the students that stood out in some way: as being successful, unsuccessful, funny, challenging, etc.

The complexity of this data is exemplified by the entry of 17/6/91:

"An interaction with Tang stands out for some reason. In response to a set exercise - to write a letter to a friend or relative at home, but to write it in English - Tang wrote an emotional letter to her 12 year old brother who is now orphaned, and who she wants to help and support and let him know she loves him and cares about him. How can she help her little brother so far away? She asked me that when she brought out her letter for my correction, and I listened to her talking about how she felt about him, her fears and hopes. I was somehow helping her negotiate her relationship and responsibility for him, and having to affirm her in that, at the same time as correcting her English (which she wanted me

to do) and within a very limited period of time, because there were others waiting. Somehow this was a cameo of the complexity of the transactions and how the language learning and acquisition are taking place in a very real emotional field. She wanted to be able to express those feelings in English, to share them with me, *and* to use the interaction to practise her English. The letter also tried to talk about the economic situation, as the reason why she couldn't come to visit him, or to bring him here. Again, she needed the words (and thus the concepts) to express the objective economic situation to him (imaginatively, in English, since she was not going to send him this letter) and for herself."

Here, it can be seen how the teacher-student relationship is inextricably bound up with process of teaching/learning language. Tang's immediate motivation for learning and practising the new words and constructions was wanting to share with me her relationship with her brother. She was also demanding of me that I 'translate' her halting and approximate English to standard English, to help her find the key words that she needed. I listened as intently and supportively as I could, but the pressure on me of other students wanting to share and to make similar demands, meant that I had to control the interaction by limiting the time spent with her (illustrating one of the constraints on teacher-student solidarity of the institutional teaching role.)

Given the problem of focus, my teaching journal tended to become more personal as I experienced the value of jotting down such interactions and creating a permanent record for myself of the joys, frustrations, and complexities of teaching adult ESL, and in particular, a record of the wonderful group of women that I was fortunate enough to be working with during that semester. The personal value of keeping such a journal became the main motivation for completing regular, detailed records throughout the period of research. At the same time, daily entries became the basis for critical reflection on my own teaching and a useful record in the development of curriculum. As well, the journal entries assisted the analysis of the collective exploration of issues of personal development, eclectic pedagogy and solidarity.

In the rest of this chapter, I will discuss the process of keeping my own personal teaching journal and its significance in terms of: self-monitoring my classroom behaviour, spirals of learning and development in pedagogical

practice, and insights about personal development and eclectic pedagogy. I will also consider its methodological significance in terms of the overall project.

### **3. Monitoring my Own Classroom Behaviour**

Keeping a personal teaching journal is quite a different process from the collective and *participatory* process described so far. Whereas the participatory process has implications for challenging institutional roles and discourses, the self-monitoring of practice by individuals is often associated with the more conservative wing of action research: as a management tool of organisational and professional development to improve individual productivity and hence organisational efficiency. (For example, at the recent 2nd World Congress on Action Learning in Brisbane, the majority of presentations on the theme of self-reflective practice emphasised the benefits to the individual and to the organisation, rather than as a tool for change. (See *Proceedings, 2nd World Congress on Action Learning, 1992*)). Action research seen as social or educational technology, in this way, is often contrasted with the liberatory discourse of participatory action research, as described by McTaggart (see Chapter 1, p.6). For myself, journal-keeping, although a separate process, did contribute to the participatory process, particularly in terms of self-reflection about power and solidarity that the poststructuralist critique calls for.

*The Teacher as Self-Observer: Self-monitoring in Teacher Development* (Richards, 1989), perhaps relates more to the social technology discourse, than to the emancipatory discourse of action research. However, it provided a useful framework for me in reflecting on and articulating my own self-learnings. Richards writes that:

"self-monitoring enables teachers to move from a level where they may be guided largely by impulse, intuition or routine, to a level where their actions are guided by reflection and critical thinking." ... it ... "can help narrow the gap between teachers' imagined view of their own teaching and reality" (p.156)

This rationalistic formulation should perhaps be reframed in poststructuralist terms as, enabling teachers to find words for their intuitive practice, to move from non-discursive to discursive knowing, or in Lacan's

terms, to 'structure the unconscious through language' as the basis of reflection and critical thinking (Grosz, 1990. p.75).

Richards quotes Luft (1969) as categorising four different kind of information about teachers' classroom behaviour that self-monitoring can reveal: "the open self", the secret self, the blind self and the undiscovered self" (p.157)

In my case, tape recording lessons and writing a journal has probably enabled me to become more confident about my 'open self, more honest about my 'secret self and more conscious of 'blind' or 'undiscovered' selves.

### ***The 'open' self***

***(referring to aspects which are known to self and others)***

Reflection upon my 'open' self has led me to consciously articulate wherein my particular teaching skills lie. One important aspect is my ability to develop authentic, warm and respectful relationships with the students. I work to project my commitment to teaching/learning, my own curiosity about language and the world, my belief that everyone can and will learn and my own values about co-operativeness in terms of giving and receiving support. Many students come to the MWLC with low self-esteem and very little formal schooling. They may have serious personal problems, illnesses and disabilities (such as RSI) which affect their ability to learn and to think and express themselves independently. For these people, learning will only take place in the context of real and supportive relationship which takes into account what is known about their personal lives. Journal entries of 13/5/91, 23/5/91, 1/6/91, 30/7/91, 9/8/91, and 21/10/91 (in Appendix C) show how I try to develop relationships with the students and a relaxed group environment which will be conducive to learning.

A related aspect of my 'open' teaching self is my ability to integrate the pedagogical elements of text, context (the real-life situations, interests and needs of the students) with language development and personal and group development. My teaching journal of 13/5/91 is an example:

Today I continued to integrate three elements in the learning activities:

- the study of a 'model' of writing by a migrant woman (Maria Lewitt), which included many aspects with which students would identify: hardship, loss, separation, struggle, achievement, reflection, 'making sense of it all', and finally, an affirmation.



- study and practice of the present perfect (eg, *I have regretted...*, *I have achieved...*)

- introduction of structures and patterns and the modelling and encouragement of students to express similarities in their own lives and to make affirmatory statements about themselves.

On the whole the lesson was successful.

A third aspect which this retrospective reading of my journal reveals is the variety of approaches, techniques, methods and content that (after twenty years of teaching) I am able to integrate into my repertoire. The excerpts from my journal in Appendix B (including bits of student feedback that I noted down from time to time) reflect that variety.

### *'Secret Self*

*(referring to aspects which are known to the teacher, but not to others)*

One characteristic of my 'secret' teaching self that I have been more able to more talk about as the result of journal-keeping is the tendency to dominate classroom discussion and to use my position of institutional power and greater linguistic skill, to impose my view. This tends to happen if it is an issue that I care strongly about, or if I have my own agenda (ie, a task I wish them to perform following the discussion).

My notes about a discussion on the women's movement (with the SACS class, on 12/8/91 - Appendix C) is an example. When the subject of lesbianism came up, and many prejudices were revealed, my notes reveal that I gave them 'the full works' in challenging views expressed and arguing strongly in favour of people's sexual rights. I note that "they listened and I think they learned something", but ask myself in retrospect if my giving them all the "answers" was the best way to handle the situation; whether, pedagogically and politically speaking, asking them a few well-chosen questions, allowing the debate to come up from within their ranks, would not have been more in line with my educational commitment.

Another example of my tendency to dominate is recorded on my entry for 3/9, when I noted that "I was not satisfied with my teaching today" following an excellent and involved discussion on child-raising in Australia (based on the Sweet Honey on the Rocks song, 'Your Children are not Your Children'). I noted then that "I did not leave enough time for the discussion to flower, nor for reflection on the song, before pushing them to do some writing" which

"clearly they did not feel like and they were inadequately prepared for" at that time. } noted then that "in trying to find a balance between structure and natural process, practising language skills and encouraging exploration, teacher direction and teacher response, I erred on this occasion towards the former."

My journal also reveals times when I have recognised and have consciously gone against this tendency. On Thursday 19/9 (a few weeks later) I recorded how I decided to drop an issue that did not bring forth the expected discussion, rather than labouring it and turning it into some writing, as I had planned:

"Started off with "Situations Vacant: Housewife" joke advertisement. They laughed, I felt I was being a bit ideological, but they enjoyed it and I did it as a comprehension. Hard to get discussion going around it. I'm not sure why. Were they overwhelmed by it? Language very difficult? Message too strong? I felt I was putting too much in by adding my interpretations too quickly when their's were not forthcoming. Some interesting responses: Li Chin said it made her very angry, because women have to do two jobs, and it's not fair. That's why I'm not going to get married. Better to be free! Carmen and other married women laughed and said it was true. Chu said, "in Chinese we call it 'no name work' because no one knows all the work that women do". Julia said "In Spanish, we call it 'anonymous work'" I felt there was a lot more potential with it, but decided to leave it and "go with the flow" and get onto the next thing. On reflection it was fine to introduce it in a light-hearted way as part of the on-going process of building women's identity, and not to try to do anything more with it."

### *Blind or undiscovered self*

*(referring to aspects of behaviour which the teacher may be unaware of)*

A style of teaching which is highly personal, builds on the teacher's personality and leadership and creates a close bonding between teacher and students carries with it the danger of dependency-creation. Monitoring, recording in detail and reflecting on my own performance, combined with my reading of feminist pedagogy and the action research discussions with other teachers have together brought to my awareness this tendency which previously I only dimly perceived. In other words, it has helped bring this tendency discursively into my reality, so that I can handle it.

The issue came to a head for me on 27/8 when I first involved the RTL group in the action research project. (See Chapter 8.) I wrote then about

"...the degree of loving dependence on me. I use this to motivate and fire them with the idea that they can really learn, and to encourage them to do a lot of their own work and writing, which they do. Perhaps my teaching challenge is now to play a more low key role and see what the group does of its own volition. But I'm caught in a cleft stick ... I need to pour the energy in to get learning results..."

Needing to "pour energy in to get learning results" can be taken as an indication that classroom teaching is hard work that requires a lot of intellectual and emotional energy. However, I also ask myself how necessary it is to put in so much energy, and whether or not different styles of teaching might enable the students to utilise their own sources of energy more.

At the class meeting on 18/10 there was another exchange which has subsequently been the basis for a great deal of soul-searching on my part. I was chairing the meeting on that occasion and we were discussing an item that Heidi had brought up; that she was disappointed that although we were learning lots of new words, she didn't seem to be able to use them in her every day speech. Everybody identified with Heidi's problem and a big discussion ensued about how the situation could change. They made a number of suggestions, and I made some. Then Prayoon said,

... but you shouldn't give to us all the time, like put food in our mouths, we should be responsible, we have to learn ourselves." (Chorus of assent) I said, "but it's my job to feed you with lots of language and put it into your mouths - I try to cook it all up and make it tasty, so you will eat more!" (Laughter) Someone said, "Yes, that's right, put in some garlic and make it taste good." I said, "Yes, I like to put in some chilli sauce too, to make it spicy sometimes". Everyone laughed, and I liked the image of my cooking it all up, but I wonder in retrospect, if an opportunity was lost, when they were talking about being more responsible for their learning. I immediately put myself at the centre with a maternal image (*N.B. Madeleine Grumet, "thinking back through our mothers", "transforming and contradicting our reproductive processes"!!!*) instead of perhaps waiting to see if they developed more discussion about taking more responsibility for their own

learning. (In retrospect, I think I dominated meeting much too much, probably because I was chair, but also because I wanted to get through it. Need to be more patient in supporting their processes.)

Then in my journal of 16/9 I noted:

"Angela's and Heidi's birthdays - cards, song and cake... but next time I will make sure students organise this themselves... me being the mother here. Lovely empanada from Alicia for lunch..."

Perhaps trying to get students to organise birthday rituals would also be unnecessarily motherly. Another approach would be to suggest they might like to do this, show ways of remembering birthdays (eg, wall chart of dates) then leave it up to the group if it wants to celebrate birthdays or not.

In first semester 1992 I have made it a conscious aim to try to move away from the dependency-creating maternal model to a more 'professional' stance that would still be warm and personal but would be more encouraging of independence and not quite so 'all-giving'. This is an on-going part of my own personal/pedagogical development agenda. These self-reflections were also stimulated by the collective reflection (reported in previous chapters) of the implications of power within the discourse of 'personal development' and by my study of the poststructuralist critique of knowledge/power in institutions and in discourse (as in Foucault and Elsworth) which is discussed in the next chapter.

#### **4. Spirals of Learning and Development in Pedagogical Practice**

Apart from monitoring and articulating my own classroom behaviour, the journal became a valuable tool in the on-going process of action and reflection which is at the heart of developing skills in facilitation and teaching. I used it to note down small points to myself about what could be done in a particular situation, where problems in the group might lie and ideas I could experiment with. These reflections feed into the spiralling of the many small learning cycles that become the *praxis* of pedagogical learning. For example, on 19/8 I wrote:

...Then returned to 'Is Having Only One Child as Bad as they Say?' (a newspaper article). I tried to get them to tell me what was in the article - they couldn't. I got quite exasperated with them, as they were supposed to study it at home, and had already done work on it. I took

them through it step by step, trying to get them to say what was in the article. The idea of this somehow eluded them - they wanted to tell me either their view, or what was the truth. I began to realise that they do not have the skill of explicating and don't really distinguish what an expert might say in the paper and "the truth" - hence their difficulty in merely saying what was on the written page only. I think this was important for me to realise... also the language implications. So, should I allow them to express their view, perhaps informed by the article, or (also) learn the discipline of just looking to see what is there? I think the latter is an important skill to be developed...

Here, my written reflection on the students' failing to fulfil my expectation led to my developing lessons that concentrated on the conceptual/linguistic skill of paraphrasing a particular viewpoint as a preliminary to being able to give a reasoned critique of that viewpoint.

As the Journal excerpts (in AppendixD) illustrate, much of curriculum development in *Returning to Learning* is 'organic' in nature: developing on the experience, needs, interests, rate of learning of the particular group of students and feeding in current issues within a broad (pre-planned) framework of skills and content.<sup>1</sup> With this model of curriculum development, a detailed recording of classroom topics and interactions provides a sound basis for planning, retrospective documentation and evaluation.

### **(c) Insights About Personal Development and Pedagogy**

In the earlier chapters I have shown how the discussion about 'personal development' as a curriculum item evolved into a focus on our own pedagogy, which is eclectic (borrowing from many traditions and methodologies), contingent (highly responsive to immediate circumstances), subjectively rational (intuitively integrating levels of feeling and knowing) and feminist-informed. The teaching journal illuminates the theoretical discussion that we were having as teachers with vignettes that show just how interwoven our awareness and attention to students' 'personal development' is with our day by day pedagogical work. The following

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<sup>1</sup> The construction of four domains of literacy ('personal writing', practical purposes, 'knowledge' and 'public debate') across four levels achievement, developed as 'Draft Competence Statements for Adult Reading and Writing, and forming part of the Adult Basic Education Framework, (State Training Board, 1992) is a useful framework to help shape such an 'organic' curriculum according to a broadly defined set of needs and skills.

excerpts illustrate four aspects of that eclectic pedagogy as it facilitates processes of learning and 'growing'. These are:

1. Facilitating the articulation and sharing of past experiences,
2. Imparting knowledge and information,
3. The use of appropriate texts, and
4. Acknowledging and supporting group processes and women's culture.

*1. Facilitating the articulation and sharing of past experiences*

On 25/5, my notes about a writing session on "First Impressions In Australia" record that:

Quiet writing and correction\_ for 45 minutes. Alicia wrote about her loneliness and isolation when -she first came to Australia, how she cried, how she was too scared to talk, but how she feels alright now. Li Chin wrote about her cousin, who locked her up as soon as she got here from China, and wouldn't let her out. He "did bad things to her" and treated her cruelly. She cried and talked at length about it when she came to show her writing to me. How he tried to force her to marry an old man, because he had money; he made her give him most of her pay, would not let her learn English, and wrote to everybody at home saying bad things about her. How her parents finally came to visit and rescued her from him and were so angry. I listened to her for 10 to 15 minutes, much longer than usual, considering that many others were waiting to see me, made some suggestions about her English and she went back to rewrite it, looking happier...

...Alice and Li Chin both articulated traumatic periods in their lives and were both confident in recounting how they are through it now, "it is over"... Alice seemed somehow to dwell on it more than Li ... I feel she IS still suffering... but somehow there IS a strengthening/growth/therapy in the sharing process... in doing so in English, the language of their new culture, and in writing.

Three days later, on 23/5, I recorded the follow-up to the writing

... Reading out "First Impressions" I set the students the challenging task to stand in front of the class and read their writing. Initially they

were horrified and all said they were much too nervous. I persuaded them, saying how you can learn to become confident by taking small steps, and that the next time it would be much easier, etc. Every single one there did it in the end. I was very proud of them, given there was a visitor in the room. Some were shaking like a leaf, but they all did it amidst clapping for and encouraging each other. (Comments such as "don't wet your pants, Phuong!") Their stories were very moving, some very personal, and it was a very successful session, with laughs and a lot of support and appreciation of each other's work. Li Chin, in particular, read her story very confidently after the emotion and upset that she had shown when first writing and telling me the story. I also noted the great improvement in their writing from the beginning of the year.

How can you describe the personal development taking place here? So many concurrent processes, mixed with love, trust, humour, courage ... like one of them said, "don't be nervous, we are all women..."

## *2 Appropriate texts that reflect themes of people's lives and operate on a feeling level*

From my journal of the same day, 23/5:

Jazz Chant. Pronunciation and revision of present perfect. ('Beaches of Mexico') Great fun. Students not good at keeping together and listening to each other - needs more practice.

*I've sure been in trouble,  
I've sure been in pain,  
I've sure been in love,  
I'd do it all again!*

Again, grammar structures and pronunciation integrated into a text that is fun, yet models an attitude of openness, that gives permission to express past pain and negatives, but ends with an affirmation, "I'd do it all again!". Tunes people into a feeling level but not too maudlin and totally non-threatening. Students respond well, and love the end part, reading it to themselves frequently and smiling. Sabina said, "if do again, maybe more trouble!"

Following a SACS lesson in the same week (24/5), I noted:

SACS group. 'Did Loneliness of the Suburbs' - article in Accent Age by Lyn Richards about research done on women isolated in the outer suburbs. Small group, then class discussion - groups had to work on understanding main points of a section of the article, then one person presented what it was saying to the rest. Brought out a lot of discussion about women at home, especially for them when there are language/cultural differences, and comparison with community life in small villages or towns where most of them came from. I suggested an extended piece of writing coming out of this... "

In this case, the text gave language that enabled the students to express their experiences, particularly in their first few years in Australia. The word 'isolation' created a lot of interest and triggered a lot of personal accounts of times when they had been isolated - though students emphasised that the isolation was how they felt in the past, not now. The cartoon brought out many issues about women living in the outer suburbs and who are unemployed. Shifting the focus away from migrant women to all Australian women was particularly appropriate in contradicting the negative stereotyping of migrant women's experience that Renate Singer talks of (1988).

### *3. Imparting knowledge and information*

In our early discussions of the many different ways in which 'personal development' may be fostered by study at the MWLC, the power of knowledge, of gaining access to information which is otherwise unavailable, was a consistent theme. (See Chapters 4 and 5.) This was confirmed by the student feedback recorded in Chapter 8 and is powerfully illustrated by an exchange that took place on the last day of semester 1, on 27/6:

When we were standing around talking again, Li Chin said, "I love being here and studying here. I feel relaxed, I can talk to anyone, I can say what I like. It's very special here, not like any other school". Then she said how important it was for her doing Women's Health and especially the last lesson when the AIDS counsellor came and talked to them. "I didn't know anything about sex. In my culture you are not allowed to know anything before you are married, Now I feel better, I feel stronger because I know what happens. This was very important for me.



#### 4 *Acknowledging and supporting group processes and the development of women's culture*

Another key element of the pedagogy of the MWLC which relates to the 'personal development' of students that has been discussed in previous chapters is the setting up of an environment that supports the development of group processes, friendships and communication between students. In my essay, *The Sound of Babel and the Language of Friendship*, I referred to the role of 'women's culture' in positively mediating differences of language, class, ethnicity, tradition. I applied Culley's image of, "a nurturant and supportive community of women" (1985) in describing the quality of interactions that commonly take place there. My teaching journal is full of vignettes and descriptions that illustrate this.

It is common for groups of women of mixed nationalities to discuss husbands, sexual morality, and their sex lives or lack thereof. In my journal I had noted down a conversational exchange that took place after the end of a class in which four women, from different ethnic backgrounds, shared such stories. and their current dilemmas. Two of the women were inexperienced, and one of them, who said she had been threatened by her parents that she would be killed if she ever went with a boy before she was married, said later that she would nevertheless like to try it if she found somebody she trusted. She received a variety of support and advice from the others. I noted in my Journal that "it was a lovely warm women's exchange, nice that I didn't have to rush away for once" (4/10).

It can be seen in this example how by entering into the collective discourse with her peers at the Centre, the student was able to separate herself in some degree from her traditional background and (in so far as she is now participating in a new culture) to consider possibilities for herself other than those laid down by patriarchal tradition.

Humour, being able to laugh at each other as well as with each other, can reflect a collectivity or culture that shares close common experiences and values. In all of my 1991 semester groups there was a lot of humour; spontaneous laughter in mutual recognition of the ridiculous in the typical. On 11/10, for example, I recorded that,

During the break I had a good laugh with them and realised just how funny and precious this group is. There was Prayoon, as usual, with

her take-away breakfast and plastic containers of lollies set out in front of her on the desk, Margaret with her Braille machine, Jenny, with her Chinese-English computerised dictionary, Bing with her medicines, Chinese ointments, and tissues all set up for her hayfever. We had a good laugh about that. Bing was distracting as usual, with loud trumpeting nose blowings, slapping herself on the forehead, and at one point twisting her ears in a bizarre way, no doubt as some sort of Chinese therapy for her hayfever. Near the end of the lesson, when I had to stop talking for a particularly loud nose blow, Prayoon looked over and said "unreal!" and everyone (including Bing) packed up laughing.

In *The Sound of Babel and the Language of Friendship* I wrote that the women's culture (or multiculture) at the MWLC, which was characterised by shared experiences and common themes of cooking, domestic craft, family health, and family relationships, "acts as a fertile soil in which a complex and many-faceted pedagogy of language can flower". The continuation of my journal entry of 11/10 captures some of the flavour of that culture, the flow of communication and the dynamism of the every day social culture at the MWLC:

I also appreciated the little cultural exchanges that day. There was Prayoon distributing bunches of fresh coriander that someone had grown in their garden and brought in, a cake Carmen had brought in, a large bag of biscuits that Margaret (who is blind) had made herself and proudly shared around for everyone. Carmen was drinking a cup of tea made with artichoke leaves that another student told her was good for her gall stone. Angela had brought in her little girl so she could be measured up by Carmen who was to make her a special dress for her first communion.

## 5. Conclusion

In the *Action Research Planner*, Kemmis and Carr write of the importance of using 'peripheral vision' rather than 'planned observation categories' (1988,p.13) in documenting practice. My journal illustrates *intuition* (rather than either 'peripheral vision' or 'planned observation categories') in recording and reflecting on events and interactions relevant to the theme of 'personal development'. A relatively unstructured, intuitive approach enabled me to monitor and start to change aspects of my classroom behaviour and to develop my teaching praxis, moving from non-discursive to discursive knowing.

As I have shown in this chapter, the journal was a powerful tool in the processes of my own development as a teacher during that period. As a detailed record of my work at the MWLC, of the teachers and the forty or so women who as students shared their lives with me and became my friends, it has enormous personal value. As 'research data' it is a detailed ethnographic record of an educational community of women and the processes of learning and growth that take place there.

The journal demonstrates processes of 'organic' curriculum development in adult ESL, and eclecticism in methodology and pedagogical practice. An important element of that pedagogy, discussed in Section 4, is the setting up of an environment that supports the development of group processes, communication and friendships between students. Another is being able to offer an authentic, supportive relationship to the students without using institutional knowledge/power to dominate. In Chapter 8 both of these elements are examined more closely in relation to the involvement in the project of students and their written contributions.

As one stream of the action research process recorded in this thesis my journal keeping provided a wealth of evidence that corroborates and feeds into the knowledge that the teachers collectively developed in the wider, collaborative processes of action and reflection, complementing the phenomenological insights gained from the students' writings, which are presented in the next chapter. There was a further reciprocal relationship between the two parallel action research processes (the dialogic process amongst the teachers and the monologic process of reflection on my own classroom work) in that *without* the inter-teacher discussions and concurrent theoretical study, the journal reflections would probably have been more of the nature of 'closed loops' than opening spirals of learning. The parallel activities created markers and question marks that helped guide the selection of what was to be recorded, the points of interest and points of disjunction. Hence, one conclusion is that the value of teacher journal-keeping is greatly enhanced when done in conjunction with a participatory action research process involving a group of teachers who are focussing together on particular issues. Another is that the dichotomy between 'organisational development' and 'emancipatory' action research, the so-called right and left wings, may not be so clear cut. This issue will be taken up in the concluding chapter.

In February 1992 I again set out to keep a teaching journal with my new RTL group, but I found I was not able to maintain regular records. During the previous semester when I had a more explicit commitment to the participatory action research process, this provided the discipline and motivation for maintaining the journal. It would be much harder for a teacher acting alone to find the motivation to keep it up. Another reason why I discontinued journal keeping was my realisation that a 1992 journal would come up with 'more of the same'. This also suggests that journal-keeping may be most effective when carried out over specific periods, with a specific pedagogical aim (or aims) as well as being part of a process involving a wider group of collaborators.

## **Chapter Eight**

# **THE STUDENTS' CONTRIBUTIONS: CHALLENGE AND CORROBORATION**

- 1. Introduction**
- 2. Bringing Action Research, to the Classroom**
- 3. The RTL Students Explain 'What Makes them Confident'**
- 4. The SACS Students Explain 'How they have Changed'**
- 5. Participation, Coercion and the Possibility of Solidarity**
- 6. Corroborating the Teachers' Constructions of an MWLC Pedagogy**
- 7. Conclusion**

## **Chapter Eight**

### **STUDENTS' CONTRIBUTIONS: CHALLENGE AND CORROBORATION**

#### **1. Introduction**

In this Chapter I describe and reflect on what was planned as the third stream of the project: the involvement of my students as participants in the action research.

Participatory action research in education, as described by Carr, Kemmis, McTaggart and others, is about groups of teachers working together as "critical communities of enquirers" (Carr and Kemmis, 1986); enquiring into their own work and their own institutional and cultural environment. There seems to be very little published experience of educational action research which includes students as full partners in that enquiry. The educational action research tradition (which has developed mainly in the context of school education) differs in this way from action research in the context of community services and community development. The practice of involving communities in these settings is highlighted by Yoland Wadsworth, who has developed the notion of the 'critical reference group' as "the group whose members' values and practices stem from their shared interests and who are thus the source of the most decisive or critical questions" and "the group to which services and providers ... must refer if they are to identify accurately what the group's needs are, and what are the best solutions" or "who it's all for" in the long run" (1991, p.10).

In Wadsworth's terms, it would be the students who are at the kernel of "what it is all about" and therefore should form the critical reference group. This fits with the Freirean adult literacy tradition which is about community development and social action, with students and teachers working in partnership as "teacher-students and student-teachers" (1971, p.76). For example, the Freirean practitioner, Orlando Fals Borda, asks whether or not we are imposing action research as "a social technology on groups" ... "Are we imposing meanings derived from a view of science on those with whom we work, or are we tapping, elaborating, challenging and extending participant's own critical understandings of their situation?" (Borda, 1988, pp.301-306).

These perspectives informed the planning of the current project and the commitment to extend the process beyond the teachers and to find ways of involving the students: "Their experience should be fed in and their constructions of the life at the Centre should be engaged and developed through collaborative reflection" ... "through the action research process, the students would become co-researchers instead of the researched; active agents instead of passive objects" (Appendix A, p.3).

I did not have any clear strategy as to how I would be able to graft student participation onto what was conceived primarily as a teacher-centred project. My proposal merely records that,

"A crucial and problematic element of the action research design will be how we plan to invite the participation of the students and ensure their active involvement, in deciding upon action, giving feedback and building theory. Given the sophistication of our conceptualisation and the low levels of English language and general literacy of most of our students, this will indeed be a challenge..." (Appendix A, p.3)

As the project developed it became apparent that it was neither possible nor appropriate to involve the students as equal participants in the enquiry into 'personal development', nor to engage them fully as the "critical reference group" in the oversight of the project. Nevertheless their centrality as the 'critical reference group' was recognised throughout the project.

In content terms, the student contributions provided phenomenological data that corroborated the teachers' constructions about 'personal development' and pedagogy and were the basis of further reflections about the role of power in teacher-student relationships and the possibility of solidarity.

## 2 Bringing Action Research to the Classroom

By mid-August, the process amongst the teachers was well under way and I was increasingly aware of the contradiction between the rhetoric of students as "co-researchers" in my original proposal and the fact that the students neither knew anything of what we were doing, nor had they been invited to participate.

My journal records the fact that on several occasions, I postponed my plan to discuss the project with the students,

... because the idea seems thoroughly patronising. The terminology, 'personal development' has, and would have for them, connotations of my intruding into their personal domains. What a contradiction! ...

...We discussed the term 'personal development' (when the counsellor had given her talk about her work) in the first week, and they said it meant "something personal", "something that belongs only to me". Their idea of 'personal' has also come from the jazz chant 'Personal Questions'<sup>1</sup> which reinforces the (itself empowering) idea of the right to remain silent, that there are certain areas that you don't have to answer to anyone, as a basic, fundamental area of control over our lives!  
"(process journal, 6/8/91)

In order to avoid imposing the potentially invasive (and obscure) narrative of 'personal development' on the students, I decided to use words they would be familiar with and to talk instead about processes of growing 'confidence'. This was in fact a significant change in that "personal development" suggests growing competence and maturity in the outside world beyond the MWLC, whereas confidence' (in this context) implies the students' feelings in the here and now of studying at the MWLC.

However, at the class meeting<sup>2</sup> on 26/8, I finally introduced the project to my 'Returning to Learning' students. They were keen to know what I was doing at university and interested in my explanation of action research. I said that I often hear students say that coming here makes them feel more confident and asked them if that was how they felt too. (This is so frequently expressed by them that it did not feel as if I was putting words into their mouths.) There was a chorus of assent and I told them that I was I was trying to

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<sup>1</sup>"Where were you born?"  
"I'd rather not say!"  
"How much do you make?"  
"I'd rather not say!"  
"How old are you?"  
"How tall are you?"  
"How much do you weigh?"  
"I'd rather not say!"

