Rees, S. (1991). *Achieving power: practice and policy in social welfare*. Allen & Unwin.

1. In social welfare circles and among politicians, the word empowerment has become common. (3)

2. A more predictable use of the term by teachers of all kinds, in schools, colleges and universities, includes the claim that their methods are aimed at empowering students. In the same vein social workers contend 'I'm empowering people' or, 'the empowerment process is old hat'. When asked to explain what they mean, they fall back on clichés about people taking control of their affairs through casework, or about staff developing indigenous resources from the bottom up through community development. A relatively new concept is being substituted for old ones without the political nature of empowerment being developed with little indication of the way power is being defined or exercised, and with no reference to evidence about the interdependence of policy and practice. (4)

3. Freire described a dialogue between educators and their subjects to challenge the banking method of education which had prevented people from being active witness and protagonists in their own interests. Domination was the major theme, liberation his objective and an educational process of 'thematic investigation' the means of achieving that objective. (7)

4. Writers in several traditions of feminism have much in common with a philosophy of education as a means of liberation. They have identified the restricted world of women who are child-carers housekeepers, husband-minders, unpaid voluntary workers or lowly paid employees. They have exposed the history of women's oppression as a product of social structure and have shown how some form of liberation could be achieved by examining the political implications of personal lives. (8)

5. Definitions of empowerment which have relied on the consensus oriented language of system theories do not appear to have paid much attention to ideology and politics, or to practitioners' involvement in economic and social policies. In that respect they are too simple. The use of theories about social systems has produced consensus-oriented goals for people and societies: namely to achieve balance, homeostatsis or equilibrium. (16)

6. Biography refers to the life course of a living being but does not have to mean only the unraveling of the story of one individual, though at first sight that may

be its most obvious use. The term 'biography' could also be used to describe the process of depicting the life of a group of individuals with something in common or the activities of an organization over time. (21)

7. The unraveling of biography requires the bringing together of past and present events and the making of projections about the future. In that 'bringing together', individuals interpretations of the causes of past events usually depict key aspects of their lives and affect their ability to move into new roles. The story which unmasks choices made in the past can suggest opportunities for the freedom to choose in the future. (21)

8. The promise of biography is in the telling of a story with a view to participating in a different way in future events. In this respect social workers' clients and students can be both participants in and surveyors of the flow of events, and characteristics in and tellers of stories constituted by those events. Through such participation, powerlessness can be replaced with some sense of power, confusion can give way to a feeling of coherence. (21)

9. The telling of a story will contribute to empowerment if the listeners as well as the storytellers recognize the importance of coherence: the relationship between points in a cross-section. Coherence connotes the value of joining ideas and activities which usually remain separate. (21)

10. The relevance of the concept of biography to people in the predicament of being clients or patients, or perhaps detainees or prisoners of other kinds, can also be clarified. They can be enabled to tell their stories in such a way that they learn to make their own assessments and do not remain dependent on others for so doing. From confidence acquired in making assessments, in context and with reference to a continuity of events, they also participate in and contribute to a wider discourse about issues such as justice and welfare. The opportunity to take part in such discourse is not limited to students, to educators or to practitioners. (23)

11. For Foucault the appropriate way to understand power was to focus not on the mechanics of control exercised by central or sovereign authorities but on the experiences of the subjects of such control. However, he also insisted that power should not be perceived as a fixed phenomenon which some people possessed and others did not, but rather as circulating through a net-like organization in which individuals could be both subject to the effects of power and the vehicles for its articulation. Key features in that circulation were the instruments for the formation and accumulation of knowledge and for studying techniques and tactics of domination. Those techniques and tactics were and are apparent in the discipline of discussions as to what we think is appropriate and normal behavior, and how we should conform to such normality. (37)

12. In personal relationships, in controversies within organizations and in the body politic at large, the essence of power, Foucault has argued, is to participate in, to influence or even to take control of discourse. That discourse will be concerned with determining facts, priorities and responsibilities, hence the need to examine who participates in such determinations and to contest the language by which power and powerlessness is expressed. (38)

13. The definition of politics which was foreshadowed in this book's introductory prospectus rested on the assumption that political activity included participation in debates about personal and collective interests and about the determination of programs and policies. A view of politics as mutual education, as the means of influencing choices through the constant process of communication with others from all walks of life with a view to defining the public good, also matches the purpose and the spirit of deliberations about empowerment. (41)

14. 'Politics' has also been defined as the exercise of influence where there is a conflict of interests and denotes processes by which resources are obtained, conflict is settled and always involves the use of or the struggle for power. (41)

