**Interview with Janina Trottman**

It was a bit of serendipity actually. As you can probably tell by my accent, I am of British origin and coming to live in Australia had never really entered my mind, not because I had anything against it, but it was the other side of the world and I didn't know any Australians.

When I was doing my postgraduate work at Reading University, I met an Australian doing the same course. And we fell in love. And I came out here because it seemed a good idea. And we stayed together for nearly 50 years.

So I finished up in Australia. I was a qualified primary school teacher and I had also graduated from the Oxford Institute of Education with an Advanced Certificate in Education, with distinction. I was completing my Masters of Community Development at Reading University.

When I first got here, I managed to secure a temporary job as a teacher at Lynwood primary, with the knowledge that, I may not be reemployed the next year, because that's what happened when you are on supply.

I was there from October to December, come January, the principal told me that he'd not been able to secure me a full time position, but only two days a week, and he wanted me to do some research for him. Then I saw this advertisement, or maybe it was my husband who pointed it out to me, for a lecturer at Mount Lawley Teachers College. They wanted somebody with a qualification in sociology, as well as school teaching experience.

So I applied. We didn’t have a telephone in those days and there were no mobiles. So I get this telegram from the college, asking me if I would please contact them.

This was January 1975. So I went into I think, they asked me to fill a form in or something. I went in to deliver the form. And it was a scorching hot day, and I walked into the building, it was so cold, and I said, I've got to get this job just for the air conditioning. I've got to be here.

I was duly interviewed. I had about five or six men in the room interviewing me, including the Principal and the Deputy. I had an initial interview with the Acting Head of my Department, before they took me to the grand jury for an interview.

And there were the usual sorts of things like: Where did you do your qualifications? What are you interested in?

And then we had, why did you come to Australia? I said, Well, I have to be honest, I met an Australian and we're getting married. I've come here and we're getting married. And they said, “Oh, do we know him”? And at that stage, I didn't know how parochial Perth was. And especially for anybody who was connected with the education department. My father future father in law was Deputy Director of Education, Primary Education, and had been a superintendent for a long time. So all of the older men in that group who were WA based of course, knew my father- in-law.

When he asked: “Do we know him?” I said, No, you probably don't. His name is Colin Trotman. Oh, Albert’s son. He, he went by the name of Howard in the Education Department. And I didn't really notice at the time that apparently at some stage Bob Peter left the room and went to the phone. He phoned up my future father-in-law to find out whether I was really going to marry this man or whether I was just spinning a line to get myself in the door.

It was this insular sort of Education Department thing that I felt. I was introduced as Howard Trotman's daughter-in-law for years. Not in my own right. One of the questions they asked me was, did I intend to have a baby?

I don't think I was a really well versed or thinking feminist at the time, I just had this feminist instinct. And I just said, I don't believe you're allowed to ask me that sort of question. The Deputy Principal blushed. He was younger than the others. And he knew that they put their foot in it, and they kind of looked sideways at each other. So the interview ended, and somebody asked Dick Lamb to show me around the place.

During that time, Dick gave me his views on whether or not women should work when they had small children. He said that his wife never worked when the children were small, and he didn't think that it was appropriate that women should be at work when their children were small.

The next thing he asked me was: did I have a cigarette? At that stage, I was a smoker. I had one cigarette left, so he took it and he said: “Never mind, I'll show you where to buy some more”, namely, the vending machine. What really interested me was that Mount Lawley campus at that stage, I think our female student membership would have been about at least 80%, that while there were vending machines for cigarettes, but none for personal things like tampons, and pads, not a thing, cigarettes, but not period equipment. And, it said something about catering for needs.

I was employed on the basis of teaching sociology, and also because I'd been teaching myself to do some of the more brass tacks stuff to do with classroom teaching. So I worked with Jim Rainford and we did really exciting things like tables of specifications, constructing so called objective tests, and all those sorts of things, lesson planning.

I was asked to start teaching courses in the sociology of education. Now, what I was unaware of was that sociology was also being taught in the Social Science Department. Because the students were teachers to be, education was a focus of their sociology.

There was inevitably a boundary clash between the two departments. I came into it rather unwittingly, because I didn't actually start teaching a course in the sociology of education till about the second semester, but in the first semester, I took over a course that someone had outlined but not detailed, and it was the Child in Society.

So I looked at historical constructions of childhood and the family, but I also took the students to places like the remand center for adolescent offenders and various other places. We went to the home for unmarried mothers in in Bentley called Ngala. We also went to Perth Children's Hospital. We talked to social workers, who worked with parents, who had very sick children. It was it was a general sort of Cook's tour of this is how we construct and cater for childhood in our society.

