Hearing silenced voices: Emotion and literacy reform

In recent years Australian state and federal governments, like those in other Anglophone countries, have initiated policies aimed at improving the literacy capabilities of citizens. Whilst literacy and the reform process itself have been of significant interest to both theorists and researchers of reform, gender and emotion remain crucial but routinely ignored, hidden, or neglected elements. My study, based in Queensland’s Literate Futures (2000-2004), addresses the emotion work inherent in accepting responsibility for leadership of literacy reform; a role predominantly undertaken by women.

This feminist poststructuralist study drew on Boler’s understandings of emotion and Fraser’s three dimensional representation of injustice to investigate a reform. Analyses of expressions of feelings of empowerment and powerlessness revealed that many participants attributed illness, family disruption, and career stagnation to their involvement in the work.

The research raises awareness of the limitations of bureaucratic leadership; in particular, how established practices not only restrict the capacity of those who build significant expertise to contribute fully to reform leadership; but also how the on-going learning of teachers is compromised through the insufficient attention given to the implementation process. The research therefore questions the capacity of government bureaucracies to manage complex educational reform in ways that are sustainable and socially just.

Key words: emotion work, literacy reform, gender, social justice

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This paper draws from my research into the emotion work of literacy reform. My thesis Exploring the gendered hearts, minds, and work of literacy leadership through Queensland’s Literate Futures reform involved analysis of the accounts of men and women who held significant roles in a major literacy reform undertaken in the period 2000-2004. Literate Futures was a progressive reform promoting a socio-cultural understanding of literacy but its implementation can be considered to have been thwarted by the rise of neoliberal values in government. My analysis of the effects of engaging in this government led reform on those who were passionate about social justice and the potential for education to make a difference for students from disadvantaged backgrounds identifies the need for recognition to be given to the gendered nature of emotion work in demanding educational contexts such as reform. The research is underpinned by theories of emotion (Boler, 1999) and justice (Fraser, 2008, 2013). The analysis of language through a process of critical discourse analysis (CDA) drew on Systemic Functional Linguistics (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004).

Theorising emotion

From the time of the Middle Ages emotion has been ascribed to the feminine; considered an expression of female weakness (Zorn & Boler, 2007). In the 1970s this feminised view of emotion was challenged by Arlie Hochschild (1979) who, from the identification of links among social structure, feeling rules, emotion management and emotive experience, claimed that emotions are, in effect, the focus of personal and social management. Through a study of the training of flight attendants, Hochschild observed that their work involved taking responsibility for satisfying the needs and wants of customers. This essential but unnamed responsibility was based in an assumption that women and ‘friendly service’ go together. Airline marketing, she argued, relied on a ‘trade in female niceness’ (Hochschild, 1993). The emotional labour involved in evoking and suppressing feelings in one’s self and in others Hochschild identified as emotion work.

Hochschild’s claims that emotions are integrally linked to culture, social class, race, and gender have been supported by American researcher and feminist, Megan Boler (1999) who argues that, although similar
patterns of gendered rules of emotion exist across cultures and ethnic groups, dominant cultures apply inconsistent norms and rules to different communities. Boler (1999) has put forth two premises: first, emotions are a site of social control—we learn how to respond appropriately in different contexts; secondly, emotions are a mode of resistance to dominant cultural norms such as the imposition of authority. Boler argues that the dominant discourses of emotion that have controlled and shaped society have derived from and been supported though the moral/religious, scientific/medical, and masculine/rational discourses of emotion. Our understandings of emotion is further complicated through the influence of physiological, cognitive, and linguistic factors such as emotional awareness, attributed meanings, and interpretation, as well as the social context and power dynamics existing between given individuals in a particular situation (Boler, 1999). These complex contributing factors have made emotion notoriously difficult to define.

For those working to improve student outcomes, there is no question about the importance of teachers’ emotional commitment (Boler, 1997; Hargreaves, 2005; Sharratt & Fullan, 2012). Teaching is a caring profession in which teacher and principal identities meld with responsibilities towards students and communities. Good leadership is now recognised as not just an intellectual pursuit, but a social practice requiring attention to moral and emotional matters (Blackmore, 1999a). Expanding accountabilities and responsibilities devoted to school management have made it increasingly necessary for principals to manage not only their own feelings about enforced change, but also the emotions of teachers, students, and parents (Blackmore, 2004; Hargreaves, 2004). This demanding work has increasingly become women’s work.

