

## An Academic's Attempt to Use Action-Oriented Research:

### Case Study of Implementing Award Restructuring in Two WA Universities

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This paper briefly explores how two universities in Western Australia, Edith Cowan University and Murdoch University, are attempting to implement award restructuring. It should be read within the context of on-going changes in award restructuring, since the process has not been completed in either university.

The paper examines how universities can be studied by a person who is also actively involved in trying to change some of the current procedures. One aim of award restructuring is to develop more participatory processes within universities for all academics. The research looks at how junior staff and women, in particular, are affected by award restructuring and it attempts to encourage women academics to become more actively involved in this process of change through the union movement.

The research project was designed around Patti Lather's (1991) ideas which draw on feminist research, neo-Marxist critical ethnography and Freirean 'empowering' research. This was basically praxis-oriented, advocacy-based research which was openly ideological. In terms of this research model, it will be seen that I did not really achieve the aims of this paradigm because I was not fully engaged in collaborating with staff at both institutions. I now believe that participatory action research more clearly identifies some important ingredients of praxis-oriented, advocacy-based research that are not delineated in Lather's work and may well have given me a greater opportunity to achieve the objectives of the research.

In reading Reinharz's (1992) book concerning feminist methods in social research, I became aware as to how elitist my research might sound, in comparison with Reinharz's reported studies. So many of the research projects she describes are about poor women, women involved in domestic violence, rape victims, Third World women. I asked myself why I confined myself to studying academics. I felt guilty that I was in the academy and not even moving outside of it to change the world that most women live in where poverty and violence are part of their every day lives. My justification is, however, to look at processes of changing academic organisations and see where such changes might benefit women in other locations. I am trying to involve more junior and

female academics in that process and also to examine the increased casualisation of academic work in which many women work for meagre salaries and are often living on the edge of poverty.

### Participatory Action Research

In the preparation for this paper, I read more widely on action research and participant observation and the work of William Foote Whyte soon captured my attention. In *Learning from the Field* (1984), Whyte remarks that he could now see that much of his work "focused on worker and union efforts to resist not only the leadership styles of particular managers but the very system of power and control that supported autocratic and dehumanising management" (1984, 256).

In a later book, *Participatory Action Research* (1991), he and

others describe studies where the organisations were actually transformed, such as Xerox, Mondragon Cooperative Group in the Basque and the Norwegian shipping companies which introduced industrial democracy. Whyte notes that interest in worker participation programs in the United States resulted mainly from the Japanese challenge. These programs have been variously called: quality circles, quality of working life (QWL), employee involvement and so on (1991, 186).

As I became more engaged in the research, I also became interested in the notion of 'industrial democracy' and how this may differ from 'collegiality'. Participatory democracy is often used interchangeably with these two terms but can be seen to have quite a distinct meaning, especially differing from the more traditional concept of collegiality. Pateman (1970) defined participatory democracy as referring to (equal) participation in the making of decisions and equality of power in determining the outcome of decisions. She was keen for this kind of participation to be practiced in industry, largely for its educative function--"educative in the very widest sense, including both the psychological aspect and the gaining of practice in democratic skills and procedures" (Pateman, 1970, 42).

This paper, in passing, will look at the difficulty of introducing the concept of 'industrial democracy' or 'participatory democracy' into universities. The university is a site where worker participation is quite evident yet even in this site junior workers, and women in particular, feel dispossessed. I had the aspiration to investigate whether award restructuring would give women more of a voice within the academy by ensuring tenure for more women and a career path that had previously been

denied many of them. Also, it was my desire to examine whether it would give them an increased chance for promotion which in some universities had been denied most staff, whilst in many other universities it seemed to be harder to obtain for female academics.

The first three years of the study (1991-93) involved observation, gathering documents, surveying academics and interviewing union officials, academics and administrators. During this time I began to know the field and was able to trace some of the blockages and facilitating factors to implementing award restructuring. At this stage I would not describe the research as participatory action research because I have not involved both management and unions and academics generally in the design of the study nor in its interpretation. If I were to get funding that would enable a more participatory process, then I would take certain steps to ensure active involvement by key personnel in the two universities and a commitment by them to change some aspects of the organisational culture when it could be demonstrated that change is necessary.

Another important factor in participatory action research is collaboration with another researcher on site. It would be imperative that if the research were to become more empowering at Edith Cowan University, it should involve another researcher on an equal basis, attempting to achieve the same ends that I am trying to achieve at Murdoch University. And on both sites, it would be important to have co-researchers, acting as critical friends, to help analyse the data and comment on the interpretations of the findings which the researchers were making in each of the institutions.