<sup>2</sup> Class meetings have been instituted by most teachers at the Centre as a means of eliciting feedback and developing discussion amongst the students about the course, the curriculum, the dynamics of the group and all other aspects of their learning. The meetings are an important strategy in supporting the students to gain more control over their own learning and to negotiate issues (including conflicts) within the group. In this sense, our existing pedagogy corresponds to the principles of participatory action research.



understand *how* the students become more confident, *how* being at the Centre helps them and *what the teachers can do to improve their work and their teaching to make this happen more*.

It was clear, however, that it was *my* research project, for which I was enlisting their *help*. I had defined the need, the subject, gave them the language, and orchestrated to a large degree their responses. Nonetheless they were interested in the subject and keen to talk about how being at the Centre helps their sense of personal confidence.

On the following day I shared with them (within all the constraints of language, limited time, etc) what I am doing and why and sought to enlist their participation. After discussing further the idea of action research (with the help of a cartoon from the cover of *Every Day Evaluation on the Run* (Wadsworth, 1991) I said,

"Would you like to do some of this research with me? Would you like to work together so we can find out more about what helps the students become more confident when they are here?" (process journal, 28/8)

To which Prayoon replied,

"Yes, we all follow you. You give us a lot of help, we like to help you."

When I tried to explain that it wasn't just for me, that it was for them as well, and that it was up to them if they wanted to do it or not, I began to feel patronising and a little ridiculous. Prayoon (the class wit) again summed up the group situation, disavowing their having any real authority in the proposed action research by saying:

"I'm just the meat in the sandwich!"

The students' response indicated clearly that they would be 'helpers' rather than 'co-researchers' or 'participants' in the same sense that the other teachers were. It would take a huge amount of input on my part to set up a situation where this could happen, which in turn would interfere with the rest of the teaching program, especially given that most of them could only manage a small amount of writing. Besides, it was *my* agenda, not theirs! I had defined the issue - it was never something they had raised as a problem.

I decided instead to ask them to contribute their views in a piece of "one-off" writing about their thoughts on how being at the Centre helps them to become more confident.

The following Thursday, after the break, I reintroduced the topic of action research, and asked them if they remembered what it meant. Someone said, "to find out why is good here for the women, what are important things for the women, and we have to say what we think." (The use of "have to" was interesting.) I then asked them to think about two questions:

1. *Do you think studying at the Migrant Women's Learning Centre helps you personally? If so, how does it help you?*
2. *What things about the Centre make you feel more confident? Is there anything that makes you feel less confident?*

I asked them to discuss these questions in groups of three for about twenty minutes and gave them about 30 minutes to write their answers. (The selection of the responses are attached as Appendix E. )

### **3. The RTL Students Explain 'What Makes them Confident'**

The responses to the first question could be loosely organised into five themes. These were:

1. Learning English and other skills,
2. Becoming educated about the world,
3. Communicating with other students in a friendly group,
4. The relationship with the teacher, and
5. The importance of learning together as women.

Following are some excerpts of their written responses (corrected for spelling but not for grammar), listed under these five themes:

#### *1. Learning English and other skills*

"My reading and writing is improving"

"I feel more confident because I learned more English, writing reading and grammar, develop in my understanding and expression"

"Learn new things quickly"

"I feel my English is improve, especially writing"

"Studying English everyday and other subjects which are helpful"

"I think speaking, reading, watch news is really help me personal need".

"We think studying at the Migrant Women's Learning Centre helps we personally and learning English good.

"Helps me to be more confident when I speak English and with spelling"

"I felt it was helped me improve my English and add more information"

"I thought studying at the MWLC helps me know a lot of grammar, reading, writing, learn to hear the news and communication"

"There are many skill training courses we can choose and we can get more skills."

## **2. Becoming *educated about the world***

"Helps me build up my education"

"Learning how to be independent for ourselves, you can share what idea you have, you can say what you think is right"

We can know more about Australia"

"Know what happens every day and in the world".

"Learn new things quickly"

"I know what happens on the day and in the world"

"Listens to news and understand what they said"

"Know a people with other culture"

## **3. *Communcating with other students in a friendly group***

"Because we feel relaxed"

"We can say anything we like"

"We have fun together"

"..because different acquaintances, different personalities and more preparation for the future, more security for myself.."

"Make feel more confident, make good friends"

"Get to know people from all round the world"

"I feel good and happy because our class is friendly"

"Together we talk to each other about new English words and use the words to talk to each other"

"My classmates are very friendly, sometimes we are talk about our countries things and sometimes we are research some words, what does that mean"

"Learn about other migrant people's problems"

"Helps me talk and meet people"

"Everyone has some ideas, so I can learn anything from the people, not even from teacher Jill".

#### **4. Relationship with the teacher**

"I felt very good because our teachers are kind, they told many data to us"

"The teachers understand us"

"When the teacher starts to talk the people start to talk, so I feel more confident"

"The teachers make everybody to be more confident"

"The teachers encourage us"

"The teacher is good and more understanding with my little English".

#### **5. The importance of learning together as women**

"We are all women to understand each other. They make me understand more, easy to learn with friends and teachers"

"We are women, it's easy to know each other"

"Women's learning Centre helps because we feel more comfortable"

"Women's Learning Centre is for the advancement of women because it is important to keep going forward and overcome any adversity, if we have the opportunity in life"(partly translated from Spanish)

"Study is important for women, it is no good to stay in the house"

"We have different women come to this country, and I will get a lot of different ways the women-learn" .

"When the women study together, I will get a lot of ideas"

"I feel more confident because this Centre is special for women".

"I feel confidence, familiarity because only women study here in the Centre"

"We can muck around - we too embarrassed to muck around if men here"

I typed out the key phrases from their responses, arranged them under the headings and fed these back to the students the following week and invited invited further comment. (The report above is a slightly expanded version from the one I fed back to them and includes a few verbal responses that I noted down after the discussions.)

Students were very interested to see my analysis of their responses and more discussion about the benefit of being in a women's centre ensued. After that there seemed to be little energy to pursue the topic. They had given their view; clearly the problems that they had were not about anything that was happening the Centre. The problems that *they* most often expressed were more to do with: where they will go when this course finishes; how they will continue to learn English; how can they get enough English to get a job; and when the recession will be over so work will be once more available....

(I have not included the responses to the last part of question 2 in my analysis as most students either did not understand the question, or referred to their lack of English.)

The significance of the RTL students' contributions and of the whole transaction between them and me will be discussed in Section 5 of this chapter. However, before proceeding to this I will present a set of writings on a similar topic by the Social and Community Services (SACS) students, who were at a more advanced language and educational level.

#### 4. The SACS Students Explain 'How they have Changed'

Throughout the period of the action research I had been collecting sets of student writing which in various ways throw light on the theme of 'personal development'. One such set of writing was passed on to me by one of the teachers of the Social and Community Services (SACS) class.

The teacher had asked them to briefly answer the question, *Do you think you have changed since you started this course?* The seventeen responses have been included (in Appendix F). They reflect similar themes to those extracted from the more basic writing of the RTL women: a sense of confidence that comes from feeling relaxed and safe at the Centre and in their group; the on-going sharing of their lives and ideas; the quality of teaching and personal support offered by the teachers; gaining language and skills; developing a grasp of social issues; and a growing sense of a shared identity as women.

The following few extracts bring to life the woman-centred 'culture for growth' that has been mentioned in previous chapters: the 'personal growth' experienced by the students as they open up to each other, feeling free to express feelings and ideas, discover commonalities, and to develop their thinking in the course of discussion and exchange of ideas. One

interesting comparison with the RTL writing (above) is the degree to which they express changes that extend beyond the MWLC situation, into their families and outside lives. (This of course would have been influenced by the wording of the question they were asked.)

*Irene (from Greece)*

There have been a lot of changes. Before I used to degrade myself. Now I put more of myself first. I have more confidence from the group, the teachers and being listened to. I have become a better listener: I listen to the kids more and don't get upset so easily. I stand up for myself more and think more clearly. I think what I am going to say and what it will achieve in a situation of conflict. I can offer support to others because of my greater experience with English;

*Laura (from Italy)*

... I'm developing by opening myself sincerely to others, sometimes even to the point of risking to be criticised, or to be judged, but other people's points of view, be it from teachers, friends or colleague students, they all help me to broaden my mind...I also find the experience of sharing my thoughts and ideas with other in the class very valuable as they help me to think that our problems are sometimes similar or at least can be discussed and seen in a better perspective.

*Amina (from Iran)*

... I am sure that we get more confidence than before and because of this confidence probably we think more clearly. We practised listening to others and sharing our feelings and experience. Then we found that we have so many things in common even if we have different backgrounds. But some of our problems are the same and dealing with shared problems makes it easier to solve. As I have mentioned before we've got more confidence and this is the key to close darkness behind and exchange our ideas and learn more about the facts in our societies. We can get new information and improve our skills which is useful for our personal life as well as in social life...

*Helenka (from Yugoslavia)*

Having an opportunity to be in this school is really great. In this school we learn English, we learn about Australia, about Australian society and Australian history and what is important for us migrant people, where we can turn to for help when we need it. We are getting a lot of

information that if we were not here we would never know. All of the teachers are very patient, helpful, understanding, pleasant and they always have time to talk and give us advice. We feel comfortable with them and we feel that they really care for us, what we really need, and we really appreciate it. In this school we gain our confidence and how to walk on the street without fear that somebody will ask us and we don't know how to answer. We are walking with our heads up and ready to talk.... We are meeting women from other countries, we are sharing our experience, helping each other, consulting and caring for each other."

*Phuong - Vietnam*

The way seems more clearly in front of me.. Things are happening just in the way I expected them to. The issue now is self-evaluation of my potential as well as my English . Sometimes I feel scared; I still have problems with listening comprehension but most of the time, I really like to put myself in challenge. I always talk to myself that I have to do things that I love and do my best to achieve, then whether I succeed or not, is out of my control. With the course, I believe that I have a group of very good companions as well as teachers who probably know what we want to do, where we want to go ... to tell us how to do such things. I'd like to say thanks to everyone for everything.

*Tran (from Vietnam)*

...Here I can understand more about society in Australia. Here I can hear and share experiences with some friends and I know the way for my future...

*Anna - Italy*

When I first started the course, I had a lot of confusion in my mind, even though I was and still am very enthusiastic about the course. My self confidence is improving with the course; I think being with women in class, we are free to express ourselves and share our different points of view, but at the same time we seem to have a lot of things in common and we do support each other.

*Maria (from Peru)*

... I can express myself more properly and in that way my way of thinking is growing up too. In this course I started to get more understanding about Australian society and about our situation as

migrants... Everyday we share our experiences. It's helpful to know women from different backgrounds have the same feelings. It's like looking at my face in a mirror and seeing a contrast.

Two common themes running through these extracts are the quality of the relationship with teachers and the importance of sharing of experience with other students. This sharing is seen as a mutual nurturance as well as a process of developing ideas, perspectives and 'intersubjective understandings'. (The original 17 pieces of writing are reproduced in Appendix F.)

### 5. Participation, Coercion and the Possibility of Solidarity

The process of attempting to involve the RTL students as 'co-researchers' was an important learning cycle for me. It became obvious that the students were not participating as active subjects in the sense that the teachers were. The process was directed at all times by me, and it was *I* who gave *them* the 'problematic theme' to deliberate on. Whereas the teachers had defined 'personal development' as being problematic in terms of the power relations suggested by the discourse, and the implications for curriculum and classroom practice, for the students, this abstract level of problematisation did not exist. The theme was rephrased (for them) as "how you see what helps you become more confident" and "how do you believe you have changed" at the Centre. These were significantly different foci from those that we, the teachers, had started out with. The RTL students saw their participation as "following" me (because I'm good to them, as Prayoon said) and because I'm their teacher and they are in the habit of doing what I ask them to do. Rather than participating as co-researchers, the RTL students were completing a teacher-directed exercise in the same way that the SACS students wrote their short piece as part of a general feedback session.

The conditions under which they were produced, does not however, detract from the power of the student contributions, as phenomenological data which corroborate the teachers' stories (Chapter 5) and reflect the eclectic, feminist-informed pedagogy that they have constructed. I believe that the evidence of both sets of students confirms my own experience of four years at the MWLC that solidarity between teachers and students is fundamental to its institutional culture and pedagogy.

In assessing the validity of this claim and the usefulness of the findings reported in this chapter, there are two alternative constructions through



which the participation of the RTL students can be viewed.<sup>3</sup> I shall discuss these in terms of positivism versus constructivism and poststructuralism..

In positivist terms, the student input is seen as a phenomenological data source which complements other aspects of the research. In this light, the question of response bias through teacher influence arises. Whereas it cannot be proved that no such influence was operating, assessing the likely impact of such influence needs to have regard to the free-flowing interchange that took place in the classroom, (for example, Prayoon's comments), to the 'triangulation' with the SACS essays, to the high degree of compatibility between the students' perceptions and the stories and discussions of the 'mini teach-in' and to the details of daily student-teacher interactions recorded in my teaching journal.

The insights of poststructuralism, of institutional power relations and of the intricate connection between power, knowledge and language (as in Foucault, 1972 and Elsworth, 1989) suggest a different critique of the findings. In these terms, the unequal power relations between students and teachers, our different interests and subject positions emanating from differences in class, ethnicity, and institutional roles, suggest that coercion (rather than solidarity) is inevitable. A narrow Foucauldian construction of this part of the research would perhaps be that because of my greater institutional power, my greater linguistic skill and my ability to control the classroom agenda (my 'knowledge/power'), combined with my interest in research findings favourable to my thesis (and to the Centre itself) the research could be a form of self-serving coercion. Habermas would concur, *unless* it could be shown that the students' participation was genuinely free and on an equal footing with that of the teachers (which it clearly was not).

The coercion of knowledge/power recognised in the constructivist epistemology of Foucault corresponds to the concern for response bias of positivist methodology.

Such concerns must be taken seriously; in fact the coercive potential of knowledge/power was explicitly discussed by the teachers in the context of critiquing the discourse of 'personal development' (see Chapters 3 and 4). However, the 'narrow' Foucauldian perspective fails to take account of the

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<sup>3</sup> Discussions with David Legge have assisted the development of the analysis in this section.

complexity of the teacher-student relationship and the possibilities of solidarity and love that exist alongside the possibilities of coercion.

The analysis I present below builds on this narrow construction in two ways. Firstly, it takes in the dimensions of class, gender and ethnicity as well as the institutional context of teacher-student relations. Secondly, it recognises that the poststructuralist discourse of power, conflict and coercion provides only a partial explanation of human relationships in an institutional context; unlike feminist poststructuralism, it says little about 'the epistemology of love' (Grumet, 1988, chap. 1), 'intersubjectivity' (Grosz, 1988, p.100) and the possibility of solidarity.

If we examine institutional relations as only one of several possible axes analysis, a more positive framework of possibilities emerges: one in which we may recognise the 'phenomenon' of mutually nurturing and comradely student-teacher relationships at the MWLC, as well as the ever-present traces of coercion.

The first axis is the institutional teacher-student relationship in which it is suggested that there is a fundamental inequality of power. On closer examination, it is not so simple. The students possess significant countervailing power in their ability (and tendency) to withdraw at any time, which in adult ESL at least, puts pressure on teachers to teach well and to offer the students a relationship and an environment which will satisfy their needs and motivate them to attend regularly, despite the multiplicity of pressures detracting them. Teachers are deeply dependent on the goodwill of the students to maintain their class numbers and thus their livelihoods.

On another level, the currently orthodox methodology of ESL teaching, the student-centred 'communicative approach', requires a large amount of informal communication to take place, and hence the cultivation of group processes and a relaxed, free atmosphere, that in turn tends to produce solidarity rather than domination. In addition, structures such as negotiated curricula and regular class meetings act to provide some scope for meaningful participation and control and to balance to some extent the teachers' institutional power.

A second axis of analysis for assessing the possibilities for solidarity or domination is that of gender. At the MWLC, the fact that teachers and students are all women living in patriarchal society powerfully modulates

the other inequalities, as is illustrated throughout this thesis. The MWLC resembles the image of "a supportive and nurturant community of women" (Culley et al, 1985, p.19) in that the support and nurturance are two-way. The student writing testifies to the support they receive as women. As a teacher in an all-women's classroom, I am able to share far more of my personal life and my projects, than with mixed groups. The support, nurturance and friendship that I receive from the students is part of the joy of teaching and of my own personal development.

Thirdly, ethnicity (the white Anglo teacher and multiracial students) is often cast as a barrier to solidarity, but here too the situation is more complex and the existence of ethnic difference does not necessarily prevent the development of relations of solidarity and love. At the MWLC, the ethnic heterogeneity of class groups tends to dissolve perceptions based on racial and language differences. The teachers, too, are ethnically mixed (recently there have been part-time teachers of Indian and Chinese background) so that stereotypic expectations tend to break down.

The fourth axis of analysis is difference in socio-economic circumstance, class and educational background, and in particular, employment. At the MWLC, this barrier to solidarity is modulated by the intensity of the shared project of teaching/learning and by the commonalities of gender, as I have argued above. On another level, on the part of the teachers, who are on short-term contracts and struggling against managerialism and the impact of "training markets" in TAFE (as discussed in Chapter 1) there is a political awareness and a level of identity with the students as being victims of the same economic rationalist policies.

The student input illustrates their experience of teacher/student solidarity despite the constraints I have referred to. It fits with other evidence cited throughout this Thesis, of solidarity being part of the culture and the pedagogy at the MWLC. For example, Miriam's acceptance of "unwanted" feedback from a student (Chapter 5); the teachers' stories about their own classroom experiences and aspirations, also presented in Chapter 5; and anecdotal accounts of classroom incidents in the daily entries of my teaching journal in Chapter 7. (See also a selection of journal extracts in Appendix C.)

## 6. Corroborating the Teachers' Constructions of an MWLC Pedagogy

The question of solidarity is closely related to that of the teachers' construction of an eclectic and feminist pedagogy which incorporates various ways of supporting and resourcing the students' personal and intellectual development.

The five interrelated themes that I abstracted from the students' responses to the question of what helps them to become more confident whilst studying at the Centre correspond closely with the teachers' notion of 'personal development' as being 'embedded' in all aspects of our pedagogy and belonging to the overall experience of studying at the Centre. To illustrate this we can briefly cross-reference the five themes that emerged from the RTL students' questionnaires with the themes that emerged from the processes of teacher discussions:

### *1. Learning English and other skills*

The teaching of "straight" language, general knowledge and other skills was seen by all the teachers as our basic role and a fundamental aspect of students' empowerment and 'personal development', as is shown in Chapter 4, and elsewhere in this thesis.

### *2. Becoming educated about the world*

This relates to discussions about 'conceptual growth that is part of general literacy - naming your experience, seeing the personal in the social', 'connecting the word with the world' in Freire's terms (Chapter 4) and also to the 'straight' teaching mentioned above. Note also Elizabeth's reference to 'knowing, labelling and nominalising' as a fundamental learning activity.

### *3. Communicating with other students in a friendly group*

A key element of the MWLC pedagogy is group development: 'the growth of people that we observe as our courses progress, as they become more relaxed, open, as they develop friendships, express themselves deeply and more confidently' and 'the development of the whole learning group in terms of group dynamics' (Chapter 4).

### *4. The relationship with the teacher*

This reflects back to discussions about 'caring about the students as people, being concerned with their overall well-being'; about teaching as nurturance as in Carl Rogers 'non-possessive warmth' and notions within feminist pedagogy of 'teacher as midwife' (Belenky); about Elizabeth's

contributions on the Jungian framework of 'teacher as mother, who gives permission and gives pleasure and stimulation'; and to the anecdotes about 'supporting students' struggles for self-expression' ( Chapter 4).

##### *5. The importance of learning together as women*

These responses strongly vindicate the *raison d'être* of the MWLC as an affirmative "safe space" for migrant women, many of whom have been affected by multiple oppressions and disadvantages. It picks up on a key theme in this thesis of a feminist-informed, eclectic pedagogy which includes feminist values of "power with" not "power over" and "woman to woman: the need for women to support each other in coming to terms with patriarchy and needing to become more empowered as women" (Chapter 4). The students' contributions are a good illustration of the MWLC as a multicultural centre where women can learn language and other skills whilst sharing experiences, building networks and supporting each other.

##### **7. Conclusion**

In this Chapter I have shown how the aspiration of including students as "co-researchers" in the project was not fulfilled. On the other hand, two sets of data collected from the students (the RTL questionnaires and SACS essays) were an important input to this thesis and corroborated the teachers' construction of an eclectic and feminist pedagogy, which includes the fostering of a culture of solidarity.

The extent to which there is a relationship of solidarity between students and teachers, is something that cannot be "proven" in the positivistic sense, and it is not relevant to try to do so. What the students and the teachers themselves say about it is the only 'evidence' there can be - they are the only ones who can construct their realities about life at the Centre.

Such 'solidarity' between teachers (who have institutional power and authority) and students (who as students are in a position of relative dependence) will always be problematic, but as discussed in Section 5, teacher-student relationships at the MWLC, are far more complex than a narrow Foucauldian analysis of institutional knowledge/power would have it. There are possibilities for solidarity as well as coercion which are revealed by reflecting on institutional roles, gender, ethnicity and socio-economic status.

# **Chapter Nine**

## **CONCLUDING REFLECTIONS**

- 1. Introduction**
- 2. The Main Story: What We Did and What We Have Learned**
- 3. The Features of an MWLC Pedagogy**
- 4. Participatory Action Research as Teacher Development**
- 5. Addressing Economic Rationalism in Education**
- 6. Insights About Participatory Action Research as a Methodology**
- 7. The Power of Feminist Poststructural/Postmodern Analysis**

## Chapter Name

### CONCLUDING REFLECTIONS

#### 1 Introduction

There are several intertwining themes that have emerged from documenting and reflecting on the participatory action research process at the Migrant Womens' Learning Centre.

In discussing problems of the textual staging of knowledge in deconstructing/deconstructive enquiry, Patti Lather writes that rather than empirical validation, "data might be better conceived as the material for telling a story where the challenge becomes to generate a polyvalent data base that is used to *vivify* interpretations as opposed to "support" or "prove" (1991, p.91).

In this concluding chapter, then, I will briefly reiterate the story, the 'polyvalent data base', and highlight some of the interpretations and insights which have been brought to life by the rich material that the action research has yielded. The main story is the organic learning process of the three streams of the enquiry into 'personal development'. The insights and interpretations that flow from this are discussed under five headings: the features of the MWLC pedagogy that we identified and constructed; the potential of action research as an approach to teacher development; the issue of resistance to economic rationalism in education; reflections about participatory action research as a research methodology; and the power of feminist poststructuralist analysis.

#### 2 The Main Story: What We Did and What We Have Learned

At the most basic level, five teachers at the MWLC embarked on a collaborative process of discussion, enquiry and sharing of understandings about their work, within the framework of action research, and came to construct their own discourse about the pedagogy practised there.

Firstly, by deconstructing and analysing the notion of 'personal development', we started to see more clearly how we tend to act out our own cultural assumptions and to began interrogate these more rigorously within the framework of multiculturalism that we consciously promote at the

Centre. We were critical (and self-critical) of some of the universalist assumptions of Western thinking about 'personal development' implicit in our discourse. At the same time we considered 'personal development' as a term which has a role in an emancipatory (and feminist) discourse. From there we articulated how our teaching is informed by our own value systems and reflects our own desires. At the same time, we acknowledged the potential for coercion that flows from our institutional power as teachers, and that our emancipatory intentions are therefore by nature problematic. Hence the need to interrogate

our practices and values and to expose them to group processes of mediation and negotiation between different values and assumptions, as part of the collective, 'intersubjective' construction of meaning.

Secondly, we clarified our thinking about 'personal development'. By making an analysis of 'focussed' versus 'embedded' models of personal development, we separated out an immediate practical problem (the First Step PD class) and decided on a solution. By exploring the 'embedded' model, we then looked at theoretical and pedagogical issues surrounding personal development in terms of our teaching in general. Whilst we rejected specific personal development classes as a feature of the Centre, we did acknowledge the value that some students reported gaining from them, and that we ourselves have gained at various times, from similar 'personal growth' activities or experiences. In reconstructing 'personal growth' as an intrinsic part of our pedagogy as teachers of adult ESL, we realised that our own skills and theoretical understanding in this area needed to be developed and took steps to have 'group dynamics' and 'role play' included in the next College in-service conference.

Thirdly, we learned that much of our confusion arose from the fact that the term 'personal development' features in different discourses in ways that can be either emancipatory or oppressive. We saw personal development as being about 'the growth of students as they learn skills and language that they want and need, about confidence and self esteem that comes from the acquisition of English language, skills and knowledge,' about 'women learning to take more control in their lives', being able to 'name experience', and so on. On the other hand, 'personal development' *also* belongs to a discourse in which it is seen as a consumer item in our materialistic, increasingly polarised and crisis-ridden world, teaching psychological techniques of manipulating reality in order to alleviate feelings of meaninglessness, and to minimise anxiety and stress: skills which may



serve to obscure and palliate the pain of an unjust social system. As teachers who experience both the luxury of relative affluence and the angst of institutional stress and social conscience, and as women who are at various stages of 'naming' our own experience of patriarchy and developing our own self-confidence, we have a foot in both camps. The question then became, *which* discourse are we participating in and projecting in the classroom? Are we initiating our students into a culture of solidarity, of personal and group empowerment that leads people to question the social 'givens', to think critically about society and contribute to social change, or are we initiating them into a discourse of individualism which is blind to social context?

Consideration of this question and acceptance that 'personal development' as it relates to the emancipatory and especially feminist tradition, is part and parcel of our work as ESL teachers, then led to a detailed sharing of what this meant in practice - the "mini teach-in". We had opened up and challenged the institutional discourse of 'personal development', and this in turn had implications for our organisation (our institutionalised social relationships) and practices (our institutionalised activities) (Kemmis and McTaggart, 1988, p.42).

Finally, by collaboratively articulating what our educational project actually is, as a holistic notion supporting, encouraging and feeding into the growth and development of students on many different levels, we affirmed and started to describe how our pedagogy is complex and multiply constituted. As this process unfolded, we found ourselves using the word 'personal development' less and less. In the course of the deconstructive enquiry we had redistributed meanings to discourses of our own personal/political values and our desires on the one hand, and to discourses of our pedagogy on the other. Not only had we resolved our original unease with the term, we had little further use for it as a key concept in our work.

### **3. The Features of an MWLC Pedagogy**

Here I briefly reiterate some of the key features of the eclectic pedagogy of ESL and adult education that has emerged (and is emerging) from the three streams of the enquiry, especially as described in Chapters 5, 7 and 8.

First, such a pedagogy is holistic, and includes attention to relationships, to group dynamics, to the kind of culture developed within the classroom and the Centre itself, and support for the students' life projects beyond the

- Centre: their struggles to find work, to support families, to continue their language and educational development, and to find more control and direction in their lives as women, whatever cultural form these struggles might take.

Second, it is eclectic, based on the student-centred, communicative approach, and borrowing from a very wide range of theories and methodologies, including theories of second language acquisition and adult literacy. The different texts and approaches the teachers weave into their teaching are largely contingent on the needs and aspirations of each group, of each person and of the *moment*. There is a constant balancing in curriculum between responsiveness to immediate needs and the pre-stated goals of courses that have been planned more broadly to meet the needs of student groupings, and to comply with government and institutional policies.

- Third, it includes a strong commitment to the teaching of skills, including 'straight' language skills (grammar, spelling, pronunciation, etc), literacy skills, basic maths, current affairs, general knowledge (naming aspects of social, geographical and political life), crafts and skills that might lead to employment or skills that are necessary for further education or training.

Fourth, it includes a belief that emotional and psychological state is linked into intellectual development, and that this must be taken into account in any classroom interaction. The development of students as 'critical and connected thinkers' (Bradshaw, 1989) takes place in the context of their overall, 'personal development'.

- Fifth, it is interactive, rather than transmissive, relating to Freirean notions of 'teacher-students and student-teachers' and to Patti Lather's notion of "interactive productivity" (Chapter 5) rather than to narrow 'training' models implied by current official discourses and policies.

Sixth, and related to this, is an on-going classroom process of negotiating and constructing intersubjective meanings and viewpoints, at the same time as encouraging and celebrating differences and maintaining a constant awareness of the possibilities of domination and coercion that flow from the teacher's 'knowledge/power'.

Seventh, it is feminist-informed. Whereas all of the teachers expressed a commitment to the MWLC as a safe and affirmative learning space for women, and to feminist principles and feminist models such as Jungian models of 'the teacher as mother', these principles and models were always seen in relation to mixed or mainstream teaching and to principles and models that were not specifically feminist. Feminist teaching practices were not seen as absolute, but as coming from a gendered position (women teachers teaching women students) and in *connection* to other practices (cf Grosz, quoted in Chapter 1).

Eighth, it is based on the building of solidarity between teachers and students. Whereas (as I have shown in Chapter 8) such solidarity may be constrained by the teacher-student relationship, by differences in culture and ethnicity and in employment and socio-economic standing, these dimensions also present opportunities for identity and the building of solidarity. There is ample evidence at the MWLC and elsewhere in ESL and adult education, that a high level of teacher-student solidarity is possible, arising from the shared project of teaching and learning, the focus on commonalities and the development of intersubjective understandings. At the same time, teachers always have a degree of choice about "power with or power over" and are able to reorient their own institutional powers in the course of their everyday interactions with students.

Ninth, the pedagogy is reflexive, developing through cycles of teachers' action and reflection as an on-going process of their professional and personal development. The teacher's subjectivity is recognised as an explicit part of that process.

#### 4 Participatory Action Research as Teacher Development

The MWLC project consisted of several aspects or streams of activity: the collaborative reflection and the sharing of ideas and experience; the systematic gathering of feedback from students; and my self-monitoring of classroom practice. Taken together, these must be considered as highly effective professional development activities.

All of the participants have said that they found that as a collaborative group process, it was extremely useful and worthwhile. Dominica, for example, said that:

I thought it was the first genuine staff development process that I've ever been through in four and a half years in TAFE because most other staff development that I've been involved in is people coming in from outside, whereas this was something that absolutely emanated from this group. (Meeting, 29/10/92)

However, it fell short of its potential to engender further collaborative processes and activities of professional development. Ideally, participatory action research is premised on autonomous action and reflection by the community of enquirers in their institutional situation. Our experience, however, has been that the lack of any institutional support makes this very difficult. With a 21 hour full-time teaching load, large classes, a curriculum which demands the preparation of new, relevant and responsive materials, a 'case load' of troubled women who rely on our solidarity and support, and the innumerable stresses caused the physical and bureaucratic environment, exhaustion is a real factor. In our case, there was no secretarial support or extra time made available for meetings. Teachers did make extra time but not without sacrificing other priorities. After eight months of additional effort that I put into leading the process, transcribing tapes, producing newsletters, my energy was beginning to flag. Whereas teachers expressed a keenness to continue with meetings and to experiment with different activities, such as organising to visit each others' classrooms, in practice, this did not happen. It became clear in early 1992 that the small steps that we had taken in building the group, the processes would not be continued *unless* there was some form of institutional support .