Pioneering studies of emotion, gender, and power undertaken over past decades by feminist theorists have investigated the unnamed rules of emotional conduct that operate in educational institutions. Experienced educators familiar with the emotional demands of teaching and leadership in a range of educational contexts have focused on the ways in which emotion is managed by government bureaucracies in order to sustain power (Beatty, 2007; Blackmore, 2013; Blackmore & Sachs, 2007; Ferguson, 1984; Franzway, Court, & Connell, 1989; Lather, 1987). The evidence shows that, through naturalising differing behaviours for different groups, such organisations fail to acknowledge and respond to others’ viewpoints. Such practices are cemented through “a tight fusion of the structure of power and the gender division of labour”, which positions women as dependent (Blackmore, 1993, p. 29). Beatty (2011) adopts Weber’s metaphor of “the iron cage of bureaucracy” to argue that this “demonstrates acute recognition that, as organisations practice systematic depersonalisation to rationalise what goes on within them, they become traps of our own creation” (p. 2). As a consequence, issues of gender have been ignored in educational policy. My study analysed the emotive language embedded in participants’ reflections to provide an insight into the nature of injustice.

The power of language
Poststructural feminism claims that language plays a significant part in sustaining women’s subjugation (Weedon, 1997) and that gendered binaries, essentialist in nature, sit at the heart of Western values. Such binaries are neither neutral nor equivalent, but represent hierarchical relations in which one term is regarded of greater value than the other. It is through the power embedded in binaries that androcentric hierarchical institutions are sustained (Boler, 1999; Francis, 2012).

The dualism of reason/emotion is no exception: in the history of Western philosophy, emotion has more often than not been maligned, neglected, and assigned as a property of the “other”, as a symptom of deviance. To study the history of such dualisms underpinning Western philosophy is to study the history of the relations of power, of what activities and qualities are valued and commodified under what circumstances” (Boler, 1997, p. 204).

The power of binaries in naturalising the oppression of women has been the target of feminists seeking to “bridge the gap between mind and body, reason and emotion, thinking and feeling” (Tong, 1992, p. 237) for the past three decades. Although Simone de Bouvoir’s innovative work, The Second Sex (1949),
raised awareness of the power of binaries through defining woman as “the other” in relation to man, it was not until the late 1990s that the rational/emotional binary embedded in the literature of educational leadership and management and teacher professionalism was challenged (Blackmore, 2011; Dillabough, 1999).

Social constructionists argue that both sex and gender are discursively produced through the “(false) duality” of binary gender discourses and that sex/gender is performative; acted out through gender identities “rather than emanating naturally from a body” (Butler, 1990; Francis, 2012, p. 2 brackets original). In seeking to conceptualise gender in ways that avoid essentialism yet acknowledge the impact of the body and social structures in the production of gender, Francis (2012) argues that Bakhtin’s approach to the relationship between language and power has much to offer feminist analysis. Bakhtin’s interest in the dialogic construction of meaning led to his understanding “that language is not neutral, but rather reflects and constructs power relations” (Francis, 2012). Bakhtin (1981) explained that dominant forms of language (monoglossia) represent the world views and interests of dominant groups and that for every discourse multiple contradictory and resistant discourses (heteroglossia) exist that are part of the everyday world. To Bakhtin, language is in essence, heteroglossic and dialogic, and while there may appear to be stability in the monoglossia, heteroglossia ensures “plasticity, contradiction and resistance” (Francis, 2012, p. 4). Heteroglossia and parody have the capacity to both undermine and deconstruct monoglossic accounts. In Australian bureaucracies the sometimes pejorative term ‘femocrat’ was initially added to the monoglossia to identify women in government empowered by Equal Opportunity policies (Franzway, et al., 1989, p. 133). In return, women referred to the men at the top as ‘The Boys’ Club’ and, even more derogatory, as the ‘Swinging Dicks’. This gendered heteroglossia of resistance parodies the androcentrism of bureaucracies.

Drawing on Bakhtin’s notion of a gender matrix, Francis (2012) argues that a continuum exists that extends from the ultra-feminine (passive, silent, powerless) to the ultra-masculine (aggressive, without emotion or capacity for caring), neither of which in reality exists. From her research into the way gender is acted out by high achieving school girls, Francis identified the selective expression of both monoglossic and heteroglossic discourses. This, Francis argues, demonstrates a separation of sex from gender and deconstructs the gendered binaries that work to sustain the hegemonic masculinity of institutions. Further evidence to support the notion of a gender matrix is the emergence of women, referred to as “social males”, “the queen bees” or “isolates” (Blackmore, 1999b, p. 192), who are not ‘caring and sharing’ type leaders. Their aggressive and competitive approaches to leadership align more with masculinism.

