

“We Really Started Coming Up With A Final Product” Primary Practitioners’ Perceptions Of Gender Inclusive Curriculum

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ABSTRACT

The academy has witnessed several standpoints associated with gender reform. There have been advocates for Womens’ Studies in the tertiary sector. There has been critique of policy developments that variously theorise postmodernism. There have been studies of secondary teachers and studies of early childhood teachers.

This paper tells a different story. It presents the grassroots story of the primary classroom according to the standpoint of the practitioners themselves. It is a different story too in that it has a focus on success.

This conference presentation provides evidence of the transformative potential of gender inclusive curriculum policy. It will encourage conference participants to share their stories of success.

INTRODUCTION

Feminists have lamented the dearth of theorisation of gender reform that takes account of the grassroots level of curriculum. Primary teachers are recognised (Mather 1995:226-235, Foster 1995:18- 19, Alloway 1995: passim, Taylor 1989: 441, Yates 1987a: 16 and Foster 1984:124- 125) as especially ignored. ⁱ

This blindspot exists even though governments have promulgated policies exhorting such reform and as such primary teachers could be expected to be engaged in related curriculum change- along with other sectors of education. This could also be assumed from the emerging (Weiler 2000) more general accounts of feminist teachers.

Australia is described internationally (Marshall 2000:153) as a leader in this field. This is elaborated locally in terms of systemic studies (Collins, Batten, Ainley and Getty 1996) as well as in the academy (Blackmore with Kenway, Willis and Rennie (1996: 253). Moreover, the gender inclusive curriculum model is accorded (McLeod 1995:134- 5 and Gilbert and Taylor 1991:3) status in the feminist academy as the principal means for instituting gender reform at the school level. In this way the absence of feminist theorisation of the primary profession seems a gap in our knowledge base in terms of gender reform.

This paper seeks to remedy such a gap between theory, policy and practice. It takes as its focus the perceived successes of the gender inclusive curriculum in the Australian

context. This in turn may be contextualised as part of analysed (David, Weiner, Arnot 2000) ⁱⁱ successes on a broader international front.

This discussion is based on the contention that it is not in anyone's interests to maintain such a gap- either educational administrator, curriculum theorist, policymaker, feminist or primary practitioner. Ignoring the impact of feminism on primary practice is not justifiable. It is a story that holds significant potential for our intended curriculum futures.

In particular, practitioners can offer an important element in this knowledge base. The classroom can be described (Arnesen 1997: 6) as a productive site for the analysis of gender relations. Significant energy and commitment can be said (Henry and Taylor 1995) to be available at the grassroots level of gender reform. New possibilities for reform can be better contextualised by a more adequate appreciation of the standpoint of the practitioner. Their standpoint needs to be included in our future agendas for education.

However, as suggested this claim is set within a context where stories of grassroots feminist activism (Taylor 2001: 47- 8) receive insufficient recognition in mainstream curriculum circles. There is an established (Blackmore with Kenway, Willis and Rennie 1996: 255- 9) failure to communicate such achievements more widely.

I am aligned with Coffey and Delamont (2000:144) who argue that “feminist scholars and teacher should not lose sight of the successes and innovations of early pioneers...[who] should be thought of as part of a sustained feminist project”. Assessing past efforts at curriculum reform can offer emancipatory knowledge for contemporary conditions. It can point to what seems worth trying and what seems a better way of proceeding in the new millennium.

As such my goal is to document these contributions to curriculum reform. Yet this is done with the understanding (Taylor and Henry 2000) that any instances of success are dependent upon a particular set of historical conditions. This is not an attempt to naively celebrate the achievements of primary teachers who embark on such curriculum change. I do not offer a simple modern linear narrative of progress. I understand that this kind of policy process will always be a mixture of success and failure- it is just that here I single out the gains that may and should be noted. This is an attempt to investigate how illustrative gains may be constructively built upon by other practitioners- albeit in other times and in other places. This is about understanding policy building and sustaining policy momentum- albeit in varying policy climates.

As a result, this curriculum review considers the theory, policy and practice of gender inclusive reform. This is premised on the assumption that we need a more sophisticated understanding of what is perceived by practitioners as actually successful in schools when such policies are enacted by primary teachers as curriculum practice. To meet this task, I assess the transformative ⁱⁱⁱ potential of gender inclusive policy in the light of practitioner's perceptions of policy enactment.

A FEMINIST PERSPECTIVE ON THEORY AND METHODOLOGY

As implied, a feminist perspective on theory^{iv} influences this discussion. This is where gender is constituted as a key lens for analysis and the goal of such analysis is to enable transformation in gender relations. This seeks to signify McNay's (1992) twin moments of 'explanation-diagnosis' and 'anticipation-utopian' as characteristic of the multiplicity of contemporary feminist theories. This is further informed by the view (Coffey and Delamont 2000) that feminist theorising should be useful for feminist politics. Moreover this takes (Acker 1993: 162) the understanding that feminist research can theorise in politically useful ways, thereby representing a political act.

