A SECOND CHANCE: AN INVESTIGATION INTO ADULT RE-ENTRY EDUCATION IN THE SOUTH AUSTRALIAN PUBLIC SECONDARY SCHOOL SYSTEM 1989 – 2005

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SYSTEM 1989 – 2005

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract

Declaration

Acknowledgements

1.0 Introduction to Portfolio of Research

1.1 Introduction (p.1)
1.2 Provisions for adults to return to study in Australia (p. 3)
1.3 Clarifying key terms (p. 4)
1.4 Understanding adult learners (p. 7)
1.4.1 Preamble
1.4.2 Reasons for returning to study
1.4.3 Social and cultural factors influencing adult students
1.4.4 Internal and psychological factors affecting adult students
1.5 System and school based responses (p. 16)
1.5.1 The training model
1.5.2 The andragogical model
1.5.3 The radical education model
1.5.4 The holistic model
1.6 Value assumptions and research methods (p. 23)
1.7 The Research Portfolio (p. 26)
1.8 Summary (p. 28)

2.0 PART 1 OF PORTFOLIO: The Introduction of Adult Re-entry Programs in South 

Australian Secondary School Sites, 1989 - 2005

2.1 Introduction (p. 30)
2.1.1 Research methods adopted
2.2 Post – war public schooling in South Australia (p. 31)
2.3 The 1971 Karmel Report and changing ideological perspectives (p. 34)
2.3.1 The Karmel Committee’s appointment
2.3.2 Issues of freedom and equality
2.3.3 Equality of opportunity in education
2.3.4 Extending further education
2.3.5 Practical outcomes of the Karmel Report

2.4 The 1981 and 1982 Keeves Reports and responding to change (p.44)
   2.4.1 The changed context of the early 1980s
   2.4.2 Important principles in the Keeves Reports
   2.4.3 Recognition of other groups at risk
   2.4.4 Key recommendations of the Keeves Reports

2.5 Pre – 1989 situation (p. 56)
   2.5.1 Further arguments for equality and education
   2.5.2 Developing the case for lifelong education
   2.5.3 Adult interest in returning to study
   2.5.4 TAFE alternative secondary programs for adults
   2.5.5 Secondary schools’ provisions for adults
   2.5.6 Concern at overlap

2.6 The Joint Ministerial Statement of November 1989 (p. 71)

2.7 Views of key players (p. 72)
   2.7.1 Greg Crafter’s explanations as Minister of Education
   2.7.2 Crafter’s interview reflections
   2.7.3 Interview with Director – General of Education
   2.7.4 The reflections of the Director – General of TAFE
   2.7.5 Reviewing the evidence

2.8 The implementation of the adult re-entry policy 1990 – 1992 (p. 81)
   2.8.1 Initial concerns
   2.8.2 The sites and their mission
   2.8.3 Staffing and curriculum
   2.8.4 The policy in operation

2.9 Changing governments and ideologies 1993-1996 (p. 86)
   2.9.1 The new liberal ideology
   2.9.2 Criticisms from the perspective of social justice
   2.9.3 Diversifying adult re-entry programs
   2.9.4 The closing of The Parks High School 1996

2.10 Continuity and change: maintaining an on going role 1997 – 2005 (p. 111)
   2.10.1 The continuing ideological divide
   2.10.2 The growing commitment to lifelong learning
   2.10.3 The funding adjustment of 1998
   2.10.4 The response of adult re-entry staff and students
   2.10.5 Adult re-entry sites in 2005

2.11 Conclusions to Part 1 (p. 140)

3.0 PART 2 OF PORTFOLIO: A Investigation of an Adult Re-entry Site and Its Program in the South Australian Public Education System

3.1 Introduction (p.144)
   3.1.1 Method of research

3.2 Pre – 1989: Catering for adult learners (p. 148)
   3.2.1 Adult learning opportunities in a boys’ technical high school
3.2.2 Challenges of a comprehensive high school
3.2.3 New adult learning initiatives
3.2.4 The significance of the adult classes
3.3 1990 – 1992: The establishment of the Research School as an adult site (p. 154)
   3.3.1 Initial challenges
   3.3.2 Establishing the basic parameters of the new school
   3.3.3 Implementing the adult program for 1991 – 1992
   3.3.4 Making the most of a new opportunity
3.4 1993 – 1999: Challenges, growth and diversification (p. 166)
   3.4.1 Strategies for challenging times
   3.4.2 Communicating with adult students
   3.4.3 The students and their views
   3.4.4 Response to the 1998 funding re-adjustment
3.5 2000 – 2005 Competition and new student challenges (p. 192)
   3.5.1 Publishing the Adult Campus’s Vision and Mission
   3.5.2 Catering for new types of students
   3.5.3 Enrolment figures 2000 – 2005
   3.5.4 Methods of communication
   3.5.5 Teachers, professional development and staff guidelines
   3.5.6 Student views and experiences
3.6 Achievements and future challenges (p. 236)