In *Teachers as Collaborative Learners* (1991) John Smyth argues for initiating action research processes of collaborative and critical learning amongst teachers as a collegial and non-bureaucratic form of clinical supervision. His model, if taken up by managers of colleges, would perhaps supply the ingredients of time, resources and legitimation that were needed for our partially-successful project to go further; for participatory action research to take root in the culture, discourse and organisation of the MWLC. Unfortunately, insofar as TAFE colleges are concerned, the prevailing management ideology, under the sway of economic rationalism, does not see the development of pedagogical excellence or the encouragement of teacher professionalism as a priority.

What we have learned about the appropriateness and the power of participatory action research, as an approach to professional development,

confirms the work of Smyth, Brown, Brennan, Kemmis, McTaggart and others cited throughout this thesis. It also indicates that that some form of institutional support or resourcing may be necessary for action research to be on-going or to bring about lasting changes.

#### **5. Addressing Economic Rationalism in Education**

At the Second World Congress on Action Learning, in July, 1992, Robin McTaggart said of the emancipatory tradition of action research (in contrast to its usage in technical, managerially controlled contexts) that:

To be credible, (action researchers) need to work to improve the rationality, justice, coherence and satisfactoriness of practice in their own cultural contexts. Current economic ideology provides the socially aware with plenty of scope for concern. Economic rationalism at home embodies all that is ill about 'development' ... it is economic, patriarchal, ethnocentric, individualistic, Judeo-Christian, and Western democratic with moral idealism subordinated to materialism. It creates social problems which signify a deep malaise we need to attend to at home. Participatory action research is an appropriate approach for the personal, institutional and societal changes which are necessary (1992, p.56).

How then, was our project a means of "confronting the immorality of economic rationalism and its manifestations in our institutional lifeworlds"? (p. 53)

As I have shown participation in the process has greatly enhanced our own personal and collective development as critical subjects able to name our own professional practice and educational realities and hence to advance our own 'discourse of resistance'. In so far as we interrogated our own subject positions as regards 'personal development' and talked through the ethnocentrism of many of our assumptions in relation to it, raising our awareness of the potential to dominate by over-nurturing, it probably improved the 'justice' and 'coherence' of our practice as well.

Recognising and affirming the levels of skill and commitment that we bring to our work and the complex and eclectic pedagogy that we practise, has strengthened the arguments that we can draw upon in defending and developing teaching as a profession whose work is of profound importance to the future life and health of our culture and society. Having explored and

focussed on our work at this depth, the MWLC teachers may be in a better position to challenge the new discourses and to defend themselves industrially, than they were before.

Central to the radical tradition of action research is the possibility of challenging of institutional practices in so far as these act as constraints on the improvement of educational delivery. John Smyth says that:

In order to succeed in bringing about reforms that have any chance of making schooling more practical, realistic and just, teachers also need to see how existing practices reinforce and legitimate those conditions. By isolating these kind of tensions and seeing them for what they are, teachers are not only able to see the discrepancies that exist between the actual and the possible, but they are able to work towards the kind of collaborative involvement necessary to change that state of affairs (p.104).

In our case, the deliberations and activities tended not to focus on the constraints of existing institutional practices nor take up any issues within the College beyond our own practice within the Centre, and so did not explicitly challenge "the rules, roles and structures within which teaching occurs" (p.137). Firstly, as teachers on short-term contracts we are genuinely intimidated and limited in the degree to which we feel free to challenge the institutional status quo. Secondly, our critique of the wider institutional context is already advanced and continues in daily staffroom discourse, irrespective of the action research. As a group of teachers, we regularly discuss and criticise economic rationalism as it manifests itself in current institutional practice, in government educational policy and within the culture and discourse of our own institution. Realistically, our only course of action in challenging policies and practices is through our union and professional associations, rather than through "collaborative involvement" at the College level for which there is little opportunity and no support at the present time. Our experience in developing counter-hegemonic discourses at the local level in the course of this project underlines the important role of unions and professional associations in resisting the hegemonic discourses and powers.

## **6. Insights about Participatory Action Research as a Methodology**

The participatory action research project described in this thesis was initially derived from the Lewinian model of the action research cycle,

developed for educational settings by Carr and Kemmis (1986) and Kemmis and McTaggart (1988) and others. The first stream of action and reflection, the process amongst the teachers, took the form of one single turn of the spiral: *reconnaissance* (Chapters 2 and 3), *planning* (Chapter 4), *action* (Chapter 5) and *reflection on the action* (Chapter 6). Each of the second and third streams, the processes of self-monitoring (Chapter 7) and involving the students (Chapter 8) also could be said to demonstrate spirals of *reconnaissance, planning, action* and *reflection*, though in a more diffused way. However, the processes in all of the three streams were actually more complex, involving a number of different but related processes of group and individual learning taking place at different levels across a range of time scales simultaneously: interconnecting spirals within spirals.

In terms of this model of participatory action research, there is a question about what constitutes 'action'. It could be said the 'action' within the first stream, the process amongst the teachers, was the organisation of the 'mini teach-in'. On the other hand, seen within a poststructuralist perspective, institutional power is located within discourse and so it is on the level of discourse that social challenge and transformation must begin. In this sense, disrupting the institutional discourse of 'personal development', interrogating how we as teachers participate in that discourse and developing our own pedagogical discourse is the 'action': creating and promoting a counter-hegemonic 'discourse of resistance' in Weedon's terms.

The experience of this project also raises the question of what are the parameters of participatory action research, or whether there are clear lines of demarcation between this and other research methodologies. In keeping my own detailed journal of daily life at the MWLC, I was in fact amassing a store of ethnographic data that could have been presented and interpreted purely as the outcome of a naturalistic research project. In asking students to respond to a simple questionnaire about their experience at the MWLC, by interpreting their responses in the light of the other findings, and by analysing a set of students' essays, I was conducting phenomenological research, moving from the collaborative model of the teachers' process towards more conventional processes in which my own voice as researcher came back to the centre of the inquiry. These research styles, however, were part of the data-gathering or field work necessary for making meaning of our experience and developing a more useful and relevant discourse about it.

Another binary that becomes somewhat blurred in reflecting on the experience of this project is that between action research which is characterised as 'emancipatory' (having a clear values base within a political context) and that which is characterised as a 'value free', management tool in organisational development. The division that arose between the two camps at the World Action Learning Congress in July 1992 is a good illustration. Whereas the participatory process amongst the teachers would fall into the former 'emancipatory' category, the self-monitoring of classroom practice falls more within the latter category. However, in the terms of this project, the self-monitoring was valuable in its own right as a means of developing my teaching practice as well as adding a new dimension to the collaborative process: here, there was not such a clear distinction between the 'emancipatory' and the 'technical'.

On the other hand, the experience of attempting to involve students as 'critical reference group' had the effect of delineating the distinction between participatory action research and more traditional research paradigms. The process amongst the teachers had a power and relevance beyond that of knowledge-creation, in the growth and empowerment experienced by the teachers as participants and the 'ripple effect' of other activities that flowed from that process. The process amongst the students bore no such significance for the participants since it was similar to the usual discussions and activities that take place in every day classroom work.

However, an action research *style* is already built into the pedagogical culture of the Centre, as I have shown by reference to negotiated curricula, to the development of group awareness within classroom groups and the role of regular class meetings as a means of feedback for the teacher and reflection on how the group is progressing. It is through this institutionalised 'culture of evaluation'(Wadsworth, p.) that the students' needs and their voices are expressed, heard and negotiated, rather than through an artificially-imposed research project that in their context would be seen to have little relevance.

The combined effect of these insights leads to problematising and to deconstructing, to some extent, the category 'participatory action research' as a rule-bound methodology congealed into fixed academic form, and as a metanarrative. Our own localised version of participatory action research, with its theme of 'personal development' and its focus on discourse, throws



into a new perspective the more 'rationalist' version (of Kemmis, Carr, McTaggart, Smyth, etc) on which it was originally modelled.

Central to their thinking about action research as a tool for educational reform is the notion of 'critical educational science'(Carr and Kemmis, 1986), which shares, with Freirean 'critical pedagogy' a rationalist assumption about control: that we are rational beings who are able to take control through action once we have 'named' or become conscious of problems. This discourse does not address issues of desire, multiplicity, and the fragmented subject who is "split between the conscious and the unconscious and between multiple social positionings" (Ellsworth,1989, p.316).

Elizabeth Ellsworth has made a substantial critique of this notion and of the discourse of critical pedagogy as being based on a masculinist model of the ideal rational person and the 'universality' of the proposition that all people have a right to freedom from oppression guaranteed by the democratic social contract (p.304). An important lesson that Ellsworth draws from poststructuralist thought is the realisation that we are all bound to discourses that are partial and reflect our own subject positions and histories. As teachers (or as action researchers) we are implicated in the very structures we are trying to change. These insights show the importance of problematising participatory action research, and as Lather points out, the need to "demonstrate how deconstructing our own practice can animate and expand our sense of the structure of possibilities in regard to change-oriented practices" (Lather, 1991, p.48).

The model of participatory action research realised in this project contrasts with the rationalist models of participatory action research, which, as I argued in the formal proposal to this project, tend to reify action research as an emancipatory metanarrative (Appendix A, p.9) Instead, it showed how the application of the principles and practices of participatory action research by women in a women's setting, has generated a different model, one which is more open-ended, is necessarily complex in its design and execution, that valorises feeling and intuition and that operates on the level of discourse. In short it has produced a model which is reflective of feminist and poststructuralist thought as well as emancipatory narratives of the left.

## 7. The Power of Feminist Poststructural/Postmodern Analysis

Clearly, the practical and the interpretive outcomes of this project referred to above owe a great deal to the power of feminist, poststructural and postmodern theory, as introduced in Chapter 1. Using the terms 'poststructuralism' and 'postmodernism' interchangeably, Patti Lather describes their power as follows:

Postmodernism offers feminists ways to work within and yet challenge dominant discourses. Within postmodern feminism, language moves from representational to constitutive; binary logic implodes, and debates about the "real" shift from a radical constructivism to a discursively reflexive position which recognizes how our knowledge is mediated by the concepts and categories of our understanding. Hegemonic forms of academic discourse are thoroughly challenged, including those at play in: our intendedly counter-hegemonic work... As such, postmodernism offers feminism opportunities to avoid dogmatism and the reductionism of single-cause analysis, to produce knowledge from which to act, and to diffuse power as a means to take advantage of the range of mobile and transitory points of resistance inherent in the networks of power relations (p. 39).

For myself, the process of collaborative analysis and the deconstruction of 'personal development' as part of a shifting discourse rather than a representation of 'reality' was a practical learning process about discourse and discourse theory in itself. Learning the language (the discourse) of constructivism and discourse theory continued with the process of articulating (and therefore constructing) a pedagogy of adult education and ESL, and the personal challenge of confronting my own 'knowledge/power' and my own 'desire' within that discourse. This experience helped to deepen my grasp on the theoretical study that I did in conjunction with the project. The insights thus afforded about language, subjectivity and power are in themselves empowering when it comes to addressing (or *undressing*) the current educational discourses mentioned in Chapter 1: discourses of institutional managerialism, the 'training market', narrowly focussed curricula, 'competencies', etc. Learning the 'discourse of discourse' in this way gives the tools for looking for the silences, the hidden meanings, the reflections of interest and power; it also leads to a growing realisation about the implications of discourse for the whole framework within which we see our world.

In terms of developing the project, postmodernism has legitimized 'open endedness' in following a range of directions simultaneously and at times going against the 'guidelines' (of *The Action Research Planner*, for example) when this was necessary to follow the energy of the group and my own intuition. This is essentially nothing new, as members of the Action Research Issues Association, who work regularly with participatory action research in a variety of settings, have often spoken of at their monthly meetings. However, in interpreting the outcomes of this project, postmodernism (and poststructuralism) have essentially freed me from the necessity of pursuing a single academic 'argument', allowing me to pursue overlapping and intertwining themes and meanings, as categories of orthodox thinking dissolve and contingency, complexity and multiplicity emerge. To find a way of reporting coherently and usefully on the complex outcomes of a 'postmodern' action research project such as this has been a challenge. To quote Lather again,

The present turmoil in the human sciences frees us to construct new designs based on alternative tenets and epistemological commitments. My goal is to move research in many different, and indeed, contradictory directions in the hope that more interesting and useful ways of knowing will emerge. Rather than establish a new orthodoxy, we need to experiment, document and share our efforts towards emancipatory research (p.69).

Perhaps a unifying theme that has emerged from this report and reflection, is the power of feminist poststructural thought in opening up richer possibilities for action research than have hitherto been realised. This thesis is an attempt to experiment with the possibilities thus created whilst documenting and sharing our efforts at the MWLC towards emancipatory pedagogy and research.

*TheEnd*

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**PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH  
AT THE MIGRANT WORKERS' LEARNING CENTRE**

**A Report and a Reflection**

**APPENDICES**

**Appendix A: The Research Proposal**

**Appendix B: Action Research Bulletins 1 - 10**

**Appendix C: Extracts from the Process Journal**

**Appendix D: Extracts from the Teaching Journal**

**Appendix E: 'Returning to Learning' Students' Input**

**Appendix F: SACS Students' Essays**

**Appendix G: Timeline and Summary of Meetings**

# APPENDIX A

## The Research Proposal

**Action Research Project  
at the Migrant Women's Learning Centre:  
A Theoretical Discussion and a Proposal**

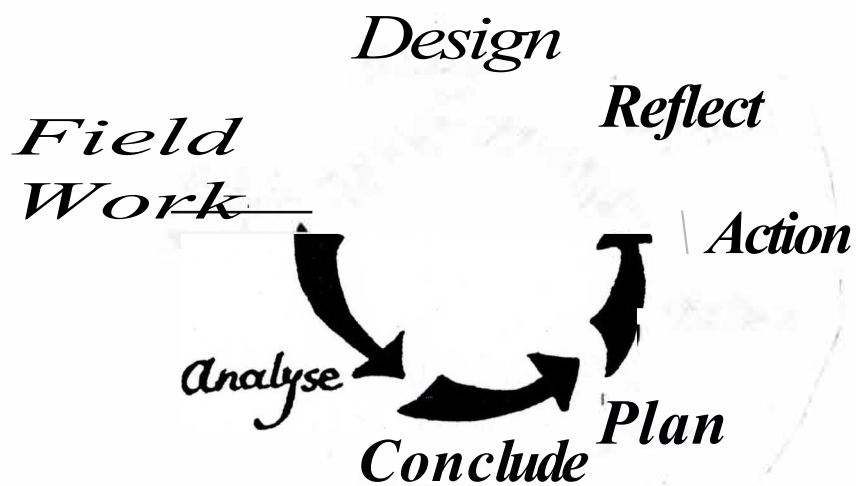
**Coursework essay for Qualitative Research Methodology  
submitted to LaTrobe University in June, 1991**

LaTrobe University  
Master of Education

## QUALITATIVE RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Lecturer: Dr Lyn Yates

Course work essay  
submitted by Jill Sanguinetti



June 14, 1991

**ACTION RESEARCH PROJECT  
AT THE MIGRANT WOMEN'S LEARNING CENTRE:  
A theoretical discussion and a proposal**

*"With regard to a particular educational problem, present a research proposal in which the overall approach and the specific techniques are justified in relation to some current debates over appropriate methodology."*

**ABSTRACT**

This essay proposes an action research project at the Migrant Women's Learning Centre, arguing that the research methodology is justified on the grounds of its compatibility with the culture and pedagogic aims of the Centre. Based on professional development and research needs identified by the teachers, the current proposal offers the opportunity for an empowering educational experience for both teachers and students.

Action research is further justified in a theoretical discussion that centres on Carr and Kemmis' criticisms of positivist and interpretive research in education and their notion of critical educational science. Critical educational science addresses the gap between theory and research in education and classroom practice. It offers teachers a framework for reflection upon and development of their own practice and therefore greater professional control in the development of educational theory and leadership in educational reform. It is highly suitable for classroom-based research and teacher development but does not, however, preclude the need for other forms of educational research based on positivist and interpretive paradigms.

# TABLE OF HEADINGS

**Introduction: the research need and the solution**

## **PART A ACTION RESEARCH: A THEORETICAL ACCOUNT**

1. The technical, the practical and the strategic
2. Critique of positivist and interpretive research as educational research
3. Action research as critical educational science
4. Discussion

## **PART B. ACTION RESEARCH at the MWLC: A PROPOSAL**

1. Aims of the project
2. Methodology
3. Initiation of the Project
4. Anticipated research design
5. Recording the data
6. Researching the research
7. Postscript

**ACTION RESEARCH PROJECT  
AT THE MIGRANT WOMEN'S LEARNING CENTRE:  
A theoretical discussion and a proposal**

**1. Introduction: the research need and the solution**

*Shulamit Reinharz uses the term "rape research" to name the norm in the social sciences: career advancement of researchers built on their use of alienating and exploitative inquiry methods (1979: 95) In contrast, for those wishing to change as well as to understand the world, conscious empowerment is built into the research design. (Lather, 1988)*

*"Action research is the way groups of people can organise the conditions under which they can learn from their own experience ... " (McTaggart, 1989)*

The Northern Metropolitan College of TAFE's Migrant Women's Learning Centre provides a variety of English as a Second Language (ESL), pre-vocational and other courses within an affirmative, woman-centred teaching environment. The learning of language, work and study skills, general knowledge and "personal development" takes place in a supportive culture especially geared to the needs of longer-term migrant women who have low educational levels in their country of origin, little or no previous formal English study, who are unemployed, have family responsibilities and are frequently single mothers.

It is the only specifically women's ESL centre in a Victorian TAFE college, (receiving recurrent state funding as well as DEET and DFE funding) and the staff of the Centre are aware of the need to research and document its work - because of its special nature and, in the current economic times, as a defensive measure against the ever-present threat of down-grading or reduced funding. We believe that our experience as language teachers in an affirmative women's learning culture (and that of similar centres in TAFE or in community settings) should be shared more widely within the system, as the pedagogic implications go beyond teaching English as a Second Language and are relevant to the main stream of adult education.

At the same time, we have a problem that is probably shared by all teachers. The momentum of our work and the intensity of our interaction with the students (inside and outside the classroom), leave little time for us to talk to each other about how we teach, what the problems are, how to develop and improve our practice, to study the relevant theoretical literature, or to record our reflections in a systematic way.

The research requirement for my M.Ed. presented an ideal opportunity to document an aspect of our work. What would be the best way to go? The essential aspects of our pedagogy, the development of relationships of respect and support and the dove-tailing of language learning and acquisition and 'personal growth' or 'empowerment' are not measurable in conventional research terms. A piece of quantitative research into outcomes would miss the essence of what is important and new. The students would become 'objects' of

study by the 'subject' researcher, which would be contrary to the teaching culture of the Centre which aspires to respect the 'agency' of the students as autonomous subjects.

On the other hand, a piece of phenomenological, qualitative research or ethnographic field work would be able to reveal the women's understandings of the learning and 'empowerment' that we observe taking place. The thoughts and ideas of some of the students about their lives in and out of the Centre could be recorded, their writing analysed and teachers interviewed to build up a picture of the complex processes that make up the learning experiences that take place here.

But even here, I had misgivings. The interviews would be conducted in a relationship of high level of trust, of giving as well as taking information with students whom I know well, so there would be no question of 'rape research', as described by Patti Lather. But still I would be aware, at some level, of a degree of exploitation and the potential on my part to manipulate (precisely because of the close relationships and my position of power as their teacher) to encourage responses favourable to my thesis. They open their hearts to tell me about the pain of their lives as well as the learning that has helped them to gain more control and direction: I use this to further my education and career in some unknown and mysterious (to them) way by writing a thesis or speaking at a conference. It is still an unequal exchange in which the students become 'objects' of my study whereas other aspects of the teaching relationship are under-pinned by an attitude of wanting to support and inform their sense of their own agency, their ability to make choices and decisions in their own lives.

By embarking on a collaborative project in which they are co-researchers instead of researched, the students become active agents, rather than passive objects in the process. In other words, the existing culture of the MWLC and its pedagogic project of supporting the women in their all-round development whilst servicing their need for language, skills and knowledge, itself justifies the use of action research.

The opportunity for an experience of an empowering, collective self-education of the teachers offered by action research methodology is a parallel issue of equal importance. Together we focus on the challenges and problems, and decide on a course of action. We will then observe and record the results of our actions, collaboratively reflect upon them and on that basis plan for new action. By methodically recording our thoughts and classroom experiences, by comparing notes, by being sceptical, by dipping into theoretical writings, by developing our praxis, we would organise and control our own staff development process. We would be able eventually to more clearly articulate our aims and our pedagogy. We would improve our classroom practice, improve our theoretical understandings and produce new theory. Finally, we would amass rich data as evidence for our claims about the Centre use this to share our insights more widely.

In their introduction to The Action Research Reader, Kemmis and McTaggart, discuss the development of action research as an educational methodology that has been combined with Freirian ideas of critical pedagogy and conscientisation and the epistemology of critical theory. They quote the Columbian social researcher Orlando Fals Borda, for example, who asks whether we "are

imposing meanings derived from a view of science on those with whom we work, or are we tapping, elaborating, challenging and extending participant's own critical understandings of their situation?" Borda criticises the imposition of action research as a 'social technology' on social groups, and emphasises that the responsibility of action researchers is not only to 'science', but to the consciousness and culture of those with whom they work. 'Not only their language but also their constructions of the social world must be engaged and critically developed through the action research process.'(Kemmis and McTaggart, 1988 - 1, p. 16, Borda, pp. 301-306).

One of the challenges of the project which we propose to undertake at the MWLC is thus to ensure that in the action research process, the 'constructions of the social world', both of the teachers and of the students will be engaged and critically developed ... ie, that it should be an educational process which will extend the critical thinking of all of us. If (as hoped) it takes on the character of 'self-determination and co-determination' and 'self-responsibility and co-responsibility' then it will contribute to the educational experience of students as well as to the democratic culture of the Centre and possibly of the College.

In what sense will the research be 'feminist'? Patti Lather defines feminist research as research which puts "the social construction of gender at the centre of one's enquiry". The thematic concern of this particular project has been defined as "personal development" (see Part B). Clearly, the exploration and challenge of gender roles must be part of that personal development within a women's learning centre, so that in so far as the research clarifies, documents and improves this process, it will be a contribution to the feminist project. More importantly, emancipatory action research, because it is based on participatory, enabling values rather than coercive values, fits clearly within a feminist paradigm: by involving both students and staff as participants in a process in which we are all subjects, by consciously attempting to minimise the power differential between students and teachers, by regarding it as an educational process which will extend the social constructions and critical thinking of all us. By using, in the words of Patti Lather, a research approach which will "both empower the researched and contribute to the generation of change enhancing social theory." (p.507)

In Part A I will discuss participatory action research as it has been theorised by Carr and Kemmis (1989) in comparison with positivist and interpretive traditions in educational research. I will then explicate and discuss their notion of action research as the enactment of a critical educational science. In Part B I will outline my proposal for an action research project, its aims, methodology and anticipated design.

## **PART A ACTION RESEARCH: A THEORETICAL ACCOUNT**

### **1. The technical, the practical and the strategic**

In Becoming Critical: Knowing Through Action Research, Carr and Kemmis (1986, pp. 35 - 41) propose the notion of critical educational science based on four elements:

- an analysis of the gap between curriculum and educational research carried out by experts and the experience and professional development needs of teachers,



- the Lewinian action research spiral as a means by which teachers can produce authentic knowledge and develop theory based on their own practice,
- a critique of positivist and interpretive research paradigms,
- the insights of critical social science and its epistemology.

In introducing their critique of educational research, Carr and Kemmis adapt Habermas's construction of the three forms of knowledge (technical, practical and emancipatory) in order to describe three major styles of thought that currently pervade contemporary understanding of educational thinking: *the technical, the practical and the strategic*.

The *technical* view treats education as a set of means to given ends (ie, it is instrumentalist). It sees teaching and curriculum as "craft-like" and solutions to educational problems are seen as being able to be overcome by improvements in technology or management. The *technical* view corresponds to the positivist or quantitative research paradigm which assumes scientific neutrality and is based on a notion of the 'objective' character of reality governed by inescapable laws. Positivist research casts teachers into the role of passive conformity to theories of the researchers and policy-makers and is invariably biased towards the status quo.(p.35)

The *practical* view, by contrast, considers education as an essentially practical activity, taking place in social situations of great complexity, which are ultimately unable to be controlled and systematised from above. "Such control as is possible in the social process of education will only enter through the wise decision-making of practitioners through their deliberation on practice".(p.37)

The *practical* view corresponds to the interpretive (qualitative) research tradition. Interpretive research in education is often seen as the alternative to positivist research. It is about how individuals interpret their actions in the situations in which they act. ie, it is descriptive, rather than explanatory. Social reality is understood by understanding the subjective meanings of individuals. The methodology, subject matter and forms of explanation are those of the social sciences, fundamentally different to those of the (positivistic) natural sciences. "Verstehen explanations aim to explicate the basic conceptual schemes which structure the ways in which the actions, experiences and ways of life of those whom the social scientist observes are made intelligible. Their aim is not to provide causal explanations of human life, but to deepen and extend our knowledge of why social life is perceived and experienced in the way that it is".(p.90)

The *strategic* view is that which sees the *technical* and *practical* views in relation to each other, recognising the institutional and technical elements of education as well as the practical and moral ones and addressing the struggle between them. It combines elements of *technical* thinking (the need for systematic examination of practice) and of the *practical* (the need to build on the self-understandings and interpretive categories of teachers.) It sees teaching and curriculum as historically located, and as a social activity with social consequences. It sees education as intrinsically political, affecting the life-chances and consciousness of those involved. It regards educational acts as deeply problematic, but as such, able to be reflected upon and reconsidered to inform future practical judgements, in the value context of facilitating or debilitating progress towards a more rational and just society. The *strategic*

view implies that a teacher plans thoughtfully, acts deliberately, observes the consequences of action, reflects critically on the situational constraints and practical potential, enters into debate with others, and so helps establish a critical community of enquirers into teaching. Critical theory is the theoretical framework within which teachers can become critical in this way. Action research is the research methodology which corresponds to the strategic view and is the means by which a *critical educational science* can be enacted by teachers and educational practitioners. (pp. 39 - 40)

## **2. Critique of positivist and interpretive research as educational research**

What are the practical limitations of positivist and interpretive research in education?

Carr and Kemmis use the criticisms of Kuhn to expose the claims of positivist research in education as being 'objective' and 'scientific' (Chap. 2) and criticise the implication of the scientific view that educational practice is an 'applied science'. They show that while aspects of education are instrumental or technical, any decisions about educational means cannot be assessed in instrumental terms alone, because any educational context has a background of moral and ideological constraints. They draw on classical liberal educational theory (especially RS Peters) to argue that the view of theory and practice assumed by positivist research "fails to recognise how, in education, aims, policies and methods are all intrinsically related."... "Decisions about means in education always reflect educational values. Any attempt to remove these values in order to make questions of means purely instrumental would, in the last analysis, result in them not being educational means at all." (p.78)

Educational research, they argue, should not "mimic the surface features of the natural sciences", but "is distinctive in that it employs a methodology which enables it to describe how individuals interpret their actions and the situations in which they act" ... ie, that it is descriptive and interpretive rather than explanatory and predictive. (p.79).

Methodologies deriving from the 'interpretive' tradition of social enquiry, based on social phenomenology are now being used to challenge positivist approaches. Interpretive social science "aims to educate: to deepen insight and to enliven commitment. Its work is the transformation of consciousness, the differentiation of modes of awareness and the enlightenment of action. It expects critical reception (that is, it does not take the simplistic **view** that its truths are unified into single theories which will compel action along pre-determined lines), and it aims to contribute to social life through educating the consciousness of individual actors." (p.93)

However, interpretive research has also come under criticism from proponents of 'anti-positivist' schools of thought. These criticisms "reflect the belief that the interpretive approach, by distinguishing between 'understanding' as the aim of interpretive social science and 'explanation' as the aim of natural science and by denying that scientific explanations have any place in the investigation of social phenomena, thereby exclude from social scientific enquiries the explanation of certain features of social reality ... in particular, questions about the origins, causes and results of actors adopting certain interpretations of their actions and social life, and neglects the crucial problems of social conflict and

social change." (pp.94-95) Because social reality is not only structured and sustained by individual's interpretations, but also produces meanings and constrains action, social science should go beyond interpretive accounts to an examination of historical and social factors. This kind of enquiry, it is argued, is a necessary corrective to the passivity of interpretive accounts. Whereas positivism imposes a narrow scientific rationality, educational problems require a form of rational and systematic approach that goes beyond interpretive research.

A second limitation to interpretive research is that unintended consequences of social action cannot be explained by reference to accounts of individual actors, and that the relationship between these unintended results and the continuity and stability of the social system needs to be demonstrated in a way that interpretive research does not allow for. (pp.95 - 96)

A third is about the fact that on the one hand, explanations incompatible with the actors own interpretations are inadmissible (according to interpretive research) and on the other hand, aspects of people's self-understandings which are illusory are left unexplained. "By emphasizing the importance of grasping the 'intelligibility' of the individuals *own* meanings and actions, therefore, the interpretive approach offers no way of examining the ideological character that these meanings and actions possess, and the purpose they serve in social life. To penetrate this resistance to ideological explanations, interpretive social science would have to provide a mode of enquiry within which individuals own interpretations can be critically reconsidered and reassessed." (p.97)

Finally, in both the positivist and interpretive approaches, the researcher stands outside the research situation, adopting a disinterested, neutral stance. Carr and Kemmis conclude that "in so far as education is a practical, value-laden activity, it seems that any educational theory worthy of the name cannot rest content with providing value-neutral theoretical accounts, but must be able to confront questions about practical educational values and goals." (p.99)

In criticising both positivist approaches to education ("which eliminate their educational character") and interpretive approaches ("which eliminate their problematic character")

Carr and Kemmis call for an approach that is both 'interpretive' and 'scientific'. "Interpretive in the sense that it generates theories that can be grasped and utilised by practitioners in terms of their own concepts and theories; 'scientific' in that these theories provide a coherent challenge to the beliefs and assumptions incorporated in the theories of educational practice that practitioners actually employ." (p.118) The purpose of such educational research is to make educational research scientific in the sense of making the interpretations and judgements of practitioners more coherent and more rational.