Dualistic thinking positions strength and leadership as masculine. This is reinforced through hegemonic discourses which naturalise particular social arrangements by determining which forms of knowledge will sustain the interests of the powerful and suppress alternative discourses. A significant problem stemming from this is that “men have been socialised to become emotional anorexics” (Blackmore, 1999b, p. 141) unwilling to express any form of emotion that may draw scorn from colleagues (Bartky, 1990). Drawing on Bourdieu, researchers Linstead, Marechal and Griffin (2014) recognise that institutional language and symbolic forms of representation do literal violence to individual identity as the meanings embedded in everyday social, economic, and political discourses constitute a constant site of struggle over power (Foucault, 1994; Weedon, 1997). A significant challenge associated with current global trade centres on the importance of emotion in negotiation with different cultures such as exist in Asian countries. The masculinist solution to this problem has been to adopt the notion of emotional intelligence (Goleman, 1999); the efficacy of which has been questioned (Blackmore, 2011).
Workplace injustices

Hierarchically structured organisations operate through practices that embody power, domination, and control with many behaviours that oppress frequently invisible, normalised and naturalised (Hearn & Parkin, 2001). Forms of oppression identified as embedded in the practices of institutions sustaining masculinist power take on many forms; they can be “subtle or dramatic; occasional or continuous; chronic or endemic” (Hearn & Parkin, 2001, p. 19); and include “exploitation, marginalisation, powerlessness, cultural imperialism, and violence” (Young, 2008, p. 93). Because many discriminatory practices are entrenched they are not easily recognised by employees. This phenomenon, requiring the victim to be complicit in their own subjugation through accepting the unequal power relations operating, has been described by Bourdieu as symbolic violence (Albright, 2008). Symbolic violence is a threat to women working in masculinised workplaces. In the following section I will draw on my research data to show that the bureaucratically managed policy process privileged institutional patterns of injustice while demanding significant emotion work of women committed to improving the educational outcomes for the diversity of students in state schools. I explore literacy reform through the lens of emotion and Fraser’s (2008) three-dimensional approach to argue that emotion can serve as a powerful indicator of cultural, economic and political injustices.

Theorising injustice: Nancy Fraser’s approach

Over the past two decades American feminist and critical theorist, Nancy Fraser, has theorised injustice. Based on an understanding of justice as “parity of participation”, Fraser (2008) argues that a three dimensional theory of justice incorporating the political dimension of representation, the economic dimension of redistribution, and the cultural dimension of recognition (2008, p. 15) provides an effective frame for analysing injustice. Her approach embraces all forms of oppression in all societies and adheres to the belief that women’s liberation must be sought in conjunction with social, economic and political justice for all people.

Inspired by socialist feminism in her early career, Fraser rejected the view that there is an essential nature unique to woman, arguing that the gendered division of labour that exists is not natural but a result of capitalism’s exploitation of those who work. As a result of the interrelationship between gender and class, different forms of oppression and privilege are experienced by both men and women. Fraser explains that the political, concerned with “the constitution of the state’s jurisdiction and the decision rules by which it structures contestation”, sets the stage where “struggles over distribution and recognition are played out” (2013, p. 195). It is her view that the success of second-wave feminism resulted from the effective weaving together of these strands but that the neoliberalism of the current era is separating the strands, creating situations in which the gains of the past could easily be lost (Fraser, 2009). As an example, the focus on the politics of difference or recognition rather than the politics of redistribution (Lingard, 2003, p. 38) acknowledges diversity but, at the same time, sustains unequal access to economic resources. The following section examines a government led literacy reform in which bureaucratic practices negatively impacted on the lives of professional women and demonstrates the capacity of Fraser’s framing of injustice to identify cultural, economic and political forms of injustice.

Gendered roles in education: A historical view

Women have played a major role in the establishment of schools across Australia from the days of the early settlement. Their participation however, has been curtailed by gendered societal values preventing equal participation with men. Stemming from the values and beliefs of the 1800s, strict rules enforced through inspectorial systems were applied to women in schools (Clarke, 1985). From the time schooling
became compulsory and managed through a government bureaucracy, gender was a basis for discrimination.