In addition, this embraces the long envisaged (Westcott 1983) desire to investigate emancipatory knowledge. This is about the realisation (Coffey and Delamont 2000: 40) that feminists have to go beyond critique to showing how transformative pedagogy can be enacted. The mainstream curriculum is a legitimate site for feminism. There is a need to relate newer feminist theorisation to existent reform possibilities.

I seek to revive calls for feminists in the academy to become more engaged with pedagogy at grassroots level following the paths of Grumet and Stone (2000), Mathews (1994), Gore (1993) and Yates (1993). As Weiler (2000: 127) correctly notes- "It is one thing to have goals and a vision of what education should be like; it is another thing to be able to accomplish that vision". There is in my view a consequential need to explicate the gains of curriculum pioneers.

Concomitant to this is upholding the role of feminist theory as generative in pedagogical alternatives like the gender inclusive curriculum. In this case, this perspective is activated through the curriculum setting of government policy frameworks as they intersect with the primary sector. This is because I also (Segal 1999: 205) disagree with wholly pessimistic judgements about the role of the state in facilitating gender equality and certainly do so in raising primary classrooms as sites for feminist attention. A central plank to my argument is my belief that curriculum policy has transformative potential- even if hitherto unrealised. As Collins, Batten, Ainley and Getty (1996: xiv) verify in this context, gender policy reforms can be empirically said to make a difference. With my interest in primary schooling, I apply (Yates 1991: 6-8) a concern to focus on transformative alternatives in the mainstream education context. Failing to come to terms with policy as enacted as curriculum in schools negates its transformative potential.

At the same time I am cognisant of the postmodern moment. This means that I also (Rhedding- Jones 1995: 492) frame my work as within the postmodern cultural condition (Harding 1993 and Flax 1990) though not necessarily by poststructural theory. Thus, I define postmodernity as a temporal shift in cultural conditions and poststructuralism as the theorisation of postmodernity. This is because I share (Tsolidis 1996: 271) nostalgia for the theoretical confidence that prevailed before the postmodern turn and the said (Tsolidis 2001: 104) utility of strategic feminist research. This relates to sympathy for the feminist standpoint rebuff of poststructural theory. As Hartsock (1987: 190) says- "at best

[it] manages to criticise... without putting anything in their place” and in terms of research methodology “it cannot accomplish the tasks we have in front of us” (p.198-199).

As a consequence, I rest on an undecided theoretical response to postmodernity. Like Elam (1999: 81-82) I propose a politics of the undecidable which I claim is not the same as being apolitical. Brown (1995 and 1991) for instance is one such a feminist who has endeavoured to imagine new theoretical spaces within what she describes as a third path between modernity and postmodernity. In my opinion, this is neither relativism nor nihilism. I manage this by distinguishing poststructuralism as a theory from postmodernity as an era, regarding this as a recognised (Rhedding Jones 1995: 492) move. Furthermore, I argue that this permits me to straddle the modern and postmodern eras whereby I can sustain a modern project of feminism in the postmodern era.

At the same time, this act of straddling is created as an active balancing manoeuvre. It is certainly not comfortable or neat. At the same time it is sufficiently convincing for me for this particular time. Moreover, this temporary closure has the added advantage of foreshadowing mobility to future locations- a theoretical asset for these postmodern days.

This research then, which sets out to report perceived successes, is somewhat of a counterbalance in the postmodern era. For instance, it is set against the rising tide of pessimism and panic discourses around the modern project of feminist politics in the postmodern era. Indeed, it is constructed amidst a proliferation of discourses noteworthy (Brown 2000) for documenting the losses of the left. As Weiler (2000:71) observes of a similar case- “a study of this kind counteracts the negative view of schools and teachers that is so commonly put forth. By revealing the struggles and achievements of feminist teachers in these sites, it can provide a model for the struggles of other feminist and critical teachers”.

This theoretical perspective is implemented by a feminist approach to methodology taking Nixon and Comber’s (1995) methodological principle of ‘lesser falsification’. This principle is interpreted here through two maxims. Firstly, research is constructed as a quintessentially subjective process. This means that I follow researchers (Haraway 1997) who construct research as lived experience in adopting an explicitly situated approach to data analysis. Secondly, I seek to dismantle the traditional barrier between the researcher and the researched. This means that I try to learn from, rather than about, the researched. My shared (Angwin et al 1992) goal is to project understandings through the data with the desire to add my voice- as opposed to usurping the researched. However, I am not inherently virtuous as a feminist in the academy. It is as Taylor (2001: 52) admits ‘easier said than done’ to get this balance of feminist methodology ‘right’- even if there is an abiding desire to be reflexive.