But I moved on then to teaching a course that was specifically about different sociological ways of looking at the school and how it was run. And there was a textbook I used I think it was written by someone called Shipman and it was called the Sociology of the School. And basically what he was saying was that you can actually get different insights into the way schools work if you look at them through different theoretical perspectives.

I think a lot of the students found some of that content really quite eye opening, particularly the sort of conceptual lenses that sociology can give you how, for example, you can look at organizations in terms of how much space the individual has, to be an individual, or how much of that space is taken up by following bureaucratic rules. So, it was the nomothetic, versus the idiographic components of what your role was supposed to be, in a school.

There were some interesting observations to be made. I mean, one of the things that many of the students remembered, was that some of the teachers in their high school years, who were most individualistic and different were, in the ideographic part were the music teachers and the art teachers. It was less pressured, and somehow there was license for that, because it was seen as part of the parcel of being creative.

I also taught, what we call then, the conversion course when two year trained people came back to do an extra year. I really loved teaching that because the mature age students would come in, and we would spend the first half hour talking about what had happened in the school that week and then trying to link it to some kind of sociological theory, and particularly the nomothetic and ideographic bit. They were really wonderful students, and some of them went on to have brilliant careers in the Education Department, but also in academia.

And when most of the two year trained people had been, quote, unquote, converted, it was called the Conversion Course. We started doing the B Ed courses. The B Ed course that I started with was a course on the social construction of knowledge and the curriculum. That meant some quite dense reading.

There was a there was a sociologist called Michael Young, at the London Institute, who had written a very thought provoking, but sometimes difficult to grasp book about the way knowledge is constructed the way it's handed down in curriculum. Because the reading was so treacle-like, I used to actually spend the first half hour with the students getting them to tell me which particular paragraphs or ideas they found difficult to grasp. It was useful to do that, but the other thing is, it actually taught me because having to teach difficult concepts to enhance understanding, actually means that you have to really deconstruct the idea yourself and see how it works. I really enjoyed that. And then we started policy studies, after we became WACAE. I moved into that, which was basically the politics of education, in general societal terms, bureaucratic terms, but also down to the school itself, and looking particularly as policy came out.

So you had to be up to speed with what policies were being churned out. But also up to speed with different theoretical perspectives on policymaking. So you had a conjunction of the material and the conceptual lenses. That happened after, after Mount Lawley ceased to be an independent organization, but it was really a very pleasing unit to teach, in the sense that there was heaps of feedback from students about how it enhanced their ability to critique educational policy and practices.

They would say to me, this happened in the school the other day, and I thought, oh, yeah, there's a very good example of that. I felt as though it was actually contributing to a more enhanced incisive worldview of where they were working.

I've also taught all sorts of other things like blackboard writing. You had to muck in with lots of things in the Education Department. One of things I now see as a difficulty, and it certainly felt difficult at the time, is that I was just dropped into the job. There was no orientation. I’d never taught adults before. There were no workshops on teaching and learning, with adults. Most importantly considering that Mount Lawley, was setting itself up, as a student-centred institution, where we would have continuous assessment and abolish exams; nobody ran that past me and gave me examples of what it would mean. I just had no idea.

Lynne was very kind to me. She showed me some of her unit outlines, which were really useful, but nowhere was it really emphasized, that the focus was on learning and the students. I think I probably started off, in a fairly traditional teacher-focused plan of what I was doing.

It was only when one of my colleagues said that I had only given one assignment for the students in the semester and that you were supposed to do many more. I said where did we find that out? That was a difficulty I had to say, because I felt very much at sea. I had to learn by doing, and listening to my colleagues.

One of the things I have to admit, is that teaching sociology taught me more about sociology than university ever did. It was having to take on new material, new ideas, see how they work, see whether they were useful. The difficulty was really orienting myself to working with adults, and working with a focus on the learner, things I picked up as I went along. I was there for 28 years, so I picked up a bit.

I didn’t actually teach with Brenda Buchanan, but I took over a course she’d planned, but she was such a wonderful influence in the Department. She was a peace-maker but she was very feisty as well and she was extremely active in the Union and very supportive of women students. She moved on to counseling later on, within ECU. She had come up the hard way. She’d worked in order to put herself through university, known really hard times. Her family were rural people. She really appreciated and understood students, who had specific difficulties and problems. Her ability to grab onto a serious issue, was like a terrier. She remained a good friend of mine until she died. She was remarkably kind and smart. In terms of rocking the boat, an irreverent lady at times, because she was very politically aware.