The vilification of the ‘dame school’, the incorporation of women into state school systems as a subordinated workforce, the ‘marriage bar’, the long struggle for equal pay and promotion rights with male teachers, the ‘feminisation’ of the workforce, are important elements of the whole story of teaching (Connell, 2009, p. 10).

Historical evidence reveals that many women who taught in remote and isolated communities in Australia were dissatisfied with the conditions of their work and keen to return to larger centres. Records show that nineteenth century teachers “wrote often to their employers—about schoolhouse and residence, about headteachers, about parents and about salaries. They pressed their case through departmental inquiries, through parliamentary committees and even through the courts” (Theobald, 1999, p. 19). Although women continued to protests over conditions of employment throughout the 20th century, it was not until their claims were supported by first and second wave feminism that significant change was achieved.

Queensland’s approach

The takeover of schools by the Queensland government in the late 1800s saw opportunities for women to take on leadership systematically removed. By 1983 only 6% of all principals were female and less than 1% (0.6%) of female teachers were in charge of schools (Clarke, 1985). Although requirements for entry into the profession were higher for women until the 1970s, management, as a male prerogative, was the basis for promotion. This had been firmly cemented in policy by J.D. Story, who, from 1902 to 1940, held roles of Chief Clerk, Under Secretary of Education (1906 to 1929), Public Service Commissioner, and adviser to the Premier and Ministers (1920-1939). Story enforced traditional gendered roles arguing that “women in the public service should fill the lower jobs. The higher positions should be filled by males for economic and administrative reasons, and because of their family responsibilities” (Clarke, 1985, p. 30).

Meanwhile, men in education benefited from this positive discrimination. Many male teachers were openly prejudiced towards women as head teachers. Story discouraged male teachers from supporting women’s claims for equal pay by raising fears that men’s wages would drop and that women would compete with men for school leadership positions. Under Story’s leadership women continued to be put in charge of one-teacher schools and provisional schools, but the Department refused to put a woman in charge of mixed schools with a staff (Clarke, 1985). Story’s resistance to legislation designed to redress the inequities encountered by women was grounded in the belief that such legislation would infringe upon the previously held rights of males (Douglas, 1995). In such a context, where men were guaranteed a job for life and women knew their careers would be short, there was little incentive for professional learning. This stands in stark contrast to Finland’s education system where, prior to 1937 female teachers were receiving equal pay (Clarke, 1985), and today’s teachers require master’s level qualifications. In effect, governments in Australian have limited the potential of education systems by prioritising gender over standards.

A Queensland case study: The Literate Futures reform

Literate Futures was a Labor Government initiative introduced as part of a reform attempt to better prepare Queensland students for successful participation in twenty-first century workplaces. In the period 1999-2000, under the leadership of Premier Peter Beattie, Minister for Education Dean Wells, senior public servant Terry Moran, and with guidance from Professor Allan Luke from The University of Queensland, Education Queensland trialled New Basics; a framework for curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment that targeted the skills and knowledges required for future economic, social, and technological conditions. This was supported by a strategic focus on literacy through Literate Futures. To guide the focus on literacy, Education Queensland engaged Professor Peter Freebody from Griffith University to
conduct a review of literacy practices in Queensland state schools. This resulted in *Literate Futures—Report of the Literacy Review for Queensland State Schools* (Queensland Government, 2000). Luke and Freebody, both experienced academics and researchers, sought to advance literacy understandings and practices through a socio-cultural-critical model of language and a focus on student diversity, whole-school programs and community partnerships, the teaching of reading, and future literacies.

Analysis of the reform revealed that a highly gendered structure quickly emerged. I observed that *Literate Futures* provided golden opportunities for a number of those involved in the leadership of the reform, predominantly men, to advance their professional careers while career options for others, predominantly women, were constrained even though huge demands were placed on them. In *Literate Futures* men dominated the design of the policy; women created the materials and managed the work in schools. This practice rests on the belief that “‘brilliant’ women are few indeed in number, but women’s painstaking attention to detail and their ‘capacity for hard work’ make them excellent material for the support of a ‘brilliant academic male’” (Walkerdine, 1987, p. 60). Overwhelmingly it was women who attended to the details associated with the new focus on literacy learning in this reform. In the next section I examine injustice resulting from bureaucratic practices requiring, but not acknowledging, the essential emotion work women perform in reform. Exploring literacy reform through the lens of emotion and Fraser’s (2008) three-dimensional approach supports the argument that emotion can serve as a powerful indicator of cultural, economic and political injustices.