This principle of lesser falsification is achieved here by a feminist interpretation of standpoint methodology principally informed by Harding (1987) and Hartsock (1985). This rests on the tenet that position structures knowledge. Methodologically speaking,

this involves strategically reversing the position of the 'Master' as subject by displacing the dominant voice with that of the 'Other'.

The subjective nature of the research process is thereby overtly foregrounded in preference to devising a falsely detached position for the researcher. In this way, the experiential dimension of the classroom teacher is specifically portrayed as having the understood (Smith 1987) advantage of incorporating grassroots experience into theory building. As a consequence, standpoint methodology offers the understanding that prejudices can be enabling (Berman Brown 1995: 199) and can be construed as a resource (Young 2000: 115). This is seen to strengthen scholarly potential through the inclusion of experiences that are typically excluded. This provides the contention (Hartsock 1985: 231-234) that more reliable knowledge claims can be proposed.^v In this case it means that the acknowledged (Johnson 1999 and McTaggart, Henry and Johnson 1997: 132) worth of the testimony of practitioners is upheld.

At the same time I agree (Haraway 1997: 37) that experience is never transparent. I am aware of criticism levelled at standpoint methodology associated with essentialism. To partially deflect this concern I utilise the solution mounted by Taylor (2001: 51) who points to the accompanying need to view accounts of situated knowledge with a critical lens. Experience is always constructed and contested.

This feminist perspective on theory and methodology is activated in this paper by the case study method and the interview technique, predicated on the work of Walker (1980) and Reinharz (1992). This is even though I am aware of poststructural quantitative critique of the case study method. Although I understand the said methodological limitations of the case study format, I refute such limitations based on the arguments put by McLeod and Yates (1997), Yates and McLeod (1996), Walker, Lewis and Laskey (1996) and Stake (1988).

More specifically, the interview sample for this case study is nominated anonymously by a network of academics in the field based on their reputation as leading practitioners in the field. This method parallels Taylor's (2001: 50) sample selection of key players in the field of gender reform by way of nomination and subsequent 'snowballing' techniques. Invitations for nominations stopped when I got repetition in nominations and the interview material generated by more than 100,000 words recorded in transcripts.

However it is precisely because these interviewees are so representative that problems of confidentiality are created. On the one hand, potential interviewees are assured of anonymity. On the other hand, pseudonyms are deemed insufficient. They are highly visible practitioners. Indeed, it is on the basis of their reputations that they are selected. A research precedent under these kinds of sensitive conditions is the construction of amalgams (Allard, Cooper, Duncan, Johnson and Macmillan 1995 and Cooper et al 1994).^{vi} I have adopted this solution in an effort to protect the interviewees, following the interpretation of Connell put by Weiler (2000).

Thus, 17 interviewees are represented in this paper as an amalgam based on evident patterns in their conceptions of the gender inclusive curriculum model as this proved the distinctive element in the data. They are identified here as Elizabeth, Maria, Jemmima, Caroline and Anita.

To manage this method of amalgams I have devised a composite biography, again following Connell (1990: 2) who explains- “given the rule of confidentiality... we did not feel entitled to print actual biographies, even with names, dates and places changed. Yet... it seemed important to convey... the sense of biography... Every detail... comes from the interviews, but they come from more than one”.

Thus, how does this sample represent the primary teaching force in terms of seniority, school location and profile? In terms of seniority, all have been appointed to additional administrative/ curriculum responsibilities. Their teaching experience is extensive with the average representing more than 15 years in the classroom. Many are authors of government gender inclusive curriculum material and all describe their work as supporting curriculum policy implementation through policy initiatives and school-based projects. All have taken a leadership role in gender inclusive curriculum policy developments in Victoria over this time period. All have significant reputations in primary schools for their recognised expertise in gender inclusive curriculum policy. All these practitioners have maintained their interest in gender reform.

DATA

What are the criteria for assessing success?

As implied within this feminist perspective on theory the criterion for measuring success for feminists in the academy (Suggett 1987a: 22, Suggett 1987b: passim and Yates 1993: 104-105) is evidence of the transformative potential of policy realised as transformative impact on mainstream curriculum enactment. Nevertheless as my previous comments imply, primary practitioner way of assessing policy impact may be expected to offer a different picture. Or at the very least they cannot be simplistically assumed to hold the same standpoint as that of policymakers, curriculum theorists, feminist academics etc. As a result, answers to my research questions are abutted against an assessment of how this sample thinks about curriculum transformation.

Given the stated feminist perspective on methodology for this case study with the attendant focus on practitioner standpoint, how does this sample measure enactment of the gender inclusive curriculum? What are their criteria for success?

According to these primary teachers if (a) there is movement in the right direction then this constitutes transformative impact on mainstream curriculum enactment and (b) if conditions for girls are better than before then this also represents transformative impact on mainstream curriculum enactment. In other words, their criteria revolve around the notion of movement in a feminist direction as they adopt a developmental approach. They

do not necessarily seek evidence of the so-called endpoint of mainstream curriculum change comparable to the feminist academy.