#### The Researcher

In taking up this research, I did so with the idea of combining both my interests in feminism and the union. From 1989 to 1992, I was President of the Murdoch University Academic Staff Association and had been extensively involved with the local association and the Federated Australian University Staff Association (FAUSA) for the past fifteen years. As an active feminist, I convened the inter-university Feminist Discussion Group for ten years, chaired the Women's Studies Programme Committee for two years, was the union representative on the Equal Opportunity Committee and served on FAUSA's Affirmative Action Committee.

I was closely involved in the award restructuring process at Murdoch University and because of this fact, I felt it would be

an opportune time to study the processes used while participating in them. I had a number of close colleagues at Edith Cowan University and my conversations with them readily suggested that a comparison and contrast between the two institutions could produce a profitable case study. I could see that the university was transforming itself from a centralised authoritarian culture to a more collegial, participative culture and academics were becoming more active in the union movement there.

Because of my location at Murdoch University, I have, without doubt, bias for that university since I have been teaching there for sixteen years and have been actively engaged in reviewing many of its procedures and introducing some new ones. I would hope that my bias is not placed in the same category as Charles Lamb's observation that we are "...a bundle of prejudices--made up of likings and dislikings" (quoted in *The Oxford Dictionary of Quotations*, 1975, 306). During my sixteen years at Murdoch, there have been occasions when I have been critical of some processes within my own school and those within the university and I see constructive criticism as part of an academic's function. Nevertheless, I found my university to be comparatively open and collegial in its decision-making, especially within the Australian context.

As a student growing up in the sixties in the United States, I attended three universities (Purdue, UCLA and University of Chicago). I was involved in student politics as an undergraduate but at that time I was not really aware of the decision-making processes within the universities. During the late 60s and early 70s, when I was completing my PhD at University of Chicago, I boarded with two households where I gained some insight into the academics' role in university decision-making processes. The first was with a male physicist and his family. Among his other functions as an academic in 1969, he was part of the university's panel of academics deliberating on a very controversial case in which the university dismissed a young female sociologist who had considerable support from students to be retained by the university. The second household was that of a female Vice President for Academic Affairs of a newly created university on the outskirts of Chicago. Governors' State University was to be a genuinely democratic institution in which representatives from all levels of the university, including secretaries, technicians and students, would sit on the university's council to help make academic decisions.

Although I have not been an academic in the United States, I was interviewed for two positions there in which postgraduate students played a major role in choosing academic staff. In one university, I was interviewed separately by a large group of

postgraduate students to assess my background and ideological position. The first position I took was at the University of

Calgary, Canada, where I taught for one year. During that time, the postgraduate students were negotiating for a larger share in the selection of potential staff and other decisions within the department.

From this background, I came to Western Australia where I initially taught in Grayland's Teachers College when it had gained its autonomous status from the Department of Education and shortly before it became amalgamated with other campuses to form the Western Australian College of Advanced Education (which later was granted university status and named Edith Cowan University). As a full-time temporary member of staff, I had no involvement in decision-making and was allowed little discretion as to what to teach. My next position was at the Western Australian Institute of Technology (now Curtin University of Technology) where I gained a tenured lectureship. I recall a meeting where I questioned the Dean about where the ultimate power over decisions resided within the School of Teacher Education. I asked if he had veto over decisions made by the Faculty Board. He answered in the affirmative that he had the power of veto. After two years, I moved to a lectureship at Murdoch University where decisions could not be vetoed by Deans and occasionally the School of Education moved in directions that were contrary to the Dean's expressed position.

I have given this brief overview of my background to show that I have experienced various forms of decision-making and have been enculturated by my early socialisation into a belief that the more equitable and the more open the decision-making forums are, the more commitment staff feel to the institution and the more just the process is seen to be. Research into participatory decision-making also suggests that participation has an integrative function and aids the acceptance of decisions (Pateman, 1970).

### The Research Sites

Case studies of two universities negotiating the implementation of award restructuring should shed light on what might be achieved for academics within this process. The two universities, Murdoch and Edith Cowan, differ substantially in their philosophies and structures. Murdoch University began teaching with its undergraduate programme in 1975 and was seen to offer an 'alternative' type of tertiary education from that of the traditional university. Its first Vice Chancellor, Professor Stephen Griew said "there was no excuse for a new university to

make the same mistakes as the older universities which had been handicapped by tradition" (Bolton, 1985, p 23). He predicted that all members of the university, including students, would have a say in its administration and he would encourage participatory decision-making rather than control by senior administrators. The structure was also to differ, administration of academic programmes would be based on schools of study rather than on faculties and departments. The university was to encourage interdisciplinary studies and set up 'trunk' courses for first year students which would integrate knowledge across schools and disciplines. The university also encouraged team teaching and other forms of innovative teaching (Bolton, 1985, 14).