**What women involved in *Literate Futures* said**

The women interviewed in this study included academics (critical friend, director), an acting regional director, school principals, policy officers, LDC coordinators, teachers seconded as writers, and consultants. Their stories, frequently told with passion even after a number of years had passed, revealed compelling evidence of injustice. The conditions under which writers worked were demanding of their knowledge and time. Following an incident described by writers as ‘a brawl’ in the higher ranks of the bureaucracy, the first team left the project. Frustrated by a lack of access to the expertise of Allan Luke and impacted by changing priorities, the writing team’s work became extremely difficult. A member of this team who chose to leave described this decision as ‘probably the hardest thing I’ve ever done’. Conscious that the act of leaving could be seen as evidence of failure of some kind, the writer stressed that the decision was not made lightly but was morally and ethically driven.

**A manager’s perspective**

The second team of writers, relocated in a separate building awaiting demolition, established a strong and productive team. The manager of this writing team saw this move as ‘brilliant’ because it removed them from the day to day workings of the bureaucracy. The manager felt that it gave them independence and allowed ‘cohesive team building which was really, really important’. Although a highly effective and supportive working environment was established, progress was hampered by bureaucratic process. The manager explained that the writing team had three months to complete their work but, because the steering group who approved their work only met once a month, writers were obstructed by process:

> We were never allowed to move forward on stuff unless it was approved. And that group would approve it, but then it had to go upstairs several more times.

This wasted valuable time and caused frustration. Furthermore, through what appeared to be power games, writers were denied important information necessary for meeting departmental standards. A head of department, critical of the writing team’s work, described their work as ‘inappropriate’ because it was not written in the appropriate language. The manager explained:

> I didn’t use the buzzwords. I didn’t use the right buzzwords. But I didn’t actually know what the buzzwords were.
Fortunately this was resolved by the intervention of ‘the young guy who was second in charge [who] massaged it, put in the appropriate kinds of words. It went through like that’. Thus technical language was a tool of power.

Further frustration for the manager came from the selective dissemination of materials. The omission of essential information for schools from a key resource left her with a sense of betrayal:

I think that I lost all faith in the bureaucracy at that point. It’s probably the thing I am most bitter about.

Her hostility stemmed from understanding the consequences of this action. She reflected:

It was not because I wrote it; not because my chapter was previously taken out; [but] because it hijacked it [the implementation] and it prevented so many schools from continuing the process they had begun. It was tragic for teachers at the grass roots level.

From the manager’s perspective, the removal of the chapter explaining how to manage change through learning communities was an act of sabotage. The significance of this act is conveyed through powerful emotive language high in modality (all faith; most bitter) incorporating strong verbs (lost; hijacked; prevented) and repetition (not because). The disappointment is not only personal, but professional as the omission is described as ‘tragic for teachers at the grass roots level’. Whilst the manager felt a moral responsibility for ensuring the best possible support for schools, it would seem that another more powerful agenda was impacting on their work.

**Writing and developing literacy resources**

Women with recognized expertise in aspects of literacy education were invited into Education House, the central office of the Department of Education, to prepare the resources that would support the work of the Learning and Development Centres (Literacy) (LDCs) in schools. As writers, these women carried immense workloads and worked long hours. Frustration with a culture that failed to understand the demands of the work and recognise the impact on their families was evident. One writer, the mother of a teenage boy, sent her son to live nearby with his father because, in her words:

I would not be any good as a mother for the next three months ... I worked seven days a week ... I have a really distinct memory of … coming to the completion of the modules. I was getting the train into town [to see the editor] and at the same time I was lamenting the fact that I didn’t have any money for overseas holidays. But as I was in the train I thought, ‘Who needs to go overseas when you can take the train into the city.’ I was so refreshed by seeing the grass and the trees that I hadn’t seen for three months that I thought it was a really fabulous trip.

Another, who was also a mother of young children, recalled:

My whole face was shaking; it was nerves. I’d pushed myself to the absolute limit that I could do; I was surviving on two hours sleep a night.