In particular, interviewees assess the transformative impact of these policies by taking a long-term perspective. They propose that the transformative potential of gender inclusive policies is being realised- just progressively so. What is more as a consequence they are keen that even small policy achievements are acknowledged as constructive steps towards the eventual and potentially more fulsome transformative impact of gender inclusive policy.

For example, Elizabeth posits that resistance amongst the teaching profession is sourced in their relative age in the community- “people of a certain age have certain views... everyone knows that sexism... was worse years ago”{p.5-6}. Elizabeth is a typical case in point by taking a long-term perspective. In doing so she claims that the teaching profession is becoming gradually enlightened by these curriculum principles. Such an explanation permits Elizabeth’s optimism that as younger staff members who have been exposed to the modern policy agenda of gender inclusiveness gain leadership positions in primary schools, the transformative potential of policy will be realised.

Similarly, Jemmima proposes a cyclical process of progressions, backlashes and change- but which in broad terms is nevertheless characterised by long term eventual progress. She asserts- “I know there has been change that... we take for granted... I just couldn’t envisage... stepping back into the 1960’s... It’s like we’ve probably gone up several steps and maybe back a couple, but... we’re still going, still moving slowly forward... you really expect things to improve rapidly and... permanently and things don’t always change so fast... The cogs are turning”{p.9}. Jemmima’s apparent optimism is allowed by her broader view of what she denotes as social progress- “one of the things that differentiates probably personkind from the animal world is that we build on... have to build on what we learn... even if you don’t get a total translation from one decade to the next”{p.12}.

Has there been success ?

With practitioners’ definition of transformation in mind, there is evidence in this case study of transformative impact. In particular, interviewees are concerned that the differing constituents of this policy process do not lose sight of these positive foundations. In some ways this is the most telling point of the interviews. Interviewees state that this policy has been good for all children in primary schools. Jemmima typifies this view. She thinks that primary practitioners have ensured that it has benefits for children from disadvantaged and ethnic backgrounds too.

Elizabeth is alone in refraining from such consistent generalising. Her use of the terms ‘think’ and ‘hopefully’ indicates a degree of initial hesitation. At first she measures the transformative impact of gender inclusive curriculum policies in terms of her school site alone- “I think it was successful. Well hopefully it was successful in our school for that

period of time, that we were doing it” {p.9}. However, Elizabeth comments on more general success later saying- “there’s really been a big effort to be even handed... You can see that in schools... that... didn’t happen when I first started teaching in the 1970’s... and I think that certainly in regard to curriculum... there have been genuine changes” {p.4-5}. Indeed Elizabeth specifies the usefulness of curriculum policy- “we wrote... our program... from it... so we virtually went through it and we took out whatever... was relevant for our school and maybe added a couple of things... It was comprehensive... so we just chopped and changed that”{p.7-8}.

Certainly, the rest of this sample is confident of gender inclusive policies as having broader transformative impact on the curriculum thanks to primary practitioners. Maria is representative in her claim that- “things have changed... the planning certainly changed... I think language did change... schools changed”{p.7} and “I don’t think we should lose sight of... the gains... that have been... made... you can lose your enthusiasm” {p.8}. Maria recalls the initial impact of a gender inclusive curriculum for primary schools- “I remember the first article, I thought my god!... This is powerful... because someone had encapsulated... in the gender inclusive curriculum... exactly all those... fragments we were trying to bring together”{p.2}. Maria explains that “you could send... things... back to be rewritten... that doesn’t happen now... there were avenues for people working in the area to have input into... curriculum development, how it was presented... the style, the content”{p.5-6} and “girls were underpinning... those things [curriculum documents]... absolutely” {p.4- 6}. Maria even describes these curriculum reforms as “the absolute jewel in the education crown”{p.13}.

Additionally, Jemmima notes that “across the education system over the last ten years there has been massive strides... The things that teachers will no longer accept, the gender based or sexist behaviour... I think it has changed considerably... I have no doubt that it has changed considerably... We’ve come a long way, oh yes”{p.5-6} and “it has been incredible incredible”{p.13}. Jemmima particularises the impact of gender inclusive curriculum policies in the mid 1970’s for the primary sector- “the majority of schools have changed dramatically” {p.8} and “things have changed in classrooms... very positively” {p.9} and “when state and national policy was developed and introduced many schools did take action” {p.4}. Jemmima describes the relevance of these curriculum policy developments- “I think the federal policy legitimised it as important and... helped to show that we weren’t a peripheral crazy group of women”{p.9}. Her summarising comments are indicative of the perceived role of primary practitioners- “It was quite amazing... Principals... had to address equal opportunity issues... it had a significant effect”{p.7} and “I think there has been change. There have been significant changes in some classrooms”{p.8} and “it’s brought about a lot of changes... by development of inclusive curriculum” {p.6} and “once you have policy and it’s backed people... start to take it seriously”{p.7}.

