GENDER EQUITY POLICY IN AUSTRALIA: PAST AND PRESENT

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Introduction

The dominant theme in gender equity policies in Australia in 1990 is the aim to encourage young women and girls into non-traditional study and work. At the school level these are led by girls and technology strategies and activities aimed at expanding girls' career options (NSW, Education Portfolio, 1990, Department of Employment, Education and Training (DEET) 1989). On the face of it these can be viewed as real attempts to ensure that young women share in the rapidly changing world of technology and a re-structured workplace based on new skills and new ways of organising the economy. Certainly this is how the policy is presented in the documents. However, career options, in this context, are narrowly defined and located within the findings of policy reviews which emphasise girls' traditional under-participation in scientific and technical subjects, and how their choice of a narrow range of career options and lower levels of self esteem have contributed to low academic expectations and aspirations (NSW Department of Education, 1990). The key strategies put forward by most Australian governments focus on redressing what is more usually articulated as a deficit or difference in how young women experience schooling vis a vis men and boys; women and girls, according to this discourse, must be encouraged into technology, and they must expand their career options (into science and technology). The circulatory nature of this discourse is yet to be fully explored.

The strategies encouraging women and girls into non-traditional study or work can be framed within a range of theoretical models that have been used at one time or another in the past,[2] to support non-sexist or counter-sexist approaches in schooling and society. For example, it is evident that the encouragement of girls and women into male dominated areas of science and technology, does draw on a deficit model of learning. Implicit in the model is the question of women's lack of ability, confidence or skills relative to male experience, (Gray, 1985, 40-1). Far better for them to move into the 'mainstream' (a mainstream that is largely based on the lives of men), presumably away from whatever they have been doing until now.

This approach when used in the past has helped with the introduction of strategies associated with countering girls' low participation in mathematics and science, in changing the attitudes of girls through positive role-modelling, in the provision of information and broadening of career options and the dissemination of more specific careers advice. Such strategies have contributed to increasing the awareness and self-confidence of women and girls. They have had some usefulness over the last few decades and certainly have produced the building blocks for policy development in the 80s and the 90s. But, gender equity policy framed in a narrow technocratic and economic way, without taking account of the social and ideological bases to it, does not address the more fundamental biases in content, teaching and assessment in schools or the sexual division of labour in Australian society. More importantly, such policies ignore female experience and fail to incorporate into curriculum and school organisation any notion of power or empowerment for women and girls.

This article does not intend to explore the theoretical implications of the deficit or any other model of educational reform. What the following discussion purports to do is sketch a brief but relevant historical background to gender equity and connect that to recent policy change in Australian education and analyse the place of female education in it. A recent report on careers' advice, industry attitudes and student perceptions about female entry in non-traditional study and work in the Illawarra (South Coast of NSW) concludes that if real change is to occur then schools, industry and Technical and Further Education (TAFE) will need extensive staff development and support if those girls who decide to take on non-traditional work are to succeed. Young women will need more up-to-date, relevant and specific information as well as support and encouragement. Trade teachers and a majority of industry personnel interviewed as part of the study either opposed the entry of women to the trades or dismissed them as incompetent or inadequate to the study/work attached to the trade/technical area (Kyle et al, 1990). Such attitudes are widespread despite Anti-Discrimination legislation and non-sexist education policies in all Australian states. The beliefs about female inferiority and difference which inform them have changed minimally from the more overt and damaging sexist nature of schooling for girls in the past.

Historical Background

In the nineteenth century the rise of mass compulsory schooling introduced into children's lives a socialisation process conducted in a newly created institution: the state school. In the twentieth century the rise of the experts - child welfare workers, teachers, nurses, doctors, counsellors, guidance officers, school attendance officers, baby health clinics, kindergarten advocates - introduced policing of childish activities outside of school as well. No longer were parents viewed as the most appropriate teachers and carers of their young. Mothers were urged to look to science for advice on childrearing, child health, nutrition and child development. It was a science that reduced childcare to a set of rules and mother/child relationships based on adherence to set formula and exact timekeeping (Reiger, 1985; Reiger, 1987; Davey, 1987; Dyhouse, 1989; Kyle, 1990; Kyle, Jones & Black, 1987; Kyle, 1987b; Snow, 1989).