The use of repetitive patterns (I would; I’d) and high modality (would; absolute) capture the unrelenting nature of the process that eventually took its toll. The writers’ stories reveal that there appeared to be little understanding of the magnitude of the task of producing materials, informed by new understandings of literacy pedagogy, for a CD-ROM; nor was there understanding about the effect the work was having on the lives of the writers.

Poor management of the implementation process was a source of angst. The bureaucracy, focused on timelines, failed to promote the work in schools. As a result, regions across the state were free to choose
whether or not to engage with *Literate Futures*. There was no sustained effort to utilise resources or any accountability requirements on the part of schools. Further frustration came from the failure to ensure that regional directors and principals were informed. In many schools, resources, such as the Reading Manuals provided to all teachers, were never accessed as the LDCs were closed down before key messages could be delivered. The CD-ROM, carrying information intended to guide the LDCs, was not released until the end of the project. One LDC coordinator who described the content of the reading CD-ROM as ‘brilliant’, recounted how, in her current role, she continues to encounter misunderstanding:

I still talk to very, very articulate, knowledgeable professional people who say, ‘Oh gee, it was a big waste of money, like you could never use it.’ And I just cry on the inside because I know … what people gave to it.

Despair is felt through knowing that very competent teachers failed to realise the quality of the resources (I just cry on the inside) and learn from them. Her belief in the integrity of the materials and knowledge of the context in which the writing was done (what people gave to it) underpin her commitment to the materials. Although the writer accepted that the life of a reform is short, the fact that poor management of the implementation process ultimately denied professional educators access to theoretically informed practice (it was a big waste of money; like you could never use it) was to her, a tragedy.

Women working as principals reported being challenged by disgruntled and change weary teachers who failed to engage in necessary discussions. Cynicism about the new literacy pedagogies was evident in comments such as, ‘Oh well, this is just another flavour of ice-cream and it’ll be gone next week’. In such contexts, emotion work was demanded of principals in order to remain calm, curb their rage, and continue on. A secondary principal explained that how the lack of direction impacted on schools:

I don’t necessarily think that the significance of *Literate Futures* was spelled out at the time… for secondary schools it probably didn’t receive the importance or priority that it should have… there wasn’t a lot of accountability …

Conflicting messages led to feelings of intimidation. The principal believed that Heads of Departments, Deputies and Principal were frightened of going into classrooms to look at what was happening because of fear that such actions could lead to ‘a big union issue’. Conflicting directives from the Department of Education that all professional development after school must be voluntary added to the confusion and frustration. In their Victorian study on the effects of centrally imposed change, Bishop and Mulford (1999, p. 182) noted “that where teachers perceive their key interests are threatened by principals, trust in the principal becomes qualified, teacher alienation is increased and heightened strategies of resistance are activated”. Here, the readiness of teachers to seek the support of the Queensland Teachers’ Union was a real inhibitor to change. For principals in a system moving toward self-management, the micropolitics of secondary schools presented a significant problem.

After four years, the LDCs were closed. The women responsible for developing the professional learning materials and LDC coordinators returned to their previous roles in schools. New educational agendas emerged that no longer valued the skills and knowledge built up through the intensive focus on literacy. Many reported feeling angered by this, as one LDC coordinator commented:

It seems very obvious that professional knowledge is not valued by our system. The path I have embarked upon really cannot be considered a career path because it leads to nothing – it is a dead end.

Those who gave years of their life to *Literate Futures* suffered emotionally and physically. One writer explained:

I worked on the project for four years with very few holidays because there were always deadlines hanging over our heads, so much so, in the end I ended up with depression. Didn’t realise that I had it but it just was
so full on all the time. After the project I went back to a school. But then I was called back to do the implementation and to organise that, and then, ‘Thanks very much, see you later, out to a school.’ And that’s when I had holidays but also realised that I’d run into problems with depression.

The demands on writers did not go unnoticed by the LDC coordinators. Reflecting on the lack of recognition given to the expertise of the writers who worked continuously on the project, a coordinator commented:

They were really, really committed people who gave up their careers because they were seconded, and then they were told, as people are told now … ‘Oh no, you have to go back after a certain time’.

There was anger at the exploitation of the women: ‘So they worked their butts off … and then they were given shitty jobs’.

Although LDC coordinators were responsible for supporting school principals and providing professional learning for teachers, the expertise required was not rewarded financially or professionally. This enraged an academic who understood the complexity of the work. She commented:

One of the things that I think was really poor, with those LDC co-ordinators, look at the level they were operating, and they were paid as classroom teachers!