Caroline goes further. She advances- “I don’t actually think that since... there’s been... a body of work that has had such an impact on what has happened generally in curriculum development”{p.11}. For example Caroline is sure of primary teachers moving beyond deconstructing gender exclusive practice to implementing gender inclusive curriculum.

Caroline even proposes that gender inclusive policies are transformative more generally in terms of curriculum development- “that work was quite influential... those ideas... have become accepted ideas in... curriculum development... teachers have found ways of giving support and inculcating... the interests... of girls... that has benefited them”{p.6}.

Anita agrees saying that significant school based curriculum development is evidence of the transformative impact of gender inclusive policies for primary schools. She generalises- “it is just a fundamental belief that education is... that way through for me”{p.4}. Anita adds that with curriculum policy came some clear... suggestions”{p.12} and “I found... the action plan... really clear... and again it asks questions... a really positive useful document... as someone working in the area... I see it... as critical”{p.15}. For Anita this prevents unquestioned orthodoxies from developing, thereby bringing broader vision and greater coherence. In her mind this prompts more widespread and lasting curriculum change.

In addition, interviewees specify the particular transformative potential of these curriculum policies for the early years of schooling. Elizabeth says from a junior primary teacher’s perspective- “they did come in with... some quite strong ideas about what was girls and what was boys... it was really important to start off with the preps”{p.10-11}. Caroline agrees that the junior primary curriculum level is crucial because gender stereotyping “is started in the primary years”{p.4}. Likewise Jemmima notes- “I really do believe the basic work has got to be done at the primary level... totally”{p.8}.

In sum, all this means that according to their established criteria for assessing policy the gender inclusive curriculum exceeded practitioner expectations of transformative impact.

For whom was this successful?

However this sample goes further in delineating emancipatory knowledge. According to these interviewees the main transformative impact of this policy platform is in complimenting the efforts of primary teachers already working in the area of gender reform to the curriculum. This is the dominant way that these practitioners specify their understanding of transformative impact. This is an important finding of this case study. It shows curriculum change via policy is possible. It is further ^{vii} and specific evidence that gender inclusive policy has transformative potential that can be realised as transformative impact.

For instance, Anita recalls the implications of these curriculum policies for those working in this field- “teachers were starting to get together... their own anecdotal experience or copies of classroom things... there weren’t policies really to support us... we were really doing this pretty much by ourselves... we were also not guided... there wasn’t a sense of an overall policy” {p.4} and “policies would have given us some guidance” {p.6}.

Maria adds that such policy documents offer this special group of primary teachers a practical example of how a school based policy can be drafted- “when we did our policy I worded it very carefully to make sure it was in line with... Victorian... policies”{p.5} and

“it was helpful to have a policy as a reference point... [it] raised awareness at the time”{p.2}.

Caroline is especially convinced of the importance of these pioneers saying that at times they in fact lead both policy and the primary profession. In particular, Caroline notes the impact of the first state policy document for these innovators- “the policies were there... they were very important documents because they provided the foundation... it meant you weren’t just on your own... it gave some authenticity to what you were doing... the system was taking some responsibility... those policies... were really important... the work was really very important” {p.5} and “they needed support... they needed the research... they needed... to know... how you can change your practice” {p.10}.

This is illustrated in greater detail in Jemmima’s comments about this group of feminist teachers in the primary profession. She has no doubt that it is these teachers who stimulate the gender inclusive policy process. In her mind they are identifiable as a group of innovators both before and after government policy development. Jemmima explains- “none of any of this would have been done without trailblazing feminists”{p.5} and “I keep thinking back to the feminists that were active and supportive of me and... they were other teachers... teachers who were having battles in their school were looking for teachers in the same situation or ones that had... wins”{p.5}. Jemmima argues that such feminist teachers in primary schools use state government gender inclusive policies to claim that “we do have policy in this area and we really should be using it... It’s wonderful and necessary to be able to refer to it”{p.5}. Jemmima feels state gender inclusive policy “actually empowered them... providing them with that framework of support in terms of giving it a high profile, like putting out publications”{p.9}. For example, Jemmima observes those in the field using this curriculum policy to tell their primary colleagues that their practice is gender exclusive, to review curriculum materials for gender exclusions and to encourage female staff to act as positive role models for girls. As a minimum Jemmima believes state gender inclusive policy removes official obstacles which can be mounted at the school level- “at least it meant people who may not have considered it an issue did back others in the school who wanted to initiate policy development etc. At least they didn’t continue to block them”{p.7}.