The institutionalisation of children through the introduction of compulsory schooling supported the emergence of a dependency model of childhood. Child labour and thus the concept of childhood were transformed as schooling was extended to produce a more efficient workforce. The transformation of childhood toward a set of dependent characteristics fitted well with the ideal of a bourgeois family of a male breadwinner with a dependent wife and children and it was enshrined in the Harvester Judgement of 1907 in New South Wales.[3] But, this was never a clearcut process as both women and children positioned and re-positioned themselves within this patriarchal framework to, at least partially, determine their own responses and futures. In the words of Alcoff (1988, 433) explanations about the social and economic position of women and girls cannot be separated from their cultural and historical context.

Before the advent of compulsory state schooling working class women and girls were schooled informally as were men and boys. Daughters were taught by their mothers and other adult women. Boys learnt through apprenticeships. How such learning occurred and how different it was for women and girls is difficult to determine given the lack of source material or historical analysis of working class childhood. Childish voices are the most difficult to find; after all their powerlessness, and subsequent lack of voice, is perhaps the greatest of all groups in society. However, the education of girls was more usually religious and moral and given in dame schools, Sunday schools, charity schools, schools of industry and industrial schools (Kyle, 1986; Kyle, 1980; Kyle, 1987a; Kyle, 1987b; Purvis, 1989). In nineteenth century Australia working class girls were more likely to be taught by untrained teachers in church schools, their absence from school was rarely questioned, the subjects of sewing, singing and music dominated their school day, and the belief that young women should be educated for domesticity was integral to the development of a philosophy of female learning (Kyle, 1986).

By the end of the nineteenth century every state in Australia had passed some kind of 'free, compulsory and secular' legislation. For all children the concept of compulsory schooling, in one form or another, would from thereon shape the major learning experiences of childhood and adolescence. For young women and girls, middle and working class, the massive introduction of enforced compulsory schooling pointed to the reinforcement of traditional family and feminine values. Aboriginal students, male and female, were excluded or forced into institutionalised, separate schooling. As noted elsewhere, Aboriginal schooling has to be viewed through the lens of racism and the associated poverty, socio-economic disadvantage, actual violence, dispossession and political oppression, that has characterised their lives, (Kyle, 1990, 46). In the period 1880 to 1940 in New South Wales a policy of protection removed Aboriginal children, sometimes forcibly, from their homes. The younger girls were taken to Cootamundra Training Home to be trained by the Protection Board matrons as domestic servants. They were taught domestic skills, such as washing, ironing, scrubbing, sewing and cooking (Brady, 1984).

From the time of European invasion Aboriginal culture has been devalued by whites with no account taken of the diversity of their traditions and life experience. On the contrary, the policy has been to force

Aborigines into submission through a concerted implementation of regressive policy action in education and society. Aboriginal girls and boys and women/girls from all groups therefore have had a considerable range of negative influences reinforcing and reproducing inequality with enforceable, compulsory schooling for some, or exclusion from it for others! How individuals or groups experienced state schooling, whether they were in the classroom or excluded from it, is thus framed by the complex interaction of gender and class/race as well as religion, disability, geography and age (Kyle, 1986; Kyle, 1988; Kyle, 1989; Williamson, 1979; Williamson, 1980a; Williamson, 1980b). Therefore, it is difficult to consider the parameters of current policy, as having the power or practical ability (not to mention the commitment) to succeed in effecting change when the policy ignores so much that is important in children's lives. In developing an understanding of the processes and policy involved in the education of girls or Aborigines it is useful to turn to the concept of equity and try to determine what educationalists were aiming for in equity policy in Australian schools in the past as well as in the present.