### **3. Action research as critical educational science**

In expounding the idea of action research as a form of critical educational science, Carr and Kemmis show how it fulfills five formal requirements for coherent educational science:

Firstly, it must reject positivist notions of rationality, objectivity and truth, in favour of a dialectical view of rationality. The action researcher attempts to discover how situations are constrained by both 'objective' and 'subjective' conditions,

explores the interplay between them and addresses how both kinds of conditions can be changed.(p.183) The socially-constructed and historically-embedded relationship between theory and practice on the one hand, and the individual and society on the other ("*double dialectic*") ,

"is at the heart of action research as a participatory and collaborative process of self-reflection". It is resolved "in the notion of a *self-critical community* of action researchers who are committed to the improvement of education, who are researchers *for* education." (p.184) The self-reflective spiral has a further dialectical quality of "retrospective analysis" and "prospective action", arranged as a *programme* of controlled intervention and practical judgement conducted by individuals and groups committed not any to understanding the world but to changing it".(p.186)

Secondly, action research must employ the interpretive categories of teachers, focussing on and developing their understandings, both in the context of their practices and in the context of explicitly sharing and examining these understandings through collaborative processes. What makes action research *research* is that this is a systematic process and that it is made public. Teachers, as well as becoming researchers into their own practices, "must establish self-critical communities of teachers-researchers which systematically develop the educational knowledge which justifies their educational practices and the educational situations constituted by these parts." (p.188) In this way, educational theory is developed which is consciously held by the practitioner, the product of reflection, rather than of habit or coercion. Building on teachers' own interpretive understandings, action research thus has the potential of emancipating them, at least in some degree, "from the often unseen constraints of assumptions, habit, precedent, coercion and ideology. (p.192)

Thirdly, criticism of interpretive research implies that a critical educational science should contain an element of ideology critique, ie, "to provide a way of distinguishing ideas which are distorted by ideology from those which are not and to show how such ideological distortions can be overcome". Action research explicitly engages teachers in this process, enabling them to identify and explore the contradictions of their own practices, understandings and situations, as well as "to identify those institutionalised patterns of practice which limit the achievement of more rational communication, more just decision-making and access to an interesting and satisfying life for all". (p.194)

Ideology critique has been likened to psychoanalysis in that it includes building an understanding of how our own values and assumptions have been formed and how these are part of broader social and historical frameworks. As ideology is reflected in our practice, the act of critically examining our educational practices through collaborative reflection within a general framework of commitment to more just and rational practices can thus raise awareness of our own (individual and group) ideological formation.

Fourthly, an educational science "should be able to expose those aspects of the social order which frustrate rational change, and to offer theoretical accounts which allow teachers and others to become aware of how they may be overcome". (p.194) Action research is theoretically compatible with Habermas' theory that the organisation of action for social change requires democratic conditions of free, communicative discourse amongst participants. The 'self-critical community' of action researchers undertakes to practice values of

rationality, communication and participation in democratic decision-making. "The organisation of action can take place as an attempt to replace one distorted set of practices with another, undistorted set of practices. Such action is always political action; new practices always challenge established institutional interests. They express a realignment of tendencies towards empowerment and emancipation, on the one hand, as against tendencies towards the entrenchment of sectional interests, on the other".(p.198)

Thus, in the course of the collaborative involvement in the research process, institutional impediments or inadequacies are confronted and either changed or exposed. It is in fulfilling this requirement of an educational science, that Carr and Kemmis use the term 'emancipatory action research'. This they define as "an empowering process for participants; it engages them in the struggle for more rational, just, democratic and fulfilling forms of education. It is 'activist' in the sense that it engages them in taking action on the basis of their critical and self-critical reflection, but it is prudent in that it creates change at the rate at which it is justified by reflection and feasible for the participants in the process." (p.205)

Fifth and finally, an educational science must be critical, ie, that the question of its truth will be determined by the way it relates to practice ... the quest for dialectical unity of theory and practice which produces enlightenment *and* can be tested in terms of practical achievement: Thus, action research "invites the group to consider not only its own domain of action, but the domain of educational action as part of a whole social domain. It invites the group to consider education as a whole, and thus the general need for educational reform in society. It is not only a process which reflects or responds to history; it envisages a profession made up of educational action researchers who see themselves as agents of history who must express their practical judgements about needed changes in education in their own considered actions." (p.209)

#### **4. Discussion**

The argument for a critical educational science is compelling in its theoretical breadth and the application of an epistemology which promises to overcome the current dichotomy between educational practice on the one hand, and theory and research on the other. Critical educational science is an attractive proposition to teachers, offering them a framework for the development of classroom praxis and the exercise of professional control in research and theorisation of curriculum and pedagogy and hence more active involvement in processes of educational reform.

But in arguing that positivist and interpretive approaches are "flawed" as educational research, are Carr and Kemmis in danger of over-stating the case for action research? Whilst they argue against an either/or approach to positivist and interpretive research and for the inclusion of elements of positivist research and interpretive research in action research, there seems to be a tendency to claim for action research an inflated role which subsumes positivist and interpretive paradigms and discounts their appropriate usage. In post modernist terms, are they constructing a universalising, 'grand narrative'-like theory of educational research? The very term 'critical educational science' suggests that it has a definitive role alongside which it is unclear where research based on the more conventional paradigms fits in.

Certainly, feminist research encompasses all three research paradigms. Positivist feminist research contributes empirical knowledge that can further the quest for gender equality. On the other hand, interpretive feminist research that does not specifically adopt an empowering methodology is not necessarily oppressive and can have beneficial side-effects for the researched. (Belenky et al), (Gilligan), (Oakley).

It is interesting to briefly return here to Habermas's theory of knowledge in which he posits three 'knowledge-constitutive interests', the 'technical', the 'practical' and the 'emancipatory', based on three distinct areas of human interest and social existence. (Carr and Kemmis, pp. 131 - 144) According to Habermas's schema, these are three legitimate forms of knowledge which exist *a priori* and each have their own epistemologies which correspond to the domains of work (the technical), language (the practical) and power (the emancipatory). Habermas suggests that the "differences in the very nature of these three interests mandate fundamentally different methodologies of objective enquiry." (Mezirow, 1981) Mezirow extends Habermas's theory to describe three different modes of personal learning and learning needs in adult education. In the same vein, it would be true to the essence of Habermas to see these three distinct but interrelated domains as constituted in the conglomeration of activities and processes we call 'education'. Carr and Kemmis, on the other hand, by interpreting the three domains as different approaches (to a singular reality?) have made a shift in emphasis which I believe distorts Habermas's theory, idealistically privileging 'the emancipatory' and down-playing the technical and practical realities.

An alternative construction is to see education as having a technical aspect (ie, there are necessary instrumental aspects to course and curriculum development, to pedagogy, evaluation and administration) and to having a practical aspect (language, communication, culture) as well a strategic aspect (politics, power, interest groups). According to this interpretation, and despite the threat of 'the imperialism of scientific reason' (Kemmis, 1981) positivist (quantitative) research has a role according to the context and the research needs, as does interpretive. For example, Bob Connell's Teachers' Work (1989) as a piece of interpretive research, could be said to contribute to developing consensus in understanding the cultural, moral and cultural complexities involved in teaching and thus to the conditions for rationality in terms of Habermas's theory of communicative action. (Bernstein, 1985, p.21)

Action research, as an expression of the emancipatory domain (and therefore as a force for social development and progress), should claim its place alongside the other two main paradigms, to be used according to the context and the research need. The scope of this essay does not permit further teasing out of this issue; I raise it tentatively and as a supporter of the theory of critical educational science as part of my own attempt to arrive at a balanced view of its role.

## **PART B - ACTION RESEARCH PROJECT AT THE MWLC: A PROPOSAL**

### **1. Aims of the project**

I propose to facilitate an action research project amongst the staff of the Migant Women's Learning Centre of the Northern Metropolitan College of TAFE, between May and December 1991.

The aims of the initial proposal that I presented to the other members of staff and which they have agreed to, are on three levels.

#### 1. Organising our own internal staff development process

- to improve our classroom practice, by collaboratively sharing our experience, ideas and insights in a systematic way,
- to build our theoretical understanding of our work, particularly in the area of what it means to be teachers in a women's learning centre, and the relationship between learning and 'empowerment',
- to develop our relationships and communication as a group.

#### 2. Published Outcome

- to be able to jointly produce, at the end of the year, a clear statement of our aims and pedagogy, which may be of use in official documentation, in discussions with other women's (or with other language) centres or in presenting our public profile (crucial at a time of funding cuts and future economic uncertainties).

#### 3. M. Ed Minor Thesis

- for Jill to present a report which will be an account of and reflection upon the entire action research project as her M. Ed. minor thesis, early in 1992.

## **2. Methodology**

As facilitator of the project, I am using the procedures suggested by Kemmis and McTaggart in *The Action Research Planner* (1988) and Yoland Wadsworth in *Everyday Evaluation on the Run* (1991). They suggest the following steps to put the action research process into train:

### Step 1: Reconnaissance (or, reflection upon our current actions-in-the-world).

The reconnaissance phase is when participants check their initial ideas about a possible thematic concern and brain-storm about areas of discrepancy between theory and practice, or areas of our practice which are problematic or controversial.

More specifically, the reconnaissance phase enables us to identify key aspects of our practice as a basis for future planned action. These include:

- an understanding of what we are doing now, in terms of how our work is informed and justified by particular educational theories,
- an articulation of our own (and others?) educational values as 'signposts' on the way to educational improvement, including our broader social values,
- an initial understanding about the way our educational work fits into the wider context of schooling and society,
- a general historical understanding of the current educational context and the processes of change,
- an understanding of our own educational autobiographies (or personal histories), ie, of the way in which our own ideas about education have been formed,
- isolation of a thematic concern, ie, of the problem or theme upon which the action research will be focussed.

The reconnaissance phase is in fact a period of intense discussion and negotiation as orientation of the group for the action to be planned. The discussion includes an analysis the three 'registers' or 'streams of institutionalisation' . These are the three interdependent processes that take place in any institutional setting: language becomes institutionalised as discourse, activities as practices, and social relationships as organisation. (Kemmis and McTaggart, 1988, p.42)

The product or outcome of the reconnaissance phase should consist of:

- a decision about the theme of the action research, and,
- a statement synthesizing some of the aspects, issues and concerns that have been discussed and reflected upon.
- a sense of the change that is to be sought.

( pp. 54 - 65)

## 2. Planning or Design Phase

The planning phase answers the question, "*what is to be done* to improve education in our setting, in the light of the initial reflections?" It is a question of deciding on a strategy for change or improvement, considering the objective and subjective limits. The planning phase will go from general, overarching goals to strategic objectives that answer in detail the question, *what is to be done, about what, by whom, where, when and how?* It includes planning for change across the three registers (language and discourse, activities and practice, social relationships and organisation), in the light of the thematic concern decided upon. This includes actions to be carried out by the members of the AR group.

Most importantly, it includes planning for the monitoring of the process and effects of the action - on ourselves, the students, other teachers, etc. How can we best *record* what we do and what happens and how will we use our data to collaboratively analyse and reflect upon the results?

The product is a design or action plan, which should include:

- a description of the thematic concern showing why it is a significant educational concern and some of the questions of theoretical and practical interest raised by it.
- membership of the AR group,
- a rationale for the changes or actions proposed,
- a detailed plan or schedule of work,
- a plan for monitoring and recording the changes,
- a view about how the data will count as evidence

## 3. Acting and Observing (Fieldwork)

This is obviously the implementation of the action research plan, in which the changes planned across the three registers are enacted and the results are observed. Data from a variety of sources is collected by all members of the group as a basis for the reflection which forms the next phase. Monitoring and record-keeping become an essential part of the activity and the exact form this will take should be built into the action plan. The product of this phase is an account by each of the participants of what actually happened when changes were attempted.(pp.65 - 86)

## 4. Reflection



The reflection completes the first cycle in the action research spiral. It is the activity of analysis, synthesis, interpretation, explanation and the drawing of conclusions. The action research group reviews the thematic concern and assesses the achievements and limitations of the first phase of action (as well as its consequences). The product of the reflection phase is a revised analysis and rationale providing the basis for a revised action plan. The improved questions articulated and the new actions planned thus begin a second cycle of design, planning, action and reflection.

### **3. Initiation of the Project**

The action research group has been formed, consisting of the co-ordinator of the Migrant Women's Learning Centre and all the teaching staff (five teachers, including myself) except for sessional teachers who work for a few hours per week each.

Two reconnaissance meetings have so far been held.

The thematic concern identified is that of "personal development" - what it means, how it fits in with our teaching, the effects of it becoming institutionalised, whether it is an oppressive construct, whether it should be integrated or taught separately, what it means in terms of the women's centre, etc. The meetings have been recorded and written feedback has been given to the participants (summaries of the discussions) after each one. Teachers have each written a statement about their current understanding of 'personal development' and its role. Relevant theoretical papers about feminist pedagogy and examining the notion of "empowerment" have been circulated as a background to our exploration of the issues. As a result of these discussions, a draft 'reconnaissance statement' can now be circulated for endorsement by the group and as a basis for planning action.

The theme chosen is a difficult one and it is likely that two or three more meetings will have to be held before an action plan can be finalised. As facilitator, I am planning that this can be done by mid-July, so that three cycles of planning, action and reflection can be gone through by December.

### **4. Anticipated Research Design**

We have not yet entered the planning phase of the project. However, I envisage that actions undertaken across the three registers mentioned above may include:

- a shift in our discourse (because of expressed dissatisfaction with the term "personal development" and all that it implies.) Or at least, a thorough examination of the term and its redefinition.

- theorisation of, agreement upon and conscious implementation of practices (that are currently carried out unsystematically in different degrees by different teachers) that we believe enhance the 'personal development', 'empowerment', 'general education' (or what ever we decide to call it) of the students. Observation and reflection on our changed or developed practices would form the basis of the research.

- an examination of the institutionalisation of social relationships and organisation within the Centre, possibly leading to facilitating change in relationships (student-student, teacher-student, teacher-teacher) to promote empowerment.

A crucial and problematic element of the action research design will be how we plan to invite the participation of the students and ensure their active involvement, in deciding upon action, giving feedback and building theory. Given the sophistication of our conceptualisation and the low levels of English language and general literacy of most of our students, this will indeed be a challenge. At the beginning of the next semester, we will probably need to brief the students and explain the research process and its aims very thoroughly, asking for their support, as part of the orientation to the course. Regular class meetings which are being currently used for encouraging student feedback about the progress of the course, the teaching, group dynamics, etc, could be developed and included as part of the research design.

## **5. Recording Data**

Another challenge for the facilitator will be to gain sufficient commitment to the project by the other members of the group for them to keep systematic records to build up a body of authentic evidence as a basis for our reflection and theoretical development.

As facilitator, I have begun to gather the following data for use both for my reflection on the classroom processes in relation to personal development, but on the development of the entire action research process:

- a journal of observations and reflections focussing on critical incidents in the classroom, including texts, discussions, group processes that throw light on the 'personal development' issue
- a journal of observations and reflections about the process of facilitating the action research,
- a series of "Action Research Bulletins" that I am producing for the other members of the group, feeding back ideas, discussions, information about action research, relevant theoretical writing, meeting times, etc.
- tape recordings of classes, photographs of students and classroom activities,
- written reports by independent observers whom I will invite into the classroom in order to feedback their impressions. (Such observers are always given a role in the class activities and asked to make some sort of contribution or presentation so that they are part of the group, not just uninvolved by-standers.)
- videoing of classroom activities (possibly)
- records of interview's with departmental heads (representing the institutional viewpoint) about how they see personal development and its role within our curriculum.

*Triangulation* to ensure the reliability of data will occur by means of inclusion, in the final report, a selection of journal entries of all members of the group, tape recordings of meetings and reports of class room observers.

## **6. Researching the Research**

In writing a report on the MWLC action research project, I will be looking to see if the process in any way throws light on a number of research problems suggested by Grundy and Kemmis (1981, pp. 329 - 331)

These are summarised as follows:

1. Is the source theory or practice?
2. Who initiates action research?
3. What issues, areas or tasks are the subjects of action research?
4. What constitutes data for action research?

5. How is data analysed?
6. How is action research reported?
7. Does action research result in significant change?
8. Do teachers continue to be involved in action research?

## 7. Postscript

It is perhaps no accident that the theme chosen for an action research project based on an empowering research methodology and aiming to extend the social constructions and critical thinking of both students and teachers in a women's centre should be 'personal development'.

My own view of 'personal development' comes from the classical liberal notion of education as all round development of a person: her intellectual, cultural, moral, physical, social and emotional development, and her development of work or professional skills.

Personal development for women, in my view, must include developing a stronger sense of our own identity and rights, of overcoming our socially conditioned disempowerment, as women, and of developing a critique of patriarchal domination. Considering the possibility, in our work, of cultural imposition, of educated Western feminists imposing their priorities and their project on less educated women of cultural backgrounds or political situations in which the women's revolution may not be a priority, the inclusion of this kind of consciousness raising in our pedagogy is highly problematic. All of my experience at the Centre, however, leads me to the conclusion that women can and do reach across boundaries of nationality, language and culture to identify common elements in their struggles and to support each other on this basis and in a context of respect for difference. The role of the teacher is as facilitator of this process and conceptual resource person. It is a sensitive role and perhaps one that will never be absolutely free of 'cultural invasion'. (Lather, 1988 p.570) The paradox, of course, is that the teacher's role in an ESL setting is often defined in other contexts (such as in language acquisition theory) as having to negotiate between the mainstream and the migrant cultures and of interpreting and offering the mainstream culture to the students in a way that includes them and enables their acculturation into its positive aspects.

Understanding this dilemma and developing a sound and effective practice in relation to feminist pedagogy in a multicultural setting is an important aspect of my own personal development as a teacher.

In adopting an action research project which explicitly aims to explore issues of personal development of both teachers and students, as well as aiming to empower both groups as an implicit aspect of the research methodology, we have a situation of a double hermeneutic. (Wadsworth, 1991, p.72) The object of study is reflected within the context of the research process itself; the form reflected by the content. As the process unfolds, reflection upon personal development as part of the teaching/learning process will inform reflection upon personal development as part of the action research process, and vice versa.

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... EVER GET THE FEELING  
LIFE IS A PERPETUAL  
ACTION RESEARCH  
PROCESS?!!

Cartoon by  
Lina Threlkove



Front page graphics  
by Yolande Hadzornel

## APPENDIX B

### **Action Research Bulletins 1 - 12**

**These were circulated amongst project participants between May, 1991 and May, 1992.**

Dear Miriam, Elizabeth, Annie, Barbara and Dominica,

As we decided to form ourselves into an *Action Research Group*(!) at our staff meeting yesterday, and as this will involve me in quite a lot of writing up and circulating of information, I thought I might as well do this in bulletin form, to help us to keep track of the development of what we are trying to do.

First of all I feel very excited about the prospect of our collaborative enquiry into uncharted waters and thrilled that everybody wants to take part. I hope the results and the process will benefit us all and be a useful contribution to the centre - as well as supplying me with the data and experience of a process that I will later present as my M.Ed. minor thesis!

### Diary date

The first meeting (called a "reconnaissance meeting" in the jargon) will be on Tuesday May 25, 3.15 - 5 pm. After that we will have monthly meetings (or thereabout) at the MWLC in staff meeting times, to follow up with planning and then Un second semester) 2 or 3 cycles of *planning - action/observation - reflection - replanning* etc. We may meet at my place or somewhere else if required.

Cartoon by Simon Kneebone from  
"Everyday Evaluation on the Run"



### What is Action Research?

I have attached the first chapter of Deakin University's Action Research which I am intend to follow to start setting things up. It would be good if people had time to read it before the meeting to get some background and help keep me on track.

I will continue to circulate bits and pieces (especially interesting theoretical papers about feminism and learning etc) as we go on and hope everyone can keep on the look out for more contributions either about AR or some of the issues that we start to reflect on. I hope this doesn't add too greatly to existing overload. (Anyone relate to the cartoon below?).



### Presentation at my M.Ed. class

Last night I presented the research proposal at my MEd class and got a lot of encouragement and some useful feedback. Contributions included:

- need to be clear about the Air project as a project and the M.Ed t/Jesis(as a presentation of and reflection on what happened) as two different things.
- reliability of my own records of what is going on - what steps to take to ensure (or increase) reliability?
- how to translate questions about the problematic leg, what is the relationship between language learning and acquisition and "empowerment"?) into an action plan?
- how to ensure collaborative nature of the process (ie, not dominated by the facilitator (me) ? etc. etc. (Answer, role of the facilitator becomes one aspect to be monitored, reflected upon ... need to record changes in my own behaviour, etc)



## Reconnaissance Meeting - 28/5/91

Aim: to look at our situation to work out a basis for deciding on a thematic concern as a basis for planning and action ... to find a theme!

It is suggested that we start by looking at our previously-held store of over-arching or guiding values and valued practices, principles, images, ideas, or ones to which some value has been attached (these are often not articulated). ...

My thoughts on this are that a good starting point would be something about a basic question such as *why we think it is good for women to learn English in a women's learning centre*, or, *how can we improve our practice as teachers in a women's learning centre?* This could lead onto many other questions such as

- *what are our aims in our teaching practice and in the running of the centre?*  
*(English language learning? learning of general knowledge about Australian society? development of student's thinking about their own experience and society? "empowerment"? "building self-confidence? self esteem? what do these mean? etc.)*
- *how do the above relate to each other?*
- *what do we do to make things happen? etc etc.*

If we choose this as a theme, this would lead us to use as resources recent thinking about feminist and critical pedagogy, language acquisition, group processes, etc.

### Aristotelian Table of Invention

(Sounds impressive, doesn't it?) *The Action Research Planner* (Kemmis and McTaggart) suggest this as a way in to clarifying a theme. You simply ask questions like "in the matter of the theme, (say, the situation of women learning in a women's culture and environment), what can be said about ..... in relation: to ..... by going across the grid.

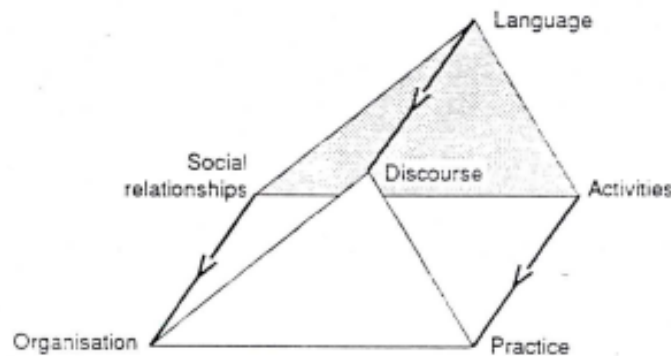
	(a) teachers	(b) students	(c) subject matter	(d) milieu
(1) teachers				
(2) students				
(3) subject matter				
(4) milieu				

## Aristotelian table of invention (Contd.)

You just bring up whatever seems interesting or relevant of problematic, and gradually themes and ideas begin to be identified.

Take preliminary notes, identifying the most important preoccupations or puzzlements. As you work through several more times, progressively refining your comments. the major concern and a list of points will emerge.

If we have any energy left, the next step is to ask the same sort of questions across the three registers of *language and discourse*, *activities and practices*, and *social relationships and forms of organisation* as a way of thinking about the interactions that take place within each cell.



For example, *"In the matter of women learning together, what can be said about the interactions between teachers and students in terms of language and discourse? of relationships and organisation? activities and practice?"*

And finally, at the risk of blowing our individual and collective minds before we even start, I've attached a list of very deep theoretical questions that the book suggests we ponder upon. as we start to think about the theoretical significance as well as practical significance of our theme or issue.

(From Action Planner Page 98.)

The idea of this Bulletin is to give some background and to get us thinking before Tuesday week. See you then.

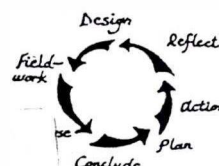
*Jill*

## ACTION RESEARCH AT THE MWLC

BULLETIN No. 2

May 21, 1991

For Miriam, Elizabeth, Annie, Barbara and Dominica



### First Action Research Meeting a Success!

We all agreed that our first proper meeting was wonderfully stimulating with a great outpouring of ideas and debate (collaborative, of course!) Not only that, but we also produced the prescribed product of a 'reconnaissance meeting' - a decision as to what theme we will focus on in the action research ... the elusive concept of **personal development**.

Based on my scrappy notes, I will try to record some of the main ideas that came out.

### A Different Paradigm

I tried to clarify again that AR is a completely different approach to research than the conventional approach. Since the main aim is our own self-education and the production of data/theory that will be of use to us at the Centre, (and others who may be interested, not necessarily the authorities) we are not making any attempts at scientific proof but will produce something that says something like, "based on our shared perceptions and values, and as a result of a process of methodically recording and reflecting on our practice, this is what we have learned." Another way of looking at it, is that the process is as important as the outcome. which is quite unknown at this stage.

### Possible Ideas for Themes Put Forward

- The gap between theory and practice in the assumption that women work more collaboratively than a mixed or men's group.
- Assessing the effectiveness of our role - eg, teacher domination.
- Evaluation of RTL.
- effect of language acquisition of being in a women's centre
- All the problematic surrounding 'personal development'

### Ideas around Personal Development

Most discussion centred personal development. A few of the questions were:

- what do we mean by it?
- how does it take place?
- how does it fit in with everything else we do?

- is it a middle class cultural concept that we inappropriately impose on students who don't need it?

- what do we make of the explosion of curriculum activity around the notion of PD - the flavour of the month officially sanctioned by DEET.

### Quotable Quotes about Personal Development (from discussion)

- "it helps people become aware of options, so that they are free to choose"
- "proceeding on the basis of our own values"
- "we are only a minor part of the student's life"
- "it can be a little seed"
- "people are already formed when they come here - how much really makes a difference?"
- "it's never too late to change"
- "you can't confine PD to 2 hour classes"
- "some things in PD classes have been very valuable"
- "can be integrated into other aspects of their learning"
- "people bringing in personal crap can disrupt group"
- "it can make them aware that their problems are universal, that there are social solutions, in a sense."
- "they all develop in some way"

### Where to Now?

After more or less deciding that this would be the way to go, we all felt a bit over-awed at the difficulty of the task: ("... a nauseating pastel area that upsets me...") However, thanks to Liz's suggestion, we have our first task...to write out a page or two on our feelings and thoughts **now** about personal development. I will distribute these before the next meeting.

### Next meeting

At the next meeting we will try to hone down our ideas more clearly and talk about what we will actually do as action to be later reflected upon. I will tape it if that is OK by everyone.

**Tuesday May 28. 3.30 - 4.30**

Cheers, *Jill*

*P.S. I have just read the attached article on "The Women's Movement: Putting Educational Theory into Practice"*

*It shows very interesting light on what we call "personal development" & shows the educational power of a pedagogy informed by the theories & practices of feminism. I suggest we both read it.*

...EVER GET THE FEELING  
LIFE IS A PERPETUAL  
ACTION RESEARCH  
PROCESS?!!



ACTION RESEARCH AT THE MWLC

BULLETIN No. 3

June 16, 1991

Dear All.

It's time for the next step of this process which is for me to try to put together the essence of our last discussion (June 4) in the form of a draft statement on our current thinking about "personal development" as a basis for thinking about what we might do about it. So here goes:

**MWLC perspectives on 'personal development'**

Our discussion was around the questions, "what is it?", "how is it practiced?", "what are some of the issues?", "what are the problems?" and "what are our fundamental values as teachers that we express in talking about personal development?"

There seem to be two models. an embedded model and a focussed model. The embedded model is about the way our pedagogy, our teaching relationship. our whole approach is informed with a philosophy or ideology around a set of values that can be described as "wholistic", "collaborative", caring for all-round development of students, etc. The *focussed* model is the inclusion of 9 hours "personal development" in the SACS curriculum, or two hours per week specifically designated for the First Step program.

In each, there is a political component: helping people to arrive at a clearer self-concept. of knowing who they are and taking control of themselves, of affirmation and self-esteem. so they are less likely to be controlled by DEET. their husbands or whatever. In each there is a therapeutic aspect and also a political aspect of conscientisation.

However, it can be an offensive term because it implies that people come to us undeveloped and we are in a position to develop them, so we are somehow superior to them.

A problem with the focused model is the situation of having to go in and take 'Personal Development' with a group for two hours per week when there is little rapport developed with that group. It seems forced and even invasive when there is insufficient trust built up and it is impossible to take activities as far as with groups that you know well.

On the other hand. a trained professional. such as Lee Kewish. who has highly specialised skills in group development etc can do a lot on those

two hours and the women seem to benefit from and enjoy those activities. There is also perhaps an issue of confidentiality. there is a different kind of trust with someone you don't see every day. Personal development classes can be like a 'special time', a bit like going to church, a time when you can think about yourself and your need. But, we can choose to go to a therapist or personal growth group. The students have no choice in the matter!

This brings up an issue about professional development. We need specific training in phases of group development, role play techniques etc. It is a highly specialised field. **Recommendation:** to put group processes on the agenda for our next staff development.

Perhaps we should also question the social values and assumptions behind the therapeutic focussed model of personal development. Its ultimate aim is to make people feel good, feel relaxed, etc. People have to be consciously taught about stress and assertiveness. society is extremely stressful and therefore we have to be taught how to cope with it, and that women need to be taught assertiveness to be able to get what's due to them. It's also a very individualistic model.

Personal development is also very much tied up with language, which is what we are here for. For example, the Polish student who was labelled as 'unassertive in English' but in fact was very assertive in her own language. Plain language teaching is very empowering in responding to a major source of disempowerment for migrant women. But we go that extra step from teaching them the words, "I want to return this" to explaining rights and giving information about rights, and supporting them as migrants in this. Then there is the extra step of role plays when they can actually learn what it feels like to be more assertive and go through the motions of returning the article.

But straight learning of skills such as maths (eg, doing percentages) is also very empowering. We are educated, therefore that is enough for us. So why isn't it enough for the students to come and learn skills and knowledge and empower them with education? (Answer, if we get rid of the embeddedness model, and go towards just teaching skills and knowledge, we are just becoming technicians, we are moving away from recognising the importance of relations and developing these as part of developing a culture. So therefore the importance of actually defining what extra we do apart from the plain language and knowledge teaching.) We look for teachers who have an understanding of wholistic education and are good communicators and have a feminist consciousness ... as we are at a women's centre and all these things are related. They are the kernel of what we do. The opposite case is Barbara's story about the woman who said a course she did in the past was terrible, because no-one

spoke to each other. there was no relating, they just learnt English and went home.