15. Social work in schools required an awareness of various audiences – teachers, pupils, parents, pressure groups and politicians. The social worker was often caught in the middle of the conflicting interests of these audiences, for instance concerning the issue of whether education policy should address the different interests of deviant children and high achievers in the school environment. (42)

16. Facilitating the least influential kid's progress in a competitive system was likely to be aided by viewing the school as a politics environment and social work in schools as a political endeavour. Being political in such a context meant defining the social work task so that it was understood by other employees. This understanding was achieved by compiling information about educational issues, maintaining credibility in the eyes of others, making connections between social work and educational objectives, and effecting alliances with interested constituencies, such as parents, students and key pressure groups. (42)

17. Each can develop confidence in the language of empowerment by examining the different meanings of power and each would then be ready to search for the different connotations of a world like choice. Or they might examine their experiences of choice as a way of redefining what they understand by power and politics. (45)

18. The process of learning new language and pondering the meaning of words and how they are interpreted by different people is an essential feature of self development. (45)

**Steps in empowerment:**

1. Understanding themes:
   - Themes refer to those aspects of biography which depict experiences of power and powerlessness, explained perhaps with reference to relationships of relative equality or those characterized by feelings of being dependent or being controlled. (90)
   - The concern with themes provides the opportunity for the practitioner to encourage people to tell a story and begin to gain confidence from knowing that one is being listened to and will be taken seriously. Concentrating on themes from biography creates the chance for an exchange about the possible link between personal and social issues. (91)

2. Evaluating self-image and knowledge:
   - Without some evaluation of people's image of their ability to act in their interests, goals may be generated which are unrealistic because they have overlooked people's aptitude for solving problems. (91)

3. Specifying problems:
   - Specifying problems involves encouraging people to have their say, but in the tradition of anticipating what they think the professional wants to hear…The art of conceptualizing problems and sorting one from another carries with it the seeds of self-learning, and some skills in analyzing the relationship between themselves and the representatives of authority. (92)

4. Developing awareness of policies:
   - Discussing how policies and services affect people has two effects. There is the obvious outcome of enabling them to know that services and other resources exist to which they are entitled. Secondly, the act of demystifying what policy is about becomes part of an overall educational and political process. (92-3)

5. Developing the notion of choice:
   - To develop ability in choosing involves assertiveness and a familiarity with the importance of choice. It requires moving from the assumption that there is no alternative to accepting one's lot, to deliberation over what might be possible. (93)

6. Experiencing solidarity with others:
   - The support group which brings together people experiencing the same predicament can be a means of education because it reveals a common grievance and encourages a sharing of ways to respond to such problems. (94)

7. Acquiring and using language:

- Language is not merely a tool for communicating but also a means of creating social relationships and realizing the self involved in those relationships. The concepts 'promise of biography', 'interdependence of policy and practice' and 'achieving power' have been advocated, not to enlarge the vocabulary of students, educators, clients or practitioners but as a means of developing a political literacy in welfare. (95)
- The language of power and politics enables people to understand some consequences of economic rationalism and the values which characterize that philosophy; it raises questions about policies which promote social divisions and thus avoids any preoccupation with private issues. (95)

8. Resisting a return to powerlessness:
- Expression of doubts about empowerment will usually show the difference between the concerns of the layperson and the professional. At that point the practitioner has an opportunity to validate the other person's position by saying that they recognize that they are not the one who is taking risks, but they should consider together the issue of protection and ways to provide it. Unless that happens, aspirations about empowerment will persist only as a scheme cherished by the practitioner. This stage of 'resisting a return to powerlessness' might appear to have its most obvious application to people in apparently subordinate positions, but it could be equally relevant to practitioners who have embarked on new ways of working but are discouraged by a lack of quick results. (96)

9. Developing interactive and political skills:
- Learning and practicing interactive and political skills is a task for students and practitioners but it can also be regarded as a criterion of progress for others. That progress can be assessed through the encouragement of action and reflection of action…As with the conditions which facilitated learning a new language, so the unexpected experience of solidarity with group members contributes to the development of interactive and political skills. (97)

10. Evaluation:
- Evidence of success, as reported by the people who say they have benefited from changes, may be apparent in a more confident self-image and in indications of tangible material improvement in the quality of lives…To evaluate is to examine the objectives of empowerment and to pay attention to the means of achieving small victories rather than making harsh judgements about failure to change the course of history. It involves some appraisal of the aspirations of all the people being worked with and this

admonition draws attention to the creative use of power, to think, to criticize, to understand, to use any relevant event of biography which contributes to the freedom to act. (98)