Equity, compulsory schooling and the state

Historically, the official discourse on equity in schooling has been linked to the ideology of progress (defined almost always in terms of more schools, more children in the schools and more intervention by the state into children's lives) and the expansion of the economy. It changed forever the ways in which children and adults would experience family life, the world of work and social interaction. There is little doubt compulsory state schooling introduced an organised system of schooling whereby girls learned to do their 'womanly work' more 'efficiently' and more 'effectively' (Turnbull, 1989, 83-84; Kyle, 1986; Jones, 1985, ch.1; Middleton, 1988; Fry, 1985; MacKinnon, 1984; Zainu'ddin, 1982; Williamson, 1979; Williamson, 1980b; Williams, 1983a; Williamson, 1982; Theobald, 1984). Nonetheless, although the intrusion of the state into women teachers and female students lives was a restricting force (more emphasis on domestic science, the gendering of teaching, preference for and more attention to the education of boys, hegemony by men of school knowledge and policymaking in education) it was also a potentially liberating one (access and participation guaranteed, access to secondary and higher education, access to 'school knowledge', schooling and training for a wider range of jobs particularly in the public service and commerce). This is not to argue that working class girls and Aboriginal students gained an equivalent access, participation or opportunity to succeed as did other students in schooling. But, state compulsory schooling did change the way in which all children in Australia would experience childhood. Working class girls, for example, although experiencing a differentiated schooling because of their gender and their class, were at least in a public school that offered a pathway to jobs in shops and offices, (see Kyle 1986; and Jones, 1985, for a discussion of this for the late nineteenth century in Australia). And, although how we assess that change in access and participation to state schooling remains problematic, it cannot be ignored as a real shift in the experience of all female children in Australia.

In a recent text, Jones, McCulloch, Marshall, Smith & Smith (1990) describe the changing concept of equality for the New Zealand education system, and what they say is useful for the Australian situation. They argue that the concept of 'equality' has been embedded in official discourses as a major rationale for the rise of mass schooling. The sheer growth in pupil numbers, the establishment of more and more schools, the strengthening of compulsory clauses, the lengthening of the time spent in school, the provision of special schooling for special groups, the spread of mass secondary schooling and the provision of special provision for children in remote areas, the introduction of a standardized curriculum, the use of external examinations common to all schools; all of these constituted for late nineteenth and early twentieth century educators the means by which 'equality' would be achieved. Children with talent, irrespective of their background, would achieve. In Australia by 1900 most of these policies had been implemented or, according to the rhetoric, should have been. It was believed the children of poorer families would take advantage of secondary schools to build themselves a 'ladder' to better things. In reality access to the early state high schools was not at all clearly achievable in practice because of a stiff entrance examination and a high quarterly fee (Kyle, 1986).

By the 1920s and 1930s 'equity' was defined differently. In New Zealand it was framed within a concern for educating the "whole child". Creativity and new initiatives were the order of the day (Jones, McCulloch, Marshall, Smith & Smith, 1990:30). In Australia the primary and secondary curriculum had

been re-organised by 1920, the Qualifying Certificate at the end of primary school was introduced into New South Wales, a sorting and sifting process via the QC allocated school places to children on the basis of their results to either academic, technical or domestic science high schools (Barcan, 1980; Kyle, 1986; Hyams & Bessant, 1972; Miller, 1987).

It was the post-1950 shift toward a concept of equality of opportunity in education which was presented as a major reform and a real step in the direction of real equity for all groups and for boys and girls. In New Zealand and Australia this was realised by a modification of external examination to cater for a wider range of pupils, the expansion of the curriculum at primary and secondary level, special provision for 'disadvantaged' groups (Maori people, Aborigines, country children, the disabled (mental and physical), and children with problems at home and in need of counselling or guidance (Jones, McCulloch, Marshall, Smith and Smith, 1990; Yates, 1987). Equality of opportunity as it was determined in this period was predicated on the belief that every individual had the right to achieve to their fullest potential.