Maybe the pedagogical aim is to move towards integrating both of those things, the language/knowledge within a culture which acknowledges and facilitates people's personal development. Each of these aspects impinges on the other. people learn better as well as becoming personally developed.

Sometimes we are disappointed with the behaviour of women in the group, when you feel they are here for themselves. and you are on about something else. How do we know that a Chinese woman and an Arabic woman will have anything in common, or get on? However, any group is a microcosm of the world outside ... it's a pluralist society. Perhaps the kind of challenge is to see how that group moves. towards more collaboration, better communication with each other, more sharing and consensus. Cultural differences are a big component. In class they are learning about and practicing new ways of relating. in response with social expectations. eg body language, ways of coping with problem. sexual harassment, are different in different cultures.

What about deleting the term altogether and stopping teaching specifically personal development classes? Domenica read out the syllabus for the SACS personal development component and said that all those things would be included in the 'hidden agenda' of her teaching. But what personal development means also changes according to the aims of each course and the nature of its student group. In SACS, a number of communication and group techniques are taught as skills that they may need in their later careers in the welfare services. The other approach is that whereas these skills and activities may not be new to the students. it may be the first time that they have done them in English - so that the language learning component combines with development component. In First Step. on the other hand. there may be certain social skills that are needed in order to go out and get a job, that the women may not have and need to be taught.

There are three important questions: what happens in particular cases: that we call 'personal development?', what is the relationship between the embedded model. and the focussed model? and what does the embedded model mean as our general philosophy? ie, in the way it informs the whole way we teach at the women's centre?

It is part of our educational responsibility of any teacher: part of a person's intellectual, cultural, emotional, social and moral development that is the outcome of a process of education as it is defined in the classical liberal sense and best facilitated in a relationship of empathy, genuineness, non-possessive warmth. etc. Perhaps the advent of the

systematic learning approach. with its emphasis on behavioural objectives, and the discourse of skills and competencies (rather than education) has had the effect of separating out "personal development" from the teaching relationship (in so far as it is about caring about the wholistic development of students) and then of defining it in terms of a series of skills to be learned via pre-defined activities. So while on the one hand. we have lost touch (theoretically at least) with the nurturing aspect of a teacher's work, working in a women's centre where it is part of a feminist commitment, part of the way women are used to relating to each other. it comes more naturally.

f So, it's part of humanistic education. part of the teaching relationship and part of the feminist project, the questioning of patriarchy and finding more power after power has been taken away from you. It is also part of our own personal development. not just as teachers. but as women, we are all learning, sharing, exchanging, being challenged in the course of the whole range of processes and relationships in which 'personal development' takes place.

These are our values, but they are also the values of many men and the values which operate in many mixed classes. But maybe these values are more concentrated amongst women and in women teachers than in the mainstream generally. We also have the freedom to develop them here, because we are relatively isolated from the rest of the college

So what are our values as teachers? What are the fundamental bedrock values and what are the assumptions that each of us operates from?

1. a commitment to "educare, to lead out" as an educational model, Not the banking model, but the development of human qualities
2. a belief that emotional and psychological state is linked into intellectual development. therefore this must be considered.
3. caring about the students as people. a being concerned about their overall well-being,
4. "woman to woman" the need for women to support each other in coming to terms with patriarchy and needing to become more empowered as women. The need for a critique of patriarchy,
5. empowerment as "power with" not "power over" ie. to do with a sense of community.
6. belief in the value of education and knowledge as powerful instruments for individual and social change, Education is socially constructed and in this society education has enormous value. We can work with that and use knowledge for social change.
7. belief in the need for social change and that we are agents of social change.



***And there was more ...***

*Other ideas came up that were that we should isolate some of the processes that are embedded in our teaching in relation to personal development and see how we can justify them. Are we going to use the term personal development at all? If not, what do we say? If so, how do we redefine it? There are many issues in the above that need taking further.*

**Feedback. revisions and additions please!**

This is a draft, based on our taped discussion at the last meeting of what may become our "consensed" statement about what we currently think and believe about our practice in relationship to personal development. Probably, *lots* of things have been left out, but I tried to reorganise the discussion a bit to get some shape into it. I must say, I'm terribly impressed by the breadth of our discussion and think that there is a lot of

meat in what we came up with ... I still found the tape interesting. the third time through!. Anyway. could people prepare comments etc for our next meeting. We don't have to be completely consensual, of course. Differing views can be recorded as such, but I thought there was a high level of consensus at the meeting, and the above is possibly what we all agree with fundamentally.

**Next meeting**

Staff meeting, Tuesday, June 25, to work on the draft statement.

**Special meeting - combined with end of term social**

Come to my place after work for a shared meal and drink on Friday 28th - any time from 5 pm onwards. Marie Brennan (currently at Deakin University, has worked as action research facilitator in Ed. Dept. has agreed to come along for the fun and also to facilitate a bit of a session for us on where to from *here*. She's fresh from her Ph.D. at Wisconsin where she studied feminist and critical pedagogy, so it should be good value.

**MEd essay on MWLC Action Research Proposal available ...**

I will make some extra copies for circulation and comment. Also, I will put written contributions on PD by Barbara, Liz and I into a folder for people to see and circulate.

*Love,  
Jill*

## ACTION RESEARCH AT THE MWLC

### BULLETIN No.4      24 July, 1991

I thought I had better put hand to keyboard in order to organise my thinking and prepare for our next action research meeting.

Where do we go from here?

So far, we have the beginnings of a joint paper about personal development as part of ESL at the MWLC. I believe we will be able to add to and refine this as we go along to come up with something really good possibly by the end of the year.

Liz has organised a session with Lee Kewish for us this Friday 1 August 2 at Liz's place. This should push our thinking along and give us some ideas for classroom practice.

As I see it, there are a few possible things we could do now:

- decide on our language - at least for the purposes of this project will we use the dreaded term 'personal development', or what?

- Each share with the others how they see personal development taking place in the classroom (a mini-teach in?). This can include ideas for lessons, activities and approaches that we could all use. What do we each actually do that maximises a relaxed and growthful environment how do we deal with personal issues when they arise in the classroom, how do we help bring out the quiet and withdrawn ones. what actually happens, that ends in students saying how more confident they feel at the end of the course, etc. If we did this properly, we could bring out a really good document, if not a book!

- Not to jump ahead too much. this sharing could be the basis of a process of us each trying one or two things that we have learned from each other, evaluating these and sharing our evaluations.

- On a more controlled basis, we could define pedagogical aims for ourselves. ie, something we would like to improve in our teaching style and use journals to record the process of conscious attempt to adjust practice in some way. For example, I think I talk too much in the classroom and want to find ways of developing their discussion (especially on personal issues) without using my skills to summarise, conclude and "give the final word" as I know I do. Any ideas about this?

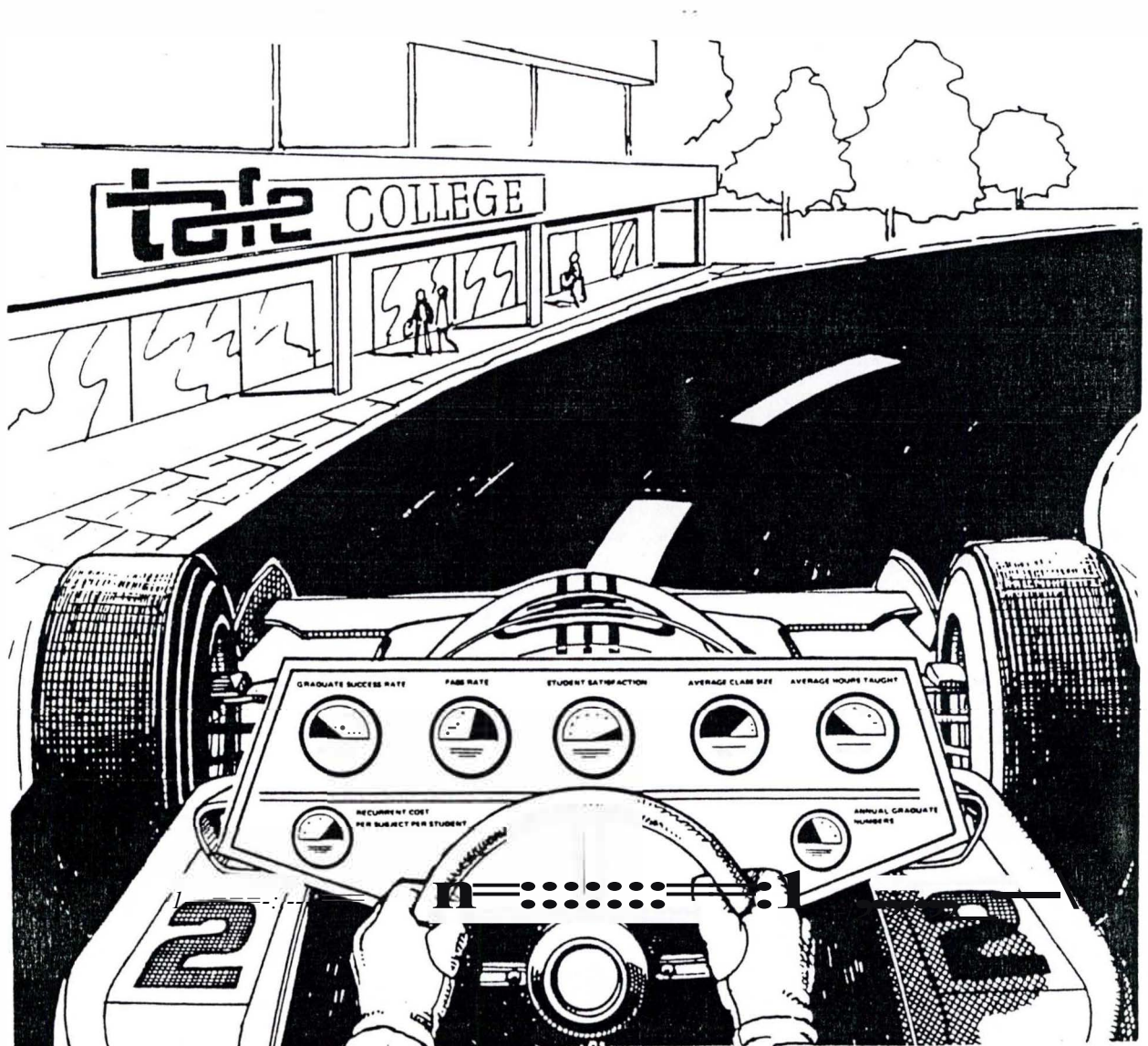
- Start keeping journals. Part of participatory action research is for people to record their practice. I've started and it's actually not too oppressive and extremely useful. In fact I'm getting far more out of keeping a journal than I thought I would - even if I sometimes go for a week or fortnight without making an entry, I'm finding it does help me reflect on my teaching and new ideas emerge from that. As an additional encouragement I'll put a copy (selections!) of journal entries to date on my desk if people want to have a look at it.

- I'll also have to see Terry as soon as possible to inform him and get his permission for the research. It would be good if we interviewed both Terry and Peter on personal development in ESL and further education as part of the research design. Any takers?

### Nei:1 meetings

Tuesday, July 30, 3.30 - 4.30 (if possible)

Friday, August 2, 6.30 pm, 24 Simpson Street, Northcote  
(Bring a plate!)



## PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

MWLC ACTION RESEARCH PROJECT  
**BULLETIN No. 5**                      **August 10, 1991**

Hi every one!

Lots of things have been going on and I've found it a bit hard to maintain the focus and sense of direction with our joint "personal development" research. However, I'm "hanging in there" and hope others are at least continuing to reflect on the issues, if not carrying out large amounts of "action" at this stage. My immediate reflection is that our discussions are the most enjoyable and interesting part of the project to date. I hope we can keep them up, preferably on a more regular basis. Time is a problem. Can we talk about this next time? My other thought is that as this process seems to be slower than I had imagined, we may have to continue into next year to make real steps forward.

Just to summarise events since last my last epistle:

- AR meeting of July 30 - notes to follow,
- evening with Lee Kewish - some useful comments from her.
- my meeting with Terry - memo attached.
- Elsa Auerbach's presentation on "An Empowering Approach to ESL and Literacy" - some new angles that help fill out the picture.
- Our own Mac has arrived, for 3 months. on loan from the Carringbush library.

**Last meeting (30/7)**

***Unfortunately I lost the notes of the meeting meeting that same day  
But I did try to write it down that night, so here it is:***

Liz started by saying that we hadn't yet started to analyse or define exactly what personal development is.

We agreed (I think) that the we use 'personal development' to describe several different aspects of our teaching.

These were:

1. The 'growth' of the students as they learn skills and language that they want and need - the confidence and self-esteem that comes from the acquisition of English language, skills and knowledge,
2. The growth of people that we observe as our courses progress, as they become more relaxed, open, as they develop friendships, express themselves deeply and more confidently.
3. Related to number 2, the development of the whole learning group, in terms of group dynamics - 'social development'?
3. The teaching of specific skills such as listening, giving feedback. being assertive, that do empower people and can be taught explicitly,
4. The process of "exploring themselves through the subject matter of the curriculum"

5. Conceptual growth that is part of developing general literacy - naming your experience, seeing the personal in the social, "connecting the word with the world", in Freire's terms.

6. Identifying as women - and as such, starting to repair the damage we have all suffered as the result of patriarchal society.

***Does everyone agree with these six elements of personal development, as it is conceived by us, in relation to our teaching at the MWLC?***

A discussion ensued about culture and the term acculturation. Miriam objected to the term because it implies a one way process - there is not one main culture, just many different cultures. Liz thought this could be an alienating model, that for all the cultures to be found in Melbourne, there is still something that is specifically 'Melbourne'. Part of our job is to break down the alienation and marginalisation by introducing the mainstream culture to them. showing them how to understand, use and enjoy it and make it their own. (eg, parks, free concerts, lovely bush places. Parliament House). I said that I thought that just as many of them come from traditional or village cultures, there is a generic Western (mainstream) culture which they need to become part of if they are to participate fully. In this sense there is an acculturation, though this process is mediated (in our classes) by a cross-cultural sharing and acknowledgement of the positive features of the different cultures (as well as a genuine learning on the part of the teacher). There are different sexual, social, moral mores - do we merely inform our students or initiate them by participating in discussions arising from the differences they observe, their troubles in trying to live in a new culture, by sharing our own cultural understandings, challenging their cultural preconceptions. At this point Dominica gave the example of Basil Varghese of the BSL challenging the SACS women's preconceptions about poverty and how profoundly affected they usually are about this. What is culture?

acculturation is intimately related to language - by learning language. the students are learning about (and no doubt absorbing) cultural ideas and attitudes. But our cosmopolitan culture is multi-faceted - the mainstream reflecting values which implicitly reinforce our profoundly unjust and exploitative world - individualism, consumerism, racism, sexism, etc. So which aspects of our culture do we implicitly reflect back to the students in choice of texts, facilitating discussion. etc?

Dominica then talked about the session she had just had with the SACS group in which she went in and asked "what are the human services?" which started off a two-hour amazingly deep discussion about "what it means to be human", ending with a five minute meditation. The process of using the more advanced and highly educated students to feed back and reinterpret and explain to the the lower ones. Not planned at all, but

all the students were fully engaged in exploring deep personal and social issues, sharing insights and building language.

### **What next?**

After that we talked about what we should do next. We decided:

1. We are nearly ready for another draft, this time attempting a definition - our definition of personal development. To do this. I would like to put together the previous notes (Bulletin No. 3). the summary on p.1 of this bulletin, and the "empowerment" notion of Elsa Auerbach, et al, which I think is fundamentally similar. I think what Lee Kewish said is a useful starting point: that what "personal development" is, is how you construct it. We need to decide how we want to use the term. not look for an 'objective' definition. Secondly, she said that it is a 'theme' running through all education - not a separate aspect.

2. I think we decided that we could start taking turns to present anecdotes of what worked or what didn't work or present some student writing for us to analyse what is going on in terms of PD. We will write down really good lessons when we think development is happening, or incidents that show a surge in growth, a small 'human victory' which goes above and beyond the subject of the curriculum.... or bring a piece of writing that shows it and analyse that together, to find out if we can what did happen, to track that elusive process of a student seeming to become a more 'alive' or 'powerful' person.

Dominica said that she would talk at the next meeting about her experience with SACS. I'd like to present at some stage what Elsa Auerbach had to say, for discussion. A summary below:

#### **Elsa Auerbach**

Elsa started by deliniating two distinct notions of "empowerment." in ESL and adult literacy: individual and social. The idea of individual empowerment, she saw as belonging to the Malcolm Knowles idea of "self-directed learning" and individual empowerment through learning, which she said was a "false claim". The idea that "we can teach you the tools and language to get access" is misleading, and can lead to self-blame and disempowerment. Looked at from the social viewpoint, migrant communities have always been the most marginalised and exploited. The vast majority will not gain access. despite learning the language and the skills of how to get a job. etc.

The goal of education is not to incorporate people into the structure that is responsible for their marginalisation. The 'genre' movement is an example of this. "If you focus on deconstructing and reconstructing texts, you are suggesting that if you own the language of power, you will become powerful."

Instead, issues of social reality need to be invited in, as the context of language learning. Concrete, local, personal experience is linked to broader historical and social context. Freire identified a core set of generative themes. These were emotionally powerful themes that were about a real and familiar issue, they were problematic (no single solutions) and used as the basis for reflection, dialogue, critical thinking and action. The themes were codified into a picture of dialogue which reflected back the social reality of the students. Problem-posing, around the real social issues forms the basis of curriculum. This process is participatory, and involves teachers listening, picking up on what the real issues are.

Applied to an FSL context, the dialogue goes through a process of describing the problem, defining it (elaborating a theme), relating it to the students, generalising and digging deeper into a socio-historical context, then finally action: the students talking about ways of addressing the problem and what they need to know to take action. Language and literacy activities come out of this process.

There was more - I have the tape of the session and also a set of notes if you would like to borrow them. Her presentation raises some interesting issues for us. For example,

- are we using an individualist (and by her analysis ultimately disempowering) model?
- to what extent do we already develop our curricula along the lines she suggests?
- is the distinction between social and individual empowerment as clear as it seems to her?
- is it possible to do both? etc etc etc

I look forward to more discussions.

Cheers,

## ACTION RESEARCH AT THE MWLC BULLETIN No. 6      September 9, 1991

Dear All,

It is now a month since I have written a bulletin: however the research is continuing on a number of fronts although at times exactly what is being researched seems rather vague and elusive. The fronts are:

- my working more intensively than I usually do with students to include them and get their feedback as much as possible in thinking about exactly what aspects of study at the MWLC contribute to their feeling more confident or becoming empowered.
- my action research journal, which is still going strong,
- a few written contributions of vignettes by teachers reflecting on apparently 'empowering' episodes or interactions.
- my continuing to study the literature of feminist and critical pedagogy - another essay coming up soon on this,
- SACS teachers also wanting to meet and discuss the issues in relation to the SACS class,
- Process we have now embarked on of teachers taking in turn to present to the rest of us the theoretical insights that are important to them in their teaching, some of their techniques, etc. I have typed up Dominica's talk from last time and will distribute that soon. Miriam is next - she is due to make a short presentation after the staff meeting today (10/9)

### **Suggested headings for talking about our teaching**

- What sort of educational theories guide you in your teaching?
- What are your main teaching aims?
- What is your 'hidden political agenda' in working with the women here?
- Do you see yourself as a feminist teacher? If so, what does this mean?
- What have been some of your successes? (failures?) from which you have learned something
- What are the most difficult things you find about teaching?
- What are the joys?

***See you at the staff meeting {starts 1.15 pm} Tuesday 10/10***



**ACTION RESEARCH AT THE MWLC**  
**BULLETIN No. 7      October 18, 1991**

Dear All,

I suppose some people are asking, "when and where is the action?" In reply I would have to say that the 'action' has slowed somewhat over the last month while I have been writing my essay about critical and feminist pedagogy and the MWLC - which as far as my process is concerned has been an important part of the action in that it has been an exploration of a theoretical context relevant to teaching in a Centre such as ours. Also, the process we have gone through so far has been an important part of my being able to develop the ideas to write the essay. I look forward to people reading it and (with some trepidation) giving me some feedback.

What seems to be evolving for me is processes on two main fronts. First, I have kept up a detailed daily journal of classroom incidents, what I have been teaching, and what I have thought about that, interesting snippets from staff room conversations (yes, you're all in it!). I was surprised to discover that I actually had the self-discipline to keep it up, but once I got into the habit, I've found it a fascinating thing to do, greatly increasing the quality and depth of how I think about my own teaching and try to improve it.

Secondly, I think we have set in train an on-going internal staff development process. which in itself is a valid outcome. I hope we can continue with this at the next action research meeting, which will be on Tuesday, October 29, straight after we have finished with admin stuff.

As promised, here is the summaries of Dominica's talk about how they view their teaching and their basic underlying thinking about it. Diriam's will be ready in a few days.)

**DOMINICA NELSON's TAL[, 28 August, 1991**

The Human Services Skills course covers all aspects of personal development, self-exploration, empowerment and the development of confidence - it incorporates these aspects in curriculum but given my own personal flavour. developed after many years of teaching in adult education. There is a bias according to what ever group is present - different groups, different backgrounds, experiences etc. So much happens spontaneously.

This semester, I have given the course more philosophical and psychological frameworks for the first time. The women themselves have an enormous amount to offer, in terms of their study in their countries of origin. For example, Gisela is preparing to give a seminar next week, talking about Victor Frankl; that was something that came up in our first session of Human Services employment skills.

My approach for the course is not to carve up, so much as integrate all the aspects - communication skills and human service skills overlap. Self-esteem arises from getting more power with the written word and is not treated in isolation.

· How do you deal with self-esteem as an explicit concept?

In the first session, for example, I wrote on the board, "who am I"? They started to talk within small groups about who they are at this level. So many of them said, "I've never been asked who am I before". My framework for this goes a long way back to people like Dietrich Bonhoeffer - I think of his poem, "Who am I when I step from my prison?" so when I do that I often think about Bonhoeffer arriving at self-knowledge in the face of all kinds of adversity and keeping his integrity intact. This influences a lot of things I do.

I use simple things on the board, like, a timeline, then we workshop: someone volunteers to do their timeline, in chronological order. It then has another level, "what did I learn at these various stages?" It's extremely simple, we talk and laugh, and I do mine. This went over two sessions. I move them out of their language groups and allow them to get to know each other. Written work comes out of this: they present any part they feel comfortable with in writing. So these a regular written exercises are not compulsory, but they always do them, and I have a thick file. There is no formal assessment for this. So somewhere along the line, the notion of self-esteem comes in, but I don't explicitly bring it in. When we sum up, the notion comes up - eg, "I'm feeling good because I've shared that, or I've told someone about this, and it connects up with self-esteem". But I believe that self-esteem is also enhanced by learning how to use computers.

(Barbara: "I've done a similar exercise that came about by default in an ETS group. What that brought out was the fact that the women had very little idea of themselves as being able to direct their future, and they saw themselves as being old, (though most of them were younger than me) and they had no notion that they actually had thirty or forty more years of their lives to plan for . and they actually could plan it. It was as if it was lightening bolt for a lot of them.")

In contrast with many of the women at the MWLC. women in the SACS course tend to have already strong ideas of the types of pathways that they could follow.

Active listening goes all the way through the course, learning to listen to one another, then going through process of reporting what they say. A lot of exercises in pairs, where people listen to each other, following from listening games done in the first week. Irene Krauskopf is coming in about a week to do a session on active listening as a professional part of human services work.

We stopped at the end of our first session with a meditation, because so much had come out. Everyone felt the need to be very quiet and I gave them just a few little exercises of meditation. We talked about "the still centre of your being", and that was when Gisela started to talk about Victor Frankl. ("How did it actually come out?") Some of them said they felt exhausted, crowded with ideas, absolutely just so much going on, they needed to quietly reflect. It also goes back to Freire, the idea of action and reflection. - this would be another influence on me. We needed to reflect in a meditative way, then also by doing some writing. They handed in a page.

(Liz: "I recently went to a psychosynthesis course, we had to do an exercise, then they would lead you in a thought process, and then immediately for about 20 minutes, you would draw or write in a journal. I found I was really going into a trance type of state - what came out was completely different. It seems amazing to me now. If you immediately apply yourself in this way, you actually process something quite differently.")

Yes something quite extraordinary happened to me in that group, that had never happened before. It's not airy faery, but I did give them some frameworks, so they could see the kind of ideas and thoughts that have influenced the way certain things happen in our society - the way counselling takes place, the way social workers operate, welfare workers are trained. Obviously Maslow, for example: if you introducing Maslow, you are very aware that for Nora this would be the first time that she had ever heard of him - you take it slowly, knowing tht others had already been trained thoroughly in these concepts - you know because of the trust and co-operative feeling, no-one is going to be bored, I've always emphasised, some of you know, some of you don't - if you, please add your bit. And those that have had no post school education at all are grasping all this incredibly easily. I use handouts and exercises to follow up.

The other thing I'm very aware of is that you can't talk too much as teachers - you have to let them talk, and share and get them rehearsing and practicing their ideas. That's something I've learnt from ESL.

We established a few simple guidelines for ourselves. and one of them was, we must look in, to look out. That is an essential part of being fully human. A simple idea, there is nothing high-falutin about any thing that I do.

Jung has also been useful too - it came out of the group, about the different types of people that we are - a natural opportunity to link what comes up to a theoretical frameworks. I just said, there was this psychologist that had some ideas about what you are talking about. The idea of libido, for example. They were talking about what qualities are involved in being human - we have an urge, a desire to do things, and it's the time to say "well, there has been something written about that. You might have heard of Jung". But not artificially put on them. Ideas of thinking, feeling, values, intuition. But with the next group, this may not happen.

("How do you do values clarification?")

This comes under who are we? what do we believe in? we are what we believe in... our beliefs can change, given time and experience... for example, their beliefs about what Australia was like have changed.

We look at areas of values, attitudes and beliefs. I've got some good practical exercises, for group work, confronting them with things like euthanasia. abortion. That's been very interesting, especially with some people who are very strict Catholics. They had to come up with consensus. The Catholic student said, "I just have to dissent from the group, nothing would ever change my belief about that". But she felt very comfortable saying it. Then I take them through a values clarification exercise as well.

This student said in the end, "I would never seek work in such an area" and this was a great outcome for the class, which we talked about. If there is a conflict that is so deep, we simply wouldn't go into those areas of work. Interestingly, she told us that they had to leave Pakistan in a hurry, because her husband had converted someone to Christianity and that was punishable by death!

Then we move into the question of conflict, the different kinds of conflicts, conflict resolution - I move from very practical exercises to some theoretical information.

I always bear in mind certain things, such as that I'm always teaching language, I'm responsible for language development, hence dictionary work, journals, writing a summary together on board at the end of the lesson. Using certain philosophical frameworks - Freire, linguistic development of 60s and 70s, Basil Bernstein, socio-linguistics.

In 60's and 70's a great development in linguistic theory - attitudes were behaviouristic before this, with deficit models of language acquisition. Socio-linguists said, "No!... people can be equally powerful in their own areas of culture, but there are certain conventions, that everyone needs to learn." Building strengths: Freire, Illich, Douglas Barnes, Graves. Emphasis on process. Experts in human relations: Carl Rogers, empathy, genuineness, non-possessive warmth.

Feminism also obviously, although I don't need to say, 'I'm a feminist'. I don't talk a lot about the oppression of women, although my standpoint is feminist, but I don't believe that I have to labour it philosophically. I'm also intensely aware of the conflict that can arise in women's lives, from personal development and self- exploration and the high that they have at the end of the course, and what can happen in their own lives as a result of it. So I have to tread a very very careful path. Encouraging a certain peace and stability and then having the courage to grow and go on. For example, one woman who said, "my husband is very cross with you, because I went home and said I wanted my name on the cheque account" - not that we had even discussed that - and the other end of the extreme is what happened to Grana.

(Miriam: "It's interesting that you have not talked about them in any way in terms of their needs as migrant women. Maybe the message is that their needs are not different from any other group of women who might be doing this kind of training.")

This is right, I don't single them out particularly, but the fact that they are migrant women, influences very much the way I work with them, through method, rather than content.

***Next action research staff meeting will be on Tuesday, October 29 - topic (and presenter) to be decided.***

Cheers,

Jill

**ACTION RESEARCH AT THE MWLC**  
**BULLETIN No. 8      October 23, 1991**

**MIRIAM FAINE'S TALK - 10/9/91**

At the moment I'm into being a straight English teacher, rather than being an ESL teacher - educational theory is not my thing, and in fact I found it quite boring when I did my teacher training. My own bicultural background has been more important.

I've grown up in a context where to speak lots of language is normal. where people's experiences have been in some cases really awful, but that there hasn't been this dreadful feeling that each one is responsible for them: not that I don't get angry about that nor that I am unaware of the tragedy of each particular person, but I'm aware of it as part of a much greater tragedy. From another point of view, that person has survived, and their children have survived. I find a lot of the stuff about immigrant professionals really annoying, because I believe it is not as difficult to be an immigrant professional as to be Nora Foster, for example. And from the other side of my family, I'm aware of the fact that the people who never speak English still can have a rich and wonderful life.... I'm worried about the degree to which we tend to say that anyone who doesn't look or talk or act like us must have a miserable and horrible life, and I guess that is what informs me.

My great-grandmother and my step great grandmother never learnt English. Members of the family have written about their lives and it's a fascinating social document about being a very isolated immigrant family in a relatively isolated country part of New Zealand. I'm aware that the immigrant factor is part of it, that being a woman is part of it, that the lack of education didn't in some ways stop people from having a meaningful life, and that the social factors were a problem as well.

I was talking to Sahar after we came back from Coburg last week, and we visited the Lebanese class - I sat as a fly on the wall - that was a good experience. I find that what informs me most is not books about pedagogy which I hardly ever read but that kind of experience - visiting students; houses, ..What I saw was not a group of oppressed women, but a group of fairly strident, fairly opinionated, chain-smoking women, within that group, and whatever their relationships were with their husbands, what they were talking about (Sahar told me later) was men, sex, children, parties... they could have been any group of women anywhere. There was a lot of energy there. Another thing that struck me was that there was a woman of about 32 with about 4 or 5 children, with an 18 month old who started to moan - she picked it up, turned it upside down, stuck the bottle between its mouth, comforted the child, and started to feed it while smoking and talking with the other hand. It was such a wealth of experience and it reminded me of my great-grandmother because my mother said she used to pick up babies like that with complete confidence - she couldn't speak English either. so there is a level on which I feel relatively humble, and I don't feel that every one has to be like me to be happy, nor that I necessarily know what to do with other people.