Murdoch University has not always lived up to the idealism of its planners and foundation professors. Many of those professors have since left the university and the idea of 'trunk' courses has been diminished as programmes of study demanded more compulsory courses and left room for fewer electives. Students often felt, even in the early years, that the notion of participatory democracy was never really realised. Yet students

have had their representatives on most committees, such as School Boards, Academic Council and Senate.

In commenting on the challenge for a university executive, the current Vice Chancellor of Murdoch University, offered the following observation:

The biggest challenge for a university executive is how to retain the essence of collegiality. That requires an atmosphere of trust but also a willingness to have an efficient division of labour where academics are prepared to entrust their interests to a small number of representatives in a particular forum. This is one of Murdoch's strengths. Murdoch has had small decision-making bodies from the outset and its main decision-making body has never been allowed to become a parliamentary assembly in the way that most of the older universities operate their professorial boards. It seems that most members of the academic community have accepted that Academic Council should not be a professorial chamber. From the outset, they did not want to leave all the decisions to professors and give them an undue importance. And it has made sense to keep the council small. You sit around that table and it's difficult to create a we/they dichotomy--partly it is physical size and partly that there are so many non-professors there.

Edith Cowan University, on the other hand, unlike Murdoch University which was established as a university, has recently been converted from a college of education to a university and is

an amalgamation of four, previously autonomous teachers' colleges. Moses (1989) noted that Australian colleges tend to be more hierarchical and universities tend to be more collegial. An analyses of the differences between two-year colleges and universities in the United States made similar conclusions:

The higher its academic standing, the more an institution resembles a professional guild; further down the hierarchy, colleges take on the characteristics of regular bureaucratic structures, with the 'higher-ups' in charge. (Ladd and Lipset, 1975, 291)

In a survey of academics, Ladd and Lipset also noted that "elite-school professors are generally more critical of existing practices in university governance and more inclined to perceive and object to hierarchical or insufficiently democratic modes of decision-making than their colleagues at lesser places" (Ladd and Lipset, 1975, 264).

The Department of Employment, Education and Training (DEET) in its National Report on Australia's Higher Education Sector (1993) described the management approach of the former colleges of advanced education as follows:

The structure was highly centralised, with decision-making power concentrated in the central administration and specifically with the Director or Principal. These institutions have become progressively more corporate during the 1980s. This is now manifest through strong managerial structures and accountability through a clearly defined hierarchy. (DEET, 1993, 131)

The responses that staff gave in interviews about Edith Cowan confirm the control that the former Director had within the institution. In discussing promotion, one said, "there is often intervention by the Director." Another said, "the Director says who he doesn't like". The promotion system was also described as a "straight out case of jobs for the boys--or should I say jobs for certain boys". Another made a similar comment: "the system

seems easier for men, a buddy-buddy system. This is a male environment, the work environment is geared to men."

The current President of Edith Cowan University's Academic Staff Association recognised that there indeed had been a change in the recently appointed Vice Chancellor's position regarding the Academic Staff Association and that "he is philosophically capable of living in a pluralist society." Indeed, the new Vice Chancellor appears to want a totally different relationship between management and staff from his predecessor. When I

questioned Edith Cowan University's new Vice Chancellor about the relations between administration and unions and staff, he very clearly favoured a collegial approach.

I don't really see much difference between the interests of the management in a university and the longer term interests of the staff. I very much believe that a university is best run as a collegial enterprise. Naturally it needs leaders and naturally it needs decision makers. And naturally it doesn't mean that every member of staff will want to be involved in making all the decisions, the endless debates and committee work when they really should be concentrating on productive teaching and researching. .... But it does mean that I think the hierarchical management structure doesn't work well in a university. Nearly everything depends upon the energy and the attitude of the staff on the job.

The new Vice Chancellor recognised that the path would not be all smooth and one of the greatest difficulties would be to ensure that "Deans of faculties find a way of handling their new responsibilities and developing their own advisory participatory mechanisms." He realised that this process would be faster for some people and slower for others. "They will be moving from a highly centralised and highly dictatorial system...to a more participative and devolved structure suited to a cohesive and rapidly developing university."

One aim of comparing and contrasting these two types of institutions is to investigate how they implemented award restructuring. Which institutional structure is more amenable to award restructuring? Or is the structure only one factor? Are there other factors such as the personalities involved in negotiating, the strength of the unions, the former relationship between staff and management more important in predicting the outcomes of the award restructuring process?