Thus, equity has changed; it is clearly not a static concept but it has been used by various governments and policymakers to justify the extension of compulsory schooling and the intrusion of the state into child life. Compulsory schooling and its rationale, based on equity, has been judged harshly by history. It can be painted as a negative force eroding the natural rhythm of ordinary lives and interfering in the social and economic relationships of working class daily events. By and large, the compulsory school day standardised the curricula, the architecture, the teaching practice, and school behaviour of children in Western education systems. It has enforced the attendance of all children of 'school' age; it has enforced the non-attendance of those considered too young. It has undermined the parent's custodial role and there has been a gradual loss of control by teachers of classroom practice and curriculum content. It has had a profound influence on family economics, patterns of childrearing, on traditional forms of skill transmission and has institutionalised the production and dissemination of knowledge. It reconstructed childhood experience and framed it within the parameters of state legislation; a new concept of childhood policed within the formal school (Jones, McCulloch, Marshall, Smith & Smith, 1990; Bowles & Gintis, 1976; Apple, 1989; Miller, 1987). Centralised state schooling was introduced to nineteenth century Australia because a range of private and church agencies simply met their own sectional needs rather than responding to the broader community. The state system that grew into the bureaucratic monolith of the early twentieth century, had, of course, one saving grace - it catered, in theory and sometimes in practice, to all children irrespective of gender, class, ability or socio-economic background (although it excluded Aborigines, the disabled and adult learners, see Kyle, 1988; Kyle, 1987a; Kyle, 1989; Williamson, 1979; Williamson, 1980). Its newly created successor - the locally-focused market-oriented public school - also follows this long held egalitarian ideal in Australian state schooling. Historians in the future will have the job of assessing whether such ideals were fundamental to current policy and whether they ultimately are achieved.

Aronowitz & Giroux (1985) argue that American policymakers have always tied the concept of social justice with equality of opportunity with that tied, in turn, to economic and institutional expansion; so too in Australia in the past and the present. In July 1988 the Federal Ministry for Employment, Education and Training, The Hon. J.S. Dawkins, tied equity to growth in the education system when he wrote:

> Improvements in access and equity are heavily dependent on growth in the system. Without new places in the system, it will be difficult to change the balance of the student body to reflect more closely the structure and composition of society as a whole.

For women and girls the implications of the Scott Report and the Dawkins' 'white paper' are far-reaching. On the one hand, if taken literally they could point to greater resources and commitment to training and improving the work skills and work opportunities for women and girls. On the other hand, such policies can be interpreted as simply imposing on women the onus to move into non-traditional fields - where male culture and male hegemony prevail and where women, even if they penetrate, are not welcome and not able to pursue the same career pathway as men. That is, this could be seen as the deficit

model 90s style - writ large in the linking of gender equity more explicitly to the economic/industrial needs of the Australian economy.

Since the 1950s in Australia the rapid growth in student numbers, the introduction of mass secondary schooling and the development of a more explicit emphasis on equality of opportunity in education has created a complex set of conditions in state schooling for historians to assess. For example, in the 1970s and the 1980s the terms equity and 'excellence' have replaced the terms equality and inequality as descriptors of policy aims in state schooling provision. Female pupils constitute half of the school population and women are more than half of primary and secondary school teachers. The position of women and girls as learners and as teachers in the education system is now clearly an issue and few education systems are prepared to argue that non-sexist strategies or anti-discrimination legislation is not necessary. Educational policymakers, however, continue to minimise the importance of gender vis a vis other issues (e.g. devolution, deregulation) and rarely examine the fundamental ideology and implicit theory informing their work.

Such one-dimensional policies also discount the value of traditional fields for women, and the particular skills women already have, e.g. language, communication and organising skills. They ignore the domestic role women continue to shoulder and lack of real input of men into the traditional caring/nurturing roles at home. They do not challenge the inadequate careers advice and negative attitudes from industry that still largely prevail, (Kyle et al 1990). In addition, devolution and deregulation can be viewed as negative concepts when placed alongside gender equity. In recent research parents, industry, schools/TAFE and students are found to hold traditional and gender-stereo-typed attitudes about the study and work aspirations of women and girls. The introduction of a market/industry driven school system, without reference to this complex set of life experiences framing the world of women and girls, could simply reinforce such negative trends. None of this makes any sense of course unless viewed against the background of the economic and schooling policy of the 1970s in Australia where the twin factors of high youth unemployment and large numbers of schools combined to force educational and social change of a significant kind. And, framing all of it was a newly elected Labor Government hungry for a chance to prove its mettle. Leading that party and that movement for reform was the ill-fated and charismatic Gough Whitlam. His short-lived leadership and his much longer and far-sighted vision and political strength were enough to set in train new insights and commitment to gender equity never before envisaged in any Australian state.