The other anecdote was that when I first started to teach ESL, one of the first things that happened to me was I was working in London in an Evening class, teaching very young Turkish sweat shop workers, and a young student was jumping down the stairs and hit his crown on the top and started to bleed. I bunged him in my car to drive him home. When we got there it was temporary accomodation (there was a whole scandal about this in London, people who were officially homeless had to be put up by the council and people would buy up old houses and turn them into hostels and people would stay here for four or five years in some cases, mostly immigrant families). Anyway, this was the first time I had seen one of these, a huge old gothic house, decrepit and grubby ... climbed up these filthy stairs. he knocked on the door . about nine people were staying in one room. The door opened and a three year old wearing only a nappy and a bottle in its mouth ... spread out on the table were all these passports and there was this huge Turkish man who spoke very good English ... what he was doing with the passports I don't know, but I suddenly thought, "shit! why am I teaching these kids the present perfect?" (we were into communicative ESL, with all sorts of tricks to teach the present perfect in a communicative way). But this was not what this kid's life was about... It was a sort of revelation ...

If I was going to criticise what we do, it is that we don't know nearly enough about what goes on in student's lives. We focus all our energies on us. what are we doing? are we doing the right thing? And I don't think they give a stuff really ... I think their agendas are quite different, they certainly don't necessarily come here to turn into us. I'm not sure that their lives are worse than mine, or more satisfying. I try not to make judgements. But there is a whole wealth of experience which we actually need to learn from, so maybe what we should be doing is going into people's houses a lot more. I've done a lot of door knocking in my time and I find it incredibly valuable. that's my speech.

Liz: That seems to be a motif of yours, the middle class way of teaching ESL and the agenda coming from them ... I don't have a strong sense of that.

Miriam: I think there is a strong assimilationist trend, the degree to which we think in terms of needing to, in fact are funded, to turn people into Australians . I think that informs a lot of our decisions and the way we structure things and present ourselves.

Jill: It's a very subtle and complex area, because on the one hand, we are fostering and celebrating multicultural, encouraging the women to express and share their insights, their lives, and be open and have that kind of tolerance and learning from each other, but at the same time, there is a main culture, and it is our job to introduce people into that culture in a way that enables them to be included if they want to... not forcing it onto them, but introducing it to them, in all sorts of ways, through texts and the curriculum, as well as who you are and the kind of discussion and dialogue that you have. I see the tension between those things, but I see it is our job to dance between both of those aspects.

Barbara: I agree with what you are saying, but you get students who come in and say they want to learn the present perfect, and like Jill says, there is a main culture,

and if you go out and say "I is been" instead of "I have been" you are going to be condemned.

Miriam: The opportunities to get on are much less if you don't speak standard English ... I don't quarrel with that ... in a way that is what we are here to do, and we have to be very careful before we take on different roles beyond that.

Barbara: But what would you have taught to that young Turkish man?

Miriam: I realised that what he really needed was housing, and it was about access to rights, and in the end it's up the students to determine that kind of agenda, and I don't necessarily mean just a negotiated curriculum, but that we do need to know more about their lives and what they need and the way they are going. The thing about biculturalism is that I'm more sensitive here than most people to the fact that we do - quite unconsciously - assert the values of the dominant culture. For example we had Christmas at the MWLC- parties, presents, decorate the place etc; we don't give Chinese New Year presents.

Liz: But what would you expect if you went to Thailand? Isn't that where cultures come from? Having common customs...

Miriam: But Turkey and Thailand are not multicultural countries like Australia and do not have a multicultural policy...

Liz: But it has to come from the culture itself and people are always free to celebrate .. it's a question of proportion and of history.

Jill: Look at it in terms of what happens in the classroom and what happens at the Centre as two different levels. Probably the fact that this is a Centre is probably more important in terms of personal development than the fact that there are only women in the classes. Maybe there is more scope for bringing those things out and allowing more expression of the different religious festivals and so forth. Is that what you were suggesting?

Miriam: Partly ... one of the things we have to do is locate ourselves ... we are all multicultural in the sense that you don't have to come from a 'funny' background to have a background. Each of us have mothers and grandmothers and great-grandmothers. I'm not the only person here that can go back two or three generations to get illiteracy. I've just been reading Janet Pine's amazing book about the Irish women pioneers of West Footscray. There's a story about a young woman, one of three women who built up pubs, and there are echoes of our students' experiences - in the end she was destitute because the young man who she thought was reliable etc. had taken everything, and she became a mad woman in the 1890s and died in Geelong jail - an amazing story, and one we could talk to the students about. So we have to go back into each of us, and rather than distancing ourselves from it, and rather than distancing ourselves from them, work out what we have in common, what we have different, what we get out of the place, as much as what they get out of the place, what we can realistically give them, what



they can realistically give us, what they can give each other and so on. So pedagogic theory is not what should inform us in one sense. Theory is useful, but it's our own experiences and we have to recognise who we are and what we bring to it.

Jill: And also our own emotional formation. I'm reading a book now which is saying what you are saying, ... to be aware of your own emotional and cultural formation, and to be aware of our own irrationality. This is what the critique of Else Auerbach is all about - we do not have a rational exchange in the class room. The students are not fully 'rational' and neither are the teachers!

Miriam: But the degree to which we expect ourselves to come clean about themselves and their feelings, means we need to know about ourselves and they may need to know about us, though they may not be the least bit interested.

Liz: If you want a theoretical framework, it is very Rogerian, because in any counselling exchange you are supposed to demonstrate personal authenticity and one of the ways you do it is by personal disclosure of some sort. I have no trouble with that -- we pace it ... this does mean that I want you to tell me the harrowing details of your emotional life, I am also willing to tell you something about my life . every body should feel free to do determine. what that would be.

Miriam: I have some difficulty with that, because ... it's more like tragedy is part of every body's life in one way and another, it is not unique to a particular cultural experience. it's more like ... the Lebanese women were an interesting group - they were different, they didn't look particularly repressed, and any way, they are not the only ones who are repressed - the function of being a woman involves a certain amount of repression any way - it's what we are trying to change, I guess.

Jill: I share your difficulty with theory to some extent, certainly the difficulty with theoretical frameworks that are restrictive to teaching, because when we are teaching we really put all of ourselves into it. But theory can help you see things in different ways. I've certainly learned a lot from reading feminist educationists and I'm interested to ask you, on the basis of that, is, do you see yourself as a feminist teacher, and do you bring that feminism into your actual teaching?

Miriam: I don't know . I think so, I've read feminist theory, but it bores me and I don't retain it - I retain emotions and experiences much better. Also, feminism is a very broad church and I'm happy to locate myself within that ...

Jill: Yes, what I mean by feminism is sharing a project that in some way addresses patriarchal society whether in relationships or in a wider way,

Miriam: Yes, but there are things in "Life Skills for Women" which are incredibly crass. I think it's very important to affirm rather than focussing on the oppression of women (though we can when it's necessary) I take the misery and oppression of being a migrant as given and focus on the positive things. That's my own experience.

Liz: You are implying that multiculturalism to you is a higher value than feminism. Where are you placing your values in the story of the Lebanese women smoking etc?

Miriam: Good question .to me it's basically up to them. I can only tell them about my experience and other women's experience, but I can't say to them that their culture is any worse to women than my culture is. It wouldn't help them even if it were true. There are Arabic feminists who are in a better position to talk to them if they need to be talked to. I'm sure they are also going through struggles and I can't impose my struggle on them. I don't have the answers any how. So it's a question of dimension, but to me it's a cultural experience - there is no such thing as any sort of over-riding feminism.

Liz: Do you think feminists are therefore a bit intrusive sometimes in a teaching context?

Miriam: Yes, I've guarded against that for a long time. For example, we were teaching women what to say to the doctor, then we went around one day and found that not one of them ever went to an English speaking doctor, so all the Women's health stuff may not be necessary.

Barbara: But the Women's health is not teaching them about what to say to the doctor, it is teaching them about their own bodies, the terminology, so they can discuss with other people, which may not necessarily be an English-speaking doctor, maybe talking to another class mate.

Miriam: I mean, we are constantly making assumptions which may not necessarily be true.

Annie: I agree with that for my class, but the knowledge is then there for them to discuss with whoever.

Miriam: so being a feminist teacher also means asserting positive models of women and asserting positive models of them ... "not saying you poor women, you are frightfully oppressed". but "you wonderful women, you've come to Australia. you've brought up your families, you've done extremely well, you are brilliant cooks, you can make filo pastry by hand! You have managed to bring up a family in most cases successfully and well. That's real achievement ...!"

Dom: In my experience, feminism is one ingredient of many in the way I approach things . if I'm teaching illiterate Greek men, which I have, my feminism is one of the things that influences what I do. The students are not empty vessels.

Barbara: I agree absolutely with what you say, however, I think we can fall into the trap of romanticising about the wonderful skills they have, because we, the white western middle class women don't go home and pickle cucumbers or do lace and they do come here to learn other things other than pickling and handiwork.

Miriam: often I don't know what words mean, or tell students I can't sew - it helps make the balance when they say "but it's so easy".

Barbara: it's also the thing about listening to them and their experiences and focussing on the bit that they want to bring forward, not on the bit that you want to bring forward.

Jill: I agree, and with a women's centre you can explore all the women's interests. - there are other dimensions that fit in with feminist pedagogy. One is picking up on women's ways of learning which is usually devalued in main stream settings - the intuitive and subjective - I think we all do it instinctively as women teachers - that is one of the frameworks - the other one is that we are in a patriarchal society - part of the mainstream is a women's movement which is critical of patriarchy - and part of the project of feminism is for women to assist other women to see patriarchy as something that actually exists theoretically and to have some awareness of themselves as women as part of that.. I believe that is universal, across all the cultures here. So to what extent do you introduce an element of conscious-raising or is that culturally intrusive, or is it a legitimate kind of activity? I actually do it to some extent..

Miriam: But why would you be different in the classroom to what you are outside?

Jill: But I am, and it's a political thing. If it's IWD, I will say "this is feminism" and I will teach about it, or with the SACS group, I've had a few sessions, straight down to "this is feminist theory" With other groups it's usually because it's come up in discussion and the moment has seemed right to take it up another step just by feeding in your thoughts just as a resource person without actually imposing it on them, saying this is how I see it. I think you have to be very very careful not to do what Miriam was saying but I'm interested if other people see it the same way.

Barbara: I very much see it the same way, especially if the moment is right. For example, when we did the census form I was going to do it purely as a form-filling exercise, but one of them brought up the issue of "what if you are a full-time worker then go home and do all the work in the house ... what do you call yourself. ? What's your label?" So we downed tools and discussed that, and talked about how you could put it in the form. I had that knowledge and that it would be a great thing if women did go and stuff up the census form, but I wasn't going in there to say that, though it did come to that ... "They told you in a way ..." Oh, they did, ... but you as a teacher had something else to add in ... yes"

Liz: another thing that came up in my class was changing your name when you got married - many of thought that you had to do this

Dom: when the census came up, I said "put yourselves down as managing directors" because you are ... I think we are always addressing those issues - they come up in work practice, in career studies, you take the opportunity, it is always there.

Jill: So there is always that element of sisterhood,

Dom: Yes, and it comes up in the kind of information you give, in welfare, rights, etc.

Barbara: yes, and about disclosing your marital status - that type of thing you just do naturally, because you are filling them in on their rights.

Miriam: but I wonder about to what degree that is our preoccupation ...what about a woman with an asthmatic baby, you know problems like debt, it's important that that type of stuff comes up.

Barbara: I think you are trivialising that, because it has happened to me, and it can happen to any woman! When it comes up in a lesson, you deal with it, it is just one thing amongst many.

Miriam: My question is, I'm not sure what's important to them.

Jill: There is no one thing important to them at any time, because they are all individuals, they are all different, and we get more and more of them which means you have to listen more carefully to get the different drifts and pick up on where most people are going and start with that.

Miriam: Yes, because you learn so much. My best example of that was taking my Carlton high rise class to the Yarra - and Phuc said she had been a boatwoman on the Mekong and said, I will take you for a row, and she had a whole other world.

Dom: yes, we need to give them as many opportunities and let us begin to that experience and finding out that someone does that.

Dom: It's really been a very interesting discussion and a lot to go along with.

One of the things that we may be could do, would be to do some personal type stuff

# ACTION RESEARCH AT THE MWLC

## BULLETIN NO. 9

## November 12, 1991

### TRANSCRIPT OF ACTION RESEARCH MEETING 29/10/91

#### Liz Connells's talk, Tuesday, 29/10/91

*We started off with a discussion about the process of taking it in turns to talk about our thoughts about teaching and what we got out of the process so far.*

Barb: I loved that bit in Dominica's where she talked about Victor Frankl and Freire, the idea of action and reflection: I had never really realised that process, of doing something and then reflecting on it, and it really is an insight for me, thinking about that and actually trying to put it into practice in the classroom. Mine were out all day Friday, just busy busy at the VOC and so on, and first thing today, I just got them in silence to just write about it, and it seemed like it was a really good exercise for them to just process in a quiet way, because normally I would have gone in and just started talking about last Friday, not let them ..... it was a very good process just getting them to reflect immediately after that very active day and I wouldn't have done that before.

Liz: I think in general, not just the action research, but say the meeting that we had with Delia, and in any discussion where we talk about what we do, when we lay ourselves open a bit and criticise ourselves, it is very helpful. For example, Miriam's comment, when there was a little bit of a word scuffle about how many times you draft or get people to draft their work... and it just stays with you, and you think, should I get people to draft their work more? Am I being too much of a smother mother with them because I just get them to correct it once, or else I correct it and type it out for them and they get this beautiful finished product right away. Is actually somebody who slogs away with them who doesn't try to make it so interesting, but just gets them to make three, four copies of the same thing .. is that better? I haven't come to a conclusion about that but it has just stayed with me and I felt well, it's point for my own reflection.

Jill: I had a similar reflection from that same meeting - Miriam talked about some people putting up their hands and saying, "Mummy, mummy, come and correct my work!", and I thought maybe I do do that to some extent, and maybe I could be helping them to be less dependent on me, and I could be saying, have you checked it? Go back and have another look.. I think I am a bit indulgent, and that's something that I have sort of learned ..

Barb: Yes, I have been a bit indulgent, I have pood pood the idea of four drafts, thinking the whole thing's dead, but I became much more rigorous with them last Monday, and went through the step of getting them to do oral conferencing as a writing process, with them in pairs, but I hadn't given them the credit that they actually could do that, and I then asked them to try and work out why I had got them to do that, read each other's passages and ask each other questions, and they came up with it, they knew what the end result was meant to be, sort of clarifying the idea... and they did much more writing yesterday.

*I then said what some of the main things were for me, coming out of Miriam's talk..*

Being aware of our own ethnocentricity.. that whole debate about assimilationism and acculturation .. to what extent are we assimilating, to what extent are we acculturating them in a positive way, to what extent is this an issue you can't really resolve ... the idea of a fair exchange ... that they have the right to know about us, if we are finding out about them ... and the idea, that we need to learn about them and their lives. The other danger is to get too personal, it can get self-indulgent and non-professional - you have just sort of got to find the line - also about affirming them, rather than focussing on oppression all the time ...

*Next, there was some feedback on what people are thinking about the concept of personal development and how it fits in...*

Jill: We started off looking at personal development, and somewhere along the line, I liked that term less and less because of all the connotations of personal development as being middle class and invasive and because of confusion with the "personal development" that professional people do. I've moved around to thinking about the term empowerment (I still have problems with it) as more useful because it is a process that we are all part of, teachers and students. How do people become empowered in terms of confidence gaining and becoming stronger in themselves? 'Empowerment' includes the empowerment that comes through education and building up your understanding of the world, it's a broader thing that somehow to me encompasses all the different processes that happen.

Miriam: I agree about Personal Development but the problem with the word empowerment, it is still **us** doing it to **them** and even though you have been critical of Auerbach, it has associations of that there could be a class of women, whose English is no better, but they have been "empowered".

Jill: I agree with you, about empowerment, but we have to somehow name it ...

Miriam: In a way what we are talking about is good teaching ... in a way I don't think we need some word that implies there is a Christmas present which is all wrapped up in glossy paper with a bow on it, because to me, that is what the

word empowerment sounds like. To me what we are talking about is an eclectic pedagogy (and I really like the word eclectic) that relates to students needs, and we can't say what we give them, there is no glossy aspect of it, we can only do our best as honest crafts people, trying our best to make the shoe fit the foot, and I really like the idea of putting it back onto us.

Barb: I totally agree, I think over the four years I have been doing this each year I get progressively more and more rigorous with my self, and especially having done the project it makes you to be really fine-tuned, what you are trying to do in that classroom ... I think I started in a really waffley way, when I went in and started to talk and be friendly, but it didn't really get anywhere .. but the talking is part of it, but there's got to be something behind it ..

Miriam: We are talking about the kind of teaching which takes what we all know we mean by empowerment and personal development, even though we have not necessarily articulated it, there is a lot of consensus in here about what we practice: but by putting it in a special box, we are almost saying it is OK to teach without it.. to me it is *so* integrated, it is so much part of what we should be doing, that I really resist the idea that it is an extra special thing we do .. it is part of the educational process ... and any body who says they are teaching ESL without it, to my mind is not teaching ESL - they are teaching EFL or language, or something.. the difference between EFL and ESL is that in ESL it is part of that agenda.

Jill: So you're saying that the politics of what we are doing is intrinsic to what we do that we don't need a special term, such as empowerment, which implies that the focus is on them ... if we talk about our own pedagogy, which is an eclectic pedagogy, we are putting the focus back on ourselves.

Miriam: When I started off teaching EFL, you might have well been teaching Japanese - it was EFL, plus being nice to the students ..

Jill: What I think is important, that isn't just in the pedagogy; what has come out in the things that the SACS women have written for me, group processes and environment, and what happens between the students.

Miriam: To me that has to be part of the pedagogy, because we set it up, to a large degree, we fight for the physical environment...

Barbara: I am getting the ETS women to try and pin point any changes that have occurred since they went to the work place, and over the whole course, but if they can actually explain what those changes actually were, why they were different in three weeks time, it will be interesting, it was a result of the last group, when three or four of them came back after the last work experience and could actually articulate changes that occurred.

Jill: The SACS students actually appreciated being asked to do that sort of writing - some of them said, it was good that we actually had to write about it.

Barb: that's what we said in the beginning isn't it. that sort of action and reflection...

Liz: I came across this little piece from Freud, about "consciousness consists in being able to name something", but that is part of that process - writing has got that special feature to it, that you do actually come to terms with your own ideas and objectify them and name them, and I guess that's the way your consciousness grows.

Miriam: What we are formulating is another version of education versus training ... The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie ... "I lead out" ..., not "I lead and you follow me" ... the idea that education is setting in motion some kind of process and not controlling exactly where it goes. If we pursue our discussion to its ultimate, what we are doing is showing a method of achieving what is a very old aim, and a perfectly legitimate one. You don't have to justify it in Marxist terms, you can legitimize it in small "I" liberal terms, the way of doing it and reaching a particular client.

Liz: I think a very important thing is to put people into contact with a greater range of environments whether academic or physical or cultural, if you are limited by your environment, and the thought that this is the only environment that you have the power to possess, that's what's going to limit your consciousness, isn't it? Part of the empowerment thing is being given the permission, to say, you have the right, to access any of this if you want to which is something a lot of them don't have the model for.

*At last we got onto Liz's talk, most of which follows:*

I would like to talk about what I have got from psychology .

For a start, I have just thought while I was musing, that Jung said that 'any creative act requires a return to the realm of the mothers'. I interpret that to a certain extent, when I free associate with it, I think of my own mother who was very supportive and gave me whatever I've got. I didn't come out of a highly intellectual background but somehow I have been a person who is interested in and loves all sorts of different areas of knowledge. And its something that I always try to take to my students, that life is terribly interesting and there is always something to be involved in, and that's something I have got from my mother ....

...So, do you see yourself as a mother...?

...Yes, I think there is an element of that



.. yes, I think there is a connection there... Lella would probably be horrified, but when you go back to the history of this place, the initial concept of the centre was ... there are matriarchal elements to the way it was set up.

... I think women in general often feel so afraid of joining into the discourse of society in general that they do need that extra encouragement and permission from the mother.. as I said before, Jung says the introvert is afraid of the object the object, the extrovert goes out to the object and I guess that I think education should encourage the student to go out to the object... when they get very stimulated, they are so stimulated that they want to identify with things so they will start to get their own education in process.

Particularly with the RIL group, I find that it is important that that group is relating to general education, not just language. I see those people as being very devoid of information, even in their own languages, about the world, and it might be a Western paradigm of education, but I really feel that they need to know so many different things, they need to divide up the world into a whole lot of different categories. divide up knowledge and see that this is part of the process of creating consciousness, analysing and nominalising, and you really can't perceive intellectually unless you do that and say, here is the physical world, here are the continents, this is how climate affects them, there is a taxonomy of names of things, you have to access a lot of vocabulary and information in order to be able to discuss those things and go out and view them confidently.

...But to what level do you have to do that?

... Knowing and labelling and nominalising can exist on any level up to an extremely abstract level, and one of the things that worries me is that we make the decision just what level we are going to stop at, being aware we shouldn't throw too much at them, which can be very disempowering. Sometimes I worry that I do try to give them too much, but you just monitor that, and I think that over-stimulation doesn't really hurt, I don't see that I'm giving them a task that's too hard. I feel that I should give them a lot and see what they can cope with. This is where I bring in the experience of having a child, because you can read a three year old a very difficult book, that she can't understand, but if you do it often enough, over the years they do start to understand them, and the kids who have never been challenged in that way don't. I imagine that there is an automatic way of tuning into what you are capable of. It's like what I have got from psychology about "smooth and crunchy" - that you make things crunchy enough, they have to get the texture of it - it's a little bit difficult and they get a bit worried and have to find out "why". Whether that works as well for adult students as it does for children, I don't know, but if you make the atmosphere warm enough and personal enough, that they shouldn't worry them, it should make things interesting to them.

... Then there is the idea that we all access information in different ways - there is auditory, visual. tactile, etc, but most people are actually highly visual; not

many people are auditory or kinesthetic. But by the same token, we should use other channels, as well as the intellectual - we often forget just how verbal we are, and that a lot of these people are still operating in a more visual mode. Because they are more illiterate than us, they are going on visual cues a lot more - again the analogy of children's learning, that they need pictures.

... There has been a lot written about pre-literate people, and what literacy does in terms of concrete thinking, they think in the concrete, not the abstract. With literacy they move from that visual world to seeing things in words. It would be interesting to track exactly what does happen ...

So I try to use as much visual stuff, and talk in images, and even act things out for them. Bernie Neville has helped with this. A lot of barriers went down doing his course, where you do often have to get and make a fool of yourself, so I don't mind making a fool of myself now, if I want to show them something, I'll crawl along the ground, or whatever. Those ideas have helped me to realise....

... Yes, I'm very visual in the health class, and last year when I was taking my community English class at the flats, I was just so visual in front of them I felt like a clown half the time, but afterwards, they related to this. The written word, although its visual, it works in a different way... more auditory than visual..

... But you don't use abstract concepts much when you talk. only you start to deal with concepts and deal with texts... it appears that it is extremely difficult to teach people to think abstractly if they are not literate. It's not until they have text that they come backwards and forwards to, it so that words take on their own embodiment. Before that people can talk, they can talk in oral culture in extreme complexity, but the ideas are very rooted in experience. My understanding that literacy actually appears that you can cope with those .....the ways which you build up oral language ...people in illiterate cultures pose the question....

... Another thing that I wrote down is the Jung personality types, the introvert extrovert, feeling, thinking, judging, etc. The way it fits in is that you don't expect everybody to be the same, and you know that people are learning in different ways, not everybody is going to be the same.

... That's really important in terms of the empowerment and personal development agendas, because both of those, at their most crude delivery, tend to negate that. We often to say, X is a lovely lady, great person in the class, but she is slow. Other people are quick intellectually... those messages imply that everybody is going to be brought from the same point A to the same point B...

... and that somehow an extroverted person is the one who has been more empowered, so an introverted person is "disempowered" because we have that stereotype in our brains..... That points the rather crude brash thing about assertiveness training, there is something a bit vulgar about it at a certain level,

making people be pushy, the sort of exercises that you often take students through, there are things that are often a bit undignified, making sure you are getting your own way, but there may be another wisdom in just being slightly different.

... We should respect people's individual ways of operating. No-one would call me non-assertive, but there are some things I just won't do...

... For example, it helps me appreciate somebody like Mileva more, I don't think she is dumb because she is so illiterate .. she has her own forms of intelligence. She understands in a large kinesthetic way really well - she knows Melbourne very well. She said to me today, when we started talking about our planet and the stars, and she said, "me know group stars". She was a shepherd in Yugoslavia, and she used to sleep out with the sheep ....she was saying, (acting out) the sower, and other names of the constellations, going back to ancient Greek myths.

The other thing is Rogers, who had a big impact on me at the time, the counselling course. At the time I found it an extremely beautiful philosophy, that one shouldn't attempt to influence or control other people. I guess the sorts of things I got from it were the ideas of letting the other person be and just sort of receiving them, and this comes back to the mothering thing, the idea that's what a good mother does, to give the person confidence by allowing them to be themselves and not by criticising. In a counselling situation, you never never judge the person. That includes things like non-possessive warmth and I realise how much a lot of women in particular boss - want to control and get power, through trying to be nice to people and forcing people to do what they want by being nice. That was important to me, and I try to moderate in that direction.

... Give an example... expecting things to happen because you're nice and they love you. That's the Demeter mother; Hera is not interested in personal feelings but family relationships and what should be done as a matter of form, whereas Demeter is the mother who loves too much and is possessive.

... So do you think that culture comes to the fore at Christmas time? It is easy to create a women's culture based on sentiment and feeling and I guess if you do want to empower people, you have to teach people the value of separation and working in a disciplined way, not just working through emotional states.

... I do feel conscious of that, it worries me, I haven't articulated it before.. when I was at Springvale the students brought me this gold necklace and a chain the next year - a very expensive present. That's what they wanted to do, but I felt very bad about it. The second year, I bought each of them a children's book, that I thought they would like, not talking down to them, but folk tales, and I gave them each one of these. I felt afterwards that this was a symbolic thing to do ... what I'm giving you is books and words. An example of me trying to work against that Demeter thing and say, "OK, I do give you something, and you've given me something, this is what I've given and I want to concretise it".

... It is much easier teaching 14 - 16 year olds to sort that one out - to be a mother, and be a good mother and a strict one. Much harder sorting that with adults.

...That happened with the SACS women, when they came back, when some rush up and kiss you and then you feel you have to kiss others who have been left out, even if its not really in their culture... it just got a bit too much. But sometimes you do end up being personal friends of the students, so there is no clear boundary ... there are these bonds. so it is important to get the balance and draw a fine and invisible and a moving line, that we do have to do that.. I'm working on that, particularly now when we are moving towards the end of the year, I feel myself withdrawing from them. At the same time as they are clutching at me, I'm withdrawing and being a bit harder on them.

*At this point I think we decided it was time to go*

*Next meeting, Barb will speak (19/11/91) After that we will probably have time for one more presentation, then one meeting when we try to come to grips with how far we've got, what it has all meant, what we have learned, how far we have come in our thinking about key issues, what if anything we want to do next year, etc.*

# ACTION RESEARCH AT THE MWLC

**BULLETIN NO. 10**

**December 17, 1991**

## **BARBARA'S TALK (3/12/91)**

**We started with a discussion about how we handle the issue of unemployment and the pending joblessness of most of our students, which Dominica and Jill were to discuss at the AAACE conference the next day ... here are some contributions**

... This issue is like Pandora's box ... we teach how to choose careers, set goals and find courses, but there are no jobs and it's difficult to go beyond that..

...The students want to know why things are so bad, how long will it keep going? Some of them are desperate and have been door-knocking. Most are anxious and so we feel like trying to reassure them... is there anything else we can do?

... I don't see people at exit points. Very few would probably be with us if there were exit points..

... For example, of the hundreds who apply for the Childcare course, very few NESB women get in and this is an area of discrimination, when under pressure, the NESB women with a linguistic disadvantage get in last.

... Are we setting them up to be let down? In many ways we are. The situation is grim. Francis was saying that many WEP students go into a decline after the course and perhaps they need counselling.

...It can be a period of self-discovery, a wonderful opportunity to learn ... I feel with mine we are opening up every box of learning and bringing everybody's experiences together ..

... it is important to talk about the recession and help people understand the reasons for what is happening

... there could be deeper ways of going into it such as exploring how do they really feel about it..

... there is a sense of excitement when they come back to learning for the first time and they realise new doors are opened up, and some of them have written that they have given up the dream of being rich, for the moment they are really just happy learning English and studying and being here. That's wonderful, and of course they must make use of the time of unemployment to develop their level and their language and skills but it's only a short term thing, it can't go on... there aren't going to be enough courses and what they really want eventually are jobs, so some of them are very worried about the future and others have faith in you, that somehow it will

be alright, and you are like a parent figure that you are interpreting the situation. I did a BTN thing on the recession, that was very good and very clear ... I found myself slipping into calming them by saying it is a cyclical thing... in a few years it will be OK ... but in actual fact I don't think it is going to be alright, we are heading for long-term structural unemployment ...

... I have been burying my head in the sand about the issue because I don't know how to deal with it in the classroom .

... I think it's more a matter of bringing it to light ... we could totally deny it or we could do what we do and acknowledge it, but just bringing it gives us the opportunity to go deeper and see what the students feel about it .

.. I have just realised how much it has been nagging at me . the work experience has always been a real high for them ... and several come back and say, "Oh, I can do that job, I would love to have that job!" and there was no way I then would have said to them, "listen dear, that's an impossibility" ...

... "It's a factor in life in general at the moment - it's very depressing, it's not even just Australia it is the world, and it is an awful fact of life we have to live with at the moment, we don't know what will happen in the future .

. We could be in their situations very easily, and I say that to them sometimes and we know friends and relatives who have lost their jobs and we could be in their situations very very easily... it's not a consolation, it is just getting across that the employment situation is so tenuous... anybody can be affected... I say, I would be frightened if I was looking for a job now.." So they know it's everybody, not just them. That's why it's important for them to understand a bit about the economy.

... the other thing, when you see their life experiences, they have had to show a lot of courage and overcoming obstacles and this is a new blow for us, but in a way our generation had it so easy, we didn't know the depression... we have had this amazingly clear time ... we have got classes of women who are survivors . eg, xxx my father in law was in jail for thirteen years in Vietnam, but there is so much experience there - her uncle was shot and her father was in jail for five years, and they have all been on boats and come out, etc" They have been through so much...