The award restructuring process as studied in this research project began with the negotiations at the Federal level that lasted from August 1989 to July 1991. The negotiations then began at the institutional level on those items that had not been decided at the Federal level. To gauge the changes that were taking place, I interviewed and surveyed academics and administrators from September 1991 to September 1993 at Murdoch and Edith Cowan universities.

### Case Studies

Baldrige (1971) in describing the methodology he used to study New York University, gives three reasons why case studies are beneficial.



First, the case study is the classical method of researchers interested in depth of study, for the case study allows many different techniques to be applied in the same situation. Interviews, questionnaires, document studies and observation techniques are all used and the results integrated and compared.

(1971, 32)

This study used all the techniques identified above, employing both telephone and face to face interviews and participant observation as well as outsider observation.

The second major advantage is that case studies are carried out in the field with the sounds, sights, and smells of the real situation hitting the researcher in the face. The importance of the "feel" of the situation cannot be overestimated, and anyone who has done field work knows that it is a vital part of the intellectual experience. (Baldrige, 1971, 32)

As a negotiator at one campus where we had monthly meetings with management and weekly contacts with the Industrial Officer and members of the executive committee, I certainly heard, saw and smelled the real situation and had a feel of the overall process. I was living it daily, especially at the time of the industrial action that lasted from October to December 1990. I also met with female academics during 1992-93 at the Women's Caucus where we discussed ways of having more influence on the four universities we represented. We exchanged documents and thought particularly about ways in which the promotion procedures could be altered to give women more of an opportunity to gain promotion.

A third major advantage of case studies is their usefulness in exploring the processes of the organization. .... The sophisticated social observer knows that official structure and official documents hide a wild, informal and dynamic set of processes that can be understood only by participation, observation, and depth interviews. The case study, executed in the field in the midst of this on-going process, has distinct advantages to anyone who is concerned with dynamics and change. (Baldrige, 1971, 32-33)

As an active participant in one of the universities, I was able to discern differences between the official documents and the actual processes as they occurred in the work site. I was also able to keep in contact with academics from Edith Cowan to try to understand their local culture and how it was changing during the three years of research. In 1992, I had an opportunity to get a

glimpse of the adversarial stance between the administration and the union at Edith Cowan by attending several days of a Board of Reference which was held to settle a classification dispute. This involved 23 cases of reclassification due to different interpretations by the management and the union of the Award's statement on Position Classification Standards. I interviewed some of the key individuals involved in that dispute and two of the academics. (A telephone survey is also planned for the other academics in the near future.)

Yin (1989) suggests that the problem of construct validity can be addressed by the use of multiple sources of evidence. "The most important advantage of using multiple sources of evidence is the development of converging lines of inquiry, a process of triangulation" (1989, 97). I also followed a corroboratory mode of checking with interviewees to make certain that I had accurately recorded their interviews. The method of interviewing informants coming from different perspectives about an issue, such as the Board of Reference, allowed me to clarify the story told by individuals.

Reporting the case study at a conference like this may go some way toward creating catalytic validity as discussed by Lather (1991). To verify whether the research has been effective, or

valid, Lather suggests that this can be gauged by the amount of change which derives from it. So my hope is that the reporting of the research may help orientate participants in the research to reflect on the process of award restructuring and move closer toward knowing reality in order to transform it. And by working more directly with women academics, it may contribute to more equitable circumstances for them within the academic domain.

## Interviewing

### Procedures

For this comparative study of Murdoch and Edith Cowan, I carried out interviews in each setting, with the vice chancellors, university personnel officers and industrial officers to gain the perspective of the administration on award restructuring in 1993. To gain the perspective of the union and academic staff members, in 1991 and 1993 I carried out interviews with the industrial officers and the presidents of the academic staff associations and with individual staff members (12 at Edith Cowan and 9 at Murdoch) in 1991. I also interviewed the equity officers in 1991 who could be seen as located somewhere between the administration and staff in their perspectives on award restructuring. In an attempt to continue monitoring award restructuring from the

national perspective, in 1993 I interviewed the Australian Higher Education Industrial Association's (AHEIA) Chief Industrial Officer, the Federated Australian University Staff Association's (FAUSA) General Secretary, the Award Restructuring Implementation Officer, an Industrial Officer and the Union of Australian College Academics' (UACA) General Secretary and an Industrial Officer. I had interviewed all of the same individuals located in Melbourne in 1991 and in addition, the Executive Director of AHEIA, its President and several other UACA and FAUSA industrial officers involved in the negotiating process at the federal level.