Gender Equity and the 1970s

When Gough Whitlam abolished tertiary fees in 1972 he did so on a wave of optimism which had been gaining momentum since the late 60s. Equality of opportunity in education appeared to gain real meaning and commitment through such programs as the Disadvantaged Schools Program and the Innovations Programs. The Commonwealth Schools Commission (CSC) and the Karmel Report (1973) were part of the heady days of school reform which addressed the needs of disadvantaged groups with more energy than had been the case in the past. Policies on sexism in schooling, Aboriginal education and multiculturalism were either adopted or would soon be; school based curriculum development, plans to overcome youth unemployment and community support networks were fostered in New South Wales by a new Labor education minister, the Rt. Hon. Paul Landa. In 1972 the Australian Science Education Project (ASEP) was launched and in 1975 the Social Education Material Project (SEMP) and Man a Course of Study (MACOS) introduced a curriculum focus on values issues into Australian Schools. But, the most spectacular change was numerical: in 1945 there were 975,000 children enrolled in Australian schools; by 1974 this number had grown to three million (Gilmour & Lansbury, 1978).

The federal government of the early 1970s was a welfare state government. Its enemies saw it as being on a reckless spending spree; its supporters applauded the increased budget outlay on schooling as representing real commitment to reform and change. Its detractors argued that by the 1980s very little had been achieved in changing the socio-economic status of those moving into higher education (after the abolition of fees) or in effecting overall change to the outcomes of secondary schooling. Its supporters argued that there was change; for example, a broadening of the base of student entry to the tertiary sector (Smith et al, 1988; Barcan, 1980). The greatest single theme in Australian society and

education by the late 1970s was much less sanguine; this was the period of massive increase in youth unemployment. In 1970, 3.2 per cent of 15-19 year olds were unemployed. by 1980, this had risen to 16.7%. The figures would continue to rise. Unemployment figures for women aged 15-19 years were much higher than for males, see Table 1. When 20 year olds are scrutinised it is found that the picture is even more bleak; with 17.5% of women looking for full time work compared to 13.7% of men. The publication of the report **Girls, School and Society** (CSC, 1975) was a watershed for gender equity in Australia. It documented systematically for the first time the restrictive and stereotyped nature of girls' schooling and their location in a small number of low status, lowly paid positions in the labour force. From this time the various governments and education systems were not able to ignore what were, in effect, substantial problems of discrimination and disadvantage in school and society experienced by women and girls in Australia. Unfortunately, reforms arising out of this and similar reports, had to compete for funds and resources in a rapidly contracting economic and educational sector. The 1980s put a brake on education spending and, not surprisingly, altered the ways in which gender equity policy would be defined from there on.

TABLE 1:	UNEMPLOYMENT IN AUSTRALIA, SEPTEMBER 1989		
Total Unemployed	6.6	5.6	6.0
15 - 19 yr olds	15.3	14.0	14.6
20 yrs & over	5.4	4.8	5.0
Looking for f/t work	7.0	5.3	5.8
15 - 19 yr olds	17.5	13.7	15.3
20 yrs & over	5.8	4.7	5.0

(**SOURCE:** Australian Bureau of Statistics, **The Labour Force**, Australia, September, 1989)

Gender Equity and the 1980s

Gender equity in the 1980s began auspiciously dominated by the Development of **The National Policy for the Education of Girls**, (CSC, 1987). The precedents to this were the Participation and Equity Program, the Sex Discrimination Act and Affirmative Action Legislation; all introduced, supported and largely brought to fruition by Senator Susan Ryan the Minister for Education from 1984 to 1987 in the Hawke Labor (federal) government which replaced the Fraser Liberal Co-alition in 1984. The effectiveness of these programs was enhanced by the more significant equity focus in them; all were underpinned by an 'equality of outcomes' philosophy not seen in gender equity before (Taylor & Henry, 1988, 102). With the resignation of Senator Susan Ryan and her replacement by the Rt. Hon. J. Dawkins the National Policy for Girls was not abandoned but there was a shift in how it was to be realised in the future. The Commonwealth Schools Commission was abolished and the Department of Employment, Education and Training (DEET) became the government body to oversee Federal educational policy.