From the standpoint of these practitioners gender inclusive policy did create enabling conditions for this group of innovative primary teachers to further explore innovative practice. They recognise the symbolic worth of government policy for these gender reformers in the primary sector. In their minds this policy platform legitimates the transformative work of feminist teachers by affording external credibility and endorsement for these pioneers- vindication of their attempts to implement gender reform and credence to feminist teaching interventions in curriculum terms. These interviewees emphasise how much these primary teachers appreciated the provision of professional development programs and the positive networking between schools which ensued.

Moreover, these interviewees confirm that this particular group of primary teachers already spent considerable effort in school based curriculum development which also had transformative potential to the level of transformative impact. According to these

practitioners the years of groundwork put in by these feminist teachers throughout the early 1970's did effect primary schools. While they acknowledge their approach to educational reform as diverse and the numbers involved relatively small, their comparative influence is still seen as considerable. Their significant contribution is described by this sample as laying curricular foundations for subsequent government reform at the grassroots level. These innovative primary teachers were then seen as extracting further transformative potential from curriculum policies to again advance transformative impact, effectively providing further transformative impetus.

How was this successful?

So in the minds of the interviewees these policies stimulate more significant school based curriculum change than otherwise possible for primary teachers who are already engaged in transformative projects. In the main they say that this is through the provision of a mandate.

Moreover, they attribute significant transformative impact to this mandate. Anita exemplifies this position claiming "policy was critical, because... if nothing else there was something on paper that committed teachers could say we're supposed to do this" {p.12} and "they validate the work of people who are already working on gender in schools. They do provide a stimulus... they are important to do" {p.2}.

Furthermore, they stipulate that a prescriptive interpretation of gender inclusive policy is critical to this transformative impact for primary schools. Jemmima discusses the significance of such a mandate- "the philosophy we worked on... was you can change them through education but if you can't change them that way you change them by mandate... people that have a commitment and want to learn about it will, but the rest, the only way you can make them move is to mandate it" {p.3} and "many... teachers were forced during the late 1980's to consider some of the... equal opportunity issues, because they... were seen as serious" {p.4} and "I remember when... principals were told... come to briefings... and in-services... and your school will have an equal opportunity policy" {p.3} and "so policy does have an impact" {p.7} and "no point people in local schools knocking away at it if in fact they don't have the... legitimacy imposed by state wide things" {p.10}.

Caroline observes principals of what she refers to as exemplary primary schools presenting government gender inclusive policy as mandatory and couples this with significant curriculum transformation- "I had a lot of contact with terrific people in primary schools doing great stuff" {p.2} and "policy underpinned everything they did... they were on the next stage, so they had in place the policy.. I had fairly forthright principals saying to me the policies are there, teachers should... toe the line or they don't make it here" {p.5}.

These practitioners emphasise the transformative impact of a specific policy directive that primary schools to develop their own gender inclusive curriculum statements. Maria observes- "it was a requirement to have one... and our school didn't have one so we

worked on that”{p.2}. Elizabeth concurs- “it became apparent that all schools had to have an equal opportunity policy in place by the end of term one in 1993... it did more than the bit of paper. It made teachers think that they might be exclusive... whenever a policy is... going to be written... they want everyone to be in on it so they’ve got ownership of it... that might have been part of the government’s plan, that they thought if they get the paperwork done. They’ve all got to be involved and it worked”{p.3} and “policy did legitimate our work... it did legitimise it” {p.4}. Jemmima notes the transformative impact of this policy directive for the primary profession- “what you did was by looking at the nitty gritty and the nuts and bolts of it you would actually come a little further along because you realised the implications of what you were trying to do”{p.9}.

Like others in this sample, Maria and Jemmima value a policy mandate- at least as a final resort to enforce mainstream curriculum change. For instance, Jemmima sees policy as a form of teacher education which should be followed up with a compulsory component to ensure enactment. Indeed she equates voluntary enactment with trivialising this policy field. Jemmima does not see such mandating as unreasonable because she thinks gender inclusiveness is a professional responsibility for all primary teachers.

In essence, this paper identifies practitioner verification of the transformative impact of the gender inclusive curriculum policy platform for the primary sector. From their standpoint it provides-

- official government legitimisation
- guidance to teachers
- support for change to classroom practice
- identified innovations
- increased profile for area
- curriculum publications
- stimulus for school based initiatives
- raised awareness of issues
- education for the parent community
- removal of formal obstacles
- an overall framework
- a directive to staff
- a foundation for curriculum development
- a commitment to change
- a benchmark for assessment of current practice
- a source of on-going enthusiasm
- a mandate

CONCLUSION

Nevertheless, before the perceived successes can be somewhat neatly concluded and although I set out in this paper to focus on documenting gains, the weight of my case

study evidence discussed elsewhere (Johnson 1998b) ^{viii} in fact points to overwhelming gender exclusivity. In addition, the false notion that gender equality has been fully achieved is shown to provoke resistance to this policy platform. Added to this is that this particular study shows that it has taken two decades for policy building in this arena. This is further complicated by the point put by David, Weiner and Arnot (2000) that the effects of reforms may not be felt until many years later.

