

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

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List of Abbreviations

ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
ACE	Adult Community Education
AEU	Australian Education Union
AQF	Australian Qualifications Framework
ASEM	Asia Europe Meeting
CAGE	Certificate of Adult General Education
DECS	Department of Education and Children's Services
DETAFE	Department of Employment Technical and Further Education
EPUY	Education Programs for Unemployed Youth
FTE	Full Time Equivalent
HECS	Higher Education Contribution Scheme
MLC	Member of the Legislative Council
NCVER	National centre for Vocational Education Research
PAS	Publicly Assessed Subject
PEB	Public Examinations Board
PES	Publicly Examined Subject
PSA	Public Service Association
RTO	Registered Training Organisation
SACE	South Australian Certificate of Education
SAIT	South Australian Institute of Teachers
SAS	School Assessed Subject
SATAC	South Australian Tertiary Admissions Centre
SSABSA	Senior Assessment Board of South Australia

STAT	Special Tertiary Admission Test
TAFE	Technical and Further Education (Department of)
TER	Tertiary Entrance Rank (South Australian)
TOIL	Time Off In Lieu
UNESCO	United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation
Uni SA PAL	University of South Australia Preparation Program for Adult Learners
VET	Vocational Education and Training
WBLA	Writing Based Literacy Assignment

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 focussed 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.

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