Recent change to state and federal education policies in Australia reflect new priorities which, by definition do not exclude equity, but which in practice could do so; the policy changes echo the text of overseas reports such as **A Nation at Risk** and the **Education Reform Act.**[4] The national education policy contained in the Dawkins' 'White Paper' outlines an Australian educational agenda for higher education in the 1990s. It is described by Kenway and Blackmore as 'reductionistic and economistic' (Blackmore & Kenway: 1988, 39-41). Taylor and Henry (1988) paraphrase neatly thus:

... despite the stated commitment to equity, the White Paper's (proposed by the Federal Australian Government) core economistic and reductionist assumptions - reducing education predominantly to that which is marketable - have generated a set of reforms which will do little for the advancement of female students or staff.

The implications for women teachers and learners in these recent policy shifts in education systems where economic rationalisation has become the paramount measurement for effective schooling, are dramatic if difficult to assess. Teachers, especially those seeking promotion or the upgrading of their positions, are flocking to courses which emphasise educational administration, in all its guises, in an effort to prepare themselves not to teach, but to budget, to barter and to be better entrepreneurs. These are, of course, fields traditionally viewed as more appropriate for male educational managers. For women teachers the policies proposed can be viewed as another attack on the feminised state elementary classroom - another page, albeit a complex and contradictory one, in the history of class and gender relations in Australian schools.

In New South Wales the **Scott Report** recommends that recruitment of teachers be changed from a centralised model to a local/regional selection process. All teaching positions will be advertised and applicants will apply to the local principal and selection will be made in consultation with executive teachers and the local cluster director (Scott: 1989, 26-27). There are no references to the effect of gender relations in teaching or to the wide disparity in numbers and power between those who teach (largely women in primary schools and kindergarten) and those who administer at all levels (men). The Scott Report has no hesitation in framing its recommendations as 'An Economic Equation for School Education'. It predicts a 'fairer promotional system', but makes no reference to the fact that, in both government and non-government schools in Australia, there has been a long-standing underrepresentation of women in promotion positions since the beginning of formal European education systems in the colony. In the non-government system, where local and regional selection of teachers has been policy at all times up to the present, there are no more women in top positions than in the centralised bureaucracies of the state. In the Catholic sector selection which has been based on 'merit' for the role of principal has not given equal outcomes to women on a par with men (Ryan: 1987). The most recent policy document in New South Wales **Strategies and Directions for Change**[5] has no reference in it to the education of girls or the gendered nature of teaching. In the section on disadvantaged groups the discussion is limited to Aboriginal learners, multicultural schooling and special education. Women and girls are off the agenda. It is as though policymakers have retreated to what Hansot and Tyack have termed 'the silence' of policy talk. They argue that in the history of American educational policy, major changes take place in gender and schooling often with little or no discussion or controversy (Hansot & Tyack, 1988). In the Australian example it is clear that a major shift has occurred in the way gender equity is defined, and it is equally clear that there is really no official concern that this has happened.

Girls and Non-traditional Study and Work

Silence is a way of masking women's voice although that silence is not one-dimensional. While the silence of policy talk evidently leaves women and girls out of the central policy file it has also to construct where women and girls fit within the new system - it informs women and girls about what their future should ideally be in the re-structured education system. And for female students the call of reform is towards technology. Nothing in the Scott Report or the Dawkins' white paper or overseas policy change suggests that men and boys may need to change as well. Nor is there real explication of the problems encountered by women and girls when they do decide to take on non-traditional work or study. It is as though the last twenty years of research on women, society and schooling has gone unnoticed by the policymakers - or, in their haste to pose education as an investment and a resource which if distributed 'efficiently and effectively' in economic terms, will effect some kind of equity at the entry level of and progression through schooling, the policymakers have forgotten about social justice, ignored the past and its difficulties associated with implementing gender equity policy and are more concerned to put in place the government's agenda for the 90s.

In New South Wales policy development at a state and Federal level has implications for women's access to training/education overall - but more specifically the impact is in the area of women and non-traditional study and work. In addition, social justice has all but disappeared under the rhetoric of efficiency and effectiveness in the labour market. This is particularly clear in recent policy shifts where equity issues have been displaced and are now secondary to 'skill formation' where,

> To the Commonwealth Government/ACTU/employer tripartite educational decision-making partners, education is now chiefly, if not only, a subset of skill formation ... The Commonwealth Government priority area of vocational training, to increase worker participation in the manufacturing sector, will negate or reduce preparatory, generalised and access programs for skill training (Junor, 1989, 124).