In terms of idiosyncrasies, I cannot really point to anyone in particular, you could probably say that we were all rather odd, but I do remember that, there were certain sort of no go areas in terms of ideas. We started the special education courses, when I first got there. In terms of the intellectual foundations of that,

it was absolutely behaviouralist - never would another perspective or window open up in it.

There was a lot of behaviouralist theory, there was also a lot of measurement and recording, and graphing and mapping. I can remember one of the lecturers who was a key person in that development saying that some other member of the Mount Lawley campus had asked whether or not they taught anything about Freud. And her response was Freud, that's all ideology. That's not psychology.

There was this very positivist bent in that particular stream.

It's not necessarily an idiosyncrasy, I think it's a follow on from what those particular people had learned about psychology, at UWA when they were there.

I do remember one or two lecturers being a bit sly about purloining, your ideas, your workshop structures, and your unit outlines, in order to embellish their teaching, even to the point where I went into the secretary's office one day to get the lever arch file in which all of my originals was stored. This is days before word processing. And it wasn't there. And I asked for it was and she said: “Oh, so and soes got it”. He didn't ask me, so I knocked on the door and went into the room. There he was, quite calmly turning over the pages and putting post its on the bits he was going to photocopy.

When I said how dare you? That's infringement of my personal stuff. He was a bit like the reptiles that change color to fit the background. He didn't react just carried on as though nothing had happened and handed me back the file.

We weren't all striving to be individually intellectually honest. I have to admit that that relying on your colleagues and your partners in teaching, to learn new things is something that benefitted me enormously, but I never went and took people's personal stuff. I think we did learn a lot from each other, as a group.

And this wasn't Mount Lawley, but I do remember that, it was assumed once my feminist reputation had been nailed to my forehead, that I would pass any thesis that was sent to me if, it was written by a woman. I had one sent to me, that was just full of spelling errors and incoherent. It was just assumed that I would let it through, and another one, which was potentially a very interesting thesis, it was about succession plans, and this particular student had had written about the changes that were taking place in TAFE and the lack of or the availability of succession plans and how successful they were. I knew nothing about succession planning, so I went to her references and read what was available, and the thesis wasn't especially good. But there were points where it was obvious that it could have been turned. I asked her supervisor whether he'd read any of the material on succession policy. No, he hadn't. I was often handed theses written by women, on the assumption that because it's a girl's piece of work, this girl will pass it and I think they saw me as being rather difficult. That’s after Mount Lawley, education and psychology.

In some ways, I think the Education and Psychology department saw itself as the spine of the teacher education curriculum, and that the other departments were kind of contributing to it. So it was the mother ship and satellite, which didn't always work out, because sometimes there were overlaps. There is a hint of condescension, about that notion that we're the Education Department and you add the bits on.

There was a very interesting relationship between the Educational Psychology department and a totally separate department, which was called the Junior Primary Department. This was the department in which the education of early childhood teachers took place. One of the interesting things about that department was that it was and always had been, staffed by women.

If you look into the history of early childhood education in Western Australia, including the non-government involvement, like Meerilinga, it has always been a women's province. In some ways, the rational approach to education and psychology might have been to include this Junior Primary Department within the bigger department structure, because after all, junior primary classes were in primary schools, so they weren't kindergartens, they were part of the school.

However, there is a long history of resistance, from the women who carved out and created and developed and worked in early childhood education, to the last of what they saw as key to early childhood education, which was namely to be child-focused. The rest of the classes were much more regimented, much more teacher-centered, much more control-centered, whereas the junior primary classes were supposed to be freer, more open, more allowing the child to naturally develop his or her own talents.

The problem comes when you try to amalgamate those two particular structures, because I think that the very core of early childhood ideology and philosophy has, from its inception, been antithetical to bureaucratic structures and control of education. When it first developed as a separate strand of teacher education, very informed by Gestalt psychology, Pestalozzi, Montessori very much influenced by the notion of a kindergarten.

It's a garden where young children learn to grow. It's an almost a kind of botanical version of human development. And thus, it was seen to be appropriate for the teacher to take a back stand, and let the child's own interests and development shape what they do in the classroom.

One sociologist I know called that particular construction of a teacher, as the ‘mother made conscious’. You weren't supposed to stand at a blackboard with a piece of chalk and ask questions. You were supposed to stand and observe and watch them flower. So there is that philosophical difference between the younger classes in state schools, and the way the older classes are supposed to be taught that I think, is really in contradiction to each other.

