

A few weeks ago I was involved in a most interesting and challenging viva of one of my PhD students. At the 23rd hour there was also a critical moment of tension when we wondered whether we would be able to go ahead because of the impending National Association of Teachers in Further and Higher Education industrial action on examinations, covering vivas too.

This was particularly worrisome for the candidate as a mature woman, with a very young child, and a full-time job organizing an adult education institute to attend to. Reorganizing her already busy schedule and finding new space for anxiety time, too, would have been of major significance to her.

In any event, these kinds of issue were already uppermost in our minds. The topic of the thesis was women's role in adult education, focusing on both the influence and impact of women involved in policy-making and the view of what women in adult education should be educated for - domesticity, leisure or other vocations.

An absolute wealth of fascinating data had been unearthed about this topic, spanning a 60 year period, from the First World War to the mid-1970s. It revealed some absolutely splendid women albeit that they found it difficult to have a strong or feminist influence on the form or content of educational provision.

One question that came up in our subsequent discussions was whether or not women had become less visible as policy-makers, teachers or students in adult education by the late 20th century. The argument of the thesis had been that women had become more invisible in adult education.

Why might this be the case? There are lots of possible explanations for changes in women's role in adult education, connected with changes in both the attitudes of policy-makers to women's involvement in paid employment as opposed to domesticity, and the actual changes in women's

# Women's work is more than child's play

participation in economic activities and education.

It could be that women are now less visible as policy-makers or teachers in adult education, historically construed as non-vocational, because of their greater involvement in other forms of education - compulsory schooling and further and higher education.

Intuitively it would seem reasonable to assume that women are now more visible as both policy-makers and teachers in other kinds of education. But the barriers that have prevented women's active and equal participation in many levels and forms of educational employment have not all been removed.

In the first place, the marriage bar which prevented many married women from continuing to pursue careers in education has finally been abolished, although its effective removal has only been achieved fully in the past 40 years. Even then, many married women were still not able to participate on a par with men.

Equal pay for women teachers was only achieved by the end of the 1950s. Actively encouraging married women to participate in the educational labour market has been subject to the assumed vagaries of the economy.

By the middle of the 1950s it seemed clear that there was likely to be a shortage of qualified school-teachers. Married women were en-

ticed back with special conditions, such as half-time or part-time employment and the occasional provision of nursery facilities as part of the married women returners scheme. I well remember my mother becoming part of this scheme when I was at school.

The assumption was that married women as mothers needed what are now known as "career breaks" in addition to maternity leaves and benefit. It was rare for a local education authority to accept responsibility for more than the provision of maternity leave, although some I.e.a.s, such as the London County Council and later the Greater London Council, have been very generous in such provisions.

The usual grounds for accepting responsibility to provide nursery facilities was the dire shortage of qualified teachers without dependent young children. Margaret Cole, a member of the LCC, and a major influence on women's education, herself argued that it was impossible for young women with young children to be active unless they also had "nurses". She presumed that women would have to make their own private arrangements as she herself had to do. Vernon, in her biography of Cole, argued that she could only be so active because "she had her domestic front so well covered".

In higher education there have been no such provisions to facilitate



**MIRIAM  
DAVID**

women's role as academics, save for those institutions that are part of I.e.a. provision and have benefited from their maternity leave facilities. Universities had not developed any system of maternity leaves or "career breaks" until about 20 years ago.

Some had, on the other hand, developed generous schemes of in-house family allowances for their members of staff who became parents, usually fathers. The development of nurseries or crèches in higher education occurred on the coat-tails of student demand for such facilities, and very occasionally as part of the "laboratory" for psychology students.

Nowadays most higher education institutions do have a nursery provision for use by both students and staff, although, because of government restrictions on funding, the costs may be extraordinarily and often prohibitively high.

We are now, however, in a situation again where the government has become attuned to demographic trends and the need to encourage women's - even mothers of young children - participation in the labour market and hence education.

A new programme of encouraging child care for working mothers has just been mounted giving political

support to schools and I.e.a.s to use their vacant or unused buildings for child care - either outside school hours or in the school holidays.

The Government has also given some political support to the provision of child care facilities for children below school age. However, it has not given any financial support nor removed any of its own imposed financial barriers to such facilities.

Employers, such as the Midland bank, have devised their own in-house schemes and rely on the services of newly formed companies of private child care consultants to suggest forms of training for the child care staff to be appointed. No single scheme of education or training for these staff has been initiated nor has any thought been given to a new nursery staff career structure.

Such training as exists is fairly basic nursery nurse courses validated through the NNEB for provision at further education colleges. There are few higher level courses or ones which combine either care and education or training and management. Nursery teachers are traditionally trained by a different route and through early childhood education degree courses.

We, at South Bank, have developed a major innovative part-time course to provide a diploma in early childhood education and management especially for senior child care and nursery workers.

The question then remains as to the quality of the care and education that private employers will be able to provide and whether mothers' careers will indeed be facilitated. All the quality control mechanisms that have been built into public sector higher education over the past 20 years are ignored in such private initiatives.

Yet it would be possible to build up new high quality facilities with in-built careers for both the providers and the teachers or trainers of the nursery workers.

It seems a great pity to me that such an opportunity cannot be seized.