The interviews were semi-structured with open-ended questions and the interviews generally lasted about an hour. I often changed the order of the questions because those interviewed tended to answer some questions in their previous answers. I also inserted questions which I thought were needed to clarify their answers. I simultaneously taped the interviews and jotted down comments. This system worked well, especially in situations where the tape ran out or I was interviewing in a restaurant and the noise level made it impossible to hear the recording. There were some instances where I just took notes and recorded the interview as quickly as I could immediately after the interview or at least in the night and day following the interview.

I transcribed the interviews and sent them back to the individuals within a couple of weeks of the interviews. I asked the interviewees to correct any inaccuracies or delete anything that they would prefer was not recorded. These then became 'negotiated' interviews.

#### Dilemmas/Reflections upon the Process

##### Interviewing 'Up'

I became aware that when I interviewed members of the administration, the process was a much more formal one. I dressed up more. I was more polite and self-conscious about my behaviour. I tended to be more nervous about the whole process. I remember particularly the interview with the President of AHEIA. At first, he declined to be interviewed. I called him several times, being particularly persistent and finally

suggested that I would get another member of the 'Principals' to be interviewed. I also used the fact that the research had been funded by the Australian Research Council and was considered to be 'important' research by the funding body. He finally granted permission for an interview but it had to be early in the morning. We agreed to meet at 8 am in his office. The office is

very imposing and I was the only other person on the top floor of this building, surrounded by leather and highly, polished wooden furniture. I arrived early and discovered that the President of AHEIA was working in his office but I did not dare to knock a second before 8 am.

When the interview began, AHEIA's President immediately took over the interview process and suggested that the questions were setting a wrong impression of the process of award restructuring and he promptly reworded about half of the questions. We then began the interview. When I sent him his interview transcript, he suggested that I had misinterpreted a number of his responses and he rewrote parts of the interview.

I noticed this latter response was repeated by the other Vice Chancellors I interviewed in Perth. They did not suggest that I misinterpreted their responses because in their case, I had tape-recorded the interviews. However, they chose to rewrite sentences quite extensively in an attempt to refine them, polish the English and make certain that the correct nuances were present in the 'negotiated' transcript. This was a very different response from almost every other category of respondent in that very few made alterations to the transcript as it stood. In fact, one transcript, the interview with the President of FAUSA, was later printed almost verbatim in the FAUSA News to give union members an overview of the award restructuring process.

My interpretation of why the Vice Chancellors reacted in this manner is hesitant because I can only speculate on why the Vice Chancellors were so insistent on getting every 'i' dotted and 't' crossed. I speculate that Vice Chancellors have to be very concerned with public image and with how they relate to staff. They would not want to appear in any way careless or off-hand in their responses. As part of their job, they must be concerned with public relations and the university's image in the community. I also speculate that they have reached their positions because they are careful thinkers and writers and are adept at using the English language in a very refined way and would not want to appear otherwise.

In comments on a previous draft of this paper, one of the Vice Chancellors gave his reasons for ensuring that my transcript correctly reflected his views.

I think the answer is that Vice Chancellors learn from hard experience how quickly misleading assumptions or rumours can start as a consequence of their words, which in other circumstances, lead to no problems. A price of the office of Vice Chancellor is that casual remarks, or poorly expressed

words, so often tend to acquire an "ex cathedra" quality which was not intended. Consequently, while in office, I find written statements do have to be studied carefully from different angles to test whether wrong conclusions or misunderstandings are likely.

Shulamit Reinharz (1992) discusses the phenomenon of 'studying up' in her chapter on "Feminist Interviewing". "When feminists engage in research on men, upper-class people, and in institutions with considerable power, they are likely to demand

less and self-disclose less because self-disclosure diminishes one's power" (1992, 42).

I think I was caught in that position of demanding less from these men. I felt as though I was taking too much of their time. (Nevertheless, the vice chancellors gave more than an hour of their time and did not appear rushed in the process of being interviewed and wanted to give very complete answers to my questions.) I felt that I had to be more formal. I also tried to be the distant, objective researcher even though these vice chancellors knew that I was an active unionist and might suspect that I would, in all likelihood, present their case from a biased union position.

My own Vice Chancellor often found himself, I thought, in the rather awkward situation of trying to describe what had occurred during the time when I was President of the Academic Staff Association and we had negotiated a number of policies together. This was demonstrated quite explicitly at one point in the interview when I asked "Would you use the term 'collegiality' or 'industrial democracy' to describe the decision-making processes at Murdoch?" He responded by saying:

"I think it is difficult to answer this question because the boundaries of what is considered to be 'industrial' matters change, as you would know (you probably did more than anyone to extend the bounds of industrial relations by putting a lot of other issues on the agenda which traditionally had not been seen as industrial but of course you had every right to put them on because they affect staff's working conditions)."