In addition, that particular section of the school the Lower School was the domain and the province and the fiefdom of women and always had been. And I think that a lot of women working in that area apart from being professionally committed to a child-centered approach, were also aware that this was a domain in which they could have some rights and some decision making power to shape the way things went.

There was a fear, to a certain extent, that if they got amalgamated with the training or education that took place for teachers of older children, that not only would their particular philosophical ideals be diluted, or even, dare I say, scorned but that they would also lose this almost natural, right to be the controllers of the childhood, the early childhood education.

So it's a really, really, philosophical, but also political conflict that you've got between those two departments. And needless to say, that emerged at Mount Lawley, when there was the suggestion that early childhood education was subsumed within the other department. It was a takeover, as they saw it.

Now, when I started working at Mount Lawley, there was very much a focus on student-centered learning and also continuous assessment, and no exams. So in some ways, this gave a lot of freedom and reduced the anxiety that some students had about doing exams.

I do know that some students got to see the continuous assessment has been continual rather than continuous. They always had their nose to the grindstone, even if it was a minor assignment. In 1975, or 76, the students basically downed tools and had what they called an ‘identity week’.

They wanted the curriculum reformed. They wanted it to be really student- centered, and they didn't see what was being done, as being that sort of model. I have to admit that there were a lot of students involved in this, but not all. I do remember that the Women's Warden, was very suspicious of one of the female students, who was in the group that coordinated the whole stop work, because this woman's father was a Communist.

The warden’s understanding was that this identity week was driven by the communists. Maybe it was maybe it wasn't. I'm sad to say that, was it was a bit of a damp squib. I remember all the sort of elation and energy that was in that initial outdoor meeting; people like Colin Kenworthy extolling in poetry on the stairs and everybody very keen on the whole thing. But where do we go from here?

It was suggested that those of us who were interested would all go to a meeting in the Ref the next morning, in which they would talk about where to now. It's a good example of how if you habituate people to some particular pattern, or control, it is very difficult for them to shake that off.

I could see in this meeting, even though the Ref was full, that as the conversation continued, and the debate and the questions about what we're going to do, students started relinquishing control and asking lecturers to give their ideas or lecturers to say: “Well, if you want choice about what you do, I'm willing to run workshops on this. I'll be doing it in this particular room”.

In some ways there wasn't a strategy for turning that into something long-term. It was an indication that some students were not particularly happy with what was going on. I remember thinking to myself that Paris in 1968 had a much more profound effect than Mount Lawley in 1975, or 76. However, it was an interesting example of how learning to be tractable is very difficult to unlearn.

I wasn't particularly well informed about student-centered learning and teaching adults when I got the job. What did happen was that, as I progressed through my teaching, I used more and more group activities, group and then feedback and observations.

I'll give you an example. When I was teaching the students who were doing the Graduate Diploma, and that's not in the Mount Lawley time, but it was an indication of where I was going. One of the things that we were well aware of was that if you're trying to include material in the curriculum, which raises the awareness, of the importance of things like gender, and ethnicity, in the lives of students, you can't just lecture at them. There's got to be some processing some active processing going on, both within the individual, but also between the individual and peers.

We grouped students in groups of four, and they stayed in the same group for the entire unit. Each week, they would have some reading to do about a particular topic, whether it was gender, whether it was ethnicity, whether it was discrimination. Then there were a series of questions that we asked them to discuss, and also include some of theirs.

The point then, was that they had to go away and reflect on how the discussion had gone, and reflect on whether or not this had introduced anything new, in terms of their understanding of the issue. It was a bit shambolic, because you had, great room with lots of small tables, and you would move around, and intervene sometimes.

Mainly, it was student driven. Every now and again, I would stop them and would say, just take a minute to think about who is doing the talking in your group? Who's introducing the new idea? Is there something you haven't heard of before. That was just giving them a pause to think about this? They’d go away and would write a journal about that experience. The whole journal was submitted as part of the assessment. What we were working on was not just giving them statistics on social class and educational achievement, or gender discrimination and how it manifests in schools. We were asking them to actually engage with the topic and that I saw as innovative for me anyway.

A lot of the stuff that I probably contributed to most came later when I joined lots of committees. I got the sexual harassment and bullying policy going. I got myself onto promotions committees, because I was sick of seeing promotions going in the direction of men quite often.

I was a bit like a screeching owl sitting around the place. Every time a mouse appeared, I'd get interested in it. Yeah, I’d pounce. I also had an enduring interest in the education of women, not just our students, but girls in schools and women generally. It was sometimes not a very comfortable position to be in, because you would get ridiculed and bullied and white anted.