4.0 Part 3 of Portfolio: The Students’ Perspective: Personal Statements of Adult Re-entry Students

   4.1 Introduction (p. 242)
   4.2 The memoir method of research (p. 243)
      4.2.1 The method of present study
   4.3 Background details of respondents (p. 249)
   4.4 Reasons for returning to study and early experiences of adult learning (p. 260)
   4.5 Evaluation of adult learning experiences (p. 268)
   4.6 Conclusion: Social Justice and second – chance learning (p. 283)

5.0 Conclusion to Portfolio of Research

   5.1 Main Findings (p. 294)
   5.2 Reasons for success of adult re-entry policy (p. 297)
   5.3 Limitations of the research (p. 301)
   5.4 Future challenges (p. 302)
   5.5 Commitment to second chance education (p. 303)
6.0 Appendices (p. 306)

6.1 South Australian Parliament Documents Consulted (Hansard) In Chronological Order
6.2 Summaries of Interviews (in alphabetical order)
   6.2.1 Mrs P C, Assistant Principal, Adult Campus of Research School
   6.2.2a Hon Greg Crafter, former Minister of Education, telephone interview
   6.2.2b Hon Greg Crafter, former Minister of Education, face to face interview
   6.2.3 Mr. Lyall Fricker, former Director General of TAFE
   6.2.4 Mr T G, Teacher, Adult Campus of Research School
   6.2.5 Mr N M, former Manager, Adult Campus of Research School
   6.2.6 Mr D M, former Principal, Research School
   6.2.7 Mrs. H R, Adult Counsellor, Adult Campus, Research School
   6.2.8 Mr John Steinle, former Director General of Education

6.3 The Hamburg Declaration on Adult Learning

6.4 Documents from the Research School Consulted

6.5 Examples of Key Documents from the Adult Campus of the Research School
   6.5.1 Adult Student Diary, 2003, pp. 4 – 5
   6.5.2 Staff Handbook, 2002 pp. 1 – 15
   6.5.3 Adult Campus Handbook, 2004 pp. 54 - 55
   6.5.4 Program Brochures 2005
      • MAPS 3 Short Courses
      • Information Technology, Certificate 11
      • MAPS Arts Production Skills, Certificate 1V
      • Travel and Tourism, Certificates 11 and 111
      • Uni SA - PAL
   6.5.5 Papers for Adult Campus Meeting, 24/01/2003
   6.5.6 Adult Campus Newsletter, August 28, 2001, pp. 1 - 4

6.6 Personal Statement Guidelines

6.7 Examples of Completed Personal Statements

7.0 Bibliography (p. 421)
List of Tables

Table 1 Students studying Matriculation and pre – Matriculation subjects at TAFE colleges in 1989, p. 69.

Table 2 Programs offered at adult re-entry sites, 1993, p. 97.

Table 3 Share of school students by sector, 1975 – 1995, p. 119.

Table 4 Enrolment details Term 1 for selected adult re-entry sites, 2005, p. 137.

Table 5 A selection of programs offered at re-entry sites in 2005, p. 139.

Table 6 Proposed 1991 Adult Re-entry Time Table, p. 163.

Table 7 Analysis of items in Adult Campus Newsletters, p. 175.

Table 8 Background details of respondents in Senior (adult) Survey, p. 182.

Table 9: Student evaluation of Research School’s Adult Campus Program, p. 182.


Table 11: Adult Campus Survey 2001 and 2004: Reasons for study and future intentions, p. 228.

Table 12: Respondents Personal and Family Background, p. 249.

Table 13: Respondents’ Educational Background Prior to Adult Re-entry, p. 251.

Table 14: Respondents’ Employment Background, p. 252.

Table 15: Source of Information about Adult Re-Entry Program, p. 255.

Table 16: Initial Contact and Enrolment in Adult Re-Entry Programs, p. 255.

Table 17: Courses of Studies Undertaken as Adult Re-Entry Studies, p. 256.

Table 18: Positive Experiences Mentioned by Respondents, p. 270.

Table 19: Negative Experiences Mentioned by Respondents, p. 272.
List of Figures

Figure 1: Political and market forces and technological changes, p. 91.