The language of emotion

Analysis of the emotive language expressed by those deeply involved in Literate Futures revealed that both men and women were passionate about its potential to bring about change. All, however, were consistently critical of bureaucratic decisions that impeded progress and were ultimately considered responsible for patchy implementation. Feelings of frustration, anger and disillusionment permeated reflections; stress was a constant. Hochschild (1993) explains that stress comes when people are faced with a rapid flow of demands but have little power over the conditions that would help them meet those demands. It is the constancy of such demands that cause individuals to reach their breaking point and suffer emotional stress and burnout, as became evident in this study.

Allan Luke played a key leadership role in the design of both New Basics and Literate Futures. However, bureaucratic practice was such that those who conceptualised reform did no more; they were not responsible for its enactment. A member of the advisory group reflected:

I found with Literate Futures and New Basics … that there was all that initial conceptualisation by incredibly brilliant and clever people but then they stepped back.

Once his work was done Luke left the project but continued as an advisor to the Minister for Education, Anna Bligh. In this role, Luke observed that a number of programs that he had initiated as Deputy Director General, such as Literate Futures, began to shift in their philosophical orientation and in their degree of implementation. The bureaucracy’s failure to understand and remain true to the intent of the reform left it open to pressure from lobby groups and impacted on the development of the resources. Although disappointed with the outcome, Luke reflected on a conversation with a very senior education official who commented: ‘What are you complaining about? You’ve had seven years of a successful reform. That’s better than anybody gets.’

Luke further explained:

It’s a shame that they lose interest, and they don’t capitalise on them, they don’t transform the expertise that’s been generated into other projects, that they more or less lose interest, end of that reform – we need
to roll out another … you get a good five year run if you are lucky; that’s if the bureaucracy is able to pull it off; that people don’t lose interest; there isn’t a snap election; that it isn’t wiped away.

Although women at both the bureaucratic and the school level reported feeling stressed by situations that they were powerless to change, they did not identify individual men as responsible. There was in fact, appreciation of the security provided by men closely involved, such as the project manager:

He was absolutely brilliant at liaising with the minister at the time… excellent at liaising and keeping them in the picture as to what Literate Futures was about … he got a lot of academics to write… he was a wonderful leader … great in that he handled all the ministerials and questions on notice and anything [that came] down from above and they’re urgent.

Women expressed sympathy for Luke’s situation. A member of the advisory panel commented:

And we all know full well what happened because it’s ghastly. I mean he [Luke] was riding this really thin line between being ostracised by his academic colleagues because he’d gone to the other side. And then these people with the academic cringe. He was really on a knife’s edge and I feel for him.

These words reveal awareness of the volatility associated with reform and the uneasy relationship existing between academia and the bureaucracy of Education Queensland. Luke’s identity as an academic was seen to be threatened (this really thin line, ostracised) by his decision to work in government (the other side, people with the academic cringe). Although Luke’s passion for social justice, evident throughout his academic work and publications, drove his desire to improve outcomes for students disadvantaged because of poverty, race/ethnicity and isolation (Luke, 2010), more was required.

**Conclusion**

The evidence suggests that government bureaucracies have limited capacity to lead and sustain complex literacy reform, for effective reform is a long-term undertaking. Constrained by the limitations of election cycles and the demands of hierarchy, bureaucracies tend to limit potential and deny recognition to those who, because of their expertise, become players in political arenas. There is a need to consider whose interests are served by this arrangement, to question who really benefits from government led reforms, and to reflect upon whether it is time to search for a new model – one that gives recognition of, reward for, and a voice to knowledge and expertise.

Through the lens provided by Nancy Fraser’s frame the data show that cultural, economic and political injustices impacted upon women undertaking leadership in this 21st century reform and that emotion was a strong indicator of these injustices. It also highlights the unstated expectation that women will perform the emotion work required to achieve difficult goals within the bureaucracy and in schools. In light of what is now accepted as injustice it is worth considering how we would be situated if issues raised by women during the first half of the 20th century had been addressed. What if women in Australia had received equal pay from the 1930s and the barriers to promotion on the grounds of gender had not been so rigorously enforced? What if women had a voice in literacy reform? What if a more equitable gender, class, and racial balance influenced literacy policy in Australia? In terms of social justice it would seem that little has changed.

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References


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