In spite of this or perhaps because of this given my feminist perspective it is vitally important to acknowledge any successes- albeit tentatively and with historical specificity. My interviewee Maria makes the telling point that it is precisely because such transformative gains are vulnerable, that it is important not to lose sight of such positive foundations in order to build on success and sustain policy momentum. Another interviewee Anita agrees, speculating on the lack of a formal review associated with gender inclusive curriculum policy enactment.

Furthermore, this case study shows that practitioners have access to valuable emancipatory knowledge. It also shows the transformative possibilities of policy and in particular of the gender inclusive curriculum model. In broad terms interviewees are prepared to say that gender inclusive policies are good for all children and that conditions in primary schools are better than before. According to these practitioners this policy helps to put gender on the agenda of curriculum reform in primary schools. It does prompt debate about the nature of gender relations in primary education. It does show what is possible of policy in the mainstream context of primary schools. In their view this establishes evidence of transformative impact.

These transcripts reinforce claims of success in the academic literature and render them applicable to the primary sector. For example, Rhedding- Jones (1995: 482) asserts that “many changes are beginning to take place... These changes are not only in the minds of enlightened teachers... They are sometimes apparent in changing curricula” and more recently Kenway (1997:332) argues that “despite new and hard times some things remain to celebrate”. This case study provides evidence for these assertions. Moreover, it illuminates some of the specific ways in which these claims can be justified.

In addition, this case study goes some way in filling the gap identified by Blackmore with Kenway, Willis and Rennie (1996: 255) who assert that “what is still unclear is the actual rather than assumed capacity of the state to ‘reach into schools’ and change practice through policy in terms”.

As a consequence I claim that there is room for cautious optimism. Celebrating these policy achievements in the mainstream context of primary schooling is not premature. This can be described as a period of gender inclusive reform in primary schools. The gender inclusive curriculum model does in this instance assist school-based curriculum reform in the primary sector.

In particular practitioners say that these policies stimulate more significant school based change than would otherwise have been possible. Practitioners specify that this is

especially so for primary teachers who are already engaged in transformative projects and that this is through the provision of a mandate. This upholds my theoretical assertion that curriculum policy has transformative potential. It also confirms the contention made by Blackmore with Kenway, Willis and Rennie (1996: 276) that these policy platforms provide agency for those working in schools. It specifies Taylor's (2001: 74) more general observation of policy legitimating the discourse of grassroots activism too.

Accordingly, this study shows the transformative capacity of feminist schoolteachers in their own right as curriculum developers. However it also demonstrates that gender inclusive policy creates more enabling conditions for this particular group of primary teachers to further explore innovative practice. In some ways these teachers seem a kind of linchpin to transformative impact at least for the primary teaching force.

This implies that these primary teachers who are already working in this field represent a crucial element in the transformative potential of policy being realised as transformative impact. Their importance cannot perhaps be underestimated in terms of curriculum reform. Yet elsewhere in these interviews practitioners admit that those who initiate these changes at the chalkface come by definition as primary classroom teachers from one of the least powerful groups in education.

This prompts a significant question. What is the effect of this group of teachers on the mainstream? These practitioners do not say this policy has transformative impact only for those in the field. What they do say is that this policy has transformative impact especially for those already working in this field. This seems an important distinction and points to much needed theorisation to help understand their role in the process of curriculum change.

A related series of questions posed but not answered by these results is how is their prior interest in the field motivated in the first place? How could other primary teachers 'get' to this point and stay there or even move beyond there? How could feminists in the academy work better with this group? How could feminists build on their transformative knowledge? How could future policy capitalise on this knowledge? Based on this case study this is crucial emancipatory knowledge. In this sense then the results of this study suggest that this particular group of primary practitioners deserve significant feminist theorisation. As Blackmore with Kenway, Willis and Rennie (1996: 254) say there is rather too much emphasis on policy production and an associated lack of attention to engagement with curriculum policies at the school level.

Sometime ago Blackmore (1992:20) contends that the fundamental question which feminists face is "how to produce policy at the macro level which provides both a useful and legitimating framework which... operates at the micro level of school practice". My case study implies that a constructive starting point lies with this group of teachers who are already established in some way in the field of gender reform.

Even earlier a few feminists (Spender 1987:7) in the academic literature acknowledge this group of teachers. For example Yates (1987b: 4) refers to "a vigorous... body of

feminist teachers... [who] worked with the conviction that they could change things within the system”. My case study suggests that this group is more important than these few references implied. More recent work (Coffey and Delamont 2000: 69) on how feminist teachers enact curriculum would seem to warrant further investigation.