**Barb then gave her talk (organised under the suggested headings) as follows:**

### **Educational theories that you keep in mind?**

Basically I try to have a student-centred class room, although in fact I also impose quite a lot; I suppose what I try to do more and more is getting a balance of bottom-up and a top down type of theory. For too long I was doing a top-down ... this is Frank Smith's terminology (reading theory): what he meant is bottom -up is word level, and top-down is text level, so what I feel I have done for too long is to have too generalised an outlook in my program, with not enough substantial under-pinning of purely skills, going into where their needs are, and I think that is where I am going now. In terms of having a clearly worked out writing program for them, I've never worked at really trying to analyse why their writing falls down and what to do about it. I still haven't done it, but I'm working more on just looking at structures and practising them. In fact, when Anne Dunne was over yesterday, she had a wonderful framework for teaching word order and it was brilliant. It just seemed a wonderful schematic thing, of headings of word order that you could superimpose .... I'm trying to get more from the bottom-up teaching. In the first EIS group what I tended to do was far too airey-fairey ... let's just sit down and talk about things and discuss things and it never got any where, because I never had this under-pinning of real skills teaching, in terms of what their skills were and what they needed.

I think I'm trying to create more of a balance - I certainly wouldn't do away with the topic focus or issues focus and discussion ... I'm trying to create more of a balance.

### **Teaching Aims?**

I am moving towards skills type teaching and to enable them to access more information, because more and more I've come to realise that their English will develop despite me, and that I'm here to enable them to understand how the community works. You see that women who were in the first course come back and visit and their English has developed by leaps and bounds and that was despite me. ("But you don't know, we don't know really, all that takes a bit of time to work their and you don't know what the opportunities were to put it all into practice...") In the classroom, I think what I do is to enable them to work out things. That is important and they'll either take that on or they won't". For example, using the library, and practical things like that to find out about courses. In their evaluation they commented that it is the area of accessing information that they have really benefitted from.

What I would also like to do, but I don't know how to do, because I think I try to control too much in the classroom is that Freirean framework of building things that come out of dialogue, and I don't think I'm very good at allowing that to happen and I'd like to be able to do that more. I find I work to a program, and I let it go, but it's difficult to leave it so that real issues come out and it goes in a direction. The other real difficulty for me is the group dynamic and just working on respecting each other and listening to each other, so that the atmosphere can let something evolve, let that dialogue come out. I find it incredibly hard ... you can preach to them about

respecting the person who is talking, and try to do that by setting up that whole meeting situation, but it falls down a lot. ("I had exactly the same experience, but Dominica's model is an interesting one, because she has a fairly explicit philosophic and value framework, which comes through talking about Human Services that is set up fairly early on and to me that is the bedrock that all these other issues come back to, and I think they need that ... how do you do that where you haven't got a course where you teach Human Services and Comm./Skills at the level at that you teach them?")

Also. I haven't had the courage to actually sit back and try to see whether they will work it out, because I remember quite clearly with this group, in about the third week, I felt absolutely oppressed by two of them because they were such strong women, and they were dominating so much in the classroom and I thought they were almost going to come to verbal blows in the classroom ... they have ended up good friends now. I sort of orchestrated it in the meeting time, to respect the speaker, but it would have been good if I had sat back to see whether the group itself would have taken the issue up.

("Maybe that's asking too much of them.. it takes a lot of skill to do that... to challenge each other without being aggressive or creating conflict when after all they have got to stick with the same group for six months" ... "I think a bit of teacher intervention is OK, a bit of teacher domination is OK .. it's a bit like the whole sixties philosophy that everything has to come from them ...no matter what level you are being educated on, you do want some degree of leadership from your teacher, don't you ... whether leadership about the agenda, or groups ... and this is where for our professional development we really should do something about groups because it's the role of the leader of the group and it's very highly skilled to know when to come in and intervene and how to do it so you are not distorting those processes too much ... you're distorting them to some extent just by being there ... so that they get the experience of having more and more control. I would like to do more work on facilitation methods, because in many way what we are doing is facilitating processes..") Certainly I agree with you and I'd like to do that too, because I had a feeling of these two women devouring me, I was swamped by them. ("What was the reaction of the rest of the students? ... withdrawal and palpable irritation by one....and after in the meeting I sort of worked around bringing it up as an issue and they sort of all took up the point of people having to take turns and having to listen, and I'm sure it was a good learning process for the two women involved, and they have ended up being good friends.. (So the fact that you did step back a bit was a process that was useful?") Yes, but I didn't step back immediately. ("I often think that this is one of the hardest lessons to learn.") The other day, too, I was being swamped by a few women's anxieties and that again was her advice and I need to practice that ...

### **Successes?**

I have a little success story in the literacy class, that was so satisfying when it happened and it worked again, at looking at connectives in a sentence and using the imagery of knitting and of stitches holding a jumper together, and they all went, "ooh.." and it meant something to them. It was so momentary but it had so much



impact. Just even drawing a sentence on the board in a knitting type of way with linking stitches, and it was one of those nice little flashes.

(" That is interesting because what you have done is referred back to women-s culture and also Lee Schulmann's paper about teaching and metaphors and he says that all learning takes place in terms of metaphors and that is how people actually think. Language itself is a series of metaphors... ") (" What I meant in my talk about being visual. partly what I meant by that was using metaphor a lot because it is visual imagery... poetry is the intersection of the visual and the linguistic and ... that is the whole left brain, right brain tension as well ... a metaphor pulls all the abstracts into a concrete image and so many things suggest so many more new things, too,") ("Like Bernie Neville's idea of grasping reality - either to make a rational analysis or the overlaying of images - the more different images and metaphors, the more subtle meanings come out".) ("Grammar overall is not the slightest bit logical, so you can't ultimately teach it logically, though there is quite a lot of logic in it ...we teach bits here and bits there and hope it all comes together... like weaving a pattern".)

### **Feminism?**

I got the literacy women to do an evaluation yesterday, and I asked them, why was it important for them to come to a women's learning centre and they were all quite pragmatic about it - that the centre is convenient to home etc, though they did all chip in and say, "you can speak more freely with no men around, and that there was sexual tension in the class if there are men around". It is not a mix of older and other women, mainly longer term residents. Tuy said, yesterday, when it was suggested she should do EIS at Otter street, that "if there are men in the room, I won't open my mouth" ... So many things we wouldn't be doing women's health. about condoms. and everyone in the class knowing who is trying to get pregnant and who isn't, there is so much that comes up, that special intimacy that we get in the class because they're women, wouldn't be there... when I was teaching in an all men's class, it was easy, you didn't have that competitiveness, you didn't have you're energy drained into being so aware of the women holding back and the men holding forth, and trying to suppress one lot and encourage the other lot; you could just get on with it ..."

I'd like to get back to Elizabeth about the Demeter complex, (mother of Persephone who never wants to let the daughter go, but the daughter has to leave her) because I feel that is something I have to fight against too, I am just so indulgent towards them, and I feel in a way it is detrimental to them in lots of ways. It doesn't train them in many ways - it doesn't prepare them... they leave early when they want, come and go . but I feel in a real bind, because I understand why they have to go and I know that , you have to leave at a certain time, or you have a sick child or whatever, but then they become too free and maybe the women I'm talking about it's just them any how, and its very hard ... some of them are very motivated and what can you do about the slack ones ... I have too ones like you, who wander in and out and I find that if you're sort of really clear about what you want them to do, and you can let them know with your body language that you are not too happy about it"

"I'm going to lay down the law with the students whom I'm interviewing, so they don't think that they can just drift in and out, and say it's very important that you make a commitment to this course . we can almost threaten them and say that we

don't want people who won't be committed and put them on probation ..." ... "this is an interesting interface with the work issue also. because about 4 or 5 of mine who have left during the year ... often those who are really interested in work don't make the same commitment."

*We left the discussion there although we said that we wish we had hours to discuss lots of the issues Barb raised in more depth. And that again, it was stimulating and enlightening.*

### **So What Now?**

I was to go next (Tuesday 17/ 12) but events have again overtaken good intentions so that I have to go to a VATME meeting at that time and there is to be a meeting about contracts.

This brings us, I announce with a sense of amazement, to the end of the college year and to the end of the planned action research period. Too fast! Too fast!

I haven't even had an evaluatory session together, which is appalling AR practice. but maybe we can negotiate something for Wednesday...

As far as my presentation is concerned, I think we have agreed that we can do it next year and I think most people are interested in continuing this process in some form or another in 1992, so I don't mind waiting.

I believe we have all benefitted from our mutual sharing and reflections so I'm not sure if it is appropriate to thank everyone. But thanks everyone, all the same, for all your collective co-operativeness and contributions. From my point of view it has been a success and I have amassed loads of rich data from which to start to think about writing my thesis. As I said, my presentation at the ARIA weekend went well and I have some excellent feedback. They were impressed with the process that we have modelled as a means of building up staff relations, our theoretical understandings of our work and "intersubjective communicative competence"(!)

**More to come!!!**

## NOTES OF THE WORKSHOP: WHAT IS THERE IS NO WORK:?

(3.10 pm, Wednesday 4/12/91)

At their workshop on 4/12/91, Dominica Nelson and Jill Sanguinetti talked about their experience at the Migrant Women's Learning Centre and raised the following questions, which, they said, were pressing issues which this conference should be seriously addressing. These included:

- Given that adult educators in the community, TAFE and jobtrain sectors, how do we respond to the current situation of deep structural unemployment, and to the fact that we are teaching students in training programs for which there are simply no jobs at the end.

- Are we setting up students to be let down, may they even be better off without us raising their hopes and expectations?

- Are vocational training programs now being used to essentially soak up unemployed people and cover up the current disastrous situation?

- If so, what can we do about it?

The discussion brought us two main issues - what can we do on the level of teaching and neighbourhood community development, and what can we do in terms of political action?

These are some of the issues that were raised:

- Job creation through small businesses based in neighbourhood learning houses with students taking up contracts for work organised there, such as in the service industry - 'elderly care' is one of these - we could be part of developing these.

- However, few jobs, especially for NESB women who are not getting a go, despite equal opportunities.

- The best thing we may have done is to bring people together, and they have started to talk to one another - but we have to keep asking in what way we are part of the system which is perpetuating the problem. At least we can bring people together and try to find solutions for ourselves. But a little bit of awareness sometimes made it harder.

- Should be more emphasis on the value of unpaid work, especially women's work.

- But we can't go on forever with unpaid work, because it doesn't pay the bills, and people need the dignity of work.

- It's the pay packet at the end of the week that really is valued - People need income to live. Women shouldn't work for no pay. People work to provide themselves with the basic means of life. Don't let this divert us from the real structural changes that are taking place in society!

- There is lots of worthwhile work to be done in communities. Govt is already cutting back on community service programs. One-off grants, etc ...we have to convince the government to change its economy - should be environmental- and people-oriented ... it's the division of wealth that is the problem!

- How do we therefore feed into the political education of students, and preparing them to become part of the decision-making process, supporting them to

become political beings ... the real changes needed are structural and that means political processes and people making their demands heard.

- Jobs are gone now that will never come back ...

- Shifting the emphasis away from individual to community ... perhaps the most important thing is to keep people in the social context ... how do we keep people in the community when they are unemployed ... if we are successful at the end of the course, they will appreciate the social context, and that they are not alone, they are relating to other people, they are prepared to feed something into the community. This has a personal development component, but what is interesting is that personal development is now accepted by DEET as something we can include, but they don't put community development into that light, that is what has been lost in the present political climate. We should change it back to community ... so we adult educators should confidently be saying that it is community education we are providing. Affirming non-rational things, qualities, dreams, etc. Not popular area but whzt a lot of people are interested in.

- We are enormously privileged in having a job. Everybody could have five years in work and five years out of it. Everybody should have that experience throughout their lives. We just shouldn't have security of tenure.

- Perhaps courses to prepare people for job-sharing?

- But that is very "them and us" ... unemployed people are anybody ... want they want is a reasonable standard of living, and training courses won't give them this. I remember two labels that were around from the last recession. One was "Hungry? - eat the rich!" and the other was "Live simply so others can simply live" and those slogans have always stayed with me. Some academics and others actually donate from out of their salaries to keep our centre going (at the ANU) .. how many of us are prepared to give up some hours of wrk to share with others. We don't give training to unemployed people to job share. we need to look at our lifestyles and decide whether we want to job share. A lot of wealthy people around, with double incomes . We need to create work, but we also need political action. We know mental illness, crime, etc are going up. Dawkins had no vision of the future at all.

- All sorts of political demands could arise, such as the guaranteed social wage concept. But its the thinking, the articulating and the connections between employment and political processes that must be done.

- Are these statements going to come out of this conference? This is one of the discussions that is closest to reality for the two days...

- We have to decide what the work ethic is ging to be based on -if we believe in equality, then everyone must share the load - it could be that we work two days a week, or job share or find other ways to employ more people with a greater number of jobs. Quite a few of us have jobs that we could share. We have to find ways of distributing the work and the wealth.

- We are talking about major social change, redistribution of our entire system of wealth, no point of job sharing unless two days becomes a living wage.

- How are we going to achieve these changes? How many people are prepared to job-share.

- A forum such as this conference is potentially a very powerful group, and we have a lot of consensus in our values and how we see it is very close. We are looking at political, economic and social change, and we're also looking at cultural change, and a change of our values. We are now facing the situation of having a permanent

underclass - we are the ones who are in a sense are the fig leaf of the government to contain it and to cover it up.

- We need to work on community or neighbourhood level to get involvement so that all people in that location become aware of the issues. We need job creation, and we need to give people the chance to learn skills in a wholistic way, so people can come to develop small enterprises. Activities which start to supplement income, then do something about it. You have to start at the local level and then start to do something about it more widely, to get political change.

- We have Dawkins ear at the moment, we need another session to get some resolutions, let's get Dawkin to look at job creation and the distribution of power and wealth in the community. Let's get some ideas that we are prepared to take further as an organisation. We should put together something as an organisation, to put up alternative strategies to the government.

- We should make this conference accountable for the fact that it has called people together, from across Australia, to answer the question, "Australia Will it work?" It has been done in a middle class bourgeois way, without getting down to the real issues and facing the fact that there are many people who are disenfranchised by the current structure in Australian society.

**This workshop will reconvene in room 227 at 3.10 on Wednesday. to continue the discussion of resolutions and what the AAACE can do as an influential national association of adult educators. All welcome.**

**ACTION RESEARCH AT THE MWLC**  
Bulletin No. 11

**March 30, 1992**

**Hi everyone!**

Here I am back again, recovered somewhat from my burnout from last year and ready for some more 'action' if people are interested in returning to participatory processes. By popular consent this should start at the end of our next staff meeting (Thursday 2/4). At this meeting I would like to get you up to date with what I am planning to do with my thesis and glean some feedback from you. At the following meeting after that, I should really make my presentation about how I think about my teaching, and see if anyone else would like to do the same. After that we could think about what other forms our 'collaborative learning' might take.

I have picked this up again now having reread all my material from last year in preparation for writing it up in a thesis, my interest has been rekindled. Also, given the amount of time we had to spend on it, one semester was not nearly enough time to realise our aims or adequately reflect on what we have done so far. If we've finished deconstructing 'personal development' we could start on something else! <sup>\*</sup>As well. I'd like to interview each of you as well, if that is alright.

I'd just like to leave you with a quote from a book called "Teachers as Collaborative Learners", by John Smyth, at Deakin:

"As long as supervisory processes, unwittingly or not, are constituted as a bureaucratic means by those deemed to know are able to exercise surveillance and invoke sanctions over another group deemed to be deficient, questions will continue to exist about the moral and ethical defensibility of what is being attempted. This kind of unquestioning acceptance of regimes of power, as Foucault (1980) called it something we might expect to find in a totalitarian state, but not something we would expect to characterise educational institutions in a democracy."

Food for thought? (He is the one I invited to staff development conference, but the invite was too late.)

\*\*\* A useful definition of deconstruction:

The goal of deconstruction is to keep things in process, to disrupt, to keep the system in play: to set up procedures to demystify continuously the realities we create, to fight the tendency for our categories to congeal. Deconstruction foregrounds the lack of innocence in any discourse by looking at the textural staging of knowledge, the constitutive effects of our use of knowledge. While impossible to freeze conceptually, deconstruction can be broken down into three steps: (a) identify the binaries, the oppositions that structure an argument: (b) reverse or replace the dependent term from its negative position to a place that locates it as the very condition of the positive term, and (c) create a more fluid and less coercive conceptual organisation of terms which transcends a binary logic by simultaneously being both and neither of the binary terms (Grosz 1989).

Cheers,

*Jill*

**ACTION RESEARCH AT THE MWLC**  
**BULLETIN No. 12      May 1, 1992**

Dear fellow teachers, . . .

This is to fill in those of you who weren't at the meeting yesterday (Thursday 30th) with what we talked\_ about and what I am now up to \_in the thesis writing process.

·As in many ways I am writing up the action research on behalf of the collective.it is important for me to spend as much time as-I can now discussing with you how I see the issues and the outcomes and\_ getting your input. Also, I will\_ start circulating chapters soon - please feel free to discuss with me any changes you would like to make, especially where you are being quoted. Also, we,can decide to use pseudonyms or not - please think about your preference when you see the chapters.

·I have just realised that it is exactly a year since I started sounding people out about the project! As far as I'm concerned it has been a great success.(so far) maybe we should have a nice meal out together or something to celebrate this (I'll buy the champagne!). My big problem now is to try to collapse it all into **20,000** words, or else take another big plunge and convert to a major thesis. I'll have to decide this soon. At Thursday's meeting I went through my chapter headings (see over page) and roughly what will be in each.

·We had a very interesting discussion about the chapter about our own (the teachers') personal development as teachers. We started off discussing the fact that we almost all reported feeling nervous before bearing our "pedagogical souls" before each other in the "mini teach-in". This is another example of how teaching is often a very private pursuit, and we are all a bit defensive about letting others (even the person in the next room) in on what we do and how we feel about it.· However, Barb, Liz and myself recounted how the process had been an important boost to our confidence, especially in developing our theoretical grasp of what we are on about individually and what the Centre is on about.

These important findings will be fed back in to my reflections about the process. The other thing that came out of that discussion was the possibility and need to get-together and continue to document our work.· Elizabeth suggested a workshop to get us going on this, and to use this to start going quite public about our work here.

At the next meeting (Thursday 7, if there is time after our staff meeting) we will continue with the mini teach-in process.

## Proposed Chapter headings for action research thesis (not yet titled)

1. Context (-ESL, TAFE White Paper, govt. policy, the recession, the economy
  - who the students are and their needs (use Spiri's work)
  - who the teachers are and some reference to our professional development and industrial situation
2. Methodology - theorisation of action research as a radical research methodology informed by critical social theory and tradition of Friere's critical pedagogy/community development paradigms. Also in terms of feminist research, the feminist critique of conventional educational research etc
3. Initiating the project - narrative account of the process of getting started and how we decided upon a theme for collective enquiry and planned the process.
4. Fairly brief narrative account of everything that happened (the story)
5. "Personal Development to Eclectic Pedagogy" - an account of how we collectively deconstructed the notion of "Personal development" and started a process of sharing ideas and experience and theorising about the pedagogy that we individually and collectively practice at the Centre
6. Four Teachers' Pedagogical Stories - this chapter is an edited version of Miriam's, Liz's, Barb's and Dominica's "stories" - with a small amount of comment and interpretation.
7. A chapter about the collective learning process itself - personal and professional outcomes so far.
8. The process of involving RTL students
9. Process of involving SACS students
10. The process of being a "self-reflective teacher" through journal-keeping - what issues came out, how journal was used, what I learned, etc.
11. Conclusion - hopefully a theme will emerge - I'm not sure what it is yet!

So far, i've drafted chapters **3 to 8** (first draft). Once again, I'm pleased we have picked up the process from last year and look forward (with some trepidation) to input to draft chapters:

Cheers Jill



APPENDIX C

Extracts from the Process Journal

**Extracts from action research process journal  
kept by Jill Sanguinetti, May - December, 1991**

## Extracts from Action Research Process Journal

*The following extracts from my process journal have been chosen to illustrate my own reflections about the developing process. The students' names have been changed.*

**3/5/91**

... Enjoyed getting out AR Bulletin No. 2. I feel that leading the process, feeding in info, papers, is really an extension of my classroom teaching role, only working with staff instead of students...

**9/5/91**

Where do we go from here? Last AR staff meeting lively but pressured - time, conditions, people's tiredness. Had to interrupt discussions after 45 minutes. Will there be enough commitment to follow it through? Will I have sufficient energy and insight to remain ahead and follow through?

I don't really know where to go from here. We seem to be moving towards an analysis of personal development, but what will we do with it?

How can we design or plan actions to improve our practice around this? We can change our discourse, but that is hardly an AR project. Go back to McTaggart etc... discuss with ARIA members ... possibly an AR 'where do we go from here?' evening...

**20/8/91**

At staff meeting gave a brief report of what we are up to. Said I would now draft the statement about PD, if there were no comments about the last Bulletin, based on all our discussions - it will be interesting to see if I can say something that captures consensus. Dominica to lead the next session next Tuesday. HF. gave me a set of SACS writing about how my thinking and behaviour have changed since I started the course - beautiful raw material for this project!!!! Perhaps I will work more with this group on the AR - as my own are much more difficult. Still, I must find a way to involve them more directly. I plan on a class meeting next Friday, to start the process. My principle difficulty is still the language - can I introduce the essence in any way other than as 'personal development' - to get their input. Otherwise, it threatens to be 'rape research' - next Friday will be interesting!

**6/8/91**

Today I had to finally face up to the fact that I have been avoiding including my students in discussion about the AR research, and why. Knowing that the meeting was in my teaching diary for tomorrow, I felt more and more uncomfortable, and actually unable to introduce to them the fact that I am doing research, involved in looking at their personal development processes. The reason? because the idea is thoroughly patronising. The terminology, "personal development" has, and would have for them, connotations of my intruding into their personal domains. What a contradiction! With the teaching and activities directed to helping them to get more control over their lives, I am now saying that the most intimate aspect of their lives, I want to poke my nose into, with all my power and a research agenda that they don't understand. In the context of the teaching relationship, the discourse of "personal development" is profoundly subject - object. It is all very well to say that we teachers are also looking at our personal development as teachers, but the students have not been invited to inspect and theorise about our personal development. This rather exposes the rhetoric quoted in the introduction of my research proposal essay, "empowering the researched". respecting their agency as autonomous subjects, and "self-

determination and co-determination".

... I discussed my thoughts briefly with Barbara and Liz - they were in more or less agreement. Started a challenging discussion with Liz, in which she seemed to suggest that I was going along too uncritically ("enthusiastically"?) with these terms - she appears to wish to deconstruct, as I do, but at some point, we must reconstruct in order to have language left to do our work. Liz maintains a critical scepticism - which is good for me - but I am more keen to get on...

### 27/8/91 (RTL group)

A big AR day today. I tried to follow up the idea of the participatory research with my RTL group in the morning. To do this I prepared a sheet (see attached) with graphic from front page of *Everyday Evaluation on the Run* (Wadsworth) on one side.

I first asked them to describe the picture - magnifying glass, mirrors, what were they doing? why? ("too see how pretty they are" - laughter) Why do we need to look in the mirror sometimes? What is important?

Margaret: I can't look in the mirror because I'm blind, but I can learn about myself because of the people around me. They tell me how I am. So I can cope.

Anika: "You know, you look in the mirror, see what right what not right, what good what bad, what you going to do about it"

Chan: Look in the mirror to try to find your direction



Cartoon by  
Simon Keebone  
in  
'Everyday Evaluation  
on the Run'

Me: Good, so so it's important to look at ourselves sometimes, for all the reasons that you said, to learn about yourself, and you don't actually need a real mirror, like Margaret said. Sometimes we need to check what's right and what's wrong, and find our direction. But have another look at the picture. Are all the people just looking at a mirror each, or what?

Someone: They're looking together in a big mirror.

Me: So what's important about that? What is the picture saying?

Someone: We need to look together to see how we all going.

Me: exactly, and that's exactly the idea of the action research that I talked to you about yesterday. Today I thought I would like to talk about that some more and give you some reading about the action research so you can understand more clearly what I am trying to do and what we can do together.

I then went through the sheet slowly, reading checking understanding getting them to comment, which they did all the time with a lot of jokes and laughter.

I asked them if they agreed with our central idea, about the way students develop when they study here, they said."yes, it's true, we do feel more confident etc" However I think they were a bit mind blown about it all - although they were very interested. I stressed the importance of what they think and feel about the course and centre so if we work together, we can make a much better course. General agreement, then I said, "would you like to do some of this research with me?" Would you like to work together so we can find out more about how the students learn and develop here?" ...

### **27/891 (SACS group)**

As I had a windfall two hours with SACS (Dom was absent) I took the opportunity to introduce the idea of the research to them as well. Fortunately there was a tape this time.

Listening to the tape, I'm conscious that I got the idea over well in the time allowed, considering how much language I had to teach to do this. However, I was really pushing it ahead, through some fascinating issues that they wanted to discuss - power, how to bring about change in a bureaucracy, whether it is possible, in a work situation, to do things according to your values, etc. It would have been great to allow these discussions to develop more, but I went ahead, knowing I had my agenda and that I wanted them to do some writing at the end of it.

In the bit when the tape when off, we were talking about power and how they feel powerful here when we are together at the Centre, but then they go out into the outside world, and feel powerless again.

How can they take the power they learn here outside and use it? Some people said they go right back, others said they have changed outside as well, maybe it's a slow learning process. Very interesting discussion about this, unfortunately missed. I said that in terms of AR, that is an important insight - the gap between theory and practice - what can we do about that in terms of our course? Then Carmen said, why not criticise the context, why the course ... then back onto the tape. Another thing I noticed, is that too often I gave the answer ..... I could have let them sort out answers themselves, except everyone talks at the same time, and some facilitation is needed. It is good that I draw out generalities from what they say, but I do it too quickly. I wonder how many people I leave behind in it. Next time, an evaluation of this discussion that I had with them.

They said they would all like to participate and I have asked them to do some writing about how they develop what things about the Centre or the course are important to them, etc. It would have been better to get the questions out of them. "What do you think you could write, where do we go from here, etc, how could you as students best participate, etc.... that was more important than hitting them with something that immediately took the initiative from them and took us right back into the teacher/students roles ... on the other hand, maybe it was best to strike while the iron was hot and get them to write while they had 20 minutes and the ideas were fresh. I keep coming back to the contradiction between the rhetoric of AR - support, collaboration, etc, for the development of the needs and viewpoint of the crit ref group and reality that I have a definite agenda and am under pressure to do the AR for my own purposes - it all comes from me - they have actually have no complaints about the course or problems with it, and I have the power to steer them in the direction that suits me. It will be interesting to see what they come up with. At the end of the lesson, Rose came up to me and thanked me and said "we're really learning a lot".

### **27/891- ARMeeting**

This was our first meeting for a month. It was supposed to start at 3.45 but didn't get going til 4.10 because of people lingering over little details of our staff meeting. I was very pissed off - thought it was a sign of not taking AR seriously, seeing that we have so little time. But really it is the culture of the place and I need to relax more.

I introduced it by saying that this was the second phase of the AR - the presentation to each other, of what we do and why, and how we think about it. Dom gave a fascinating presentation - fortunately on tape. She tied together the aspects of "personal development" self-exploration" "empowerment" in terms of her human services skills course and comm. skills. I will have to synthesise and type out the essence of what she said this weekend. Unfortunately not enough time to develop much discussion...

On the point of teachers's personal development, Dom said at the beginning that she was "nervous" talking in front of her peers, and at the end that she really enjoyed it and found it challenging - she had never had to account for herself in that way before and enjoyed being challenged about her thinking about her work and articulating what her theoretical frameworks actually are - how they are the culmination of twenty years of teaching and research and are integrated into her own value system.

### **13/10/91**

... on the negative side, the last two months of concentrated effort (Babel essay) has taken a big hole out of the AR process. The fact that I've done so little, and no-one else has done anything or hardly even mentioned it, has reinforced my feeling that as far as the "AR group", critical community of enquirers, etc, is concerned, that is really a long way away. It really is me who is leading, initiating, pushing the process with my dear friends and comrades 'helping' -also participating, but not really taking on a lot of responsibility. Like Prayoon said in class "Yes, we want to help you, you're good to us, so we follow you, we'll do what you say!". It's basically the same with the teachers! It makes me think

of what YW says, that it is a matter of bringing about a change in culture, in the way we think, operate, relate, etc... and that takes a lot of time. May to December, with all the pressures we are under, may not be enough -I'm sure won't be - for this to happen. If it weren't for the external pressure of wanting to finish my M.Ed., I could ease into a more relaxed and long-term approach,. Maybe it would be worth taking an extra semester and doing just this.

**22/10/91**

... otherwise, I now feel that I am back in the swing, with distribution of AR Bulletin No. 7 and preparation of No. 8 - it is fascinating to have records of discussions and to see how much more can be got out of them by having them in hard copy - how much more we can develop on that. Miriam is really pleased with how her talk came out... and many people have asked me when we are having the next AR meeting - good signs.

**27/10/91**

AR Bulletin No. 8 now ready to distribute. I'm not sure what to plan for the next AR meeting. Must ask tomorrow if anyone wants to present for this Tuesday. If not, I could do the talking or have a discussion about where it is going. On the same day, AR meeting with the SACS teachers.

**29/10/91**

A big AR day today. First, SACS AR meeting - only Helen and Dom could come - shows impossibility of involving sessional teachers who are only there for classes. But I appreciated the chance of a relaxed discussion with them about it and their input. Main points to emerge:

- importance of distributing the Bulletins and essay to the other teachers - they read them and will contribute in different ways, even if not at meetings.

- question of some teachers being intellectually intimidated and being too nervous to make presentations to other staff - Dom suggested I raise this at the meeting as an issue to be looked at. Importance of all contributing.

- Helen's discussion about feminism - student's writing about this - I have copies for later inclusion.

- Suggestion that we call students in for an extra day to help us reflect on the processes of the SACS course - convene an extra workshop, to ask them to contribute to the research... I'll follow this up.