Figure 2: Social Inequality - equality and poverty, p. 116.

Figure 3: Main reasons given for leaving school before year 11, p. 117.

Figure 4: Occupations of early school leavers 1997, p. 117

Figure 5: Facts and figures about teachers, schools and schooling in Australia 2004, pp. 120-121.

Figure 6: Protest on education cuts to adult sites, pp. 133-134.

Figure 7: Adult Campus Newsletters February 1998 and September 1999, pp. 176-179.

Figure 8: 1998 Some Student Profiles from the Adult Campus, pp. 188-190.

Figure 9: Vision and Mission Statement of the Adult Campus of the Research School, p. 198.

Figure 10a: 2005 Adult Campus Timetable for SACE subjects, p. 203.

Figure 10b: 2005 Adult Campus Timetable for Foundation subjects, p. 204.

Figure 10c: 2005 Adult Campus Timetable for Vocational subjects, p. 205.

Figure 10d: 2005 Adult Campus Evening Timetable (all programs), p. 206.

Figure11: Adult Student Enrolments (FTE) for Term 1, 2000 – 2005, p. 209.

Figure 12a: 2005 Term 1 Total Enrolment Statistics for Research School, p. 209


Figure13a: Adult Campus Newsletter, May 2002 (p. 2), p. 214.

Figure13b: Adult Campus Newsletter, August 2003 (p. 3), p. 215

Figure 13c: Adult Campus Newsletter, May 2005, (pp. 2; 4), pp. 216-218.

Figure 14: Agenda for Adult Counsellors’ Meeting, November, p. 221.

Figure 15: Parents and Children Studying Together, June 2002, p. 232.

Figure 16: Adult Student’s Speech to Research School’s Adult Education Night
(Adult Student Reunion Night), September 2003, p. 235.

Figure 17: Pilot Study 1, pp. 287-288.

Figure 18: Pilot Study 2, pp. 289-292.

Figure 19: Pilot Study 3, p. 293.

Figure 20: Adult public education advertisement, p. 305.
### List of Abbreviations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ABS</td>
<td>Australian Bureau of Statistics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACE</td>
<td>Adult Community Education</td>
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<tr>
<td>AEU</td>
<td>Australian Education Union</td>
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<tr>
<td>AQF</td>
<td>Australian Qualifications Framework</td>
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<tr>
<td>ASEM</td>
<td>Asia Europe Meeting</td>
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<tr>
<td>CAGE</td>
<td>Certificate of Adult General Education</td>
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<tr>
<td>DECS</td>
<td>Department of Education and Children’s Services</td>
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<tr>
<td>DETAFE</td>
<td>Department of Employment Technical and Further Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EPUY</td>
<td>Education Programs for Unemployed Youth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FTE</td>
<td>Full Time Equivalent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HECS</td>
<td>Higher Education Contribution Scheme</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MLC</td>
<td>Member of the Legislative Council</td>
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<tr>
<td>NCVER</td>
<td>National Centre for Vocational Education Research</td>
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<tr>
<td>PAS</td>
<td>Publicly Assessed Subject</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PEB</td>
<td>Public Examinations Board</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PES</td>
<td>Publicly Examined Subject</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PSA</td>
<td>Public Service Association</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RTO</td>
<td>Registered Training Organisation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SACE</td>
<td>South Australian Certificate of Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SAIT</td>
<td>South Australian Institute of Teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SAS</td>
<td>School Assessed Subject</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SATAC</td>
<td>South Australian Tertiary Admissions Centre</td>
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<tr>
<td>SSABSA</td>
<td>Senior Assessment Board of South Australia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abbreviation</td>
<td>Description</td>
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<td>--------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>STAT</td>
<td>Special Tertiary Admission Test</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TAFE</td>
<td>Technical and Further Education (Department of)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TER</td>
<td>Tertiary Entrance Rank (South Australian)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOIL</td>
<td>Time Off In Lieu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNESCO</td>
<td>United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uni SA PAL</td>
<td>University of South Australia Preparation Program for Adult Learners</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VET</td>
<td>Vocational Education and Training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WBLA</td>
<td>Writing Based Literacy Assignment</td>
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ABSTRACT