At this moment, there was a little nervous laughter and we both realised that the interview question was putting us in awkward positions. Had I been a stranger, I could have possibly probed deeper into this issue. But I felt it was not fair to pursue this because it would be putting the Vice Chancellor on the spot to reveal what he really thought about my actions when I was President. However, sometimes in interviewing situations more is

revealed in nervous laughter and various forms of body language than what well calculated words can ever say.

Had I been a male and suggested a follow-up interview at a pub over a few drinks, I possibly may have been allowed to probe further into areas which were more sensitive. Was this a case where familiarity and being a female made it difficult to explore the depths of an interviewee's perceptions?

I was known to the two Vice Chancellors in Perth but a stranger to the one in Melbourne. The President of AHEIA, also a Vice Chancellor, may not have known my union activist background when he was interviewed but he clearly identified the unionist perspective in a paper I sent him to comment on and alter if he so wished. He made this comment: "Whether you recognise it or not, the article is clearly written from a strong unionist perspective. I do not object to that but simply note it." He went on in his two page letter of reply to point out areas of interpretation that he felt needed correcting. I accepted some of the points of clarification but I could not accept all of his personal perspectives and interpretations.

The Chief Industrial Officer of AHEIA was also more prone to make alterations to his transcript. He was an English major in university so he was more likely to want to refine his responses. In contrast to the Vice Chancellors, I developed a more informal rapport with him perhaps because he was a younger male and had more recently been an academic. He was very open to being

interviewed. I interviewed him three times over the course of the study and during that period of three years, he disclosed his thoughts about the negotiating process and became more reflective about the process of award restructuring.

I felt much more comfortable with the union interviewees. Most were women who had known me for several years as an active member of FAUSA. I had served on several national committees and had worked with some of the industrial and research officers on these committees. I interviewed them at restaurants, in the staff room, in pubs and in their offices. The interviews tended to last longer and often involved an exchange of information or opinion about the process of award restructuring.

The staff who were interviewed at Murdoch and Edith Cowan were interviewed jointly by my research assistant, Julie Tracy, and me. Occasionally we interviewed staff together. Julie did the majority of the interviews and she also interviewed me which made me, then, part of the research process as an interviewee. The interviews tended to be in the staff room over coffee or in the

staff member's offices.

### Comments on Self-Disclosure and Empathy

Our feminist analysis of women's oppression, which constituted much of the theory informing our work, also increased our sensitivity and awareness in the interview process, and contributed to the emergence of an empathetic atmosphere in the interaction process. (Acker, Barry and Esseveld, 1991, 146)

The goal of finding out about other people through interviewing is best achieved when the relationship of interviewer and interviewee is non-hierarchical and when the interviewer is prepared to invest his or her own personal identity in the relationship. (Oakley, 1981, 41)

In this project the researchers modelled interviews on what they call "a true dialogue" rather than "an interrogation." Self-disclosure initiates "true dialogue by allowing participants to become "co-researchers." (Reinharz, 1992, 33, quoting from research by Bristow and Esper, 1988).

In the interviews with members of the union and staff at the two universities, I often disclosed something about what was happening in my situation or at my university in terms of how we were tackling a particular aspect of award restructuring. This exchange with Edith Cowan's former President of the Academic Staff Association illustrates the kind of reciprocity we established.

President, Edith Cowan:

We've actually decided to do the reciprocal thing and invited the Vice Chancellor out to lunch with the Executive of the union. Just for lunch, a chat, no hidden agendas, just to be nice.

Interviewer, Jan Currie:

Actually we did that too, that was about two years ago, we invited the Vice Chancellor and the University's Industrial Officer to lunch. It was right at the beginning of award restructuring. We had a new committee of management and we thought it would be good to have an informal chat over lunch, get to know each other and throw on the table some of the issues to be tackled over the next year.

I also shared with the executive of the union at Edith Cowan non-confidential documents that Murdoch had negotiated or was in the

process of negotiating on staff development/staff appraisal and promotion which I thought were good models. In this way, it was my hope to be able to assist the staff at Edith Cowan.

I often felt frustrated concerning the conditions I learned of at Edith Cowan University. I had difficulty understanding how Edith Cowan staff could accept their working conditions which lacked any concept of collegiality. They lacked a career path for academics because there was no internal promotion. They lacked study leave opportunities, except for Professional Experience Programmes which were awarded on a competitive basis and, I understand, very sparingly. I just could not believe that staff could be so complacent about the lack of entitlements that we at Murdoch had taken for granted. I had difficulty empathising with them because I felt they should be more actively engaged in dialogue with management. Finally when they dug their heels in at the end of the year, had a day of industrial action, took a vote of no confidence in the previous Vice Chancellor, and demanded better working conditions, my perceptions began to change and I could sense a new spirit awakening amongst the staff.