These findings also bear out the supposition of Blackmore with Kenway, Willis and Rennie (1996: 256) that when investigating gender reform at chalkface there is an associated need for more sophisticated theoretical frameworks that analyse the links between the microsocial with the macropolitical. Overarching frameworks cannot capture the subtleties of curriculum reform that are revealed in this case study. And yet given the modern narratives of progress presented in these interviews, what we find here is that the policy process exhibits both modern and postmodern traits.

On top of this, we need to think through how and why practitioners are not looking for whole systemic change. Indeed, they see this as an unrealistic goal at least for now. But they do go on to warn that we will effectively cut off such a possible eventuality if we do not comprehend the small successes that are indeed observable.

In the postmodern era feminists have become more adept at seeing teachers as active meaning makers of policy texts. This case study is further verification that we cannot imagine primary teachers as mere passive recipients of policy. We need to build on the watershed work of Anyon (1993) ^{ix} who indicates how reception of gender reform resembles a complex mix of both accommodation and resistance.

To conclude, my emphasis in this paper has been on highlighting what seems optimistic, hopeful and useful- in particular what may withstand contest in the mainstream curriculum arena. This is with the intention of informing subsequent feminist theorising, curriculum and policy development.

To finish, I return to where I began- to the voices of the standpoint of these primary practitioners which provide the paper title of “*We Really Started Coming Up With A Final Product*”. The academy assembled here in the ACSA conference can learn from the successes of these primary practitioners. A starting point could be to build on earlier groundwork laid in the ACSA journal *Curriculum Perspectives* (see for example Willis et al 1992, Jenkins 1992, Vale and Roughead 1987 and Yates 1987c).

The standpoint of primary practitioners contains emancipatory knowledge that can be better appreciated in our curriculum futures. As one concludes of the gender inclusive curriculum- “the incredible work that’s gone on... We’ve done some ... internationally ground- breaking stuff... that is recognised... We had such an impact... We made a big difference”.

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NOTES

ⁱ *Answering Back* (1998) is also relevant here, as it not only laments this dearth but actually responds to it. Nevertheless, although it is an excellent example of what is being called for here, it is focussed on the secondary sector. Other excellent analysis of the secondary setting may be found in Collins, Kenway and McLeod (2000). In addition, related research of the early childhood field is reported in Davies (1989) and Alloway (1995). Clark (1990) remains the only significant exception in its treatment of the primary setting, though to a lesser extent Large (1990) and Evans (1991) relate to this sector also.

ⁱⁱⁱ However, it should be noted that David, Weiner, Arnot (2000:3-4) also suggest that these kinds of educational successes are less likely from specific educational policy advances than wider social shifts. I take a differing stance. Whilst I appreciate that this curriculum policy like any other policy platform does not develop in a social vacuum, I do not necessarily privilege social shifts over curriculum policy shifts. Whilst I certainly acknowledge that there is significant scope to investigate the interrelationship of social and educational policies that pertain to feminisms, my focus here is more specifically on curriculumpraxis at the chalkface.

ⁱⁱⁱ I take 'transformation' to mean enabling a change in the character of curriculum practice and I argue this should constitute an improvement in feminist terms. It is taken to mean mainstream curriculum reform of primary practice at the level of pedagogy. I am also abbreviating this within a common sense notion of 'success' and in opposition to the concept of 'conservative'.

^{iv} I take Harding's (1987) definition that distinguishes theory from method and methodology; whereby I define 'method' as the specific techniques of research (for example data gathering empirical evidence) whereas I take 'methodology' to mean the theorising of how research should be conducted (for example broader interpretative frameworks. Additionally, I understand 'theory' as the set of principles that guide the

argument. Finally, the feminist perspective on theory is only summarised here. For fuller details see Johnson (1998a) and Johnson (1998b).

^v Standpoint methodology typically emphasises the marginal standpoint as transformative. However I resist referring to my sample as marginal. It is true that I observe that their perspective is typically ignored in the policy process. On the other hand, I also recognise that other practitioners would regard these particular practitioners as occupying significant positions in this policy process - given their influence in professional development, ministerial committees etc as demonstrated by the composite biography included later in this paper.

^{vi} It is also for these reasons of confidentiality that interview transcripts are not attached. Transcripts have been witnessed and verified by interviewees. Quotation marks are used to denote transcript quotes and the symbols { } refer to the page number in the transcript of that particular interview. All comments made by interviewees that are identified here as quotes come verbatim from the interview transcripts. This includes the title of this paper.

^{vii} For instance, this finding is further evidence of the primary teachers interviewed by Webb and Vulliamy (1999: 124) on comparative gender reform. As one typically comments - "I had to wait for changes to curriculum policy, which facilitated putting his ideas into practice: My own philosophy of education has been formed a long time ago. I've lacked the means to put it into practice, and the resources. It would have taken energy".

^{viii} Here I also discuss this research in terms of the complex relationship between practitioner conceptualisation and enactment; that success varies across the primary profession.

^{ix} It should be noted however that Anyon's (1993) incisive propositions relate to secondary pupils rather than teachers.