The re-direction of TAFE priorities towards entry-level training and the voluntarism of access programs (e.g. Skillshare) and subsequent lack of accreditation could effect the access of certain groups to training and education. For example, fewer mature age women or, in fact, young school leavers could find TAFE as useful as a mode of re-entry or entry to tertiary education, as it was in the past (Pocock, 1988).

Much of what appears to be encouraging for women and girls in non-traditional fields is being reported for tertiary study, (see Beilski, 1989; Fowles, 1987; Ivey, 1982; Ivey, 1988; Lantz, 1982; Humphreys, 1988). There is, too, much that is difficult and much that needs to be changed for female students, in lecturers' attitudes, in departmental and faculty practices and in the 'ecology' of the institution (see Burton, 1987; Byrne, 1988; Byrne, 1989; Carter & Kirkup, 1990; Keller, 1986; Parker, 1990; Pocock, 1988). But if one were to look for a negative, almost hostile environment to change for women and girls it is in the primary and secondary school and the workplace. In their recent report Kyle, Wright, James and Jones (1990) found that in every aspect associated with subject choice, career choice, careers advice, work experience, apprenticeship/cadetship, industry attitudes, TAFE workshop environment and careers advisers' awareness on the issues, there was either a resounding silence or simply lack of recognition that there was an issue at all. The majority of industry and TAFE personnel were either explicitly opposed to women's employment in non-traditional fields or believed the working conditions posed a problem (e.g. heavy lifting, dirty or dangerous work, offensive language, lack of facilities and the intrusion of women into 'male culture'). No female apprentices were indentured in the surveyed industries.

The situation did appear more complex in interviews with medium size industries; the personnel here indicated a willingness to discuss ways of redressing the lack of recruitment of women. In addition, most industry supported the concept of work experience and wanted to engage more closely with schools and careers advisers in the future. There were some positive findings; large industry was aggressive in pursuing recruitment and selection policies to encourage more women into non-traditional work, retention rates were high for the surveyed students, all students, irrespective of gender, were intensely interested in enhancing their employment prospects and all students appear more aware of the need to plan for their future although they were critical of both careers advisers and teachers for lack of relevant information and lack of support. In general however the findings of the study supported the literature. Lack of training, lack of time, inadequate support and lack of knowledge/understanding about gender issues in careers advice came through clearly. Most industry personnel and careers advisers were singularly unaware of the difficulties associated with recruiting young women into non-traditional study, training and work.

Conclusions

The discourse of education systems in Australia when explaining recent change has been careful to outline the 'freedom' involved in the devolution of power to the local region; freedom of parents to choose, freedom of schools to be different, freedom of staff to develop their own curricula, freedom for students to choose those courses best suited to their interests (Hale & Starratt, 1989, 25). Similarly, the term 'excellence' has attained a mythical power in being able to provide:

(that which is) ... testable, a state to be attained, a one-stop shop, the ultimate, the 'tops', a destination (Cahill, 1987, 42).

And what of gender equity? These are not key words in the rhetoric of deregulation, devolution, or mainstreaming. The free market model underpinning it assumes that schools can be deregulated and privatised in the same way that industry and commercial interests are to make them more competitive in the 1990s. This may indeed be attainable for institutions (e.g. schools, buildings, staffing and administration. But there is no indication, apart from dubious rhetoric, as to what pedagogic and social benefits (academic, equity or individual learning) there will be as real outcomes for the majority of female students. Unfortunately, a corporate model, which is imposed from above, advantages those already well equipped to shop around for the best schools; the rich, the powerful and professional groups (usually White Anglo-Saxon and male) in Australian society. The poor, Aborigines, women, non-English speaking groups, the disabled and adult learners remain marginalised - they derive no competitive advantage in an increasingly market-oriented competitive classroom. This can be demonstrated by reference to past policy which has relied heavily on rhetoric and too little on real connections to people's lives. One example is the spread of rural schooling in New South Wales where more paper printed by and for, and from, a Western cultural text, more technology and larger schools posed no real advantage to Aboriginal students, women or working class youth (Kyle: 1990, 52-53).