When interviewing the President of the Academic Staff Association, it was clear that staff were disgruntled with their situation and could recognise that things had to be improved. They were going to use the award restructuring process to try to begin changing things. The President commented:

We had a profile, attitudes and practices that were very much out of kilter with what was going on in the rest of the country. I certainly think there was an impetus that has come about because of award restructuring to do something about making better working conditions than what we had. I guess another way of saying that is that we were so down at the bottom of the pile, there was no where else to go except up.

When discussing collegiality, she told me about a series of faculty meetings that she attended in her role as the Council representative. She accompanied the Deputy Vice Chancellor to these meetings which were to be 'no holds barred' exchanges of information. The Deputy Vice Chancellor took up his position at the front of the meeting and said to staff "Tell me what's getting up your noses and I'll listen to you." The President of the Academic Staff Association elaborated on her observations:

The lack of collegiality was something that came up again and again. It was expressed in a variety of ways--this institution does not promote trust, people are distrustful of the way they are handled in this institution, this institution devalues people, it's always a top down method of decision-making, never



anything back up. The comments certainly showed to me that any notion of collegiality was a big joke.

With the advent of a new Vice Chancellor and agreements made at the end of last year due to mass meetings of staff voting no confidence in the previous Vice Chancellor, an award restructuring committee was established. Two rounds of tenuring have taken place but not under the guidelines set by the Award. This committee negotiated staff appraisal procedures and the university appears to be taking its first steps toward a more collegial culture.

When interviewing administrative officers at Edith Cowan in late 1991 and early 1993, I must confess that I experienced difficulty

in maintaining my composure and I had to restrain my criticism of the lack of action they had taken. I knew that I would have to interview them again in the future so I had to bite my tongue and swallow my dismay. Often I restrained the urge to ask how they could hold such out-dated views. I had difficulty understanding the out-moded hierarchical structure of Edith Cowan. A comment by one staff member in 1991 probably summed up my dismay, which would be shared by my colleagues at Murdoch, when she responded to the question: "How do you view the selection procedures and internal promotion system?"

The system is abysmal. Here there are no rules, no advertising, no job descriptions and no guidelines for interview panels. Part of the problem with Edith Cowan is the institution is not a university yet. People are being promoted to associate professor and professor who would not necessarily qualify at other universities."

This comment was made when university status had just been granted to Edith Cowan but the staff member was doubtful that it merited the name of university in terms of the current ethos. In coming from a university which was set up as an alternative type of university with a keen sense of achieving a collegial atmosphere, it was difficult for me to come to grips with the history of an amalgamated university like Edith Cowan which has grown out of a teachers' college background into a fully-fledged university within a period of ten years.

In comments by Edith Cowan staff on an earlier version of this paper, they pointed out several reasons why the two universities differed in structure, style and staff involvement in decision-making. The academic programmes taught in the two institutions differ, with Edith Cowan having a more vocational focus and Murdoch having a more liberal arts notion of undergraduate

education. The staff at Edith Cowan have had much higher teaching loads, although teaching loads have increased at Murdoch, particularly since the relative funding model was introduced in 1991. The qualifications of staff on the two campuses differ dramatically, with Murdoch having the highest number of staff in Western Australia with PhDs and advanced degrees and Edith Cowan having the lowest. As a consequence many staff at Edith Cowan are involved in upgrading their qualifications and they have little time to engage in university decision-making structures or union activities. Another factor that has limited the staff's resistance to the more authoritarian structures imposed on the amalgamated colleges is the proportion of staff who have been in contract positions. When a staff member is concerned to renew a contract, she or he is less likely to want to 'rock the boat'. Even among tenured staff, it was reported to me that there was a feeling that one would be 'punished' if seen to be resisting the administration's mandates.

It is also very easy to idealise one's own setting and not see its weaknesses. When I reread some of the responses of Murdoch staff who were asked the same question, I could see that having a formal system and guidelines did not make the system ideal and it was also subject to criticism. These two comments from Murdoch staff suggest that there is a great deal of room for improvement.

Promotion procedures could be improved. They are unsatisfactory and the outcomes are quite corrupt. The obvious people aren't getting promoted. The criteria are not clear enough which leaves room for the use of discretion. Other factors tend to come into it such as jealousy or money considerations.

I generally question who is on the appointment and promotions committees! The formal system always seems undemocratic; it is usually determined by the programme chair and dean and no one hears about it. Tutors have been told they have no place on committees as they don't know the system, jobs, or research. Usually there are only one or two women on promotion and school advisory committees; it is restricted because of the requirement that academics be senior lecturers or above. Women are particularly left out of ad hoc committees. For promotion you need to be seen as an easy going person; you can't be seen as someone who has a problem. Informally tutors are always saying this--you'd better get on with senior staff. Ad hoc committees are particularly undemocratic. Basically the more participation you do, the more understanding you get, particularly on how to change the system.