Over the 1980s secondary schools and Technical and Further Education (TAFE) colleges in South Australia had increasing numbers of adults returning to formal secondary education mainly in search of better jobs or to qualify for tertiary studies. The teaching of such students required an appreciation of the difficulties they faced with the competing demands of family and work, and the anxieties they had in meeting the requirements of formalised study. In 1989 the South Australian Government made a policy decision, to transfer all the year 11 and 12 classes which TAFE colleges had specially established for adult students to the public secondary school system. Funds were allocated for the establishment of a secondary school system wide structure of nine Adult Re-entry sites, eight of which are still successfully operating within the Department of Education and Children’s Services. Whilst adult educational sites existed elsewhere, no other Australian state had a comparable systemic secondary school structure designed for adults returning to study. As a teacher of adult re-entry students, I sought to investigate the historical factors behind the policy decision to establish of adult re-entry sites within the secondary school system, to research the development of adult programs at a particular site and to study the experiences of adult students, analysing in particular why they returned to formal studies.

Overseas studies indicated that to understand the personal worlds of adult students two sets of factors needed to be taken into account. External social and cultural factors influenced their current situation and their life experiences. Internal psychological factors helped to determine how they responded to the new demands of study. Four different educational responses to adult students could be identified. Direct and structured teaching could be seen in many vocational training models. Programs based on andrological principles put the emphasis on the individual’s self – directed learning. A third approach was focussed on critical pedagogy which sought to change society. There was also evidence of a holistic approach, which was centred on the adult learners but provided sympathetic educators to support their learning.

The researcher’s underlying perspective in carrying out this study was that associated with Weber’s social action theory, because of the way it enabled emphasis to be placed on the actions of individuals and their interpretations of their actions in their social and cultural
contexts. In this research portfolio the individuals concerned were politicians and educational administrators making policy decisions (Part 1); teachers developing appropriate programs (Part 2); and adult students deciding to return to studies and participating in adult programs (Part 3).

Part 1 of Portfolio
Two main sources of data were used to investigate the reasons for the 1989 policy decision to establish a system of adult re-entry colleges and schools within the Education Department of South Australia. The first was the official Hansard record of debates in the South Australian Parliament during the late 1980s and early 1990s. The second was a series of interviews with the Minister of Education involved and key officials in the Departments of Education and TAFE. The debates were focused on the ideal educational location for adult re-entry students. Arguments based on the perspective of social justice and the special needs of adult students led to the establishment of a formal network of sites and programs to cater for the needs of adults within the secondary school sector. Despite the closure of one site in 1996 and funding readjustments in 1998, by 2005 adult re-entry colleges and schools had a well-established role in South Australian public education system.

Part 2 of Portfolio
The investigation into the development of adult re-entry programs on one site was based on documents available in the Research School chosen – annual statistics, reports, curriculum, administration and journals. In addition, key members of staff involved in the adult program were interviewed. There was evidence of the way the adult program had changed over the period 1990 - 2005 in response to changing demography in the surrounding area and to changing needs and interests of those returning to study, as well as satisfying Departmental requirements. In recent years there has been a trend for more students to study part-time and to seek vocational rather than pre-university education. The provision of appropriate courses, resources and support was regarded by staff as important in the ongoing success of the adult re-entry program.

Part 3 of Portfolio
The investigation of adult students’ motivations and experiences in returning to study was based on the memoirs and personal statements of 40 adult re-entry students from the
Research School. Their comments provided a unique understanding of the diverse personal worlds of adult re-entry students, their expectations, goals and aspirations, their difficulties and problems and their learning experiences.

The formation of adult campuses in the secondary sector in South Australia was influenced by both pragmatic factors and by principles of social justice which sought to promote educational opportunities and offer those who had left school without recognised qualifications a second chance. Adult re-entry sites have continued to provide for the needs of adult learners in the communities they serve. They have made an important contribution both to the individual's right to life – long learning and to society's need for skilled workers and well educated professionals.

During the twenty first century adult sites in South Australia within the Department of Education and Children's Services have faced two challenges. The learning interests of adult students have changed, with more looking to the acquisition of technical and vocational skills. Furthermore, in order to remain viable, adult sites have had to maintain a high profile in relation to innovative policy development, student numbers, funding and resource allocation. Their successes have been due in large measure to their recognition that adult re-entry students were not big kids, but required specific educational structure and programs catering for their diverse learning needs.
DECLARATION

This work contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution to Ascenzo Lancione and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text.

I give consent to this copy of my thesis, when deposited in the University Library, being made available for loan and photocopying, subject to the provisions of the Copyright Act 1968.

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...Date……………………………………………………………………………………………………

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- Mr T G, teacher at the Research School, for giving a personal interview on 06/06/2007.
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Finally, this study is of professional and personal importance to me as an educator of adult students.