Then AR meeting - the most relaxed and interesting yet, maybe. Unfortunately they jumped in and started talking before I had a chance to get a timing process going and establish myself as facilitator - but I let it roll and it didn't matter. See tape. Clearly a process is now unrolling, which everyone has identified as being interesting and extremely valuable - signs that it is being owned by the group, not just by me. Best feedback, was for the two transcripts of teacher's presentations. Barb said that the transcripts are invaluable in contributing to her thinking - we would have forgotten what was said, if we didn't see it written down later. For example, a few lines from Dom's talk about *actiori* and reflection and the need for students to have a quiet time to digest new ideas and experiences had prompted her to do the same with her group after the VOC excursion, with good results. Also, Liz and Barb said that after what Miriam said about getting the students to conference together and doing multiple drafts, that they were seriously thinking about doing more of the same in their classes (I am too).

Liz gave a great talk, quite deep stuff about various psychological frameworks that she keeps in mind in approaching her work - quite different from the other two, but complementing them. At the end, we all said how marvellously interesting the talk was and that we couldn't wait to see the transcript... with this meeting I feel that the AR process is going full speed ahead and on a good track - I feel sure that people will want to continue into next year, after the AR period.

# APPENDIX D

## Extracts from the Teaching Journal

**Extracts from teaching journal  
kept by Jill Sanguinetti, May - December, 1991**

## Extracts from the Teaching Journal

*A slightly edited version of my teaching journal for the the first two weeks of September 1991 follows. Students' names have been changed and a few entries have been omitted.*

**2/9/91**

Arrived late and feeling like teaching was the last thing I could do. So went ahead with homework correction and other routine items (after ascertaining about how weekends were, health of children, news, etc)

Homework of auxiliaries and "interested response tags" turned into a series of hilarious role plays. Annika telling a marvellous story about how she won \$50,000 then travelled around the world alone, leaving family at home, and meeting her ideal lover in Spain - he followed her to Sydney, etc - with Li Chin saying "did you"? "were you"? at appropriate intervals. I must learn how to integrate more role play and drama into the lessons.

Second part, we did a play from one of the graded books - boring English play, but they had a wonderful time, giggling and hamming up the acting. Sorry I didn't prepare more; next-time some vocab pre-teaching and an attempt at scenery and props would be good. Ended up energised and a good general day.

**4/9/91**

Not satisfied with my teaching today. First part fine, group correction of common errors in their writing. Then did "Your children are not your children" as a listening and doze exercise. They were very involved and given the emotional and profound issues raised on the general topic of child-raising in Australia, there was some good discussion - all agreed with the sentiment about how we don't own our children. A lot of discussion noting the cultural differences between the attitude in their countries and here in Australia. All identified with the Australian 'norm' as how they would regard their children, rather than how they were brought up at home. Loraine brought up question of emotional blackmail, and her mother. This sparked off more discussion around the question of emotional blackmail, and a few examples of how mothers in particular do this - much laughter and great cross-cultural comparisons.

Not satisfied, because I did not leave enough time for the discussion to flower or time for reflection on the song, before pushing them to do some writing. Clearly they did not feel like it - and were inadequately prepared. Five minutes in groups of three discussion at the ideas would have been better. Only about half attempted writing in the 25 minutes left. I'm aware that I pushed it ahead partly because of Loraine's presence and thought I should give her something to do as Margaret's aide - ridiculous. In trying to find a balance between structure and natural process, teaching skills and encouraging exploration, teacher direction and teacher response, I erred on this occasion to the former.

**7/9/91**

Launching of Marta Rado's report. Rosario and Tina's moving reading of their writing about their lives in front of a large public audience. Two women who have moved from functional illiteracy to being able to write lengthy and, fairly complex descriptions of their lives and including a degree of critical reflection on society as well as having the skills and motivation to



read these in front of Caroline Hogg and various others. 'Personal development' in action!!!

**5/9/91**

Grammar work looking at error analysis from their writing about 'Children'. Quiet writing and correction time. I read 'Snugglepote and Cuddlepote' stories (in preparation for tomorrow's excursion) while women sat around on the floor to look at the pictures.

**9/9/91**

A lovely morning excursion to the May Gibbs exhibition, the Concert Hall and David Jones Flower show. Everyone responded well to the May Gibbs - is the 'universality' of children's culture (which is also women's culture) a bridge for them into anglo-aussie culture? (at least the artistic rendering of our natural heritage?) They also enjoyed the conducted tour of the Concert Hall and especially the Sydney Nolan mural. Lots of photos posing in front of extravagant vases of flowers at DJ's. Later, over lunch, Prayoon regaled us with some funny stories about her sister and her Phillipina friend who are both married to Australians - hilarious multicultural vignettes, showing how powerful the women often are in marriages to Aussies.

Another beautiful SACS session - though they were tired and it was hard to push it long. Reflections and reactions to 'A Company of Strangers' - their writing. Quiet writing and correction time. Fatima's tears in response to an innocent question I asked about her essay - it came out about what had happened to her as a highly qualified migrant woman with a good job in her country of origin, who came here for the sake of her husband and her kids and found she had nothing - suddenly she was on the bottom of the heap. Talk and comforting from friends around. Chuychune's story about how her husband had abducted one of her children for three years when they split up. It is amazing what these women have been through. Nothing like enough time to relate properly with them, to hear their stories, to teach, to give them time to digest all this communication and help them to write.

**9/9/91**

A slow start - taught "Mondayitis" - corrected homework, taught lesson on conjunctions. After break, physical jerks and some moving and shaking exercises, followed by back rubbing in a circle and "volcano" - always good for a laugh and to re-energise.

Then second of our class meetings. Chaired by Annika who had various agenda items prepared - most of which consisted of her lecturing the students on what they should do (remembering to bring books, etc) did not go down well with others and it took a long time before anyone could understand what she was trying to say. Then on question of "talking in class" she delivered a homily on how people should talk to their friends in the break or to the teacher if they have personal problems and that they should not talk about them in the class - after which it was established that people rarely do, anyway. (Clearly, some more input from me on the skills of chairing a meeting would be very useful before the next meeting.) I told them how I approach people's personal problems when they arise in class, emphasising flexibility, that sometimes it is important to stop and discuss the problem if that is what the person wants and they are really in need. At other times, it is not appropriate - we all need to decide if and when it is appropriate to bring things up. With many problems, I might suggest the college counsellor. Under teacher feedback, they told me they were very happy, especially now I was giving more dictation and writing. Juanita said she liked the variety that I give and they all agreed. Some debate about how much BTN ('Behind

The News') they wanted - some wanted twice a week, but they agreed amongst themselves that once a week would be enough... at that point, I felt they were genuinely involved in taking more control about what happens and that it would take the group much longer to take more control in the development of group dynamics. I was pleased with the meeting (see minutes). Next week, Margaret will be chairperson, Li Chin the secretary.

### **10/9/91**

Again, students were in a quiet mood when I entered the classroom, so I decided to utilise that and suggested an hour of quiet writing - catching up, mainly - and individual help, up until the break. I put on a tape of lovely piano sonata music while they wrote (which they enjoyed). They all worked well, including Margaret, who worked unaided. They I asked some of them to read out 'What is the best sized family in Australia? Why?' They did, but somehow the reading out was an anti-climax and there was very little comment and discussion about each other's ideas. I must discuss this with other teachers and see how they handle reading out and discussion sessions such as this.

### **11/9/91**

Started with some nice chats. Then language experience writing on board of about the excursion. Video not working, so ... instead. After most students went to aerobics, a few s4lyed and chatted. Students want to go together on a major excursion to Canberra or somewhere and want me to organise it. Help! I would love to if I had time.

### **12/9/91**

Lots of fun today. Leunig's cartoon about the little woman cracking up. Distributed it and they all laughed, once Prayoon and I explained "cracking up".. He is the one who is really cracking up, said Prayoon.

I prompted, "what do you think about him calling his wife "little woman"... no response.. "I think it's cute", said, Prayoon, "like my boyfriend sometimes calls me *little one*". "Does any one else ever called names that mean you are small, or young, by men?" (I asked.) "What do you think about it?" No answer, so I said, "well, I dont like it if men call me something that makes me seem little or young. Sometimes men in shops say, "yes, *young lady*, or *love*, when they might be young enough to be my son!" (Laughter) "Why do you think men especially Australian men sometimes make it seem that women are little or young?" Someone answered: "Because they want to seem more strong!" ... "Yes, that's right, I don't like it when men do it to me" ... then, chorus of agreement, "yes, it's no good, etc... We are not children... They want us to seem weak.." etc.

Then moved onto analysing Leunig's verb tenses. Contrast past continuous with pst simple, etc. identification exercise, and discussion of tenses. This led into a work sheet in which they had to connect 10 sentences with the names of 10 different verb tenses... very useful questions and discussions - they were listening intently and asking good questions.

After break, BTN on alcohol awareness week. presented vocab first, then que questions then played video. Discussed issues, general agreement about the tragedy of alcoholism and how bad the marketing to you young people is. Replayed video a second time, this time more questions. More discussion. I suggested writing a letter about it... maybe Monday.

Then I felt like singing, so taught them '500 Miles', which they liked. After 'Que Sera', they wanted to do 'Diana', so I put words on the board and they

sang happily until lunch while I and a few of the others jived around the room.

During the lunch break I heard much laughter coming from SACS room at lunch time. Eventually saw the women were teaching each other dances from all their countries and putting on a spontaneous dance show - Pakistani, Greek, Spanish, Egyptian, etc. They were having a ball. I took some photos and joined in a bit, teaching them "heel and toe".. Great group development! Dominica said later that she thought the dancing represented that some healing had taken place, after quite a lot of conflict and sadness in the last week.

Did Leunig again with the SACS group; this group immediately cottoned on and poured scorn on the "little woman" concept. Much more sophisticated analysis of the relationship depicted in the cartoon, and again, grammar analysis. Lecture on verb tenses by me .. centring on past and present perfect. They seemed to enjoy it. In the last hour, they mainly read out their appreciations of Company of Strangers and their essays on "My Life as a Woman" - superb writing. Stayed back to talk to Maria and correct her work - she is really struggling with her English. Later, talking to M, who said that students seek her out and talk about themselves and their lives a lot more. I realised that I have been avoiding this - I tend to cut them off during the week when I am trying to be with mine - in the break etc. I find it hard to relate to so many women, from both of my classes, who are so giving and so needy, all at the same time. Also, pressures of other things I am always doing is showing. Felt exhausted at the end of the the day, and really just wanted to be alone and go for a swim.

**16/9/91**

Totally unprepared today, but no-one seemed to notice. Pairs: "how was your weekend?" then "how do you feel about the holiday? Responses: "looking forward", "can hardly wait", "dreading", etc.

Then talked about where we would like to go, leading to exercise writing postcards from an imaginary holiday and reading them out.

Corrected homework and talked about conjunctions - much more practice needed. There was a good para on the environment in their grammar book - I'll use this again for dictation and possibly develop the environment as a theme next term.

I then gave them back the analysis of their responses to the 'action research' questions. They were very interested and did not have much more to add, except to agree with my four categories. Bing asked why I left out her suggestion that mixed classes are better for younger women. I started to explain that that wasn't the question that was asked, then realised that I should have put it in any way... (positivism and teacher/researcher privilege getting in the way of solidarity?) I asked them what they thought (about younger women). They all said they would prefer to study with all women. Why? "We can muck around, laugh", said Prayoon. "Why not muck around with men in the class?" "We too embarrassed to muck around when there are men."

Later Prayoon had us all in fits imitating Bing's accent. "She can't say 'single child' ...she says 'shee shoo show'!" said Prayoon, in a perfect imitation (in her Aussietrhai accent) of Bing's Chinese accent. (Bing was laughing too.) Angela's and Heidi's birthdays - cards, song and cake... but

next course I will make sure the students organise this themselves... me being the mother here. Lovely empanada from Alicia for lunch.

Realised group not nearly as formed as I had hoped when Margaret said she had not met My or Sally. Must move groups around more and get them to work together.

**17/9/91**

First, a dictation on "the environment"(from grammar book). Strong content - difficult words, but they did it well and said they enjoyed it. Julia and another student left right behind. The main focus for the group to work on was 'what we had learned this term'. Very useful. Happy group work that students extended into the coffee break - seemed unwilling to stop. Students realised what they had learned, preparing to think about the last half of the course. Then reading out and correcting answers to "selfless lives" ('Age' article about a married couple of doctors working in harsh conditions in Eritrea). Finally, sang 'Diana' again (must do tape for Margaret).

A good session with the SACS class. First, gave out work and chatted to them. Then formal letters writing. Then "I am Woman" (Helen Reddy) which they sang with great gusto, straight off. They want to go on a trip or excursion - discuss with Dominica - Commonground?

**18/9/91**

Started off with "Situations Vacant: Housewife" joke advertisement. They laughed, I felt I was being a bit ideological, but they enjoyed it and I did it as a comprehension. Hard to get discussion going around it. I'm not sure why. Were they overwhelmed by it? Language very difficult? Message too strong? I felt I was putting too much in by adding my interpretations too quickly when their's were not forthcoming. Some interesting responses: Li Chin said it made her very angry, because women have to do two jobs, and it's not fair. "That's why I'm not going to get married". Better to be free! Carmen and other married women laughed and said it was true. Chu said, "In Chinese we call it *no name work* because no one knows all the work that women do". Julia said "In Spanish, we call it *anonymous work*. I felt there was a lot more potential with it, but decided to leave it and "go with the flow" and get onto the next thing. On reflection it was fine to introduce it in a light-hearted way as part of the on-going process of building women's identity, and not to try to do anything more with it.

Then we went to the Health Day at the Students union. This was excellent and women enjoyed getting their blood pressure done, watching videos about smoking, etc. getting condoms, leaflets in many different languages and recipes. Then went to the library and they got lots of books to read over the holidays. Then we came back and did a video explaining unemployment and a bit about the Australian economy on BTN. It was just the right level, but more time was needed to really work on the words, revise etc. But some basic ideas got across about causes of the recession, which they seemed to understand.

**19/9/91**

A freezing day, so we had to cancel the planned Yarra excursion. By popular consent, we went into Daimaru instead - I found it depressing, they like it I think. Then they shouted me to a lovely Yum Cha lunch in Little Bourke Street. It was a good ending to the term.

## APPENDIX E

### Extracts from 'Returning to Learning' Students' Input

**On 29/8/91, the RIL students were invited to discuss two questions about how studying at the MWLC helps them personally. After some general discussion, they discussed the issues in groups of 3 or 4, then wrote their responses. This is a selection of the students' written responses.**

**RETURNING TO LEARNING - GROUP 2  
ACTION RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

1. Do you think studying at the Migrant Women's Learning Centre helps you personally? If so, how does it help you?

I think

Speaking, reading Watch News is really help me personally need.

2. What things about the Centre make you feel more confident? Is there anything that makes you feel less confident?

teach us how to be independent for ourselves  
you can share what idea you have  
you can say what you think is right  
how to help teach to learn.

**RETURNING TO LEARNING - GROUP 2  
ACTION RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

1. Do you think studying at the Migrant Women's Learning Centre helps you personally? If so, how does it help you?

I thought, in the Migrant Women Learning Centre.  
because in the Australia, we had different  
women come to this country, and I can  
get a lots of different way the way  
learn.

2. What things about the Centre make you feel more confident? Is there anything that makes you feel less confident?

In this class I felt confident  
because even the teacher start to  
call people start to talk to  
so I felt confident.

**RETURNING TO LEARNING - GROUP 2  
ACTION RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

1. Do you think studying at the Migrant Women's Learning Centre helps you personally? If so, how does it help you?

I think women's learning centre helps because we feel comfortable everybody so friendly

2. What things about the Centre make you feel more confident? Is there anything that makes you feel less confident?

we feel more confident because of women's in the class.

**RETURNING TO LEARNING - GROUP 2  
ACTION RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

1. Do you think studying at the Migrant Women's Learning Centre helps you personally? If so, how does it help you?

I thought learning for studying at the Migrant Women's Learning centre to help me. I felt good and happy, because our class they are friendly. Some times together talked each other about the English new world what the mean make me understand, can use the word talk with some one.

2. What things about the Centre make you feel more confident? Is there anything that makes you feel less confident?

The centre make me feel more confident because with the writing and some reading will get a lot of difficult for my idea.

**RETURNING TO LEARNING - GROUP 2  
ACTION RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

1. Do you think studying at the Migrant Women's Learning Centre helps you personally? If so, how does it help you?

I think study in Migrant Women's Learning Centre it helps to much. and:

Skill English

Other subjects

and to know a people with other culture.

know what happen on the day and the word.

2. What things about the Centre make you feel more confident? Is there anything that makes you feel less confident?

I thought about the centre make I felt more confident with the studying in the class they had some idea by everyone, so in there I can learning anything from the people. Not even from Teacher still.

2. What things about the Centre make you feel more confident? Is there anything that makes you feel less confident?

I felt confident because we are all women to understanding each other.

They are makes me more to understand. easy to learn with friends and theshis,



**RETURNING TO LEARNING - GROUP 2  
ACTION RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

1. Do you think studying at the Migrant Women's Learning Centre helps you personally? If so, how does it help you?

Yes, because different acquaintances, different personalities, more preparation for the future, more security in myself, learn quick and different subject for different job for preparation for the future life. Maybe in the future build more Women's Learning Centre for advancement of the Women.

advancement

2. What things about the Centre make you feel more confident? Is there anything that makes you feel less confident?

I feel confidence, familiarity because every Women's studied here in the Centre. The teacher is good and more understanding with my little English.

1. Do you think studying at the Migrant Women's Learning Centre helps you personally? If so, how does it help you?

Yes it help me more English, help me build up my education, and at this centre ours are women's easy to know each-other.

## APPENDIX F

### SACS Students' Essays

**On 20/8/91 students enrolled in the Social and Community Services Course for NESB Women were asked to write a few lines in response to the question:**

*Has your thinking or behaviour changed since you started this course?*

**This is a collection of the responses and some other pieces of writing by the same group of students.**

## APPENDIX F

### The SACS Students Es.says

The eighteen stories were elicited from the SACS students on 20/8/91 by another teacher at the Centre who was unable to attend the action research meetings, but who took great interest in the project and contributed in other ways. As part of on-going feedback and discussion in her subject, 'Human Services Skills', she asked them to respond to the question,

*"Has your thinking or behaviour changed since you started this course?"*

The stories which follow have been corrected for grammar and spelling and the names changed.

*Connie - Greece*

There have been a lot of changes. Before I used to degrade myself. Now I put more of myself first. I have more confidence from the group, the teachers and being listened to. I have become a better listener: I listen to the kids more and don't get upset so easily. I stand up for myself more and think more clearly. I think what I am going to say and what it will achieve in a situation of conflict.

I can offer support to others because of my greater experience with English.

*Phuong - Vietnam*

The way seems more clearly in front of me.. Things are happening just in the way I expected them to. The issue now is self-evaluation of my potential as well as my English. Sometimes I feel scared; I still have problems with listening comprehension but most of the time, I really like to put myself in challenge. I always talk to myself that I have to do things that I love and do my best to achieve, then whether I succeed or not, is out of my control. With the course, I believe that I have a group of very good companions as well as teachers who probably know what we want to do, where we want to go ... to tell us how to do such things. I'd like to say thanks to everyone for everything.

*Cora - Spain*

Yes, but I don't think my way of thinking has changed that much. As for my behavior, I am more friendly, I find that I like to work with a group (as usually I like to be with myself). We have different ideas, but underneath we are the same, we share the same problems. On the other hand, the course is helping me to understand society and its problems better, to be more aware of others, to be more caring. Before I used to see every thing pink, now I see it black and it is not a nice picture.

*Fatima - Egypt*

Yes, my thinking and behaviour changed since I started the course. Now I "can think clearly , my steps to get a job become certain.

Through my relationship with teachers and friends I became more confident. Now I can hear and understand them easily, and the thing I am most proud of is that I can explain what I want.

I'm happy because I can share with my friends, their talk about their feelings, opinions and problems, and I think that is the right way to help people. When I make a comparison between me and others, I put myself in my real size. I'm not sad to be in a low position because I know that to solve the problem you must identify it then you must do all your best to reach to your goal and now I do.

Maybe the road is long and hard but it deserves the fatigue.

*Anna - Italy*

When I first started the course, I had a lot of confusion in my mind, even though I was and still am very enthusiastic about the course.

My self confidence is improving with the course; I think being with women in class, we are free to express ourselves and share our different points of view, but at the same time we seem to have a lot of things in common and we do support each other.

I have learnt to concentrate more when I listen to people and this doesn't happen just in class, but outside the college situation, and what helps me in this area is a lot of teaching of communication skills being taught in class; it is a continuous reminder for me, to leave my mind free and listen carefully to what people have to really say.

I can now think more clearly in my everyday life situation and I can deal better with things, I still have a lot to learn and I'm very eager to absorb more and more.

My aim is to become a strong, self-assured person, only then I will be able to help others in a positive and constructive way.

*Tran - Vietnam*

I have more confidence when I come to this course, and I can understand more about society in Australia. Here I can understand more about society in Australia.

Here I can hear and share experiences with some friends and I know the way for my future.

The course helps me to know how the children need from the parents, but now I worry because too many families have problems but I don't know why and I know why some families don't want to have children when they get married.

*Maria - Peru*

Yes, because I started to feel more confident. I can express myself more properly and in that way my way of thinking is growing up too. In this course I started to get more understanding about Australian society and about our situation as migrants.

Everyday we share our experiences. It's helpful to know women from different backgrounds have the same feelings. It's like looking at my face in a mirror and seeing a contrast.

Sometimes I have felt depressed because the reality is cruel and hard to overcome but I try to be as positive as I can. I believe I have started to change and I would like to see me at the end of this course ...

*Chuychune - Thailand*

This course gives me more confidence about knowing myself and brings out my talent that I've been used to for a long time since I became mother of four children. I see clearly who I am and what I want apart from being a mother. I know what I'm capable of, I want to do more for myself and give to others. I want to use my ability in the right way. I learned a lot from the course, understand more and learn more from others' experiences. I know that I'm a very strong person, I always plan a lot of things for my life. This course helps me to plan it more clearly and better. I admire the teachers here who have such strength to show me how I can see myself, and lift me up high with their voices telling me that I'm capable.

*Carmella - Italy*

With this SACS course I feel I can reach the ambition I have in my mind, even if at this stage I still feel not very confident in my spoken English and written English.

But I believe with all those very talented teachers who are very helpful, very understanding, very human, that gives me the courage to go further and further to reach some goal, and feel capable in skills which I never thought to understand.

They encourage me to become more aware of my own values and feelings and be more assertive, and I will never finish thanking those magnificent teachers because they give me the opportunity to do this course.

*Van Nguyen - Vietnam*

This course has given me a lot of new things about society in Australia, When I started this course, I felt discouraged because I couldn't follow or understand all the things when my friends spoke. That made me very sad that I didn't have the intelligence.

But now, I feel a little bit confident with my understanding and knowledge and can follow the teacher. Furthermore, this course has given me one important thing: that is the system of society that I live in now. I think that's very important because when I understand this culture I'll push myself to go ahead and it will be easy to know how to behave.

*Fahra - Pakistan*

Since I started this course I am feeling more confidence. Before I started this course I thought that I could follow the lessons and I could not understand anything, and also that it would be a waste of time for me. But now I am becoming very confident and I can explain what I want. I am becoming very punctual. During this course I learn to share and ask questions.

When I reached Australia every thing was new for me. And I thought my standard was very low, I could not do anything. When I started this

course I found it very interesting and helpful for me. It changed my life. It gives me a lot of strength and speaking power. I learn many new words.

*Amina - Iran*

I think it is very hard to answer this question if our thinking or behaviour has been changed, because sometimes it is easier for other people to judge that. But I am sure that we get more confidence than before and because of this confidence probably we think more clearly. We practised listening to others and sharing our feelings and experience. Then we found that we have so many things in common even if we have different backgrounds. But some of our problems are the same and dealing with shared problems makes it easier to solve. As I have mentioned before we've got more confidence and this is the key to close darkness behind and exchange our ideas and learn more about the facts in our societies. We can get new information and improve our skills which is useful for our personal life as well as in social life.

*Sabina - Poland*

In my opinion my thinking and behaviour haven't been changed. Four weeks is too short time for that. I don't know what and why I have to change. The course is very good and interesting but I think it would be more useful for me to learn general English.

*Irina - Macedonia*

I believe there is a change in my thinking and behaviour since I have started this course. I can think more clearly and listen attentively. I can dismiss my problems where before I found it very difficult to do.

The issues that we have discussed I found interesting and informative. Also I am more confident to say or give my view on a particular issue.

I am more open with the women than I was before. I can share or talk about anything - problems. I am comfortable and at ease in the group and I am very glad that at times I can be of help to some of the ladies, either in computers or English.

*Dora - Portugal*

Before, in my bad days I felt like a mosquito. Now, I'm very happy, I make friends, I can understand better my problems. I stopped thinking just me has this or that.

In my home I have more understanding with my children and husband. I improve my English - every day I learn new words and about Australian society.

I can explore my curiosity, at the bus stop or in cafes or in different places. I ask the people what I want to know. Before I started the course, I thought my English was very bad. I'm more confident now.

From now on, I would like to start an unpaid job, to contact people who need help, and that way help myself and feel more helpful to others.

*Rosario - Philippines*

Since I started this course I thought I couldn't make it because of my poor education but little by little then I catch up slowly. Now I am confident to talk with the people, and I have changed my attitude, not to interrupt others when they are talking, and also I hope I can improve my writing, especially the spelling. I think I have far more to go with this problem, but to me, I'm sure one day I can. I did learn to share each others problems.

*Diana - Peru*

Since I started this course, I have had many positive things. I have refreshed my knowledge, I'm improving my general, technical English. I'm able to get to know the people and to participate more in the environment of Australian society. I feel that I am getting more confident. It's preparation for work in the future.

*Laura - Italy*

As I'm developing through life's experiences, I realise that things in life aren't black and white as I used to believe. I now know life is much more complicated. When everything goes apparently well, I found that one's personality or behavioural thinking doesn't change or develop, until some degree of suffering or significant changes happen in one's life.

I'm developing by opening myself sincerely to others, sometimes even to the point of risking to be criticised, or to be judged, but other people's points of view be it from teachers, friends or colleague students, they all help me to broaden my mind.

This SACS course in particular is giving me strength, encouragement, more self-confidence. That is showing in my outside school relationships with other people. I believe I owe this development or empowerment to the subjects and topics we deal with during the SACS course. I also find the experience of sharing my thoughts and ideas with other women in the class very valuable as they help me to thank that our problems are sometimes similar or at least can be discussed and seen in a better perspective.

Ultimately, I would feel more satisfied and most of all self-confident, if I would be able and capable of doing further study and get a better education, and to me the SACS course for women, it's the start or the first step towards my final goal.

*Helenka - Yugoslavia*

I was full of confidence when this course started but now I'm really confused and worried. At first I was confident because I did another English course and the atmosphere in class was familiar to me and I really enjoyed it. I'm enjoying this course too but I worry a lot.

I'm confused and worried because I lost the hope that I will continue with further study. I can see that I'm not able to because of my pain. When I go home after the school I'm not able to write or practice new words... I feel a lot of pain and just have to rest. Because of this I'm really worried and angry with myself.

*Helenka wrote the following and gave it to me one week later:*

Having an opportunity to be in this school is really great. In this school we learn English, we learn about Australia, about Australian society and Australian history and what is important for us migrant people, where we can turn to for help when we need it. We are getting a lot of information that if we were not here we would never know. All of the teachers are very patient, helpful, understanding, pleasant and they always have time to talk and give us advice. We feel comfortable with them and we feel that they really care for us, what we really need, and we really appreciate it. In this school we gain our confidence and how to walk on the street without fear that somebody will ask us and we don't know how to answer. We are walking with our heads up and ready to talk.... We are meeting women from other countries, we are sharing our experience, helping each other, consulting and caring for each other. I really enjoy this school and I'm grateful to all teachers and people who established this school.



# APPENDIX G

## Timeline and Summary of Meetings

# Timeline and Summary of Meetings

## 1991

**Fro** Idea formed at ARIA weekend seminar (Commonground)

**April** Idea floated with MWLC colleagues  
Project negotiated with LY as thesis research topic

### **Holidays**

May7 Decision at staff meeting to form group and undertake project

May8 *AR Bulletin No. 1* circulated

May14 Presentation of plan to 'Qualitative Research Methodology' class

May20 1st AR meeting: 'reconnaissance' and theme identified

May21 *AR Bulletin No. 2* circulated

June 4 2nd AR meeting: more discussion of 'personal development'

June 14 Formal proposal submitted as coursework essay to LY

June 16 *AR Bulletin No. 3* circulated

June 25 3rd AR meeting: draft statement on personal development discussed

June 28 Dinner/social gathering of AR group at Jill's: MB invited to make input

### **Holidays**

July24 *AR Bulletin No. 4* circulated: 'Where to from here?'

July30 4th AR meeting: consolidating and planning the 'mini-teach in'

Aug 1 Meeting with TL to gain NMCOT permission

Aug 2 Dinner/social at Liz's: Lee Kewish invited to make input

Aug 10 *AR Bulletin No. 5* circulated

Aug16 Meeting with SACS teachers about the project to discuss their role

Aug26 Introduced project to RTL class at class meeting

Aug27 - Follow-up with RTL students: structured input and discussion on AR

group - Introduced project in 2 hr discussion session on AR with SACS  
(tape recorded)

- 5th AR meeting: 'mini teach-in' - DN's presentation

Aug29 Feedback discussions about meeting of 27/8 in normal staff meeting

Sept. 9 *AR Bulletin No. 6* circulated

Holidays Wrote 'The Sound of Bable and the Language of Friendship' for BN

Oct9 6th AR meeting: MF's presentation

Oct18 *AR Bulletin No. 7* circulated

Oct29 7th AR meeting: LC's presentation

Nov12 *AR Bulletin No. 9* circulated

Dec3 8th AR meeting: BS's presentation

Dec4 AAACE workshop 'What if there is no work?' DN & JS

Dec7 Students' last day

Dec17 *AR Bulletin No. 10* circulated

Holidays - commence writing first draft of thesis  
 - presentation of project at ARIA weekend workshop  
 (Commonground)

**1992**

Feb3 first day back at MWLC

March3() *AR Bulletin No. 11* circulated

Holidays

April20 informal staffroom discussions about impact of the project noted down

April30 9th AR meeting: draft chapters circulated for comment and feedback

May 1 *AR Bulletin No. 12* circulated

May7 10th AR meeting: MM's presentation

Holidays thesis writing

Aug? 11th AR meeting: JS's presentation

Aug. 23 left MWLC to take up new position

Oct. 7 presentation of thesis findings and discussion: ARIA monthly meeting

Oct. 13 feedback interview with LC tape recorded and transcribed

Oct29 12th AR meeting: presentation of concluding chapter and group feedback session (taped recorded)

**1993**

Jan26 penultimate draft circulated to AR group and approved by LY