Since these interviews were carried out, the promotion procedures have been altered at Murdoch but there is still scepticism among staff as to whether the culture of promotions has really changed. A few comments, from a survey given to female academics in September 1993, throw doubt on whether the changes that were instituted, due to award restructuring, were necessarily going to have the beneficial effect desired.

Still biased towards counting papers. I am beginning to think that is unlikely to change until certain professors retire."

"There has been an attempt to shift the system to a more equitable balance between research/teaching and administration. But I need proof that the shift is real and that promotions are being made on the basis of teaching and administration in fact and not just in theory."

Of course, Edith Cowan female staff, surveyed at the same time, were compelled to remark that they had yet to gain an internal promotion system:

"What promotion system?!"

"No 'system'!"

Both the administration and the union at Edith Cowan University are negotiating new promotion procedures which should be in place by next year. It would be interesting to interview staff after these procedures are in place for a year to determine how the promotion system is then viewed, especially by junior staff and women.

It is clear from the interviews with the two Vice Chancellors that even though they have collegial attitudes toward decision-making, their definition of what is collegial may differ from that of the concept held by more junior staff. The image the Vice Chancellors hold of junior academics is often portrayed in a fairly stereotypical manner. A comment by Murdoch's Vice Chancellor captures this attitude.

Participatory democracy, which was the catch-phrase, the buzz word of the late 60s, early 70s, I've never seen as appropriate for a university. Partly because I don't believe that a very junior person has the same experience and wisdom to bring to bear on decisions as a person who has been in the system for many years, partly because this process can slow down decision-making too much.

This statement probably does not take into account that many academics, particularly women, enter the ranks of academe in

their 30s and 40s, having some years of experience, often in other professions, and may have equal or possibly more maturity and wisdom than some professors.

### Concluding Comments

To change the cultures of universities and the nature of decision-making is a difficult process. I realise that this piece of research has been mostly descriptive and exploratory. It has tried to give only a brief picture of what has happened with the implementation of award restructuring. It has not tried to influence the outcomes in any direct way. Indirectly, of course, I tried to influence the outcomes at Murdoch and perhaps because I was studying what was happening and was more aware of the breadth of objectives, I was able to participate in the negotiations at the local level more effectively and perhaps to a more satisfying degree than the union representatives have accomplished to date at Edith Cowan, which is understandable given all of their unique obstacles.

However, I realise that I have not achieved many of the objectives of an emancipatory research process. And certainly I have not achieved the goals of participatory action research as detailed by Whyte, Greenwood and Lazes (1991).

The practitioners should take part in evaluating, interpreting and reflecting on the data generated through the research process. This would open the research process to a kind of validation through consensus (Karlsen 1991). "It corresponds to an epistemological view of knowledge as partial and local" (Gustavsen and Engelstad, 1987 as quoted by Karlsen, 1991, 155).

Drafts of this paper were sent to many staff who participated in the research to gather their comments on the research process. This was one way I sought their impressions of my preliminary interpretations. In this way, the project is similar to Becker's work as described by Wagner (1993) as "a project of cooperative research, in which research findings, data-collection strategies and analysis were shared with research subjects, some of whom made their own contributions to the analysis" (1993, 21, 21).

Wagner (1993) made an important distinction between pursuing truth and reducing ignorance. He argues that "research itself is a form of learning and research reporting a form of teaching. By helping to define what people don't know and might learn next, ignorance is a central concern in both of these processes" (1993, 21).

Wagner argues that ignorance is a better criterion than truth for determining the usefulness of knowledge generated through educational research.

Many academics present at this conference will know the institutions described in this paper. Many of the individuals quoted are also well known. I am not attempting to hide each individual's identity since the purpose of this research is to be open to the interviewees and to the wider academic community. The aim of the research is to collaborate with the interviewees and report to them in an iterative manner, moving back and forth from praxis to interpretation to praxis. This may reduce our collective ignorance about our institutions and may improve the quality of our work lives. My task in the next couple years is to engage academics more fully on these two campuses in the pursuit of this goal. To do this, we need to act collectively to

reduce our ignorance. This can be done possible more quickly than might be thought, for as Mark Twain observed:

When I was a boy of 14 my father was so ignorant I could hardly stand to have the old man around. But when I got to be 21, I was astonished at how much he had learned in 7 years. (Quoted in Concise Dictionary of Quotations, 1986, 326)

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