In the rhetoric of reform where young women are exhorted to become more involved in science and technology there is a certain commonsense value simply because of the nature of workplace change and technological advance. But it is clear that young women will need more than this narrow interpretation of what constitutes the basis for real reform, if they are to realise a more satisfying and challenging future. In general, recent study shows that young women in secondary school are aware of the need to stay on at school, they want to secure a reasonable job and they are optimistic about their chances of doing so (Kyle, et al, 1990). They do need more up-to-date and relevant information about the workplace and about science and technology. They do need better careers advice and work experience that connects them to the more rewarding and better paid jobs. But reform is not a one way process and nor should it be and will not be if we include in it the density of history, culture, interactive methodology and reflective practice. Structural change in schools and school systems must accompany attitudinal change. This could involve guidelines for re-writing curriculum, re-assessment of resource allocation and critically analysing negative structural elements in individual schools, school systems and in the objectives and fundamental aims of schooling. Industry should be encouraged to appoint women to all areas of work and training and should be made aware of their obligations under the various state and federal Anti-Discrimination Acts. There is room to seize opportunities for women and girls in the 1990s provided we continue to criticise the many competing discourses, evaluate policy planning and implementation around gender equity and seek constantly the best and fairest possibilities for an equitable and just future. A just future, of course, may well depend on how we make judgements about and connect to the past.

Notes

1   Jan Wright, Jan James and Jenny Jones were part of the team researching the report **Everyone Expects You to Know**. Their participation in the report is acknowledged and parts of the report quoted in this paper are equally attributed to them. The writing of the paper is, of course, my own responsibility.

2   See M. Henry & S. Taylor 'On the Agenda at Last'; A. Gray 'Women and Girls: Present Status, Current Initiatives, Future Prospects, and Possibilities'; and G. Weiner 'Feminist Education and Equal Opportunities: unity or discord?' for a critical analysis of the theoretical models underpinning much of the gender equity strategies, non-sexist education and Anti-Discrimination legislation in Australia.

3   The Harvester Judgement introduced the concept of a basic wage and tied it to a male breadwinner concept - women were to receive only 54% of the basic wage.

4   **A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform; A Report to the Nation and the Secretary of Education** (National Commission on excellence in Education, 1983) was commissioned by Reagan and spearheaded debate to pave the way for reforms based largely on financial and administrative considerations. The **1986 Ministry Structures Project Team** (Victoria, Australia) is said to have influenced the **Picot Report: Administering for Excellence; Effective Administration in Education** (Report of the Taskforce to review Education Administration (the Picot Report), Wellington: Government Printer, New Zealand, 1988). The **Scott Report: Schools Renewal; A Strategy to Revitalise Schools within the New South Wales State Education System**, was released in June, 1989. The 'White Paper' **Higher Education: A Policy Statement** (circulated by the Hon. J.S. Dawkins MP, Minister for Employment, Education and Training, July, 1988) was the response of the Federal government in Australia. **The Education Reform Act** (England, 1988) introduced more 'testing' of teachers, a National Curriculum, more surveillance and the curtailing of the role of Local Education Authorities. The English model of a decentralised model increasingly came under attack due to the ability of teachers and LEA officials to resist/modify national policy initiatives and minimise the capacity of the government/bureaucracy (Evans & Davies, 1989, 45-47). In Australia, the movement of managerial control has been in the opposite direction; from centralisation to decentralisation of financial and resource management. However, similar reasons are mooted for the change; more effective, efficient and 'excellence' in administration.

5   This document is a 'white paper' implementing the Scott and Carrick Reports. It asks for responses from interested individuals and organisations by January 1991.

6   It is important for women to signal that naming is a game; a serious game, of course, of power relationships between women and men. When women give up their birth name they lose not just social and political power but they lose what Lucy Stone has called '... the symbol of my identity.' These articles were written by me under my previous name of Williamson. Kyle is my birth name and I re-claimed it in 1984. I tend to forget and perhaps others do as well that I have written and published a significant number of words on the history of childhood, on the political and historical dimensions of disadvantage and on the institutionalised schooling of girls. I include these here and have footnoted them at appropriate points in the article, as a backdrop to my arguments on the history of female childhood and gender equity in Australia.

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