It wasn't always easy. I once wrote a short piece for a journal, and I think its title was: “When she was good, she was very, very good, but when she was bad, she was horrid”. I pointed out that the word horrid comes from the Latin for hedgehog bristles. This is why I bristled at times and gave examples of the various things.

I've been retired for 20 years now. But as recently as the late 90s, or the very early 2000s, one of the male members of staff who was a quite nice, gentle, beautiful man (who happened to be in a senior position) was absolutely instrumental in creating opportunities for some of us, including me, who were technophobic to get involved. At morning coffee one day, he just said: “Oh, Jan Trotman. Oh, you're one of those feminists one of those bra burners, aren't you”?

That was that was not so long ago. And he wasn't in the ancient Education Department. It happened after ML - it was at ECU.

Initially, when I started supervising students on practice was something that we were kind of invited to do, but not forced. That soon got pushed into what was required of our workload. I actually quite enjoyed assessing students, and I enjoyed being in the classrooms watching what was going on. I must admit, some students were really, really clever.

I really admired what they did. It took me a while to get the hang of what I was actually looking for. We did have an assessment sheet about were the objectives clear and strategies appropriate and that sort of thing. I would just sit and make lots of immediate notes, observational notes, as I was watching, maybe even three pages of them. I wouldn't actually write the formal document of the assessment of that lesson, until the end of that night. I might even go away and say, I'll give this to you next week. I liked to think about it.

I loved being with the kids. Sometimes it was very funny. Sometimes I was really appalled about how sloppy the preparation had been.

I used to meet my students before I came in the classroom if they hadn't met me before. I would say, what I want you to remember is that I will be very sympathetic if things go wrong in the enactment of the lesson. You can't always predict what's going to happen, but I'm a real stickler for planning. If there's evidence that you haven't properly planned this lesson, and what you're going to do, and how you're going to do it, and how you're going to move the kids, even something as simple as giving instructions for them to go to their lockers and get their books has to be thought of beforehand.

So all of that planning, even if it seems tiresome while you're doing it, then becomes routine because you remember it and then you can focus on how you're going to deliver it. I think that that's appropriate because I've had situations where the actual situation gets out of control. I've seen some problems that students have had, even with junior primary classes. There was one junior primary class, where the kids were absolutely feral. It was absolutely dreadful.

I thought, I'm glad I'm not teaching this class. I don't know how the full time teachers did either. Sometimes what I would try to do was to model something that could be helpful. If kids were sitting, listening to a story and the ones at the back were poking each other, I would just stand up and go and just stand by them. I would pass a table, where if I thought the student wasn't reall

y giving them much feedback, I'd say: “Gosh, that's really interesting. I wouldn't have thought about that.” In other words, lather it on.

I remember being at North Perth Primary. There were three boys, the Three Stooges, year two, I think, absolute terrors. They were at the back of the story group. This student was trying to tell the story and trying to answer questions. They were indulging in undoing each other's shoe laces and things like that, so I went and stood behind them. They looked up at me. And one of them said: “God who farted? The other one said: “She did.”

I did enjoy prac. I sometimes found the teachers, in whose classes the students had been placed, were very disappointing and very negative. Not very helpful to the students. Not very helpful to me.

I think there was this assumption that you teach teachers how to teach, but you can't teach yourself. Fortunately, that wasn't a huge number, but it was the case. I know that there was one principal at a primary school who wouldn't allow a member of the phys ed department to come in and supervise because she had had no school teaching experience.

You know, if you don't know what it's like, you don't know how to do it. And so no, I'm not going to, and I can understand that as well. But on the whole, I really enjoyed supervising teachers, and teaching, and it taught me a lot about teaching as well, because I had to analyze what they were doing and why I thought it was wrong. What happened here that could have been better? It was very good for me as well, and a lot of traveling, I got to know the northern suburbs as though they were my backyard. I’ve forgotten all of that now, but put me south of the river and I'm lost. The northern suburbs are really my province.

The highlights of my time or the greatest achievements, I must say that I have made a lot of lifelong friends. It was a whole learning experience for me. I learned more sociology teaching it than I had done at university. I felt I was a much more competent sociologist, when I retired than I had been when I first started working at Mount Lawley.

That’s when I took up finishing my PhD, which had sat moldering on the shelf. I think that throughout my 28 years, probably my greatest achievement was to keep gender equity in focus. I would have to add that I hoped that my students learned not only about developing a critical perspective on gender, but a critical perspective on educational policy and practices, generally. It was this kind of opening of an eye within that I hope continued with them.